



# March 2026: Southwest Climate Outlook

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April 3, 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

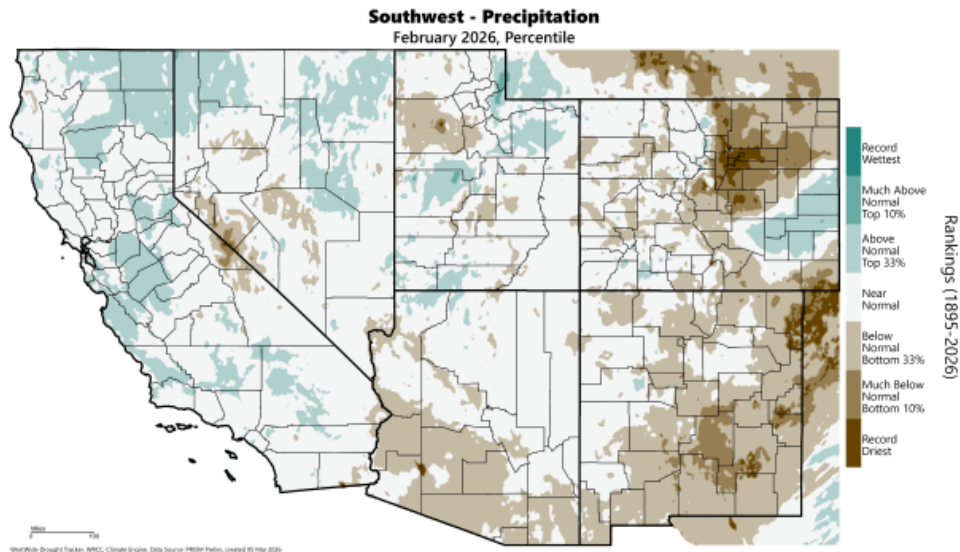
Mexico State Climate office.

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## Precipitation and Temperature

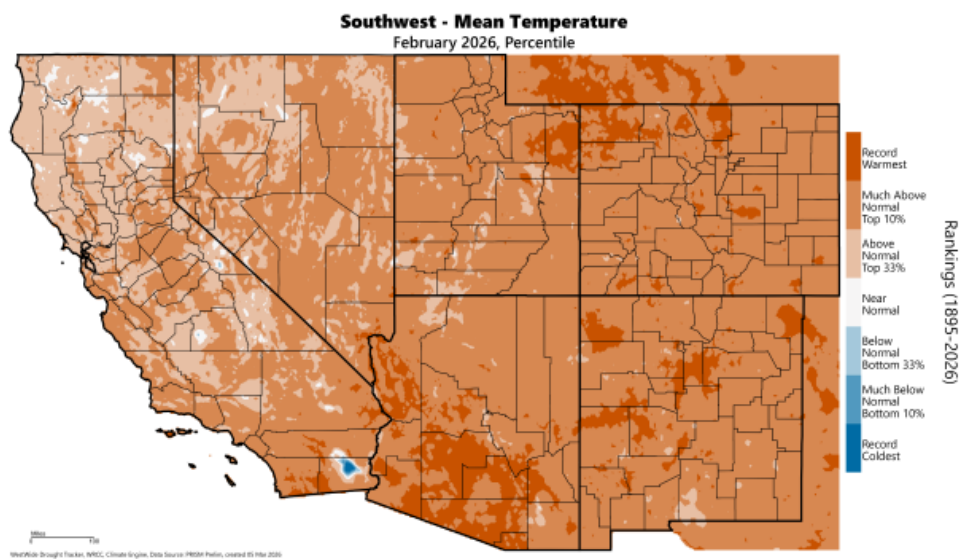
February precipitation was below normal across much of southern Arizona and much of New Mexico. It was the driest February on record in some areas of eastern New Mexico. For

much of northern Arizona, eastern Arizona, and western New Mexico, February precipitation was near normal (ranking among the middle one-third of Februarys in the record).



