



January 2026: Southwest Climate Outlook

Stacie Reece
January 30, 2026



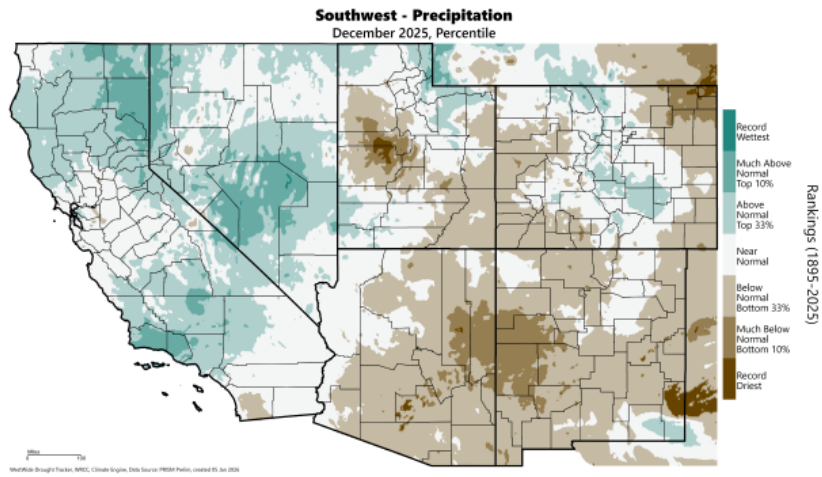
<https://climas.arizona.edu/>

The Southwest Climate Outlook is published by the Climate Assessment for the Southwest (CLIMAS), with support from University of Arizona Cooperative Extension, and the New Mexico State Climate office.

Questions/Contact: Stacie Reece, sreece@arizona.edu

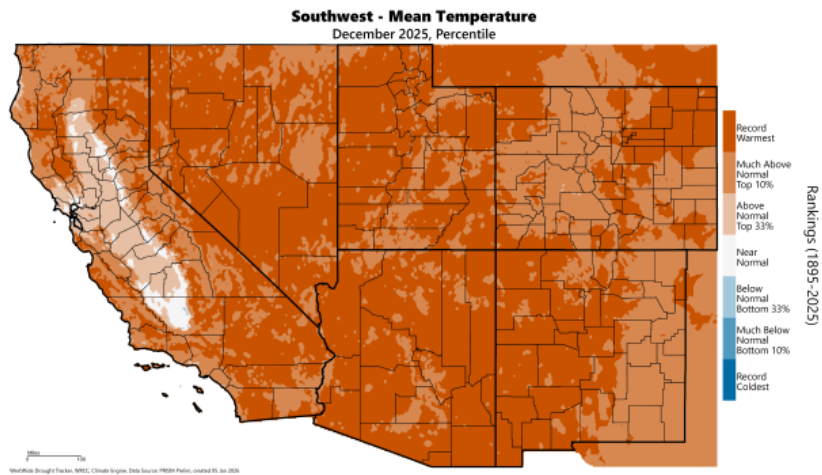
Precipitation and Temperature

December precipitation was below normal (ranking among the bottom third of Decembers on record) across much of Arizona and New Mexico. Parts of eastern Arizona and western New Mexico saw much-below normal precipitation—totals ranking among the bottom ten percent of years on record.



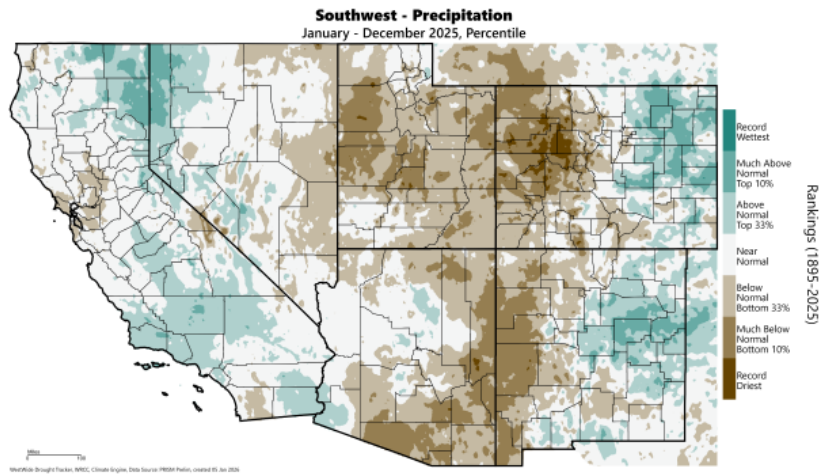
Source: [WestWide Drought Tracker](#)

December temperatures averaged warmer than in any past year on record for areas across the west, including Arizona and much of New Mexico.



