



National Significant Wildland Fire Potential Outlook

Predictive Services
National Interagency Fire Center



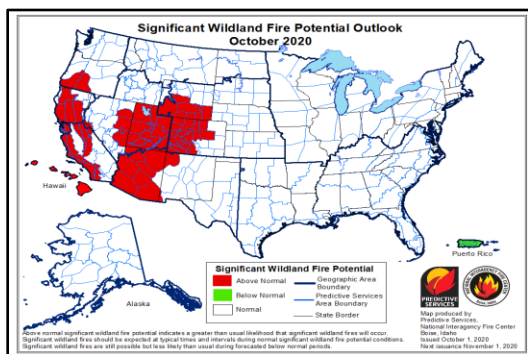
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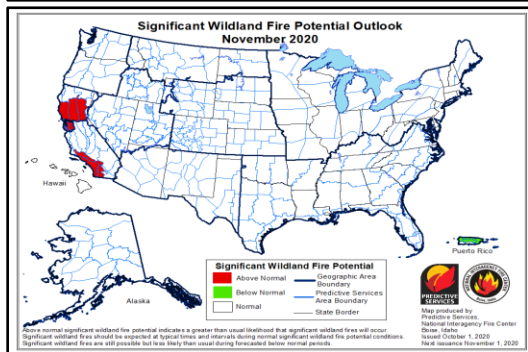
Outlook Period – October, November, and December 2020 through January 2021

Executive Summary

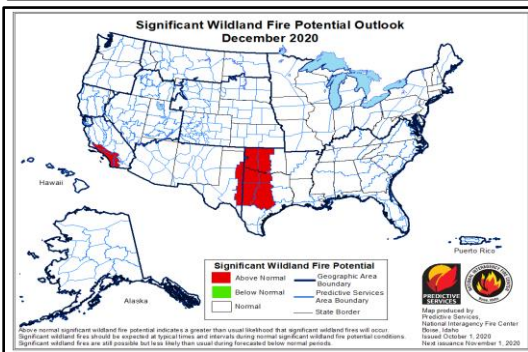
The significant wildland fire potential forecasts included in this outlook represent the cumulative forecasts of the ten Geographic Area Predictive Services units and the National Predictive Services unit.



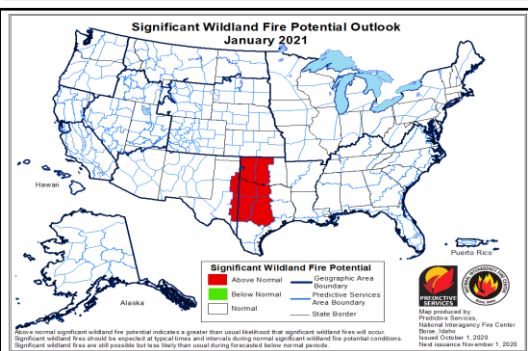
A heat wave developed across the West Coast during the first week of September that resulted in hot, dry, and unstable conditions with explosive large fire growth. The Creek Fire in southern California produced multiple pyrocumulonimbus clouds including lightning and the first two pyrotornadoes ever surveyed by the National Weather Service (NWS). Fire activity also increased across much of the West in response to the heat wave and very dry fuels.



Multiple wind events resulted in significant large fire activity including a historic offshore wind event that began Labor Day and continued during the following few days. Rapid fire spread and extreme fire behavior developed on numerous new and existing large fires in Washington, Oregon, and California. Other notable wind events led to significant increases of fire activity in Montana and California early and late in September, respectively.



Air quality and smoke concerns were greatly exacerbated on the West Coast and eventually most of the West for much of September. However, a series of upper-level troughs produced wetting rain across portions of the Pacific Northwest and Northern Rockies later in the month. This helped reduced fire activity and significant fire potential late in the month across these regions. A pause in fire activity was observed in the Rocky Mountain Area due to cold, wet conditions during the week of Labor Day, but rebounded later in the month.



La Niña and current fuel conditions are the main drivers of significant fire potential through fall and into winter. Drought conditions are expected to continue for much of California, the Great Basin, and the Southwest through October with drying expected to increase across portions of the southern Plains and Southeast. Significant fire potential remains above normal for California due to the number of active large fires, near record dry fuels, and offshore wind events.

Above normal significant fire potential is expected across much of California, Arizona, eastern Nevada, Utah, Colorado Rockies, and southern Wyoming in October. However, fire activity and potential will likely diminish across the West, except for portions of California, and remain normal over the Eastern and Southern Areas through November. Elevated periods of fire activity are likely in portions of Oklahoma and Texas and possibly in other locations in the Southern Area during fall into winter.