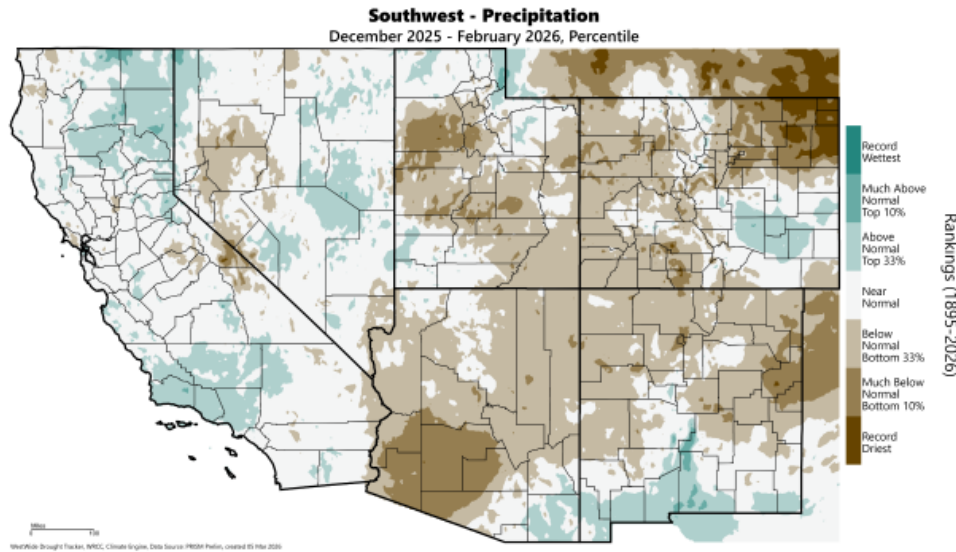
Source: WestWide Drought Tracker

February temperatures were much above normal (ranking among the warmest 10% of Februarys on record) across Arizona and New Mexico. For parts of southern and western Arizona, and parts of central and western New Mexico, it was the warmest February on record.



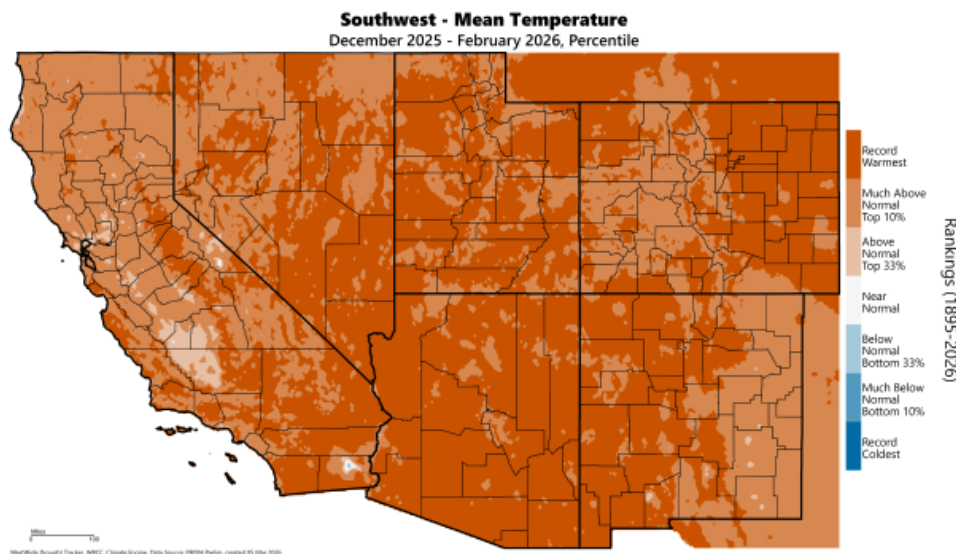
Source: WestWide Drought Tracker

December–February 3-month precipitation totals were below normal or much-below normal across much of Arizona and New Mexico, but totals were near normal to above normal for parts of southeastern Arizona and southern New Mexico.



Source: WestWide Drought Tracker

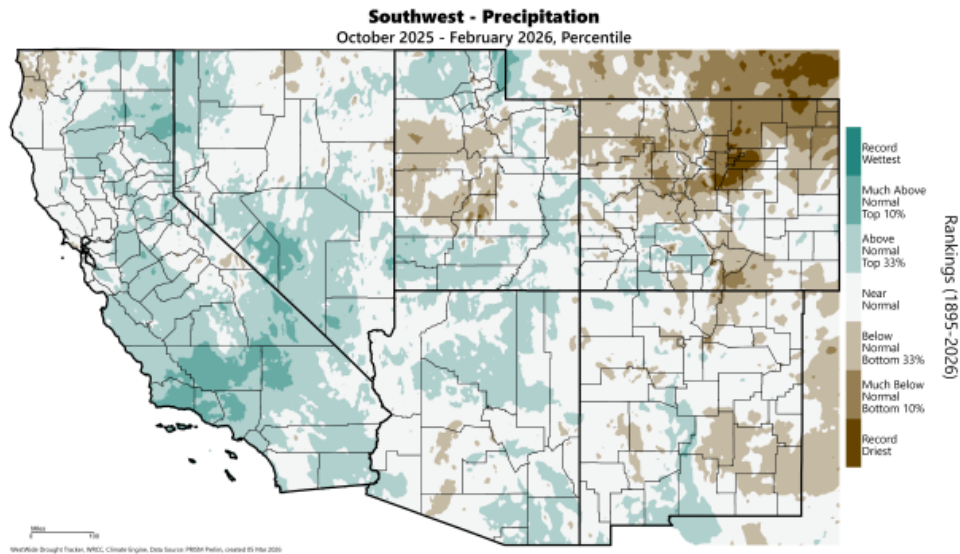
December–February temperatures averaged record-warmest for areas across Arizona and much of New Mexico.