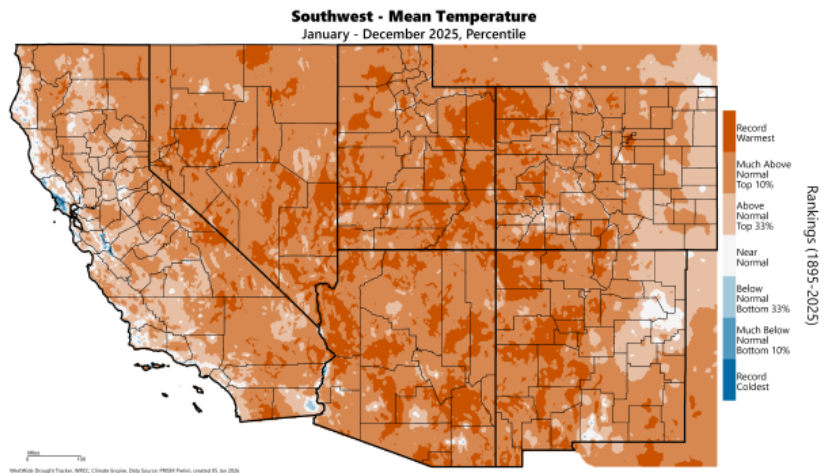
Source: [WestWide Drought Tracker](#)

Precipitation totals for calendar year 2025 (January–December) ranged from much-below normal for parts of western New Mexico, eastern Arizona, and southern Arizona, to much-above normal for parts of eastern New Mexico.



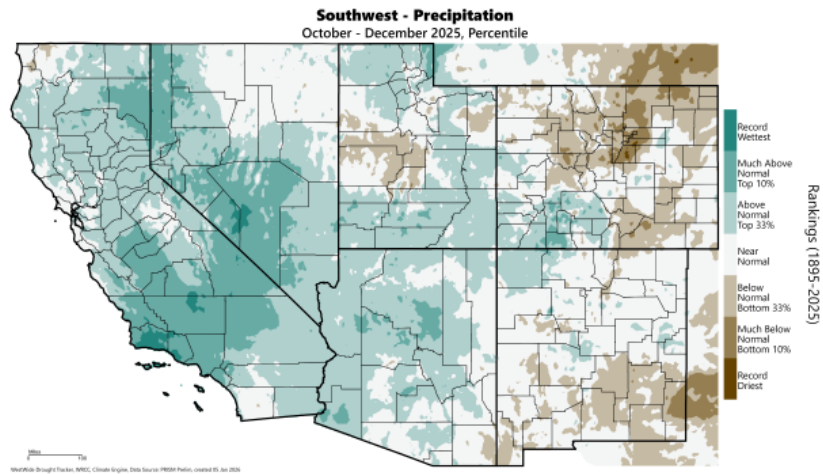
Source: WestWide Drought Tracker

Temperatures averaged over the twelve months of 2025 were generally much above average, or ranking in the uppermost ten percent of years on record. For many areas scattered widely across the region, it was the warmest January–December average on record.



Source: WestWide Drought Tracker

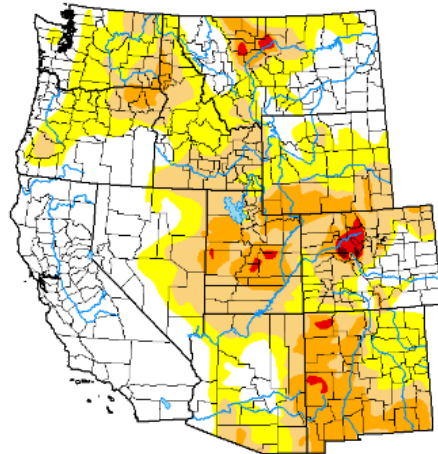
Despite the generally dry conditions in December, precipitation totals for the October–December three month period were generally above normal for western and central Arizona, ranging to near normal for eastern Arizona and much of New Mexico. Southern New Mexico, and especially southeastern New Mexico, had a relatively dry October–December.



Source: WestWide Drought Tracker

Drought

Over the past month, drought conditions have generally improved for parts of Arizona while generally worsening for New Mexico. An area of drought conditions classified as Severe (D2) or worse extends over an area accounting for over half of land in New Mexico, spanning across western and southern parts of the state. Northeastern New Mexico was until recently considered free of drought conditions but has been reclassified as D0—Abnormally Dry. Drought conditions in Arizona are generally less acute, with around 30 percent of the state’s area considered drought-free; however Moderate (D1) to Severe (D2) drought persists in areas of northern, eastern, and southern Arizona.



