



Montana Fire Season Outlook

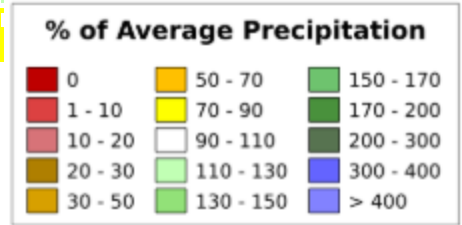
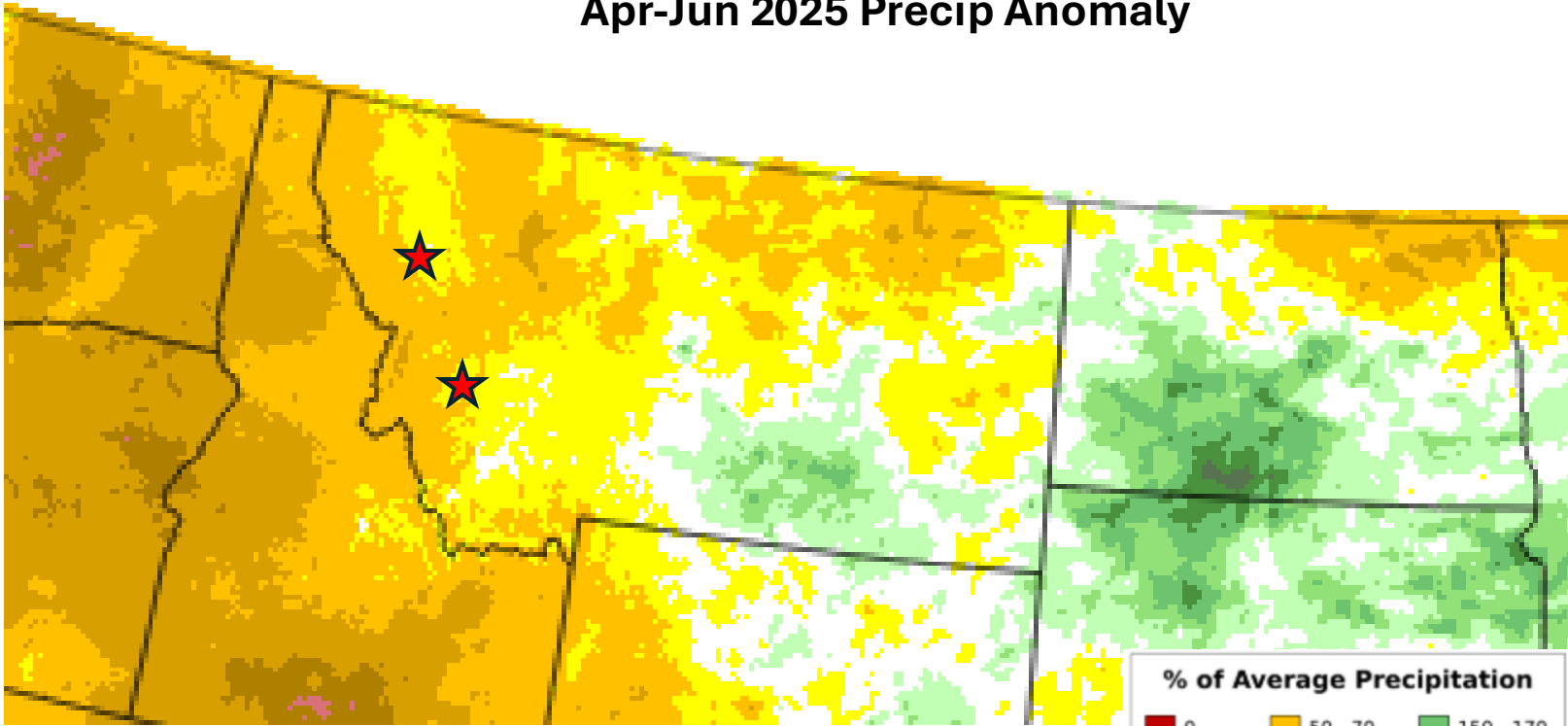
June 2, 2026



- **Weekend storm system helped short term conditions**
 - Normal event for the “wet season”
 - Lack of similar follow up event trends towards fire potential returning
- **Areas expected to experience above normal fire activity:**
 - Eastern Montana through July
 - Southwest Montana in July expanding into the Bitterroot in August
 - **Normal outlook elsewhere still means fire activity is going to happen**
- **Factors: weak winter snowpack, periods of significant wind, dry and warm this winter/spring and summer heat potential**
- **Monsoon and possible east Pacific hurricane activity could temper later fire season activity like recent years**



Apr-Jun 2025 Precip Anomaly



PRISM

Northwest Alliance for Computational Science and Engineering

Looking at last year provides insight to how fire seasons evolve

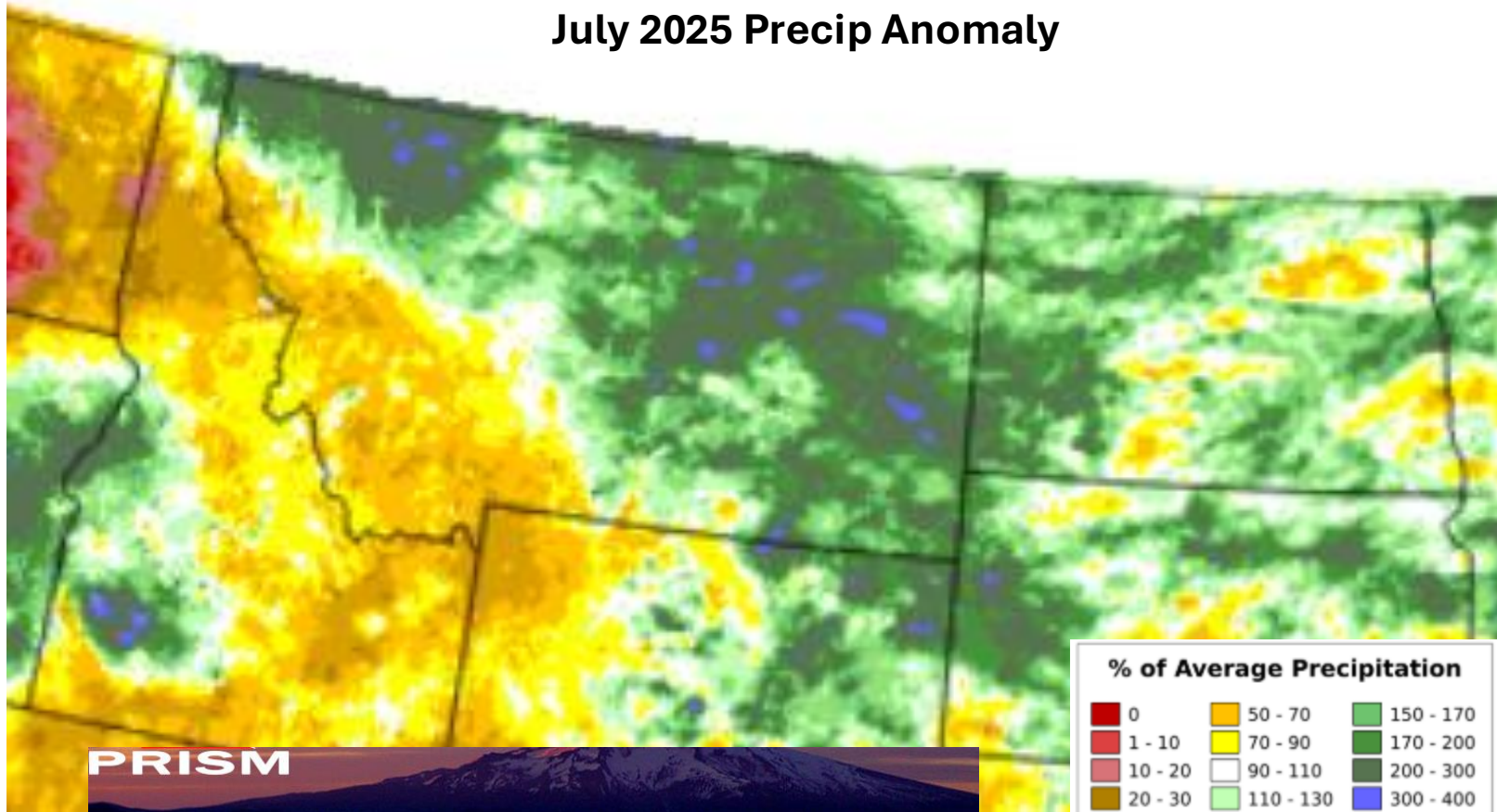
The setup:

Dry spring accelerated concerns for significant fire season in western MT

Saw Log fire near Wise River first week of May and Banana Lake fire near Plains were unusual and significant reason for concern



July 2025 Precip Anomaly



PRISM

Northwest Alliance for Computational Science and Engineering

Relief begins to arrive in July:

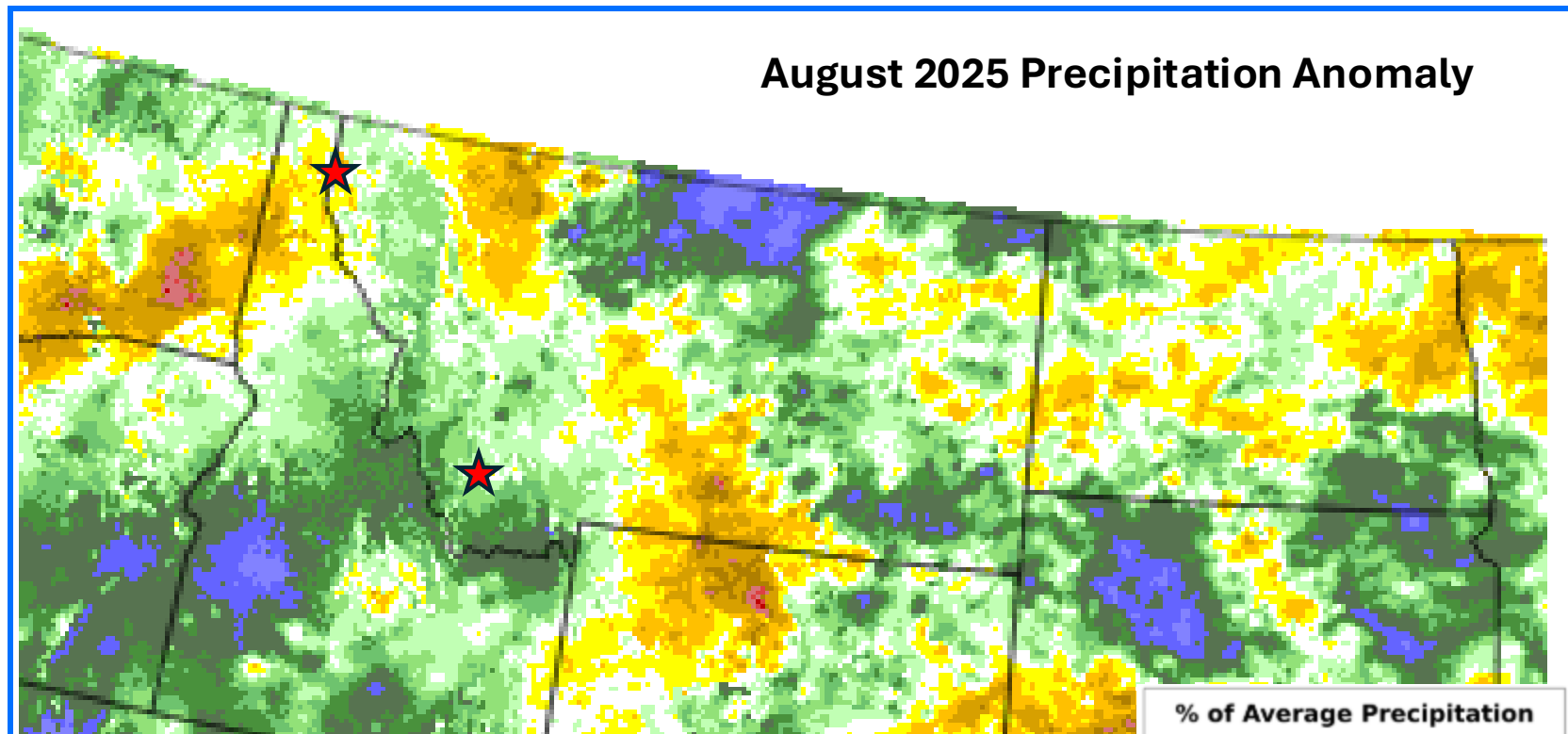
Northwest MT and MT east of Continental Divide were on the wet side

Southwest MT experienced intensifying conditions

Decreasing the geographic extent of concern areas helped focus response



August 2025 Precipitation Anomaly



% of Average Precipitation

0	50 - 70	150 - 170
1 - 10	70 - 90	170 - 200
10 - 20	90 - 110	200 - 300
20 - 30	110 - 130	300 - 400
30 - 50	130 - 150	> 400

PRISM

Northwest Alliance for Computational Science and Engineering

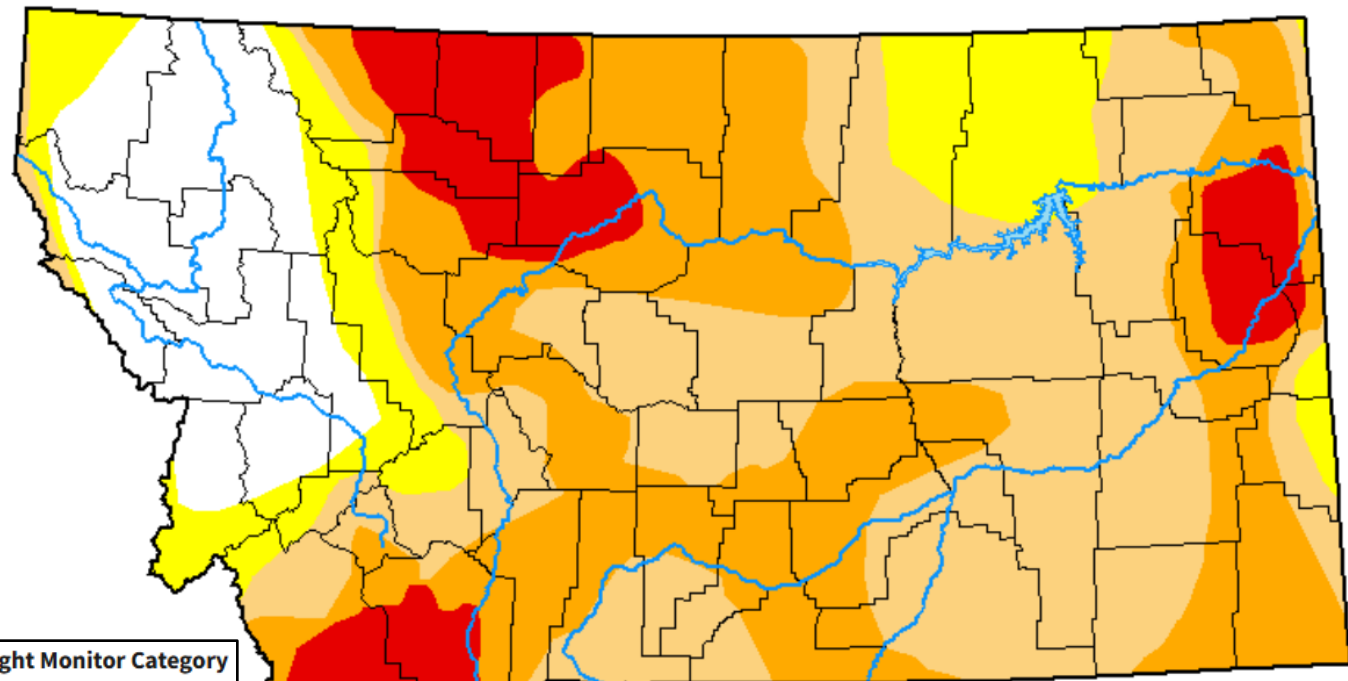
Southwest MT fires were slowed by monsoon moisture intrusions

Parts of northwest MT remained active supported by late season lightning activity

East of the Continental Divide conditions were not hot and dry enough to offset July moisture



- Western Montana has been having better rain since mid March
- Southwest, north central and eastern Montana driest
- Much more of Montana in drought status compared to 2024 and 2025

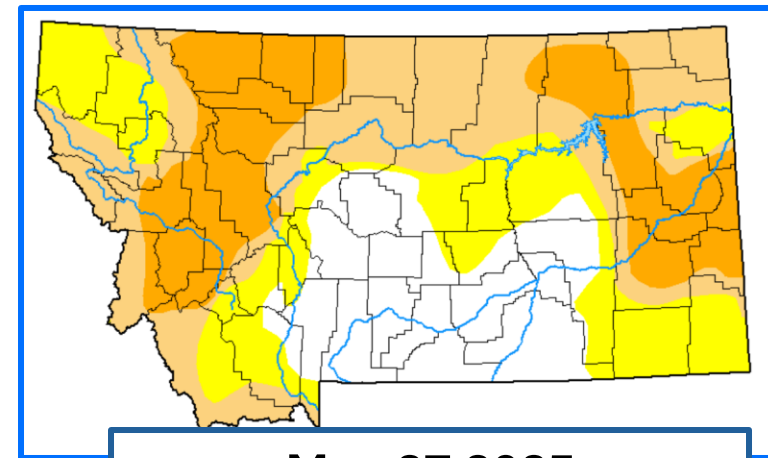


**Drought Monitor
May 26 2026**

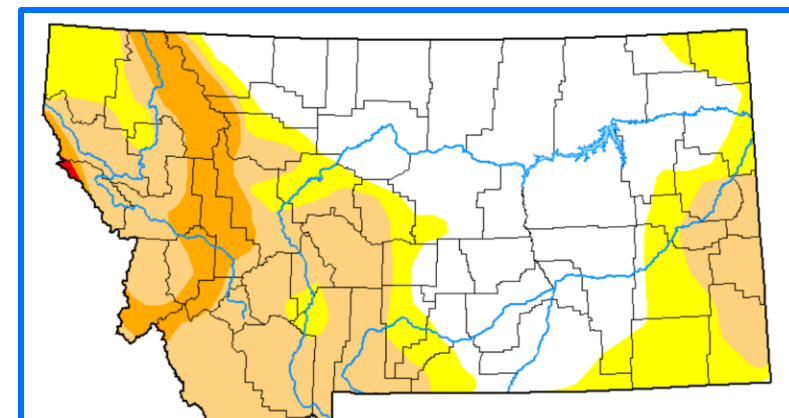


U.S. Drought Monitor Category

	D0 - Abnormally Dry
	D1 - Moderate Drought
	D2 - Severe Drought
	D3 - Extreme Drought
	D4 - Exceptional Drought



May 27 2025

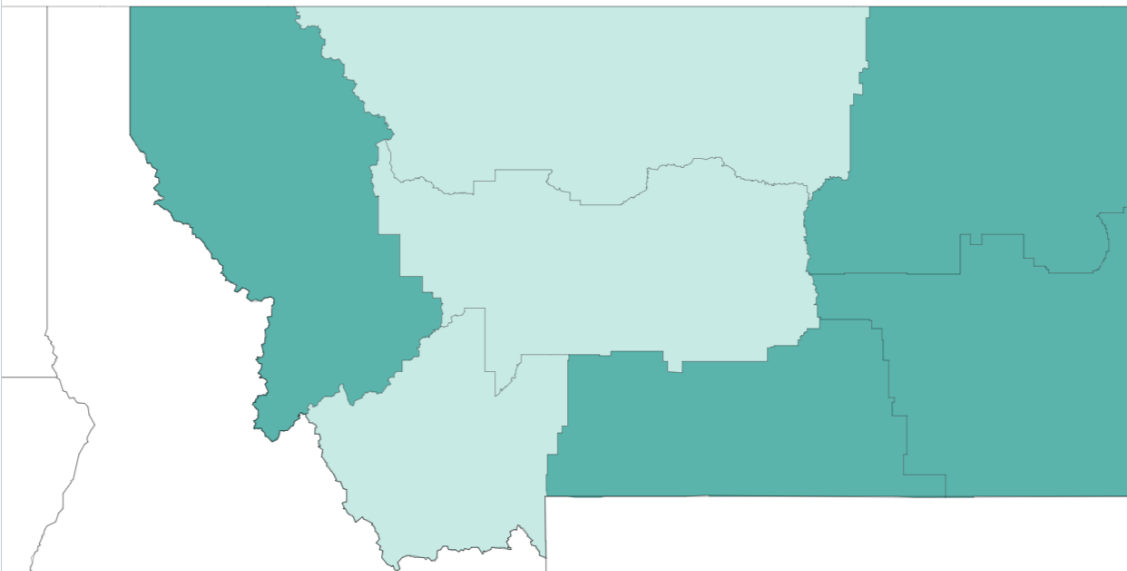


May 28 2024



Divisional Precipitation Rank (131 years)