Source: WestWide Drought Tracker

Precipitation totals for the water year so far (October 2025–February 2026) are near normal (ranking among the middle

one-third of October–February seasons on record) for much of Arizona and New Mexico. Areas where totals are above normal include parts of northern and southeastern Arizona, and parts of southern New Mexico. Areas where totals are below normal include parts of southeastern New Mexico and the Sangre de Cristo mountains of New Mexico.



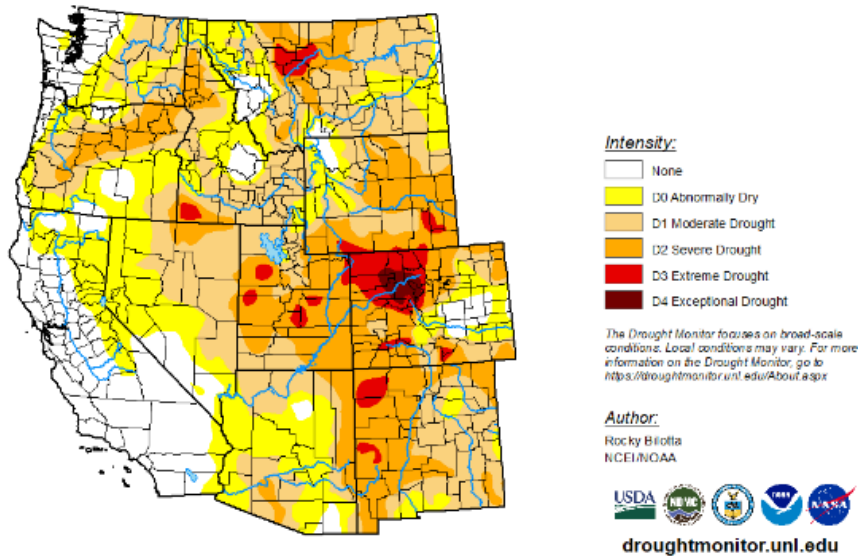
[Source: WestWide Drought Tracker](#)

## Drought

Drought conditions are most acute for areas of New Mexico west of the Rio Grande into eastern Arizona. Conditions there are classified Severe Drought (D2), with some areas of Extreme Drought (D3) in Catron, San Juan, and McKinley counties of New Mexico. Over 95% of Arizona lands are classified Abnormally Dry (D0) or in drought. In New Mexico, over 90% of the state is classified under Moderate Drought (D1) or worse, with the remainder considered Abnormally Dry.

**U.S. Drought Monitor  
West**

**March 24, 2026**  
(Released Thursday, Mar. 26, 2026)  
Valid 8 a.m. EDT



Source: U.S. Drought Monitor

**NIDIS Improved and Expanded State Pages on  
Drought.Gov**

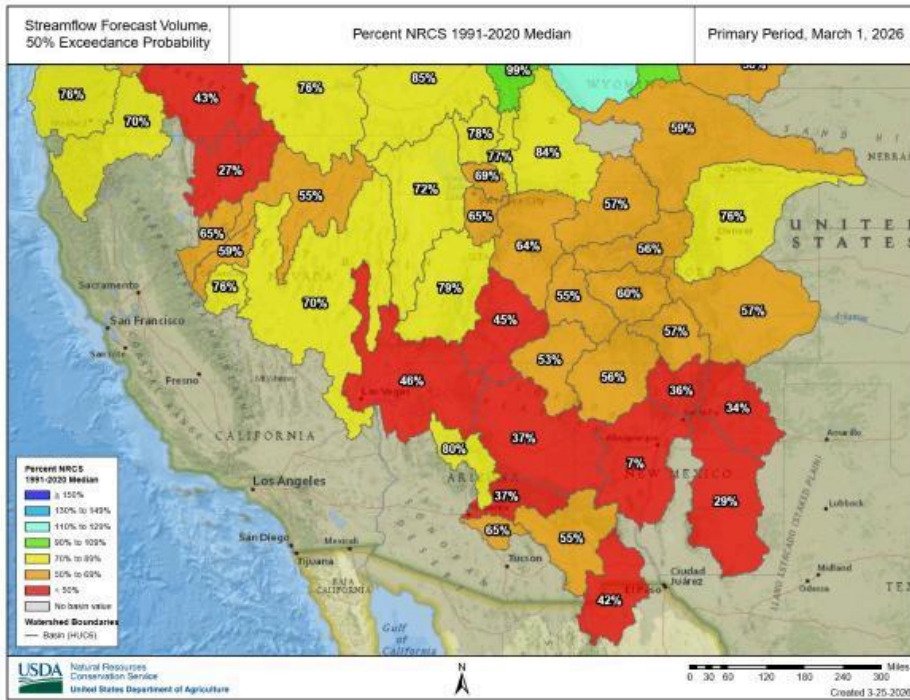
New Mexico

Arizona

**Snowpack & Streamflow**

Mountain snowpack this winter has suffered from persistently warm temperatures, and in many places, below normal precipitation. The extreme heatwave that affected the region in late March has led to further steep declines in snow water storage. Snow water equivalent (SWE) storage in the Salt, Verde, and Gila river basins ranges from 2–4% of normal. Rio Grande headwaters SWE is 24% of normal. Basin-average SWE

