

NIFC News

National Interagency Fire Center
3833 S. Development Ave.
Boise, ID 83705

<http://www.nifc.gov>



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Contacts: Rick Ochoa, 208-387-5451
Robyn Heffernan, 208-387-5874
Don Smurthwaite, 208-387-5458

2009 Fire Season Outlook identifies few areas of concern; forecasts normal to below normal potential across most of the West

Boise, ID – Northern California, where nearly a million acres burned last summer, is poised to possibly be another hotspot for wildfire activity in 2009, according to the Fire Season Outlook released today by the Predictive Services group at the National Interagency Fire Center. The seasonal outlook considers the condition of wildland fuels, weather forecasts, and climate and drought data.

“Whether or not we see that potential develop into another severe fire season in California depends on ignitions,” said Rick Ochoa, fire weather program manager at NIFC. “Last year we had wide-spread lightning storms move through that area and ignite multiple fires.”

In addition to California, north-central Washington is expected to see above normal potential for wildfire activity, based on persistent drought conditions. The Southwest, from Texas to Arizona, also is expected to see above normal fire potential until what is expected to be a robust monsoon season moderates conditions there beginning in early July.

Elsewhere around the West, however, winter snowpacks and cooler early spring temperatures are expected to moderate conditions and keep the fire potential in the normal range for most other states. Although drought conditions are expected to persist in Nevada, the lack of moisture and subsequent lack of fine fuels are expected to result in a below normal fire potential. In Alaska, ample moisture over the winter, combined with a forecast for normal to below normal temperatures results in below normal potential for fire activity there as well.

“Overall, the areas with the greatest fire potential this summer are Arizona, New Mexico, California and north-central Washington,” Ochoa said.

The full seasonal assessment can be viewed at:

<http://www.predictiveservices.nifc.gov/outlooks/outlooks.htm>