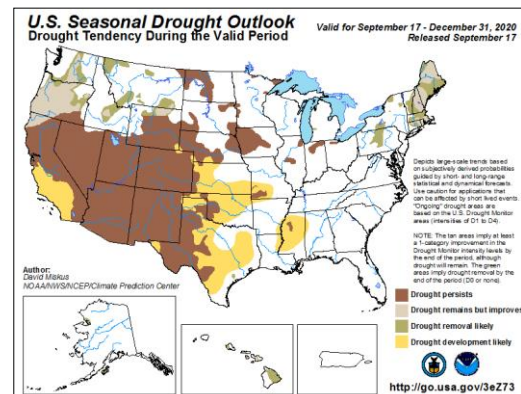
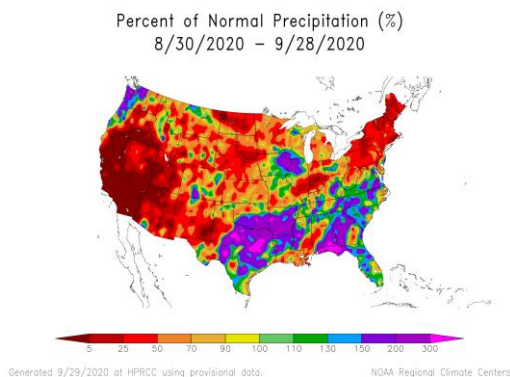
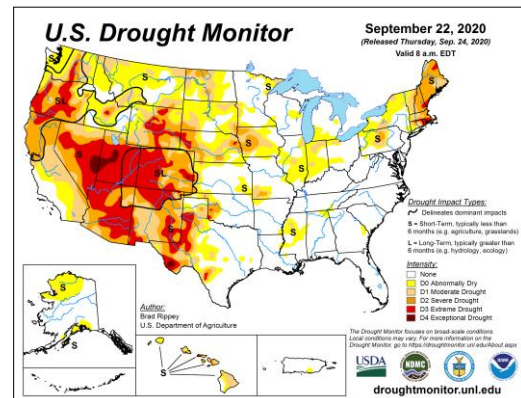
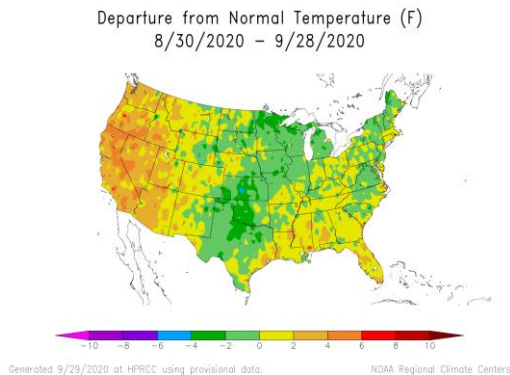
Past Weather and Drought

September began with strong upper-level ridging over the West and above average to record setting temperatures across large portions of the region, especially from the Desert Southwest into the Pacific Northwest. Due to the hot, dry, and unstable conditions, multiple large fires produced pyrocumulonimbus clouds including the Creek Fire in California where the NWS surveyed the first ever pyrotornadoes. A wind event in early September resulted in multiple large fires in Montana while periodic hot, dry, and windy conditions fueled growth on large fires in Wyoming and Colorado.

A strong upper-level trough began to move southward into the Intermountain West on Labor Day before stalling out near the Four Corners region. Extremely strong east-northeast, offshore winds developed amid a dry airmass along the length of the West Coast resulting in historic wind-driven fire activity. Also during this event, precipitation, including snow at higher elevations, fell across the Rocky Mountains and the Plains, which helped temporarily dampen fire danger across these areas.

Tropical Storm Beta made landfall at Matagorda Bay in Texas on September 21 and brought heavy rainfall to portions of east Texas, the Lower Mississippi Valley, Tennessee Valley, and Southeast. Warm and dry conditions continued across much of New England, which led to several days of higher fire danger.

A series of upper-level troughs moved through the Pacific Northwest and Northern Rockies towards the end of the month resulting in wetting rain across much of the region and significantly lower fire danger in Washington, western Oregon, the Idaho Panhandle, and northwest Montana. While lightning was relatively infrequent during September, widely scattered dry thunderstorms resulted in an increase of initial attack and new large fires for portions of the Southwest, Great Basin, Rocky Mountain, and Northern Rockies areas on September 21-24. As a cold front pushed south through the West during the last weekend of September, another round of strong offshore winds developed resulting in extreme behavior and rapid fire spread in northern California, including new large fires that remain active.



