



National Seasonal Assessment Workshop

Western States & Alaska

Boulder, Colorado
April 4–7, 2006

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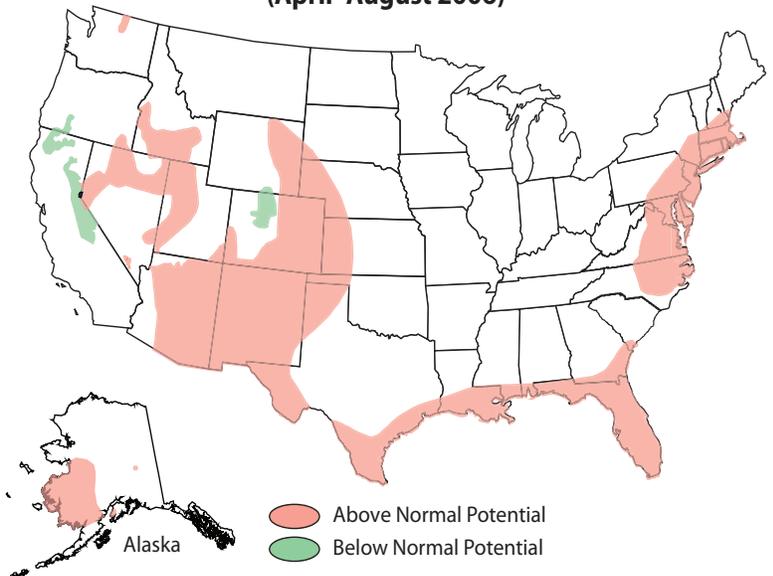
Western States & Alaska Fire Season 2006

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:

Seasonal Wildland Fire Potential Outlook (April–August 2006)



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

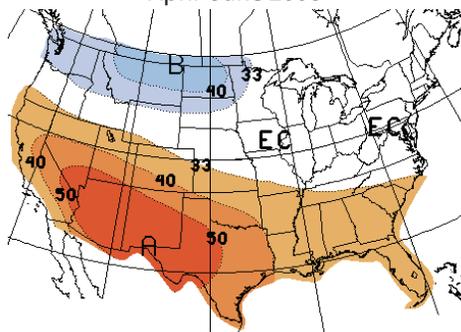
Above-normal fire potential is expected in western Alaska due to low snowpack and warmer-than-normal temperatures this spring and summer. In the Kenai Peninsula, large areas of bug-killed spruce will increase fire risk.

Pacific Northwest

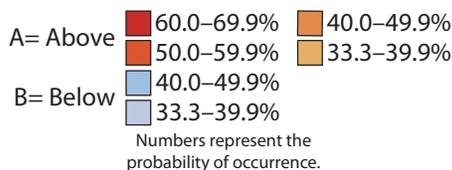
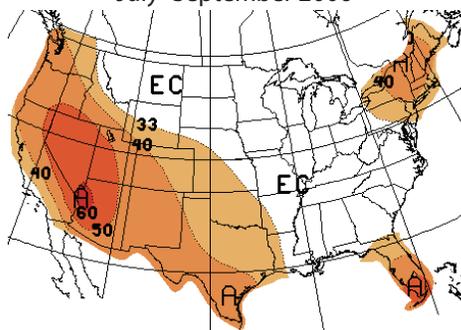
Washington and Oregon have received well above-average precipitation through the 2005–2006 winter. Normal fire potential is forecast for much of the area. Southeast Oregon and north-central

Temperature Forecasts

April–June 2006

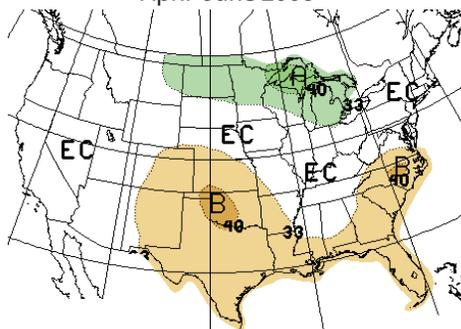


July–September 2006

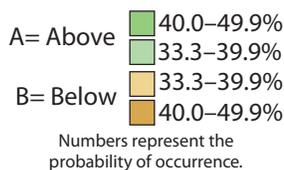
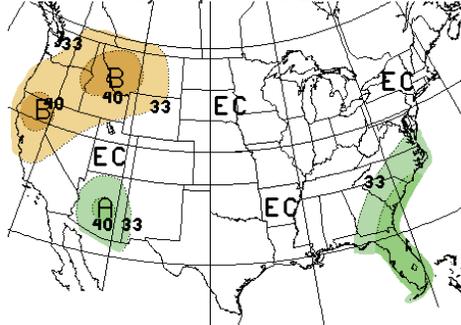


Precipitation Forecasts

April–June 2006



July–September 2006



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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