Intensity:

- None
- D0 Abnormally Dry
- D1 Moderate Drought
- D2 Severe Drought
- D3 Extreme Drought
- D4 Exceptional Drought

The Drought Monitor focuses on broad-scale conditions. Local conditions may vary. For more information on the Drought Monitor, go to <https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/About.aspx>

Author:

Brad Rippey
U.S. Department of Agriculture



droughtmonitor.unl.edu

Source: [U.S. Drought Monitor](https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu)

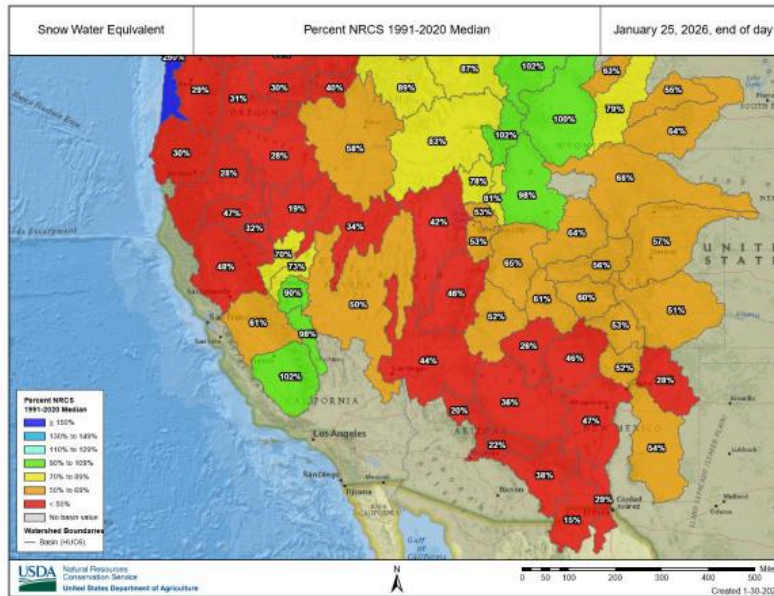
NIDIS Improved and Expanded State Pages on Drought.gov

New Mexico

Arizona

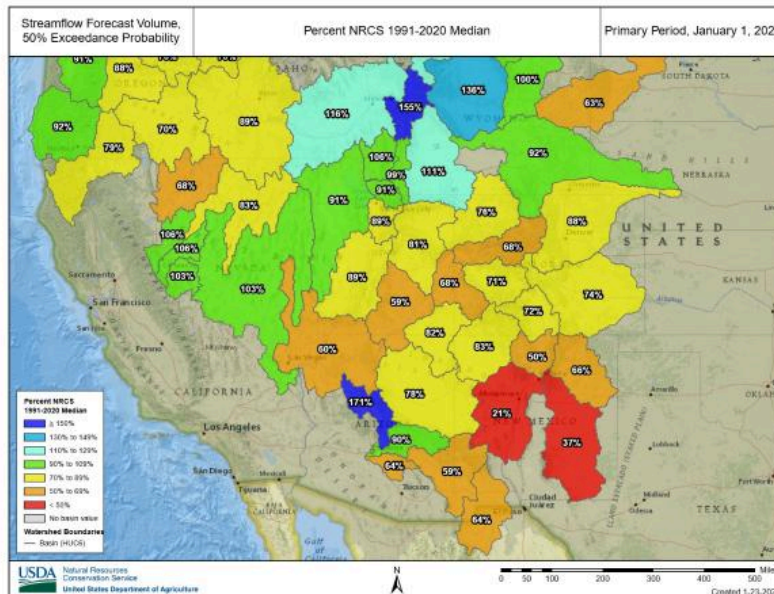
Snowpack & Streamflow

Snowpack is below normal or much-below normal across the Southwest and throughout nearly all of the Colorado River Basin. Snow water equivalent (SWE) measures less than 50 percent of normal for most New Mexico and Arizona stream basins; recent snows have brought a few basins—of the Pecos River and uppermost Rio Grande—to just above 50 percent of normal for this time of year. SWE averaged across all stream basins of the Upper Colorado River Basin measures 64 percent of normal.



USDA: Natural Resources Conservation Service

Streamflow forecasts, based in part on snowpack data, are predicting below normal spring streamflow volumes—as low as 21 percent of normal in the case of the Middle Rio Grande. Forecasts for the Salt and Verde rivers are predicting near normal and above normal flows, respectively. However, it is important to note the forecast is based on January 1 snowpack data, and SWE in those basins has since declined significantly to 19 percent of normal.