Left: Departure from Normal Temperature (top) and Percent of Normal Precipitation (bottom) (from High Plains Regional Climate Center). **Right: U.S. Drought Monitor (top) and Drought Outlook (bottom)** (from National Drought Mitigation Center and the Climate Prediction Center)

Weather and Climate Outlooks

La Niña developed in September with below average sea surface temperatures (SSTs) in the equatorial east-central and eastern Pacific Ocean. The Climate Predicter Center (CPC) forecasts a 75% chance that La Niña conditions will continue through the winter. La Niña has the potential to significantly impact the fall fire season in California by producing persistent drier than average conditions along with a possible higher frequency of wind events. Warmer and drier conditions are also likely to continue for much of the Great Basin and Southwest through the fall. Drier than average conditions may also develop across the Southeast this fall and winter.

Geographic Area Forecasts

Alaska: The forecast for Alaska calls for normal fire behavior from October through January. The forecast of “normal” fire behavior is somewhat deceptive, however, as there is typically no activity in Alaska during this time. For the purposes of this discussion, the word normal is almost synonymous with “zero” fire behavior.

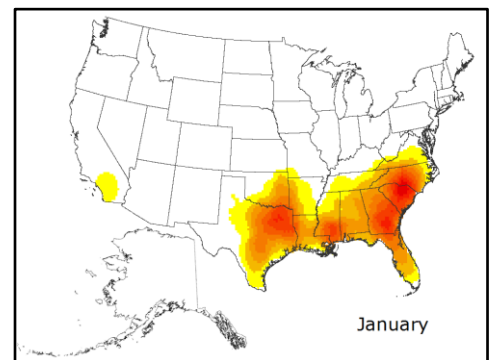
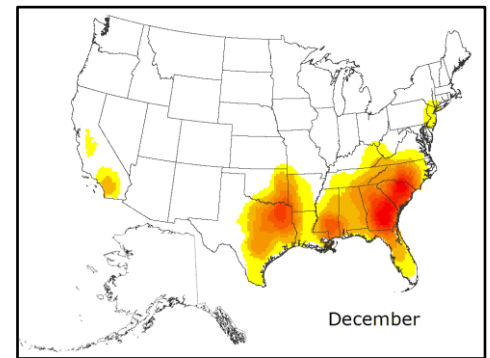
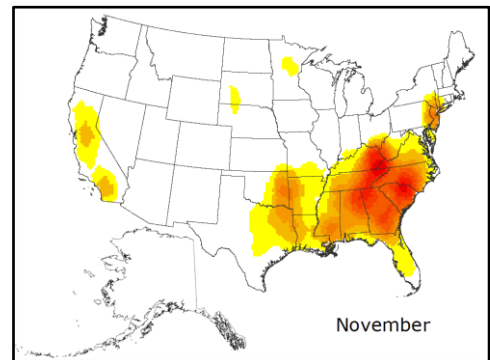
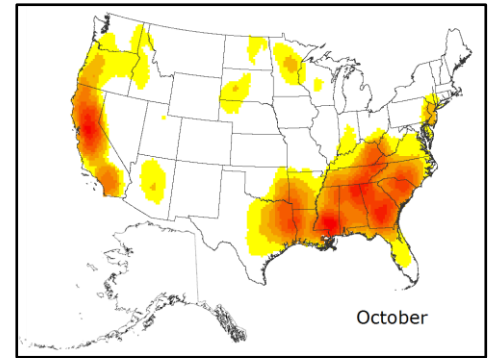
While much of Alaska’s Interior and the southeast Panhandle received ample rainfall through the summer, some parts of western Alaska had below normal precipitation. Consequently, the Kotzebue area in northwest Alaska and Kodiak Island have been moved into moderate drought status.

CPC forecasts above normal temperatures along western and northern Alaska through the coming winter due to the decrease sea ice along these coastal areas. The forecast of increasing La Niña conditions suggests meridional flow will be prominent in the greater Alaska region this winter, which can bring wild swings between long cold snaps and sudden warm-ups.

Much of Alaska ended the 2020 fire season with moist fuels, even into the deeper duff layers. If snowfall is below normal in October and November, dried and cured grasses left over from the summer could be exposed and support small local surface-fires with any such fires likely easy to control.