October - December 2025



Lowest ◀ Much Below Below Average Near Average Above Average Much Above ▶ Highest

Montana (Hover over a Climate Division)
Precip: 5.98" Average: 3.82" Departure: 2.16" % of Avg: 156.6% Rank: 4th Highest



Fall and early winter started off wetter than normal

Snowpack that had been established eroded due to warm December rainfall events

Flooding occurred in parts of northwest MT

October - December 2025 Montana Divisional Precipitation

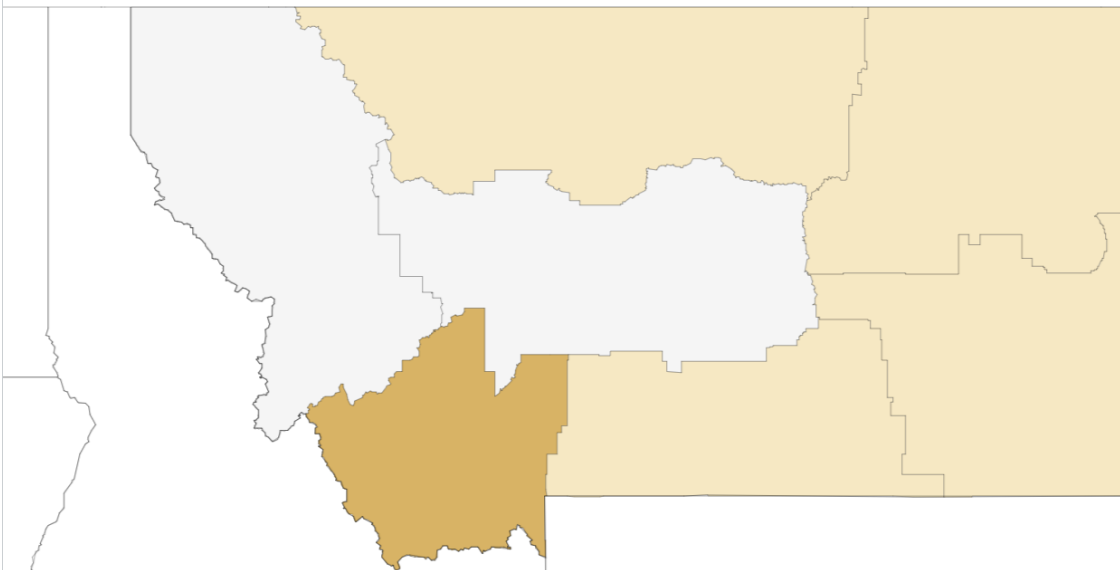
Climate Division	Value	Period: 1901-2000		
		Period Average	Departure from Average	Percent of Average
1. Western	14.88"	9.51"	5.37"	156.5%
2. Southwestern	6.15"	4.85"	1.30"	126.9%
3. North Central	3.56"	2.31"	1.25"	154.3%
4. Central	3.97"	3.08"	0.89"	128.8%
5. South Central	5.43"	3.36"	2.07"	161.4%
6. Northeastern	2.84"	1.50"	1.34"	189.6%
7. Southeastern	4.46"	1.92"	2.54"	232.0%

Bi-Modal winter precipitation made fire season outlook challenging



Divisional Precipitation Rank (132 years)

January - March 2026



Lowest ◀ Much Below Below Average Near Average Above Average Much Above ▶ Highest

Montana (Hover over a Climate Division)
Precip: 3.09" Average: 3.69" Departure: -0.60" % of Avg: 83.8% Rank: 29th Lowest



Dry later winter and spring was offset by the fall and early winter moisture

January and February were drier than normal across the state

March started a shift to normal precipitation west of the Divide

Snowpacks never really recovered after the warm rain events

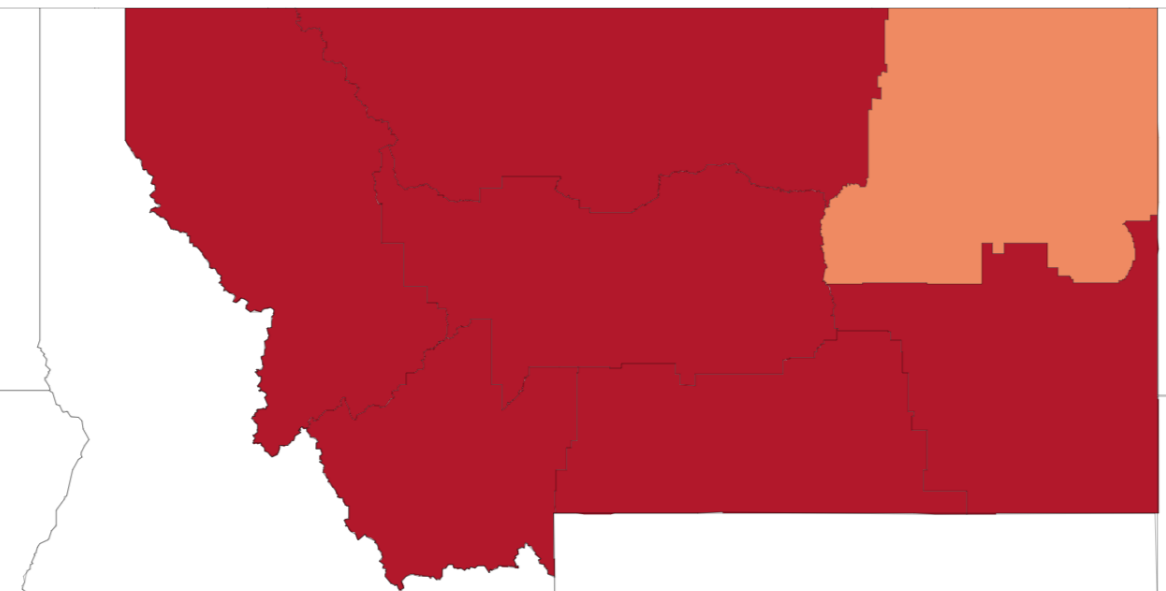
January - March 2026 Montana Divisional Precipitation

Climate Division	Value	Period: 1901-2000		
		Period Average	Departure from Average	Percent of Average
1. Western	8.54"	9.40"	-0.86"	90.8%
2. Southwestern	3.41"	5.04"	-1.63"	67.7%
3. North Central	1.79"	2.21"	-0.42"	80.9%
4. Central	2.94"	2.94"	0.00"	99.9%
5. South Central	2.46"	3.19"	-0.73"	77.2%
6. Northeastern	0.92"	1.26"	-0.34"	72.8%
7. Southeastern	1.05"	1.63"	-0.58"	64.5%



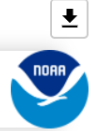
Divisional Average Temperature Rank (131 years)

October 2025 - March 2026



Coldest ◀ Much Below Below Average Near Average Above Average Much Above ▶ Warmest

Montana (Hover over a Climate Division)
Temp: 34.0°F Average: 26.8°F Departure: 7.2°F Rank: Warmest



Abnormal drying on the landscape offset the precipitation so much of Montana experienced drying despite normal to above normal moisture

Nearly everywhere in Montana experienced one of their top 5 warmest winters ever

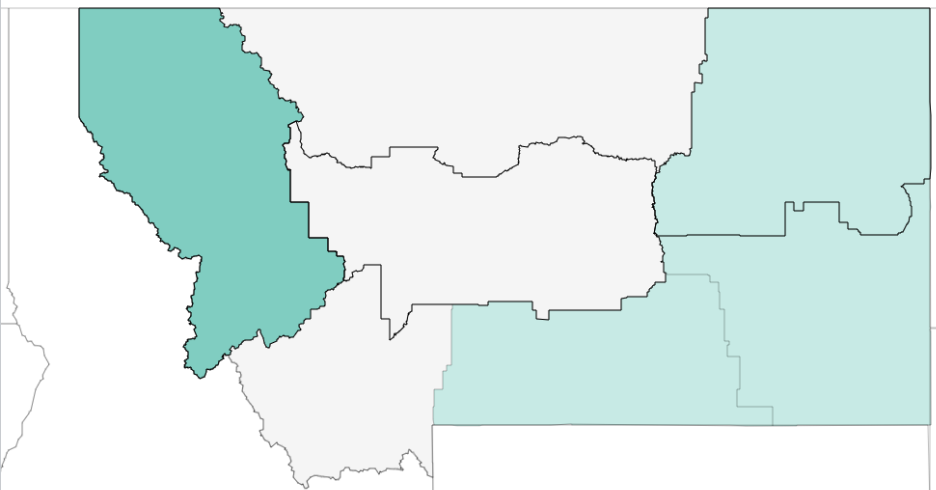
Temperatures ran 7 to 8 degrees above average

Kept mid elevation snow from recovering

Supported unusual fire activity in Jan and Feb

Divisional Precipitation Departure from Average (1901-2000)