USDA: Natural Resources Conservation Service

Water Supply

The combined water storage held at Lake Powell and Lake Mead is lagging last year's volume and remains far below the long-term average storage. San Carlos Reservoir is down to 1% of capacity following the past year's extreme drought on the Gila River watershed. Salt River reservoirs are near average volume; Verde River reservoirs are up compared to last year and well above long-term average levels—in part a consequence of mid-winter snowmelt runoff brought about by high temperatures.

Eastern New Mexico reservoirs generally hold near or above average volumes. Rio Grande reservoirs are far below long-term average levels and are, overall, down compared to last year. Navajo Reservoir is similarly below average and down over last year.

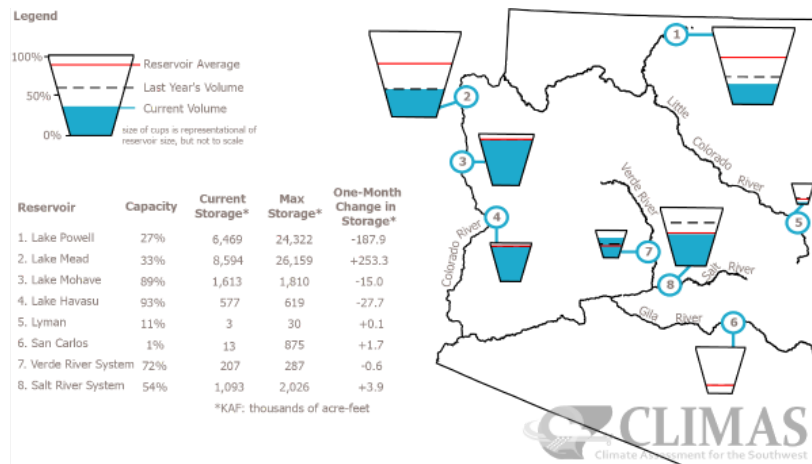


Figure 1. Arizona reservoir volumes for the end of December 2025 as a percent of capacity. The map depicts the average volume and last year's storage for each reservoir. The table also lists current and maximum storage, and change in storage since last month.

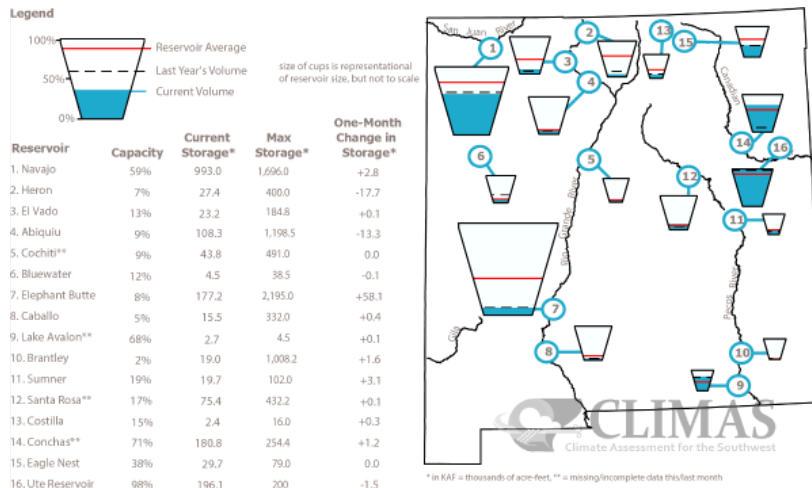


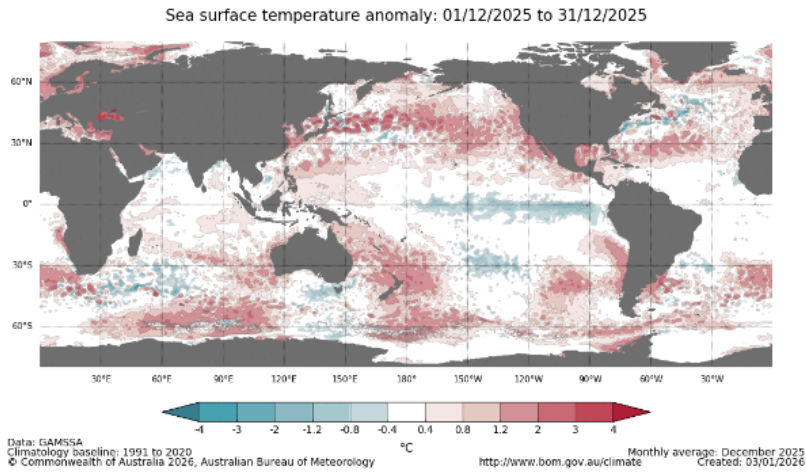
Figure 2. New Mexico reservoir volumes for end of December 2025 as a percent of capacity. The map depicts the average volume and last year's storage for each reservoir. The table also lists current and maximum storage, and change in storage since last month.