Northwest: After a busy September, the Northwest Geographic Area will return to normal significant fire potential in October and remain there through spring. Normal risk in October through April means a low probability of large, costly fires.

The very dry trend observed in July and August across the region continued for the first half of September. Daily values of minimum relative humidity and corresponding overnight recoveries maintained a worsening trend from late August through mid-September, falling steadily below average. On September 7-8, a strong dry cold front moving south from Canada pushed across the region bringing record breaking strong winds and low relative humidity to much of the region. As winds calmed behind the front, smoke from multiple large fires settled into western Oregon and Washington creating unhealthy air quality and poor visibility the spread over the next ten days on both sides of the Cascades.



Normal fire season progression across the contiguous U.S. and Alaska shown by monthly fire density (number of fires per unit area). Fire size and fire severity cannot be inferred from this analysis. (Based on 1999-2010 FPA Data)

Dry air and heavy smoke lingered until several Pacific frontal systems brought welcomed rain on September 18 and September 24. The areas most impacted by rain were western Washington and most of northwest Oregon where rainfall totals were well above normal. However, eastern Washington, eastern Oregon, and southwest Oregon did not accumulate as much precipitation and rainfall totals remained below average for the month. Air quality improved considerably with the arrival of the Pacific frontal systems. Despite the arrival of cold fronts, temperatures were above normal for September over the entire geographic area.

The Northwest Geographic Area was already busy at Preparedness Level 4 in early September with a dozen large incidents receiving support, including Type I, Type II, and Type III Incident Management Teams (IMTs) in both Oregon and Washington. On Sep 7-8, a dry cold front swept in from Canada with strong winds and toppled power poles across the geographic area igniting multiple large fires in eastern Washington, and in or near the Cascades of western and southern Oregon.

The resulting fast-moving wildfires in timber, brush, and grass burned hundreds of thousands of acres during and after the winds. Hundreds of homes in a variety of communities around Oregon and Washington were destroyed and widespread disruptive evacuations were ordered with loss of life reported. The event proved to be an unprecedented catastrophe for communities and resource loss.

The Northwest Geographic Area elevated to Preparedness Level 5 as the demand for firefighting resources spiked. Over 9,000 firefighters were subsequently assigned to multiple Type I, Type II, and Type III incidents. Fire activity was well above average for the region for September both in terms of numbers of fires and acreage burned.

September began with fire danger above average and rising steadily in every part of the region. Fire danger reached or exceeded extreme values set over the last thirty years during and after the wind event. Following the arrival of several wet frontal systems from the Pacific, cool weather and rainfall helped drop fire danger back down to normal levels or below for late September. Fire danger rose again as warm and dry weather returned at the end of the month. Climate outlooks suggest autumn and winter are likely to be wetter and cooler than normal.

Northern California and Hawai'i: Above normal large significant fire potential is expected across most areas west of the Cascade-Sierra crest in October. Coastal areas from Mendocino County south, the Sacramento Valley and surrounding foothills, and the western Cascade-Sierra slopes are forecast to have above normal significant fire potential in November. All areas of northern California are expected to have normal significant fire potential in December and January. For all of Hawai'i, above normal significant fire is expected in October before returning to normal November through January.

Fuels are near or drier than average for early October with some areas above the 90th percentile ERC values and 10th percentile in fuel moisture values. As October begins, the North Ops region has several active fires that have recently exhibited extreme fire behavior and rapid spread rates. Outside of two episodes of light rain in far northwest California, the region has received little to no rainfall since late May. Near-term outlooks show another light rain event in far northwest California during the second week of October. Precipitation is not expected in the remainder of the region through the first half of October. Current outlooks call for drier and warmer than normal weather through December, followed by near normal weather as 2021 begins. Even with the expectation of below normal precipitation, it is expected that occasional light wetting rain events will impact the region beginning in late October, but these events are not expected to completely end the 2020 fire season.

With the fall offshore wind season off to an intense start and fuels remaining very dry, most areas west of the Cascade-Sierra crest have above normal significant fire potential in October. Until a significant wetting rain event arrives – not likely until the early or middle part of November – areas west of the crest to the coast from Mendocino County south will continue to have above normal significant fire potential in November. Significant fire potential is normal in areas not mentioned above, and in all areas in December and January.

Sea surface temperatures (SSTs) surrounding the Hawai'ian Islands are slightly warmer than normal, and the warm SSTs are expected to continue through January, leading to above average temperatures in the region. Rainfall has been well below average in all areas this summer, leading to abnormally dry and drought conditions. A weak La Niña pattern is expected to continue through the winter. The outlook calls for warm and dry conditions to continue in October, followed by a switch toward wetter weather during the late fall and winter. All of Hawai'i has above normal significant fire potential in October with normal significant fire potential in all areas from November through January as the rainy season begins.