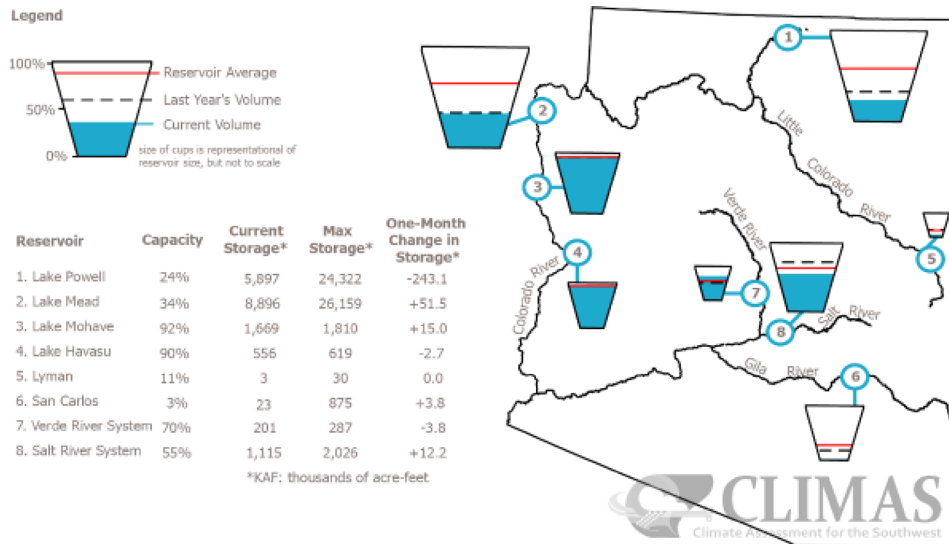




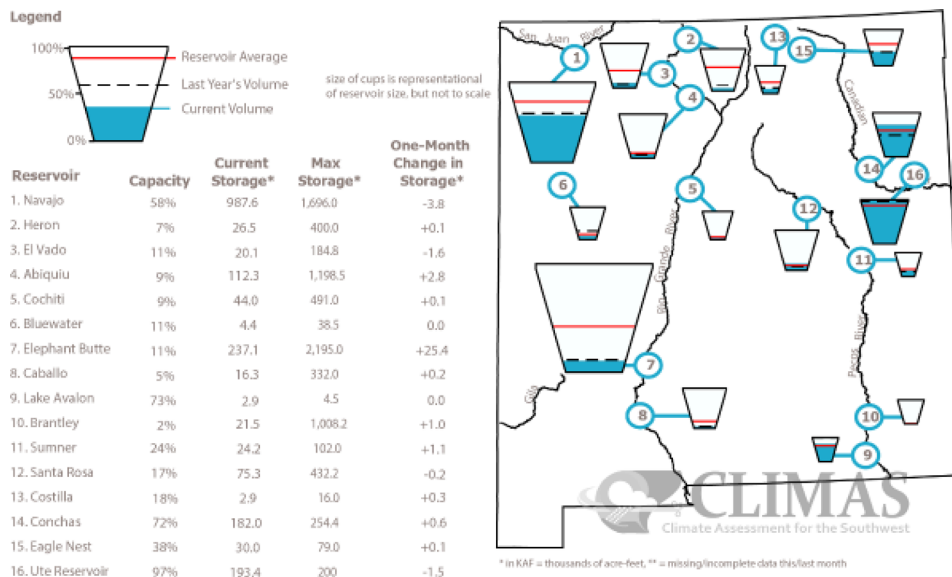
USDA: Natural Resources Conservation Service

## Water Supply

The combined storage of Lake Powell and Lake Mead is down compared to last year and remains far below the long-term average. Salt River and Gila River reservoirs are likewise down compared to last year and the long-term average, but Verde River storage is above normal for this time of year. New Mexico reservoir storage is generally below normal and down relative to last year, except for in the eastern part of the state, where reservoirs of the Canadian River and Pecos River are at near normal or above normal levels.



**Figure 1.** Arizona reservoir volumes for the end of February 2026 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 February 2026 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.