The map gives a representation of current storage for reservoirs in Arizona and New Mexico. Reservoir locations are numbered within the blue circles on the map, corresponding to the reservoirs listed in the table. The cup next to each reservoir shows the current storage (blue fill) as a percent of total capacity. Note that while the size of each cup varies with the size of the reservoir, these are representational and not to scale. Each cup also represents last year's storage (dotted line) and the 1991–2020 reservoir average (red line). The table details more exactly the current capacity (listed as a percent of maximum storage). Current and maximum storage are given in thousands of acre-feet for each reservoir. One acre-foot is the volume of water sufficient to cover an acre of land to a depth of 1 foot (approximately 325,851 gallons). On average, 1 acre-foot of water is enough to meet the demands of four people for a year. The last column of the table lists an increase or decrease in storage since last month. A line indicates no change. These data are based on reservoir reports updated monthly by the [Natural Resources Conservation Service - National Water and Climate Center \(USDA\)](#).

BOR: New Mexico Dashboard

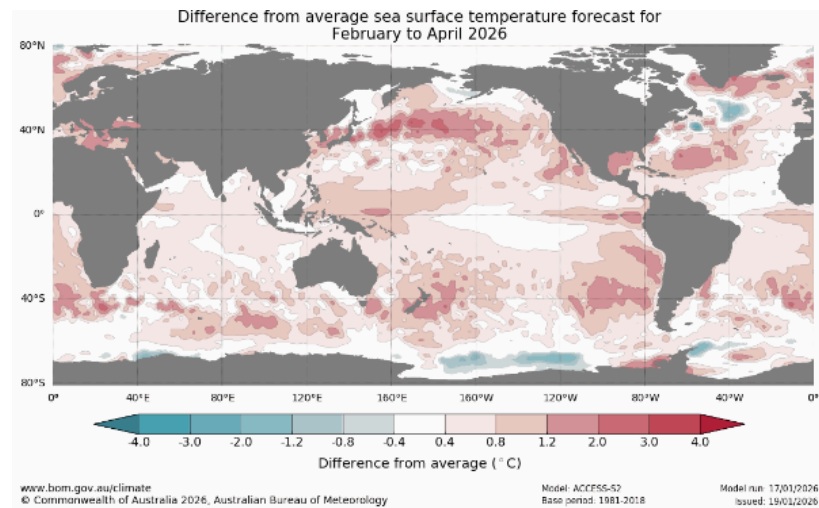
ENSO Tracker

Sea surface temperatures (SSTs) in December followed a pattern characteristic of La Niña conditions, with cooler than normal SSTs along the equator in the central-to-eastern Pacific.



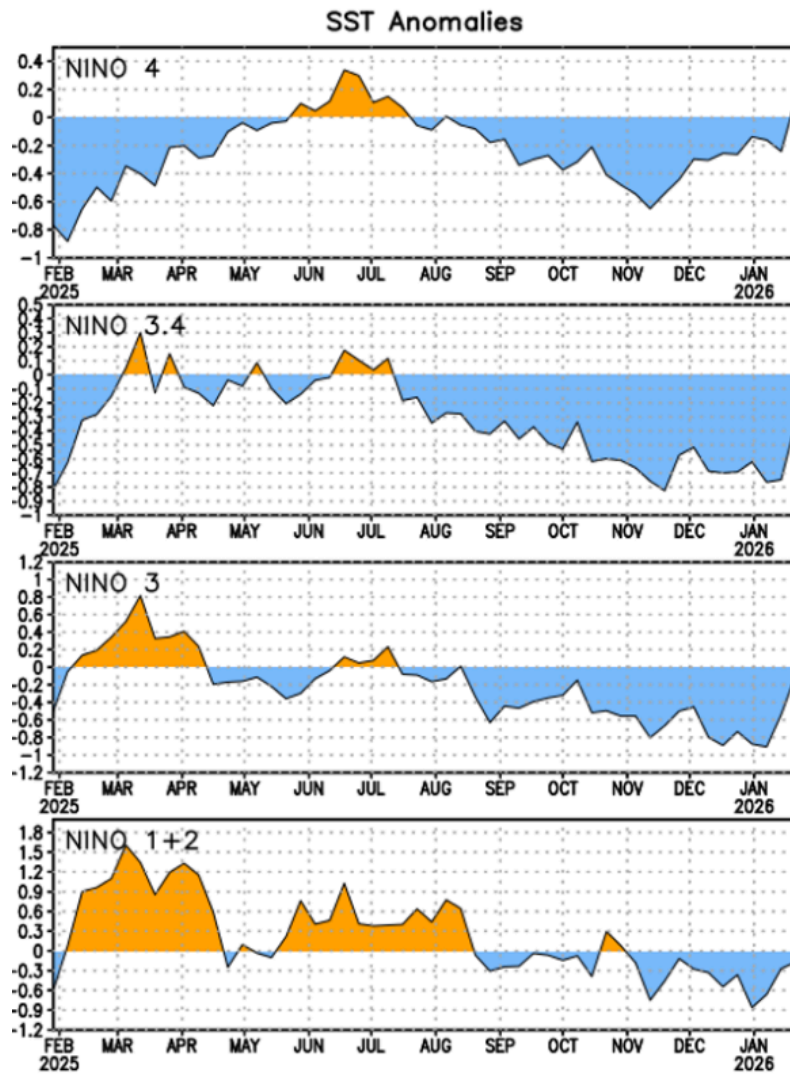
[Source: Australian Bureau of Meteorology](#)