October 2025 - March 2026



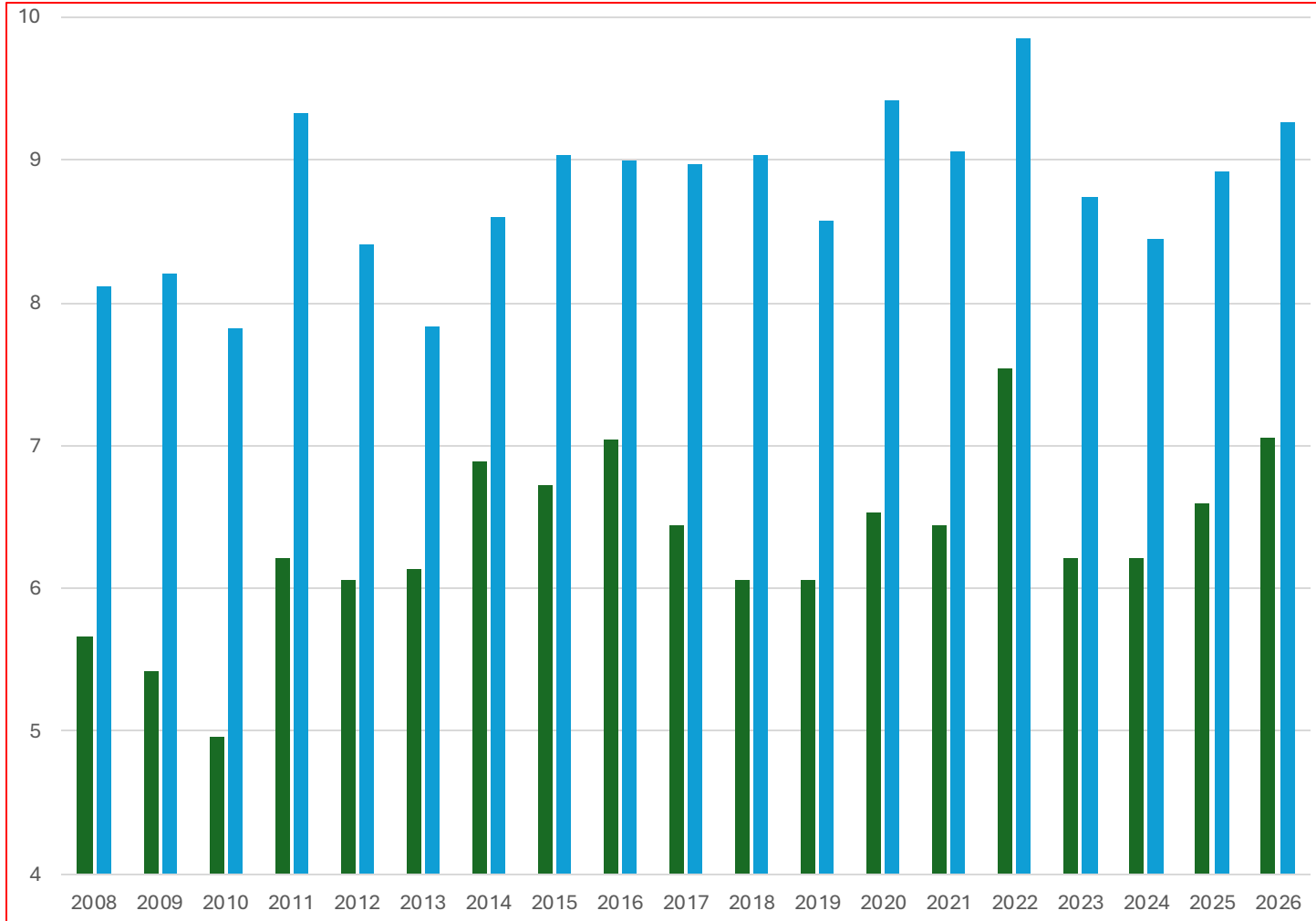
-24 -12 -6 -3 -1 1 3 6 12 24"

Northeastern
Precip: 3.76" Average: 2.76" Departure: 1.00" % of Avg: 136.4% Rank: 18th Highest





Wind speeds Dec-Apr



 **Average of 6 stations**

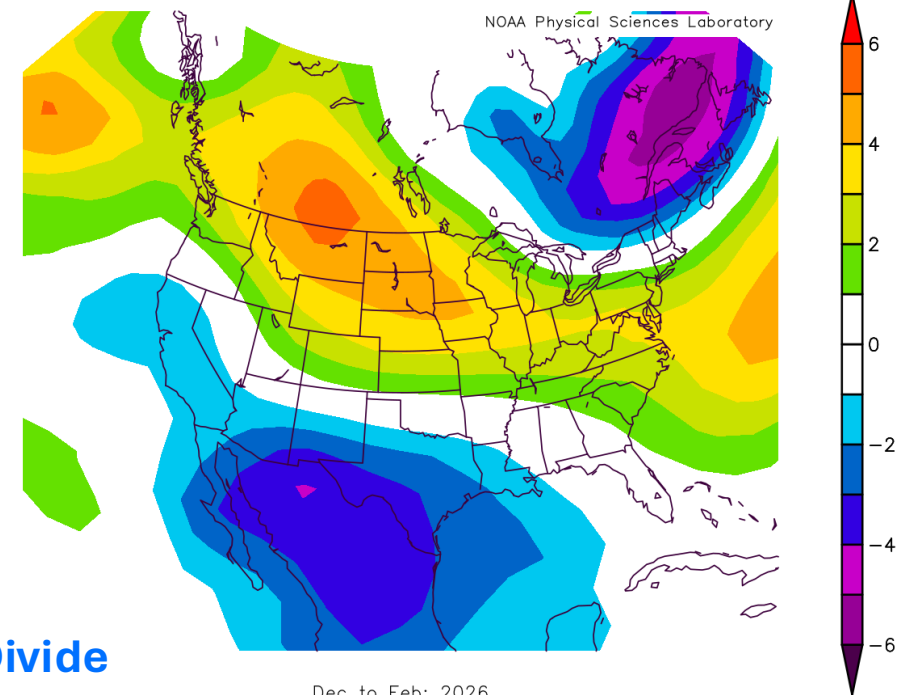
 **Fort Howes RAWS Station**

Significant wind events promoted fire activity winter and spring months.

Multiple station analysis: 2026 has been windier than past 3 years and second windiest of the past 10.

Measures cumulative wind and not “wind events” but matches perceptions

NCEP/NCAR Reanalysis
500mb Scalar Wind Speed (m/s) Composite Anomaly 1991–2020 climo
NOAA Physical Sciences Laboratory



Jet stream analysis Dec-Feb reflects above normal winds favored much of MT east of Divide

Dec to Feb: 2026

Snow Water Equivalent

April 30 SWE

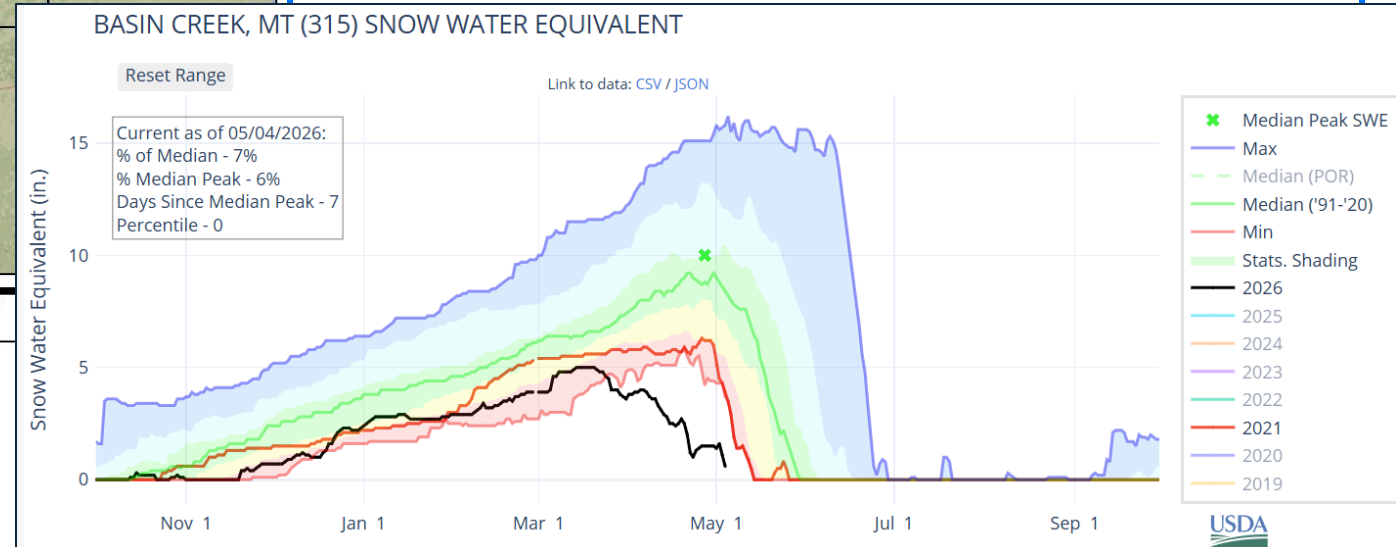
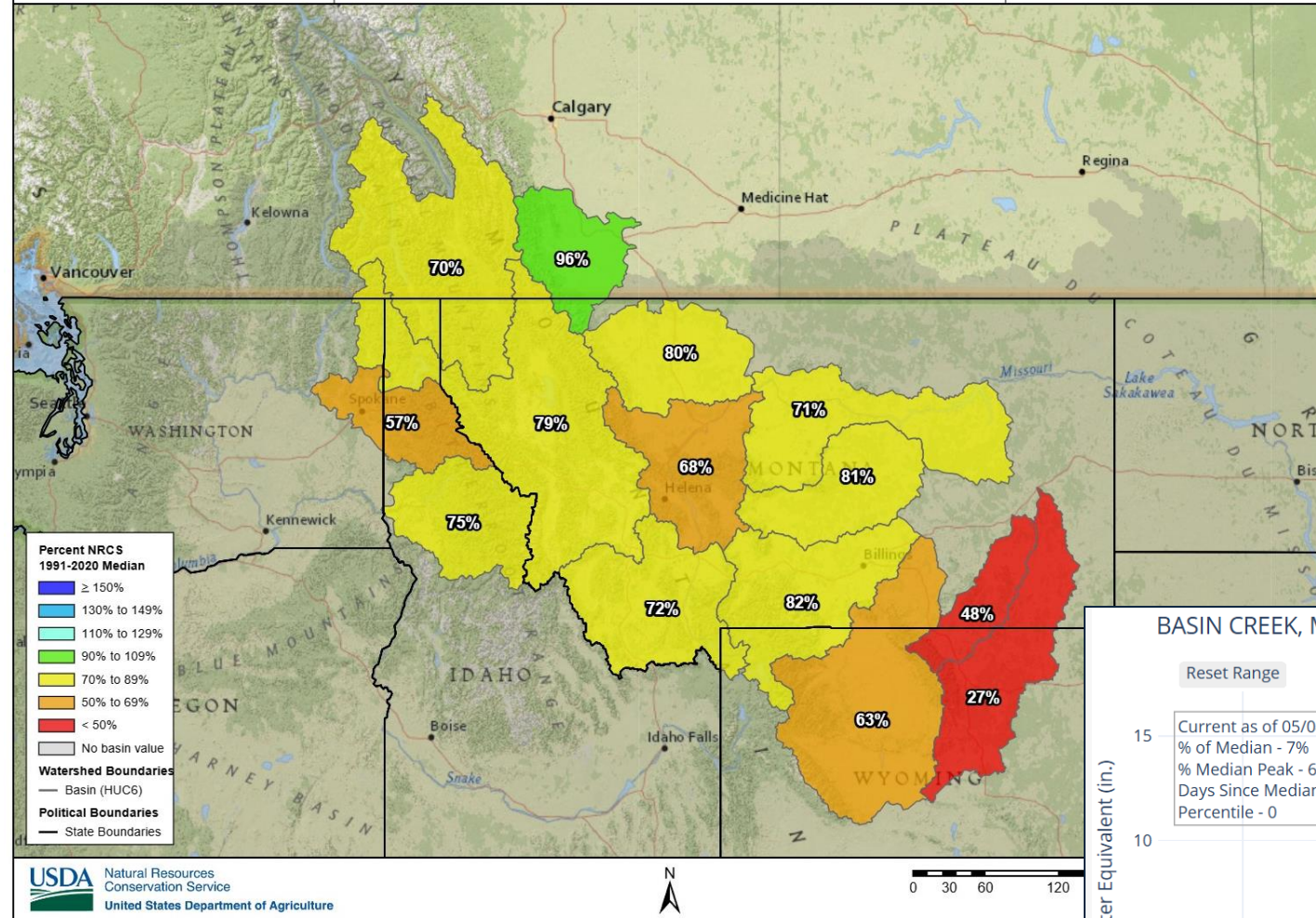
Percent NRCS 1991-2020 Median