Southern California: Above normal significant fire potential is expected across much of the Coast Ranges and Sierra Nevada in Southern California for October. Significant fire potential is forecast to continue to be above normal for the Peninsular and Transverse Ranges into December with all areas likely returning to normal by January.

During September, high pressure over the Great Basin and Desert Southwest was the dominant weather feature and it brought above normal temperatures and little to no precipitation across Southern California during September. However, a couple of upper-level troughs moving inland across the Pacific Northwest brought brief periods of near to slightly below normal temperatures. The high pressure was exceptionally strong on September 5-6 when some locations recorded their hottest days ever including many valley locations with observed temperatures of 110-120°F with pyrocumulonimbus development over the Creek Fire resulting in lightning. Moisture from the remnants of Tropical Storm Karina brought scattered light showers with less than a quarter inch of rainfall to the central and eastern Sierra on September 17-18.

Moderate drought to abnormally dry conditions continued across interior portions of central California north of Kern County and across the deserts. 1000-hour dead fuel moisture remained near or below the 3rd percentile across much of the region and some areas across Southern California broke record low values. The live fuel moisture has dropped mainly to between 50% and 70% with a few old growth fuel moistures running between 40% and 50%, which are below normal for this time of year.

SSTs remain well above normal over the Gulf of Alaska and across the West Coast, while well below normal over the Equatorial Pacific. This will most likely cause high pressure off the California Coast to be the dominant weather feature from October through January. This ridge of high pressure will bring above normal temperatures and below normal precipitation to the region. Offshore wind events are also expected to be above normal as upper-level troughs are forced down into the Great Basin from the Pacific Northwest resulting in stronger offshore surface pressure gradients. Even though precipitation is expected to be well below normal and temperatures above normal into the winter months, significant fire potential will most likely drop to near normal across central California starting in November as temperatures cool. The large fire threat will most likely continue to be above normal across Southern California through December due to the expected above normal amount of Santa Ana wind events. However, enough rainfall will most likely occur across Southern California by January to lower significant fire potential to near normal.

Northern Rockies: There may be short-lived events east of the Continental Divide with above normal potential when dry and windy conditions align but they are not likely to be persistent, nor widespread. Overall, the Northern Rockies Geographical Area is expected to see near normal significant wildland fire potential for October through January.

Precipitation during the past two months was well below average in the Northern Rockies Geographical Area. For the same period, mean temperatures were slightly above average in north-central Idaho and west-central Montana, partially due to warmer nighttime temperatures. However, it was slightly cooler than average in North Dakota over the past month. There are persistent, but small areas of drought in southwest, southeast, and northwest Montana as well as the northern Idaho Panhandle. A larger area of severe (D2) drought remains in northwest and central North Dakota, surrounded by abnormally dry conditions across most of the state.

There was a significant and widespread windstorm during the first week of September. It brought late-summer winds from a rare north-northeast direction that gusted over 50 miles per hour in many places. Several large fires started during this event, primarily in central and eastern Montana where relative

humidity was in the single digits during the cold frontal passage. The windstorm was followed by higher humidity and cooler temperatures, which brought some temporary moderation in fire potential, especially west of the Continental Divide, where there was a series of measurable precipitation events.

The first mountain snowfall of the season brought several inches over the higher passes on Labor Day. East of the Divide remained very dry and warm during September as a strong ridge of high pressure resumed over the western U.S. A significant mid-month smoke intrusion from the western wildfires kept temperatures about 10-20°F cooler but remained very dry with multi-day periods of poor humidity recoveries on the mid-slopes and ridges. This smoke prevented aircraft from flying due to visibility restrictions, and it also created very unhealthy and hazardous air quality in north-central Idaho and the western half of Montana.

The third week of September brought several new large fires to southeast Montana with an early morning lightning storm followed by strong winds. This was a sizeable test for those fires and the driest areas of south-central and central Montana with several days of strong and gusty winds associated with dry cold frontal passages. Despite the dry and windy conditions, there is currently only one large fire in the Northern Rockies Geographic Area.

Many of the western predictive services areas (PSAs) have near average fuel moisture and fire danger. However, east of the Divide in central and south-central Montana, fuel moistures remain extremely low – or near record low levels for this time of year. Fine fuels in all the lower elevations are still abundant and cured and continue to support fire spread. Live fuel moistures in timber are still near-average in the western PSAs, reflecting an absence of significant drought status.

