Above-normal fire potential is predicted for much of the interior West, Southwest, and Alaska this spring and summer, according to expert assessments from climatologists, meteorologists, fuel specialists, and intelligence personnel. During the fourth annual National Seasonal Assessment Workshop: Western States & Alaska, held April 4–7, 2006 at the NOAA-Earth System Research Laboratory in Boulder, Colorado, a map was produced highlighting areas of fire potential for the 2006 fire season (see map below). Fire potential is the likelihood of wildland fire events influenced by factors including fuel conditions, weather, climate, and firefighting resource capability. This report is a short synopsis of their findings. Complete geographic area reports are available at: http://www.nifc.gov/nicc/predictive/outlooks/outlooks.htm. Updated assessments will be issued throughout the fire season.

Critical Factors
Winter 2005–2006 conditions were characterized by above-normal precipitation and snowpack in the northern half of the western states, which has mitigated fire potential in higher elevation timbered areas. Conversely, dry winter conditions in the Southwest and western Alaska have created an increased potential for wildfires this spring and summer. Other critical factors include:

**Carryover herbaceous fuels**
Abundant standing dead grasses remain from the wet 2004–2005 winter in many parts of the lower elevation Southwest and Great Basin geographic areas. These fine dead fuels increase susceptibility to ignition and provide a continuous fuel bed for rapid fire spread.

**Drought**
Portions of the West and Alaska remain in drought with depleted soil moisture, lower live fuel moisture, and increased vegetation stress. This drought, combined with observed warmer-than-average seasonal temperatures, has resulted in increased susceptibility to insect infestation and associated vegetative mortality.

**Climate outlooks**
For spring and summer, increased chances of warmer-than-average temperatures are predicted for much of the West and Alaska. Increased chances of below-average precipitation are predicted for the Southwest this spring and for the Northwest this summer. Additionally, some climate indicators suggest an early and strong monsoon.

**Geographic Area Reports**

**Alaska**
Above-normal fire potential is expected in western Alaska due to low snowpack and warmer-than-normal temperatures this spring and summer. In the Kenai Peninsula, large areas of bug-killed spruce will increase fire risk.

**Pacific Northwest**
Washington and Oregon have received well above-average precipitation through the 2005–2006 winter. Normal fire potential is forecast for much of the area. Southeast Oregon and north-central
Washington are the only areas expected to be above normal. A heavy mountain snowpack could delay the onset of the fire season.

**Northern Rockies**
Normal spring and early summer fire potential is forecast based on above-average precipitation this winter and predicted drier-than-average precipitation this summer.

**Rocky Mountains**
Above-average fire potential is expected in the drought-stricken southern Rockies and central Plains. The northern Colorado Rockies have received above-average snowpack and fire potential is forecast to be below normal.

**Great Basin**
Above-average precipitation throughout the winter in the northern half of the Basin will lead to increased fine fuel loading, resulting in above-normal fire potential below 6,500 feet. Due to drought and carryover fine fuels, above-normal fire potential is anticipated in portions of the southern Great Basin.

**Southwest**
Fire potential is expected to be above average for most of the area due to a record dry fall and winter. Increased fine fuel loading from record precipitation during the 2004–2005 winter and spring, long-term drought, and widespread vegetative mortality will also contribute to fire risk. There is a possibility for a strong and early monsoon.

**California**
Below-normal fire potential is expected in portions of northwest California and the Sierra Nevada due to above-normal precipitation and snowpack this winter and spring. Normal fire potential is forecast elsewhere. A later-than-normal fire season onset is also expected.

**The Value of the Workshop**
These annual assessments are designed to allow decision makers to proactively manage wildland and prescribed fire, thus better protecting lives and property, reducing fire-fighting costs, and improving fire-fighting efficiency.

The 2006 workshop was part of the fourth national assessment organized by the National Predictive Services Group, the Climate Assessment for the Southwest, and the Program for Climate, Ecosystem, and Fire Applications. The first North American Assessment, which included participants from Mexico and Canada, was held in conjunction with this workshop.

**Participating Agencies**
- Alaska Interagency Coordination Center
- Bureau of Land Management
- California Applications Program
- California Department of Forestry and Natural Resources
- Climate Assessment for the Southwest/University of Arizona
- Department of Interior
- Desert Research Institute
- Eastern Great Basin Coordination Center
- Lassen National Forest
- National Interagency Coordination Center
- National Park Service
- National Weather Service
- NOAA Climate Prediction Center
- NOAA Earth System Research Laboratory
- Northern Rockies Coordination Center
- Oregon Department of Forestry
- Pacific Northwest Coordination Center
- Pacific Southwest Research Station
- Rocky Mountain Coordination Center
- Rocky Mountain Research Station, Fire Sciences Lab
- Scripps Institution of Oceanography
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
- University of New Mexico
- USDA Forest Service
- USDA Forest Service Pacific Northwest Area
- USDA Forest Service Redding Fire Weather Office
- USDA Forest Service Remote Sensing Application Center
- Western Great Basin Coordination Center
- Western Water Assessment

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