April 30, 2026, end of day

All basins ended season with noticeable lack of snow below 7000 feet

Unsure impacts to green-up and curing cycles of fine fuels but expect wildfire earlier and higher elevations than normal

Example shown below: Basin Creek 7100' elevation south of Butte snow has dissipated at record pace and less snow than 2021 (busy fire year)



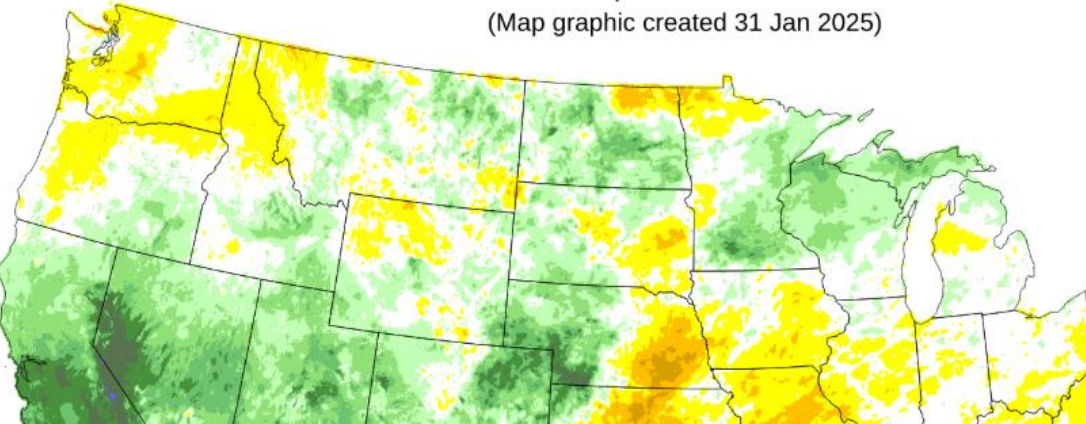


Total Precipitation Anomaly: Dec 2022 - May 2023

Period ending 7 AM EST 31 May 2023

Base period: 1991-2020

(Map graphic created 31 Jan 2025)

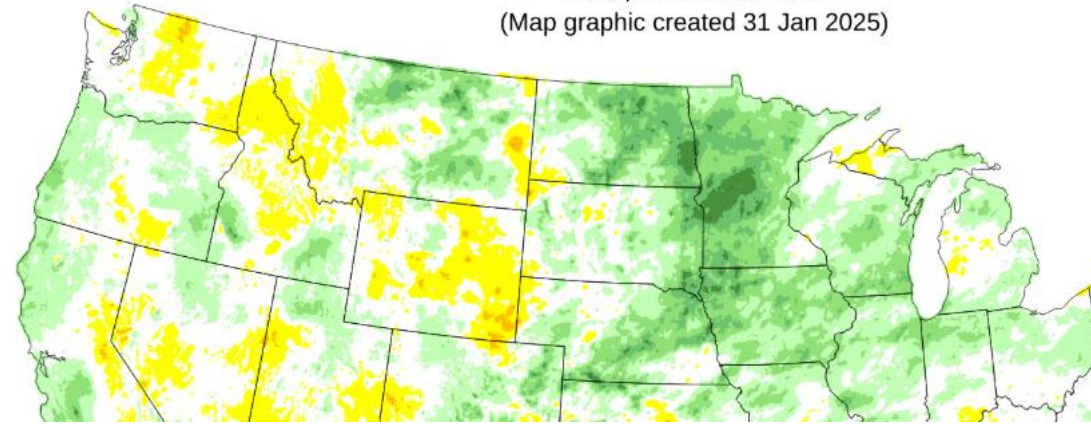


Total Precipitation Anomaly: Dec 2023 - May 2024

Period ending 7 AM EST 31 May 2024

Base period: 1991-2020

(Map graphic created 31 Jan 2025)

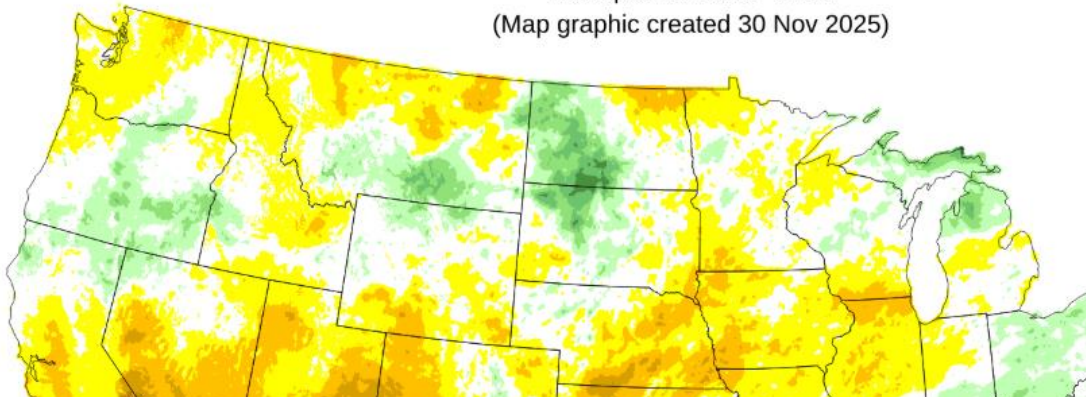


Total Precipitation Anomaly: Dec 2024 - May 2025

Period ending 7 AM EST 31 May 2025

Base period: 1991 - 2020

(Map graphic created 30 Nov 2025)

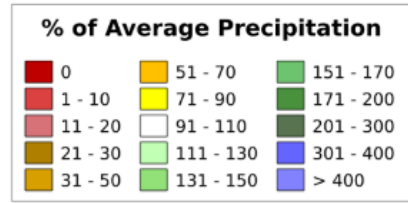
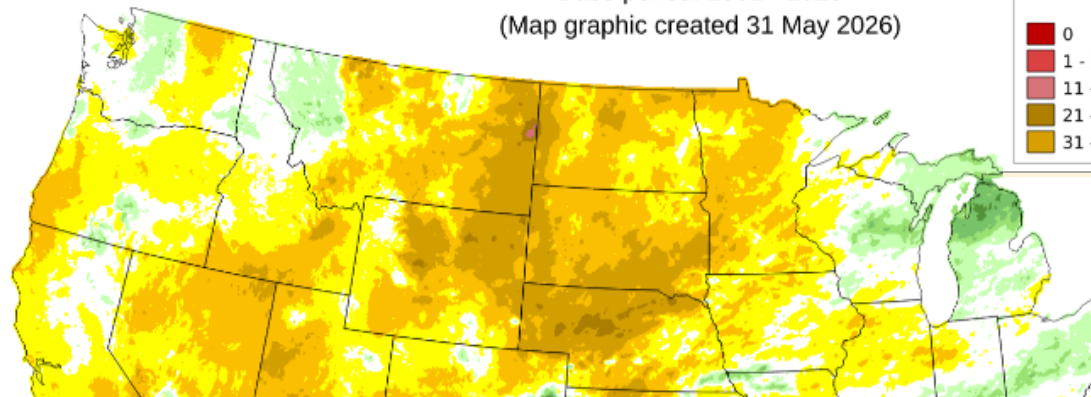


Total Precipitation Anomaly: Dec 2025 - 30 May 2026

Period ending 7 AM EST 30 May 2026

Base period: 1991 - 2020

(Map graphic created 31 May 2026)