There could still be periods of enhanced fire potential with dry cold fronts and gusty winds, but a gradual return to normal fire potential in October is expected. Climatologically, the latter half of October brings more frequent upper-level trough passages with significant cooling, wetting precipitation, and multi-day periods of higher relative humidity. The longer nights and stronger valley inversions lead to much shorter daily burn periods, and slower fuel curing.

On the Plains, warm, dry, and windy periods are a typical early fall occurrence. In drier years like this year it can be persistent in central and eastern Montana when dry upper trough passages are more frequent. This can be enhanced during La Niña periods, which is currently ongoing, and 2012 is one example, when an extended season persisted in eastern Montana into October.

CPC's seasonal outlooks for the October-December and November-January periods depict near to above-average precipitation for the period west of the Divide, which would suggest normal fire potential. For central and eastern Montana and North Dakota the climate outlooks suggest warmer and drier than average conditions – at least for October. Normal fire potential is expected despite short-lived periods of enhanced winds and dryness in October.

The months of November through January are out of fire season in the Northern Rockies with cold temperatures and mountain snowpack developing. La Niña fall and early winters tend to be colder and sometimes wetter as well, especially on the Plains. Accordingly, fire potential for all PSAs will be indicated as "normal/out of season" for the period.

Great Basin: Above normal significant fire potential is expected to last through September over much of the Great Basin. Fire potential should gradually lower later in October across the region with normal conditions expected heading into the winter. There will be periods of increased fire potential through the fall and winter in Nevada and Utah where fine fuel loading is above normal.

Temperatures across the Great Basin have been above normal over the past 30 days, as stronger high pressure has been dominant. Precipitation over the last 30 days has been well below normal across most of the Great Basin, and only near to slightly above normal over parts of central and eastern Idaho due to cold fronts dropping south bringing wetting rain. The monsoon did not materialize this year resulting in

above normal temperatures and below normal precipitation in the Great Basin. Precipitation for the past year has been below normal across all but the far southern portions of Nevada into northwest Arizona and far southwest Utah, which is 130-200% of normal, accounting for wetter weather in November, December, and the spring. Otherwise, precipitation was just above normal across parts of Idaho into Wyoming, and below normal across the rest of the Great Basin. The drought intensified to extreme and exceptional over much of Nevada, Utah and the Arizona Strip due to the abnormally dry July-September conditions. Moderate to localized extreme drought is also occurring over a small portion of south-central Idaho. These drought areas are expected to persist into the fall across Nevada, Utah and the Arizona Strip while improving across Idaho due to recent moisture and likely additional moisture later in October as cold fronts return to the region.

Fine fuel loading is still 100-300% of normal across parts of Nevada, Utah, the Arizona Strip and southern Idaho. Most of the higher fuel loadings over the northern half of the Great Basin are due to dead carryover fuels. Southern portions of the Great Basin have seen new fine fuel growth due to a wetter winter and spring in the far south.

Periodic record heat with occasional breezy winds occurred in July-September. Cold fronts were quite dry in September as they swept through Nevada and Utah bringing only stronger winds. Moisture remained north across Idaho and Wyoming and far northern Utah. Fuels remain exceptionally dry over the southern half of the Great Basin with ERCs, live and dead fuel moisture at record levels. Fuels are not quite as dry in Idaho, but there are some drier areas that missed out on precipitation with the cold fronts.

Above normal temperatures and very dry conditions are expected across the Great Basin through early to mid-October. As cold fronts return, breezy winds are likely and moisture may remain more limited until later in October. At this time, the southern half of the Great Basin is expected to be drier than normal heading into the winter months, while precipitation may start increasing over the winter in northern areas toward Idaho and Wyoming as La Niña sets in.

Fire activity typically peaks in August and steadily declines in September with minimal fire activity by October. However, September was quite busy with team fires across Idaho into Utah and the Arizona Strip. With record low fuel moisture and record high ERCs across the southern half of the Great Basin and warm and dry weather expected through at least the first half of October, above normal significant fire potential will continue in October. The higher elevations that are very dry along the Sierra Front will be at risk for above normal significant fire potential as well. Shorter days will gradually diminish fire activity and keep most new fires later in October or November to a burning period without wind. Normal fire potential is expected November through January. However, depending on moisture, we will have to monitor the southern half to two-thirds of the Great Basin. As cold fronts move through elevated fire potential may develop as winds increase after extended dry periods due to the current low fuel moisture and as fuels transition to dormancy.