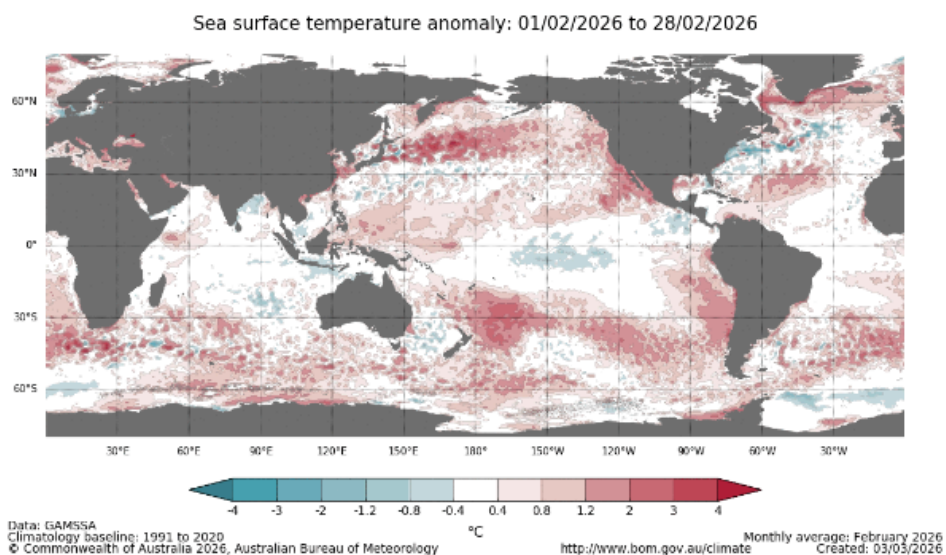
The map gives a representation of current storage for reservoirs in Arizona and New Mexico. Reservoir locations are numbered within the blue circles on the map, corresponding to the reservoirs listed in the table. The cup next to each reservoir shows the current storage (blue fill) as a percent of total 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

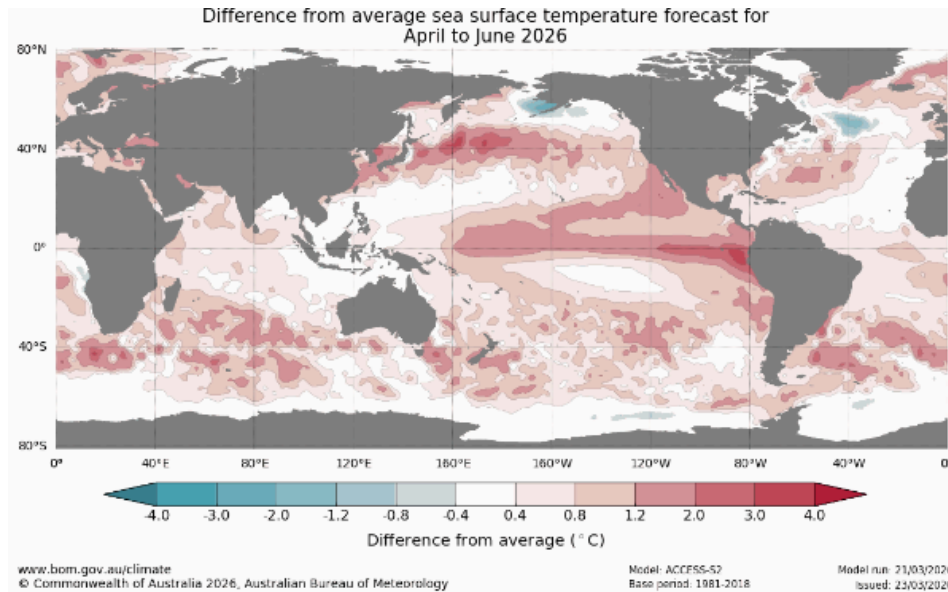
February sea surface temperatures (SSTs) were near normal to below normal in the central equatorial Pacific—the persisting signature of the fading La Niña event that lasted through the winter months.



[Source: Australian Bureau of Meteorology.](#)