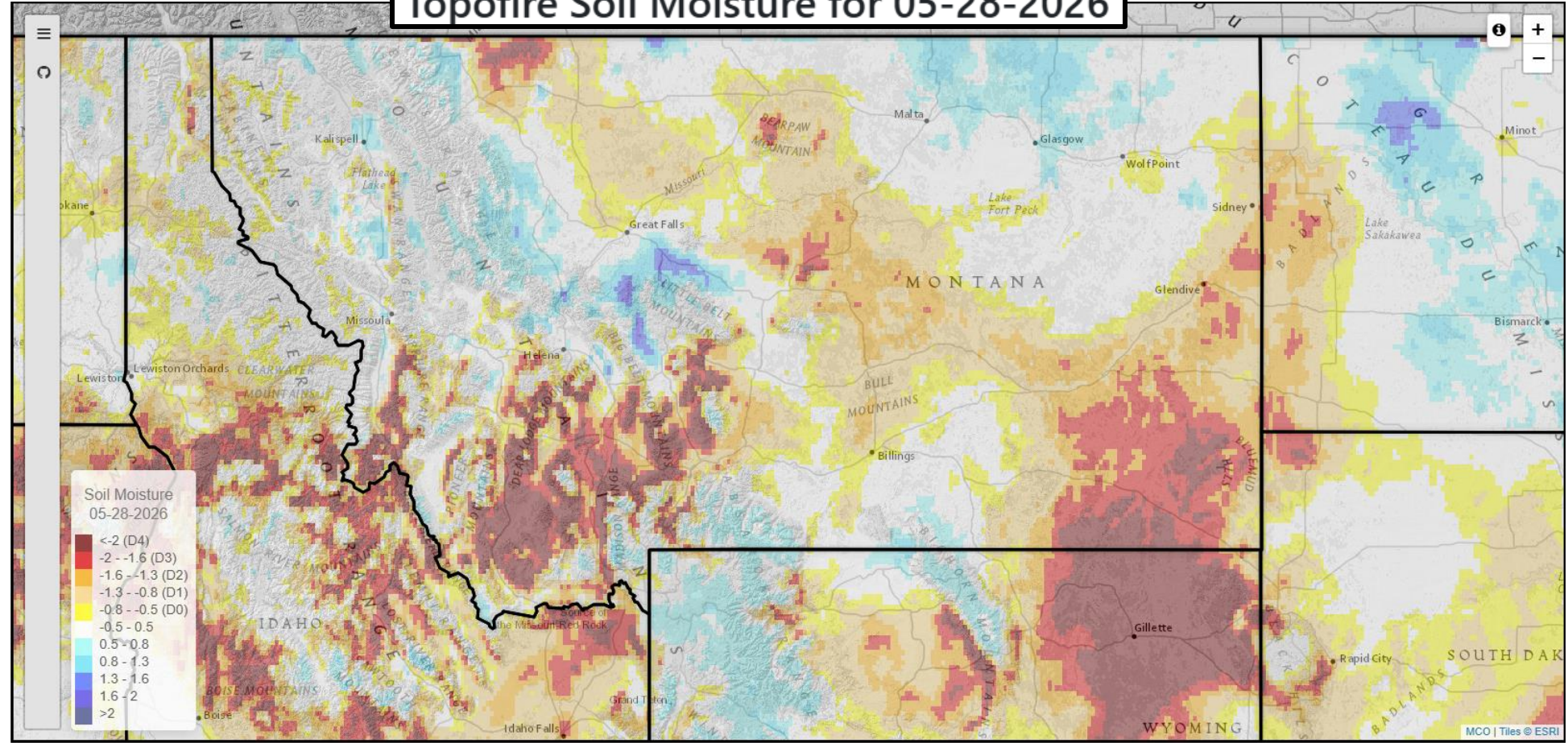


Dry conditions observed in Montana extend through a broader region

Year-by-year progression is concerning

Widespread dry ground can support hotter temperatures during the late spring and summer months

Topofire Soil Moisture for 05-28-2026

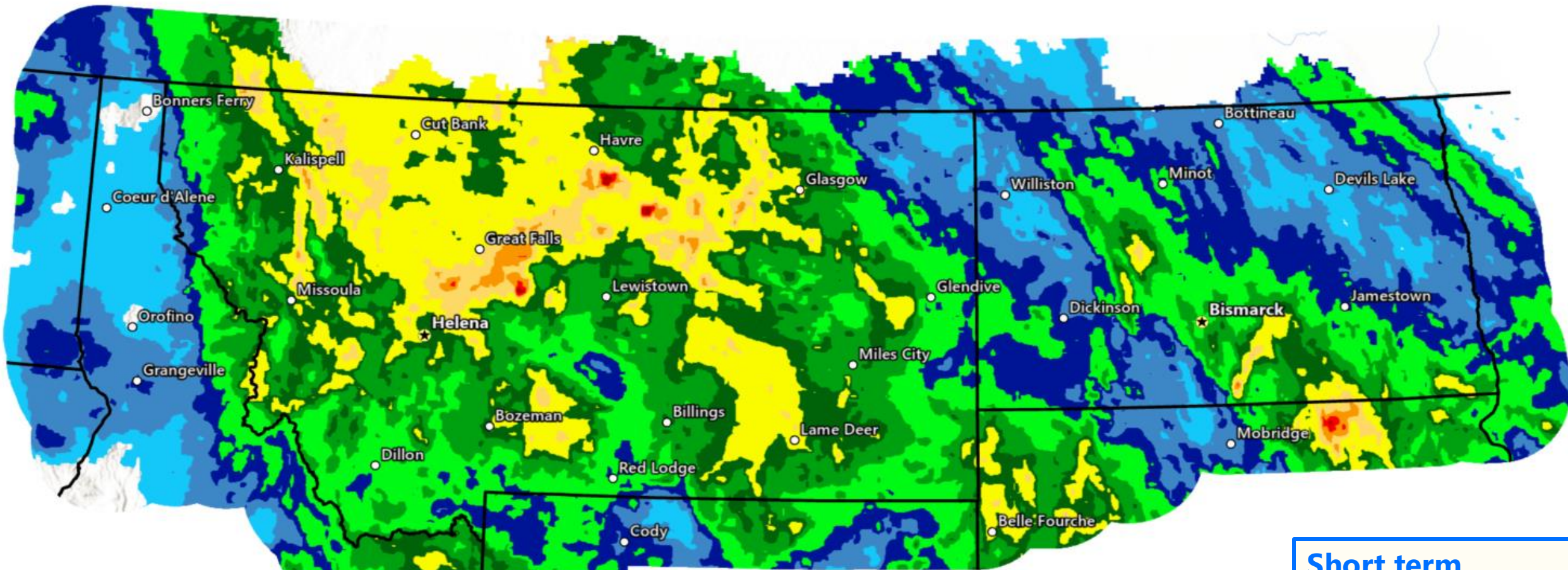


Soil moisture captures effect of temperature and precipitation

If enough moisture falls during an event it percolates downward and “stored”

Current soil moisture demonstrates the areas of greatest concern in southwest and eastern Montana

Northern Montana received a huge assist this weekend



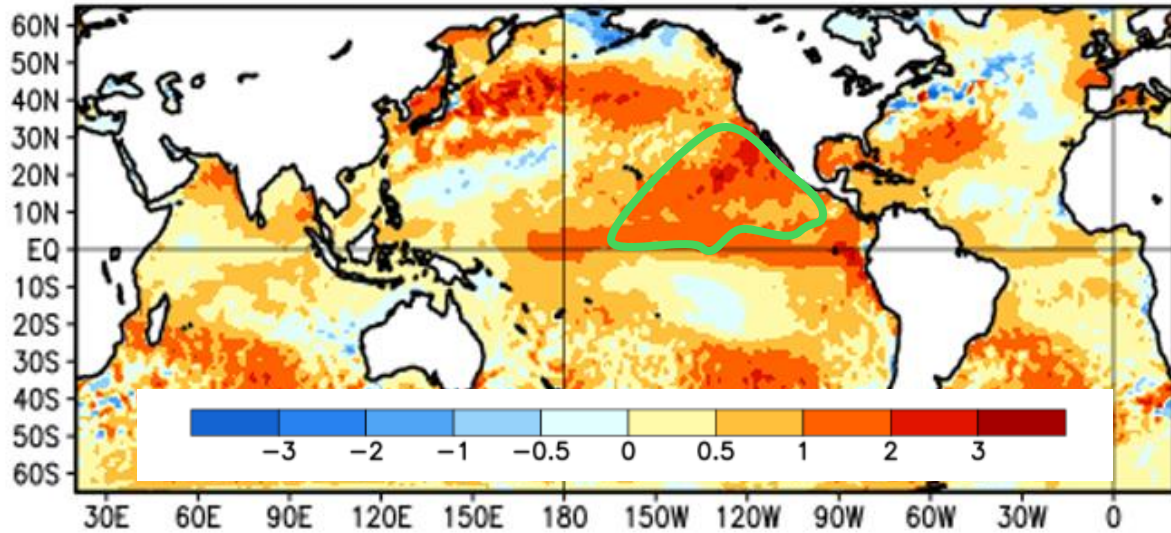
Rainfall event May 29 to May 31 produced beneficial moisture helping make up some deficits



Short term forecasts indicate northwest and north central Montana most likely to see rain next weekend



Average SST Anomalies
26 APR 2026 – 23 MAY 2026



Official NOAA CPC ENSO Probabilities (issued May 2026)
based on $-0.5^{\circ}/+0.5^{\circ}\text{C}$ thresholds in ERSSTv5 Relative Niño-3.4 index/RONI