Southwest: Above normal significant fire potential is expected across much of Arizona for October with normal significant fire potential elsewhere. Normal significant fire potential is expected across the Southwest Geographic Area November through January.

Over the past two months high temperatures have been mainly 4-8°F above normal across most areas along and west of the New Mexico central mountain chain with more temperate conditions across the eastern half of New Mexico into west Texas. Dry conditions continue with precipitation 50% of average across most areas west of the Continental Divide and the driest areas in western and northern Arizona. New Mexico, in general, has received more precipitation, but remains abnormally dry or in drought, but a few pockets of above normal precipitation were observed in portions of the state. Overall, precipitation has averaged around 50-75% of normal for many areas of the state over the past two months.

Oceanic conditions have been shifting and are now into a weak to moderate La Niña. Overall, these oceanic conditions result in normal to above normal temperatures. Backdoor cold fronts will become more likely and regular as October arrives, which will provide some brief respite from the warmer than normal conditions. However, below normal precipitation is still expected in October and likely through fall.

Most models reveal the same signal of mild to warmer than normal temperatures throughout the upcoming forecast period with primarily dry conditions intact. It is likely that a negative Pacific-North American (PNA) pattern could arrive periodically during the next few months offering at least a brief period of breezy and cooler conditions with a chance of precipitation focused north and west as well as across the southern High Plains. However, it is expected to be a dry and mild fall and early winter for the Southwest Area due to the building La Niña.

Lingering large fire concerns will continue across much of Arizona through much of October with normal conditions across New Mexico. An expected notable lack of high-risk triggers is anticipated over the next few months as significant wind episodes and lightning events are unlikely this late in the year. This will more than likely negate the above normal significant fire potential west of the Divide during October. However, the underlying likelihood of fire concerns remain given that some ignitions are likely to occur. A very dry fall into early winter remains likely with small, nuisance fires likely continuing through the next few months.

Rocky Mountain: Overall a transition to normal significant fire potential is forecast across the geographic area after the first half of October. Above average risk for new large fires is predicted in western and central to north-central portions of Colorado through southern and central Wyoming during this time.

The most persistent above average temperatures in August through September were from southwest to central Colorado, and in Wyoming across the southeast and the west-northwest. September precipitation deficits continued to mount from previous months west of the Continental Divide. Otherwise, very dry conditions have emerged in September in central to southeast South Dakota and northeast Nebraska. In the longer range (July-September), drier than average conditions are most evident west of the Continental Divide, and to a lesser extent central Wyoming, the Colorado Front Range, and portions of the far eastern plains. Continued to intensifying drought is forecast through October west of the Divide into central Wyoming where extreme drought is indicated. Otherwise, severe drought has expanded over a large portion of Wyoming, southwest South Dakota, western Nebraska, and eastern Colorado.

Large fire activity has been well above average in September in terms of acres burned (over 80,000) from fires started in September across a relatively small area of south-central Wyoming (Mullen Fire) and north-central Colorado (Middle Fork). Additionally, the Cameron Peak in north-central Colorado, which started the second week of August, remained very active during the latter portion of September after a lull earlier in the month.

Most of the Rocky Mountain Area (RMA) is showing ERCs near the 90th percentile, except much lower values for Kansas. Corresponding 1000-hour dead fuel moistures are near the 10th percentile, except for Kansas. Soil moisture calculations continue to show deficits most evident across Colorado, far western Kansas, southern Wyoming, and a large portion of Nebraska.

The first two weeks of October are predicted to receive minimal precipitation, and breezy to windy conditions to be most evident east of the Divide. Less windy conditions are predicted during early October in locations west of the Divide, but with comparably warmer temperatures and lower relative humidity values. In the longer range, CPC is forecasting warmer and drier than average conditions across southern portions of the geographic area with northern portions of the area in an average to wetter than average regime, especially after October.

A lack of beneficial moisture in the short and long term has set the stage for continued above average risk for new large fires in Colorado from the western and central to north-central portions of the state, and through southern and central Wyoming. These areas are expected to be in a warmer and drier than average regime at times during the first half of October in conjunction with occasionally windy conditions in northern Colorado into southern and central Wyoming. By the second half of October, expectations are for a transition closer to an average risk for new large fires, especially across the higher terrain of central to southern Wyoming and Colorado, which are typically out of season during this period. Breezy to windy conditions expected during the first half of October across the eastern plains and in the northern portions

of the geographic area are anticipated to be tempered by cooler than average conditions overall along with slightly higher relative humidity compared to areas farther to the south and west. As a result, fire activity in these areas is forecast to be close to average with occasional short duration wind driven grass and brush fires, especially from northeast Wyoming through western and central South Dakota, and northwest Nebraska. Otherwise, for the second half of October and to a lesser extent in November, an average large fire risk for the RMA is shown to continue with occasional short duration grass fires primarily across the eastern plains.