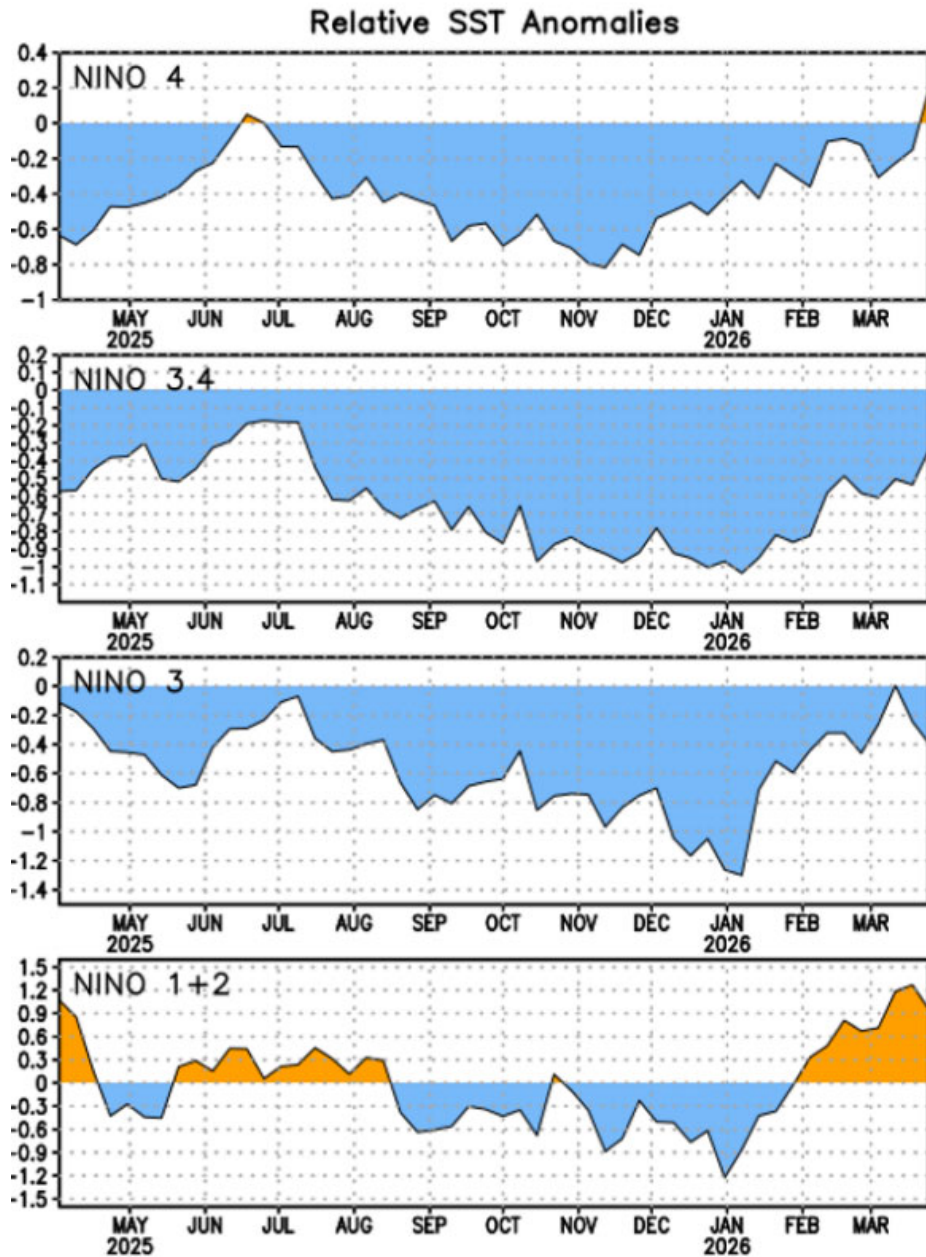
Forecast models are predicting a shift, toward warmer-than-average SSTs in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific, and possibly El Niño conditions, as early as the April–June forecast

window, as depicted by the ACCESS-S2 model forecast for Australia's Bureau of Meteorology.



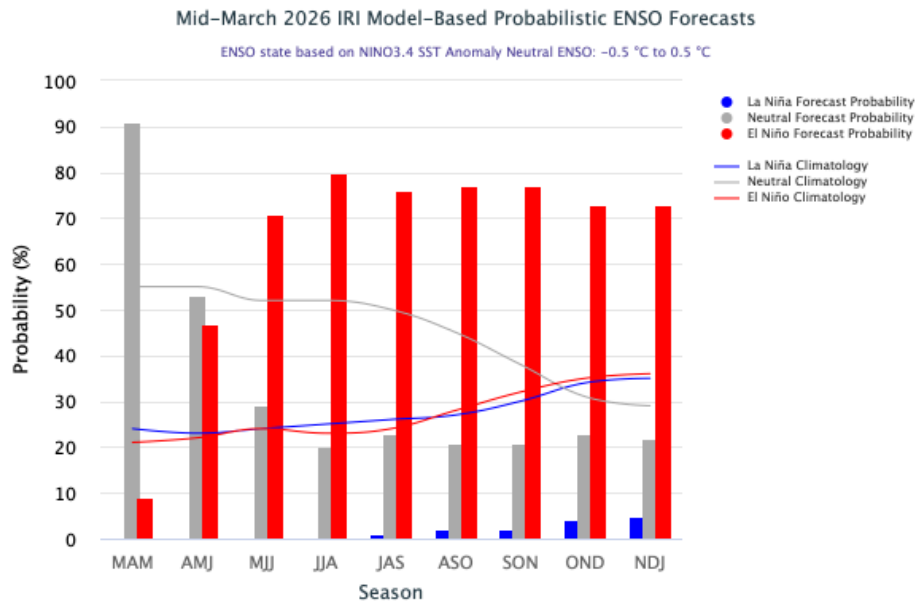
Source: Australian Bureau of Meteorology.