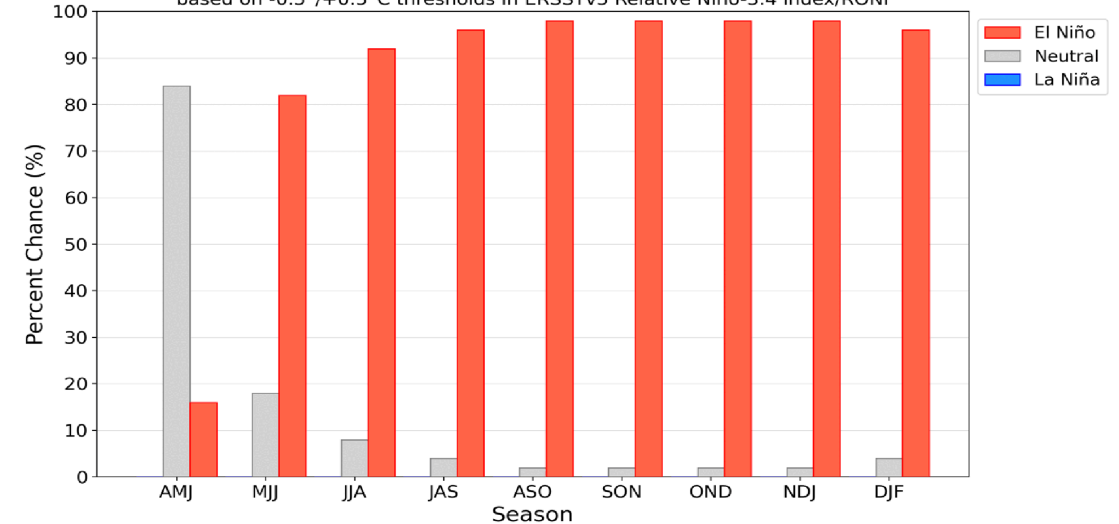
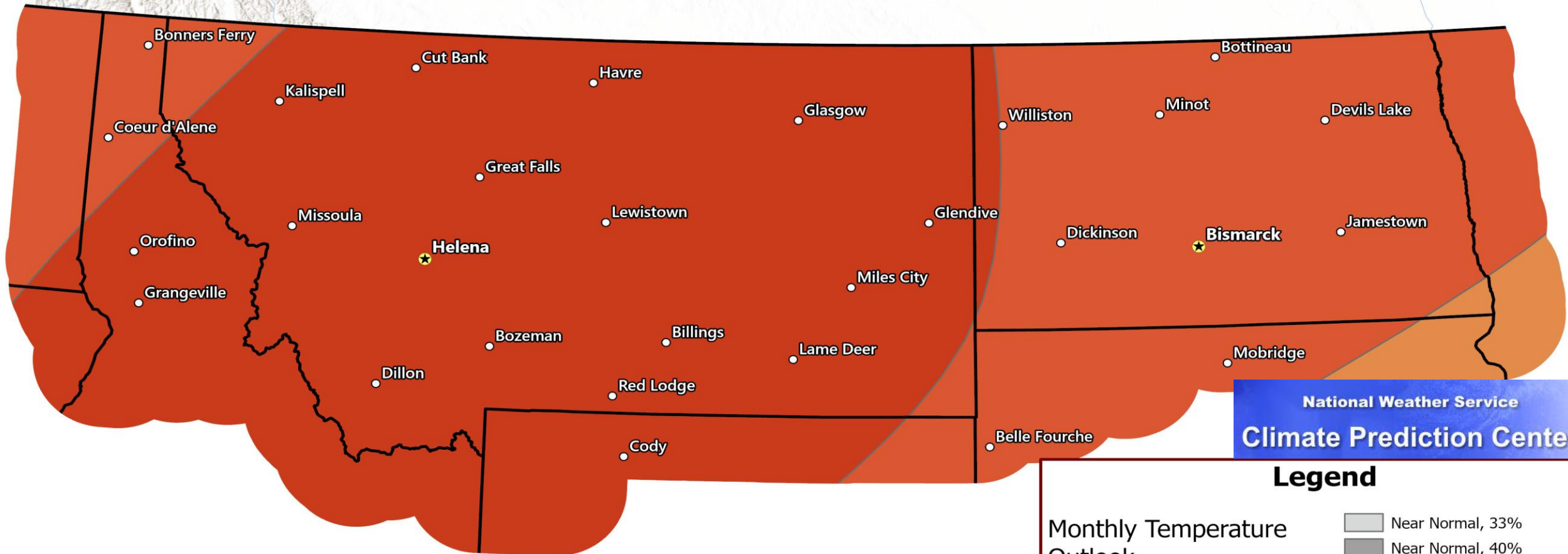


Figure 7. Official ENSO probabilities for the Niño 3.4 relative sea surface temperature index ($5^{\circ}\text{N}-5^{\circ}\text{S}$, $170^{\circ}\text{W}-120^{\circ}\text{W}$) minus tropical mean ($20^{\circ}\text{N}-20^{\circ}\text{S}$). The relative index is re-scaled to

Developing El Nino in the Pacific Ocean becomes a weather pattern driver later in the fire season

El Nino does push warmer water into eastern Pacific which can support hurricane activity and enhance the moisture available for Monsoon flow

Statically, El Nino's greatest influence on Montana is fire potential in the Spring



National Weather Service
Climate Prediction Center

Legend

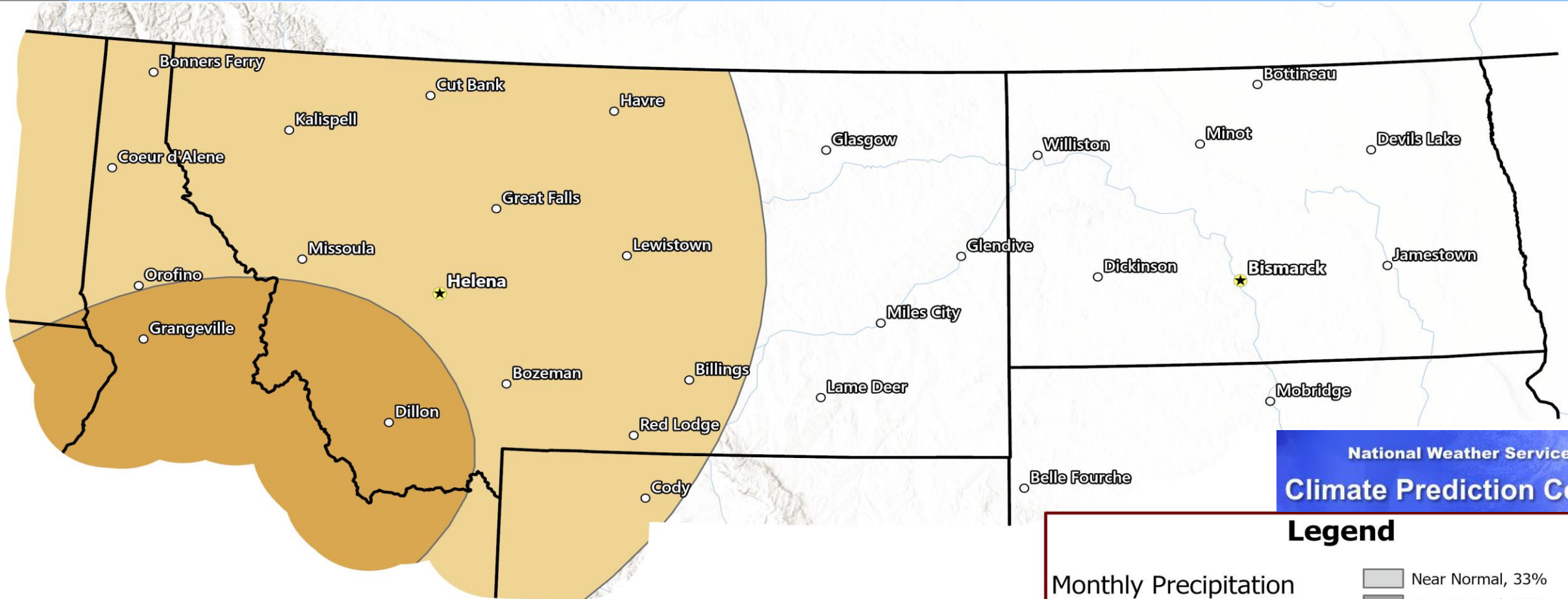
Monthly Temperature Outlook

Cat, Prob

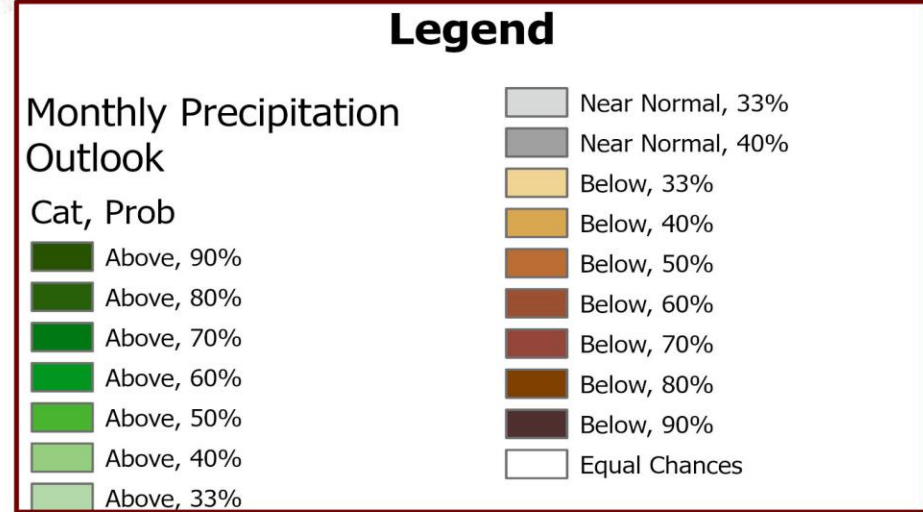
- Above, 90%
- Above, 80%
- Above, 70%
- Above, 60%
- Above, 50%
- Above, 40%
- Above, 33%

- Near Normal, 33%
- Near Normal, 40%
- Below, 33%
- Below, 40%
- Below, 50%
- Below, 60%
- Below, 70%
- Below, 80%
- Below, 90%
- Equal Chances

- **June outlook likely above normal temperatures**
- **June 2025 was above normal west of Continental Divide but below normal east of the Divide**
- **Unusual to have a forecast show this much confidence in June (looking back at 15 years of forecasts)**