Eastern Area: Elevated fire potential may persist over drier parts of the area into October if forecast near to above normal precipitation trends do not develop. Medium range model projections valid through the first 7-10 days of October do show a drier than normal pattern persisting over the central U.S. Warmer than normal trends may also lead to periods of elevated fire potential in October, although cooler than normal conditions are expected to prevail November into December curtailing overall fire potential.

30-day soil moisture and precipitation anomalies were below normal across parts of the western Great Lakes, Pennsylvania, southern Indiana, and the Northeast towards the end of September. Longer range drought conditions were indicated across parts of Iowa, southwestern Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, western and central Pennsylvania, and the Northeast.

Above normal fire danger and drier than normal fuel moistures were observed towards the end of September in drier portions of the Eastern Area noted above, mainly across the northern Mid-Atlantic states into the Northeast. The fall fire season is forecast to continue spreading southward in a normal progression through the rest of the fall.

Warmer temperature trends are forecast over much of the Eastern Area in October with wetter conditions developing across the northwestern half. Cooler than normal conditions are forecast November into December with warmer trends expected for January. Drier than normal conditions are forecast over much of the geographic area in November lingering over the southern tier into December. Wetter than normal conditions may prevail over parts of the northern tier December into January.

Southern Area: Overall, we are expecting a generalized trend towards to normal conditions through fall – all due to the broader warmer and drier weather patterns created mostly by the current and strengthening La Niña and other supporting intra-seasonal atmospheric oscillations. The exception to this overall outlook is likely in areas of Oklahoma and west Texas where drier conditions are expected to continue and further develop.

Except for D0 to D3 drought conditions in west Texas from the Panhandle to the southern Trans Pecos and similar conditions in far western counties of Oklahoma, the rest of the Southern Area is essentially drought free courtesy an active rainy pattern over summer and from numerous tropical rainfall events. Fuel moistures continue at much above normal levels across all fuel classes except for western areas of Oklahoma and Texas. Overall, fire activity has been below normal.

High and well above average rainfall from September's robust tropical and otherwise higher late summer rain activity has dramatically altered the fire potential threat for the month. While we expect broadly drier and warmer than average weather to be the transitioning trend, very high fuel moistures, soil moistures, and robust "green" vegetation will have a significant muting effect to any early to mid-October drying events. Exceptions are likely for Oklahoma and an area from southeast Louisiana to west-central Mississippi, which have 30-day rain deficits of one to two inches. The occurrence of the first freeze for Oklahoma and Texas, typically later in October, will be a signal for increasing fire danger in the grass fuel types.

Broader, enhanced drying is expected during November as La Niña strengthens. Very moist fuel conditions from September, the still yet to be determined fuels impacts from any drying episodes during October, fall freeze events, and the unfolding fall leaf drop complicates the outlook for November. While timing of these events will be important, conditions seem borderline at this time for precisely indicating above average fire

potential. With the forecast drier and warmer conditions, managers should at least plan for at least “normal” fire potential.

Except for western Oklahoma and areas of central and west Texas, normal significant fire potential is expected in December and January. The expected warmer and drier than average La Niña induced weather pattern could produce some periods of elevated fire potential early in December. Cured grass fuels along with a drier winter forecast could keep western Oklahoma and areas of central and west Texas in elevated to above average fire risk into January.

Outlook Objectives

The National Significant Wildland Fire Potential Outlook is intended as a decision support tool for wildland fire managers, providing an assessment of current weather and fuels conditions and how these will evolve in the next four months. The objective is to assist fire managers in making proactive decisions that will improve protection of life, property and natural resources, increase fire fighter safety and effectiveness, and reduce firefighting costs.

For questions about this outlook, please contact the National Interagency Fire Center at (208) 387-5050 or contact your local Geographic Area Predictive Services unit.

Note: Additional Geographic Area assessments may be available at the specific GACC websites. The GACC websites can also be accessed through the NICC webpage at: <http://www.nifc.gov/nicc/predictive/outlooks/outlooks.htm>