La Niña conditions—SSTs cooler than 0.5°C below average in the central-eastern equatorial Pacific (the Nino 3.4 monitoring region), have persisted into March, but the most recent weekly SST observations were on the ENSO-neutral side of the threshold at 0.3°C cooler than average.



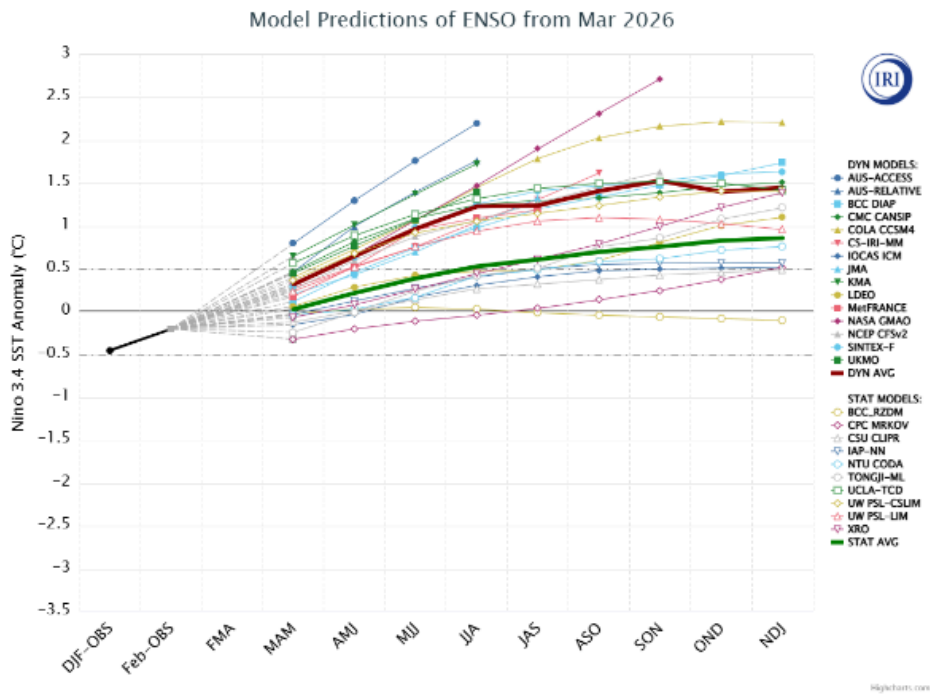
Source: [Climate Prediction Center \(NOAA\)](#)

Forecast models are in general agreement that ENSO-neutral conditions will prevail over the March–May (MAM) seasonal window, but El Niño conditions are favored beginning with the May–July (MJJ) forecast window, and for all subsequent seasons in the forecast, with probabilities greater than 70% chance.



Source: The International Research Institute for Climate and Society, Columbia University Climate School

Individual model forecasts vary, with some models—including the Australian ACCESS model—showing a rapid warming of SSTs in the east-central equatorial Pacific and meeting criteria for El Niño as early as the March–May forecast window. On the other extreme of the range of model forecasts, there are some models that show only moderate warming over February SSTs, or delayed warming, in either case keeping Pacific SSTs in the range of ENSO-neutral conditions. No models predict a return of La Niña conditions within the time horizon of the forecasts.



Source: The International Research Institute for Climate and Society, Columbia University Climate School