Forecast models have in recent months been anticipating a shift away from La Niña, as in the February–April SST forecast from the Australian Bureau of Meteorology’s ACCESS model, which shows near normal to above normal SSTs replacing the cooler SSTs of the La Niña pattern.



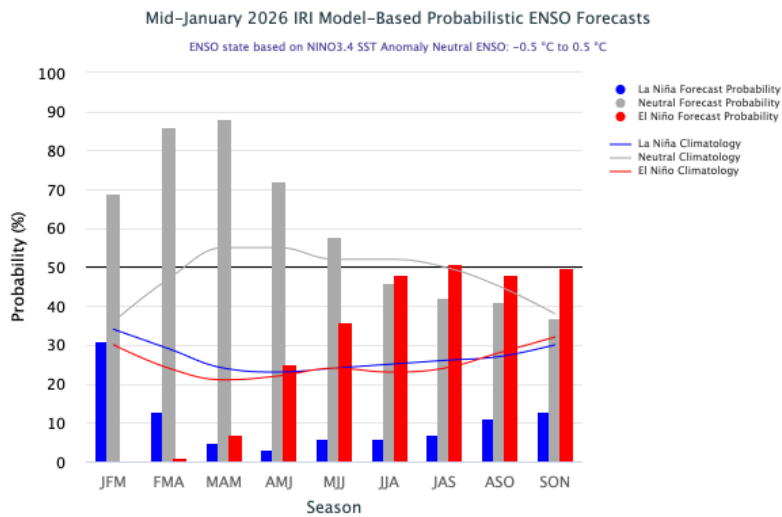
[Source: Australian Bureau of Meteorology](#)

Weekly SST anomalies (difference from long-term average) in the ENSO monitoring regions indicate a possible ongoing shift away from La Niña. The most recent observations have sharply trended warmer, and Nino 3.4 SST anomalies (used by NOAA to diagnose ENSO status) fall in the range of ENSO-neutral conditions (SST within 0.5°C of average), after consistently falling in the La Niña range (cooler than 0.5°C below average) since October.



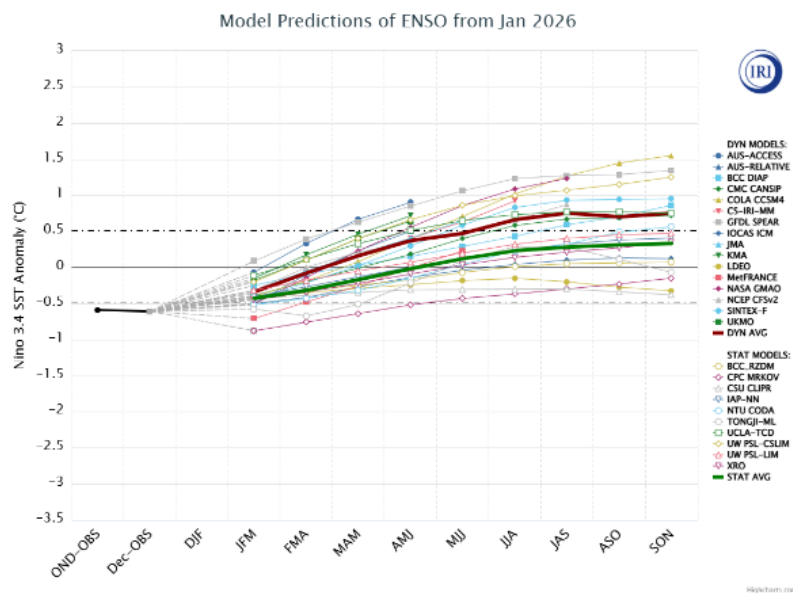
Source: [Climate Prediction Center \(NOAA\)](#)