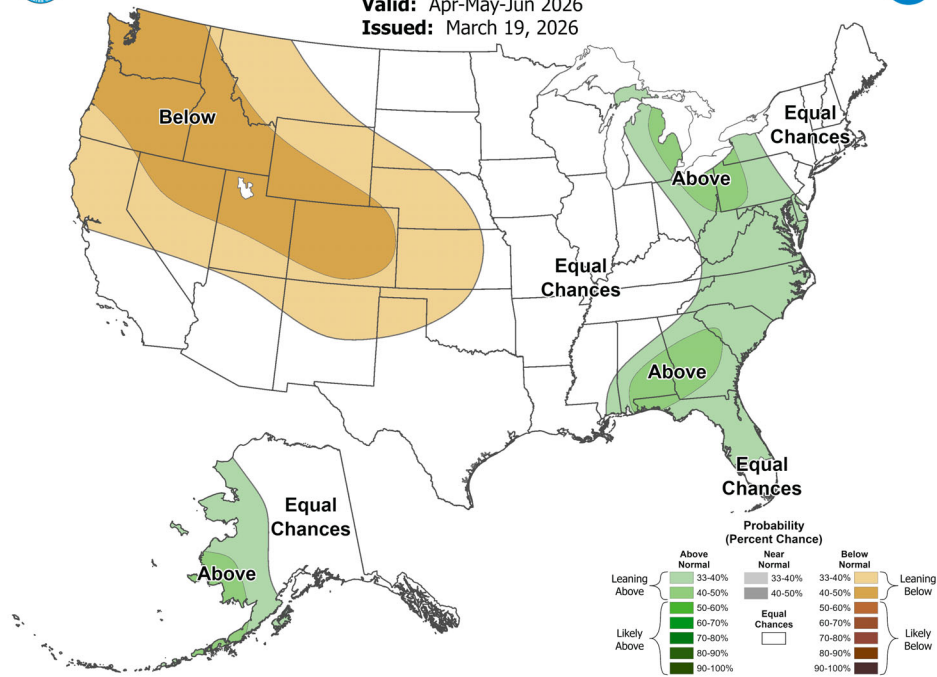
## Seasonal Forecasts

The seasonal precipitation forecast for April–June gives equal chances of above normal, below normal, and near normal precipitation for an area that includes much of Arizona and southern New Mexico. The forecast leans toward below normal precipitation for northern New Mexico and parts of northern Arizona—giving 33–40% chance of precipitation totals that would rank in the bottom one-third of the record for the April–June season.



# Seasonal Precipitation Outlook

Valid: Apr-May-Jun 2026  
Issued: March 19, 2026



Source: [Climate Prediction Center \(NOAA\)](https://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov)

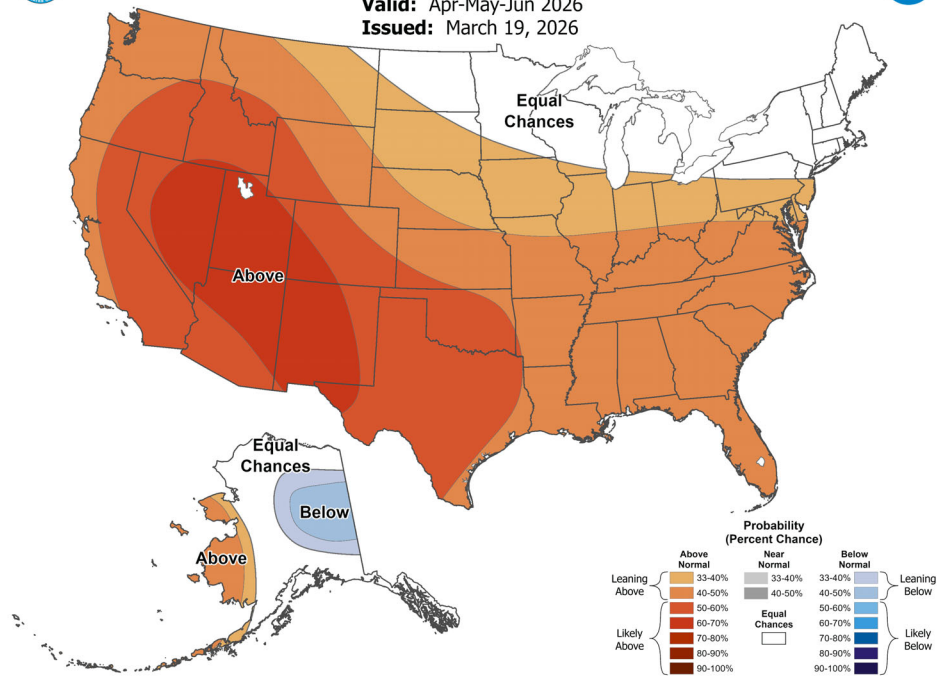
The seasonal temperature forecast for April–June indicates a *likely* (50–70%) chance of above normal temperatures for Arizona and New Mexico. Above normal temperatures refers to seasonal averages that would rank in the upper one-third of April–June seasons on record.



# Seasonal Temperature Outlook



Valid: Apr-May-Jun 2026  
Issued: March 19, 2026



Source: [Climate Prediction Center \(NOAA\)](https://climatepredictioncenter.noaa.gov/)

## Southwest Climate Podcast

### March 2026 SW Climate Podcast - What's Your Favorite Month?



*Recorded 03/03/2026, Aired 03/04/2026*

In this month's episode of the Southwest Climate Podcast, Hosts Zack Guido and Mike Crimmins rank their favorite months of the year - and June gets no love. They recap February's weather which was high and dry but not much else. There's a discussion on ENSO with a deep dive into a couple related papers of note. And with the

end of meteorological winter they cover the bleak snowpack conditions in the west. Towards the end there is a look into the models to see what is on the horizon - including for the monsoon. Stick around for an announcement on the 2026 Southwest Monsoon Fantasy Forecasts game with a lot of new exciting features - you won't want to miss!

[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.

### Currently Funded CAP/RISA Teams and Expansion Activities



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



### Disclaimer

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**Southwest Climate**      Mike Crimmins & Matt  
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