ENSO forecast models generally favor a shift to ENSO-neutral conditions prevailing for the January–March forecast window, by roughly two-to-one odds, over a continuation of La Niña conditions. For subsequent forecast windows through the spring, ENSO-neutral is favored with greater confidence, and La Niña appears all but ruled out. Further out, models indicate near evenly split odds of El Niño emerging versus ENSO-neutral persisting—as early as the June–August forecast window.



Source: [The International Research Institute for Climate and Society, Columbia University Climate School](#)

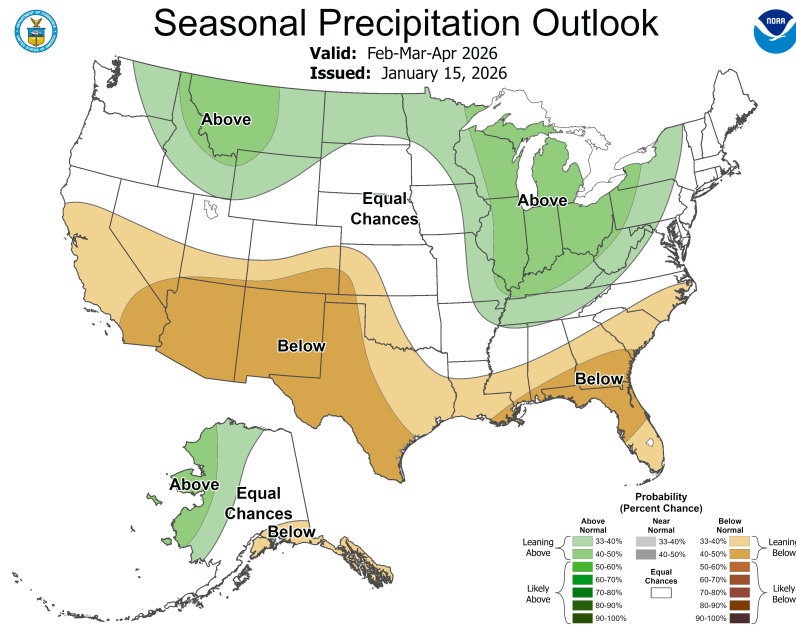
ENSO forecasts from individual forecast models almost unanimously trend away from current La Niña conditions, toward ENSO-neutral conditions. A few models trend steeply toward warmer than normal SSTs, predicting El Niño conditions in the Pacific as early as the March–May (MAM) forecast window, but most models fall in the ENSO-neutral range for that window, and in all forecasts between now and the June–August (JJA) window, at which point models are split about evenly between El Niño and ENSO-neutral.



Source: [The International Research Institute for Climate and Society, Columbia University Climate School](#)

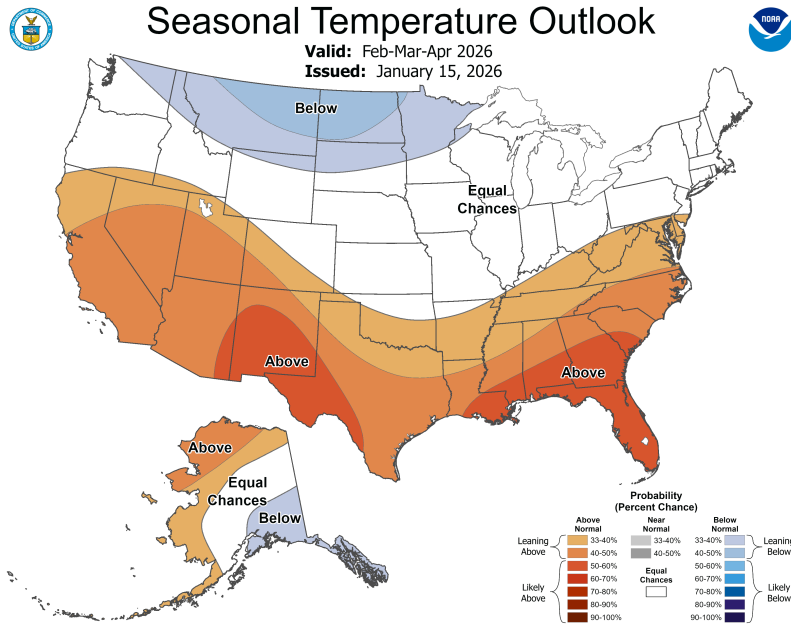
Seasonal Forecasts

The February–April seasonal precipitation forecast leans toward (40–50% chance) below normal precipitation for an area that includes Arizona and New Mexico.



Source: Climate Prediction Center (NOAA)

The February–April seasonal temperature forecast calls above normal temperatures *likely* (50–60% chance) for an area that includes much of New Mexico and part of southeastern Arizona. The forecast also favors above normal temperatures for the remaining parts of Arizona and New Mexico with greater uncertainty—assigning 33–50% chance probabilities.



Source: Climate Prediction Center (NOAA)

2026 E&S Fellowship

2026 Environment & Society Fellowship Applications Open

CLIMAS is currently accepting applications for the 2026 Environment & Society Graduate Fellowship Program. This fellowship supports University of Arizona graduate students from any degree-granting program whose work is focused on collaborative environmental research or outreach. This opportunity supports students in developing their knowledge, training, and experience in applied environmental science and communication.

Up to four fellowships of \$5,000 each will be awarded for projects occurring between May 2026–May 2027. **Applications are due March 2, 2026.**

Apply online: <https://climas.arizona.edu/es-fellowship/application>

Contact Gigi Owen, gigi@arizona.edu, for more information.



2026-2027

ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIETY FELLOWSHIP



BENEFITS:

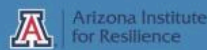
Four \$5,000 fellowships are available for University of Arizona graduate students for projects conducted from May 2026 through May 2027

FELLOWSHIP PROJECTS:

- Open to any field of study
- Connect environmental + societal issues
- Use collaborative methods
- Conducted anywhere in the world

Contact Us:
gigi@arizona.edu

Application deadline
March 2, 2026



Southwest Climate Podcast

December 2025 SW Climate Podcast - We've Been Ridged



Recorded 12/19/2025, Aired 12/22/2025

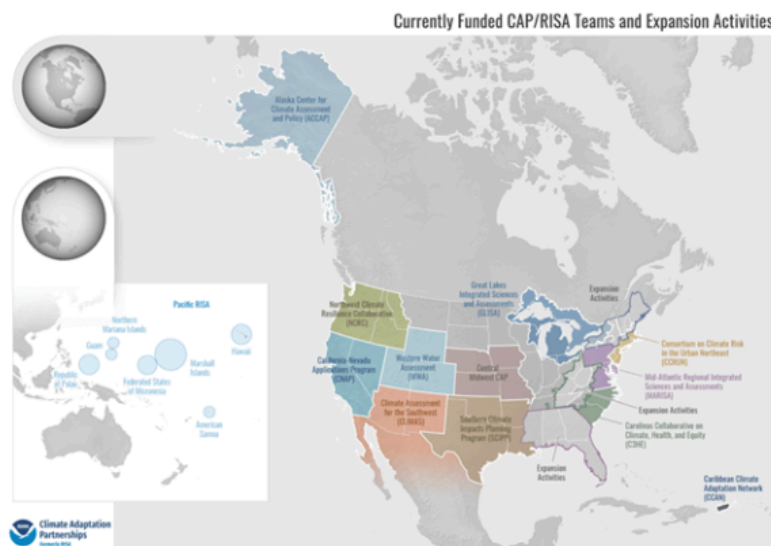
In this month's Southwest Climate Podcast episode, hosts Zack Guido and Mike Crimmins are feeling good about the warmer than normal December temps. They start out with a look at recent conditions, including the persistent ridge keeping us dry this month. This leads to a review of a paper on the Heat Dome of 2023 - and what all this warmth means for

snowpack in the west. They give their End of Year review of heat, fire and precipitation in 2025. Rounding out the episode is a telling of each of their picks for the Climate Story of the Year for the Southwest.

[Listen Here](#)

About CLIMAS

The Climate Assessment for the Southwest (CLIMAS) program was established in 1998 as part of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s Climate Adaptation Partnerships (CAP) Program (formerly known as Regional Integrated Sciences and Assessments, or RISA). CLIMAS—housed at the University of Arizona’s Institute of the Environment—is a collaboration between the University of Arizona and New Mexico State University. The CLIMAS team is made up of experts from a variety of social, physical, and natural sciences who work with partners across the Southwest to develop sustainable answers to regional climate challenges.



[Learn more about the NOAA CAP program here](#)



Disclaimer

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Southwest Climate Outlook contributors: Mike Crimmins & Matt Meko