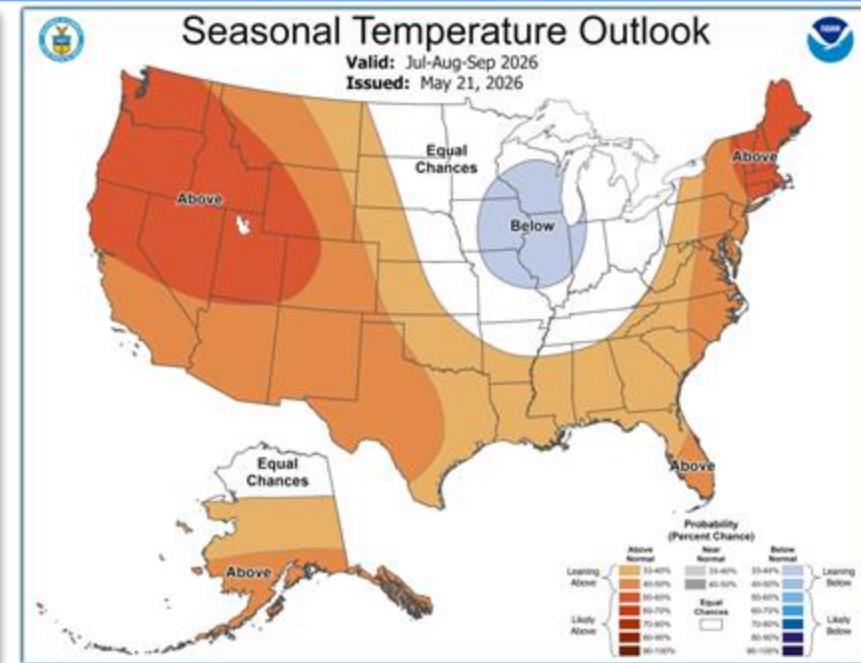
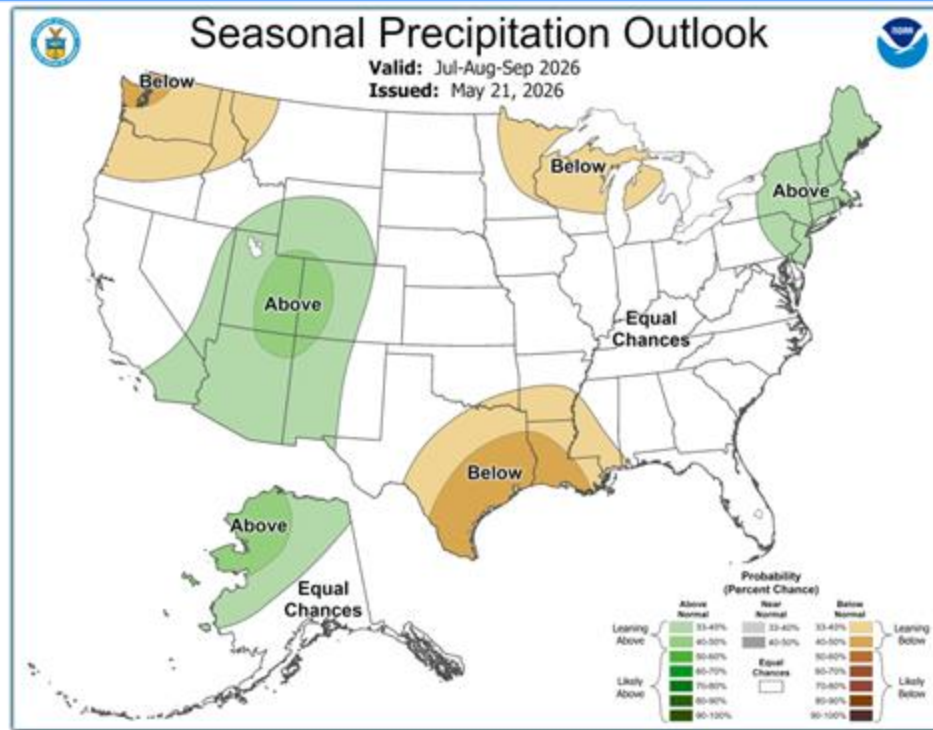
National Weather Service
Climate Prediction Center



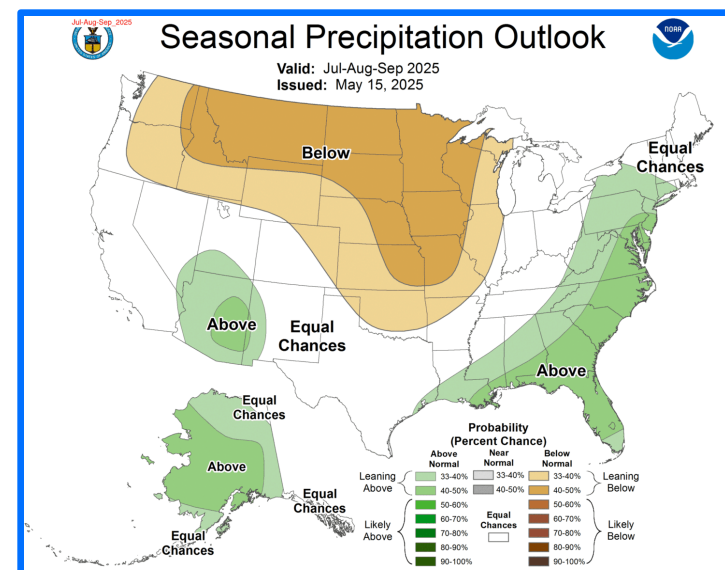
- June outlook leaning below normal moisture for western half of MT and Northern Rockies
- Similar appearance to June 2025 precipitation pattern
- "Normal" June precipitation can range from 1.5 to 4 inches depending on location and elevation



- Low confidence but leaning below normal precipitation western Montana
- Likely above normal temperatures MT
- Indications of above normal monsoon activity in southwest US
 - Could be a lightning source
 - Persistent higher humidity?



Last year's outlook was far more pessimistic about summer rainfall



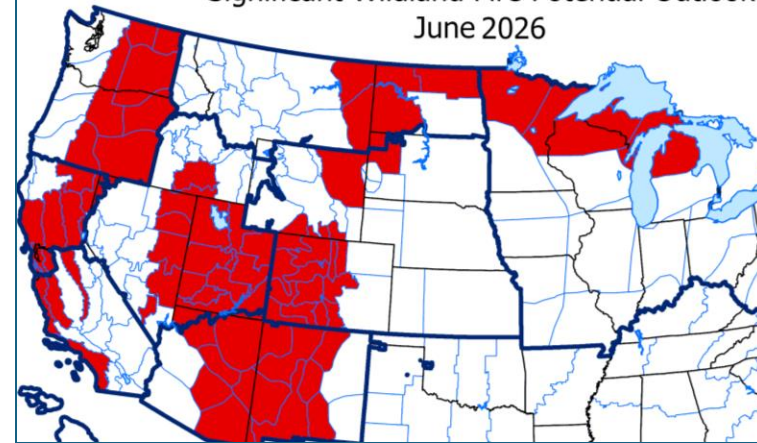


Expected June warmth produces above normal fire potential eastern Montana June through July

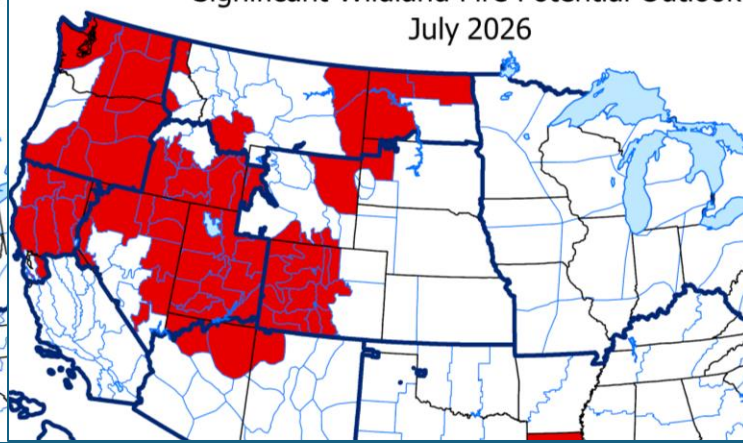
Southwest Montana increases potential in July and potential spreads to the Bitterroot in August

Other areas normal forecast but still expect fires in those areas

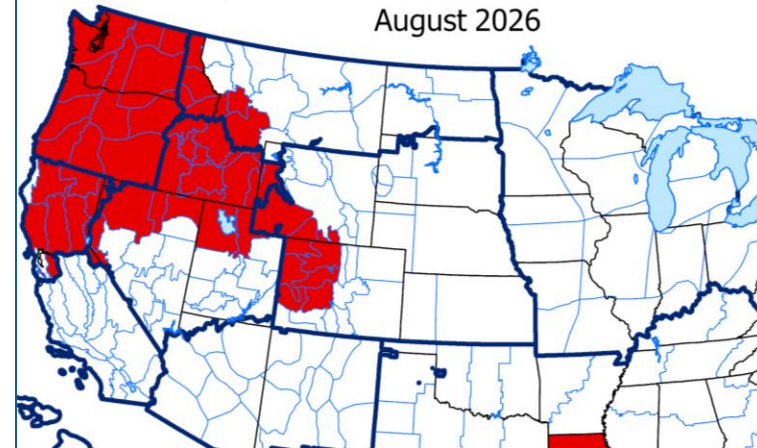
Significant Wildland Fire Potential Outlook
June 2026



Significant Wildland Fire Potential Outlook
July 2026



Significant Wildland Fire Potential Outlook
August 2026



Significant Wildland Fire Potential Outlook
September 2026



Significant Wildland Fire Potential

Above	State Boundary
Below	Geographic Area Boundary
Normal	Predictive Services Area Boundary



Map produced by
Predictive Services,
National Interagency Fire Center
Boise, Idaho
Issued: June 1, 2026
Next Issue: July 1, 2026

Normal likelihood that significant wildland fires will occur. Areas during normal significant wildland fire potential conditions. Areas forecasted below normal periods.



- **Weekend precipitation beneficial but maybe not enough to offset the strong dry and warm periods past 5 months**
- **Monsoon fed by east Pacific hurricane infusions likely and may abruptly adjust fire activity**
- **Impact of “super” El Nino more likely to be felt in the Fall and studies indicate stronger spring fire activity influence**
- **Areas with “normal” potential still mean fire is possible**

Contact Information:

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Fire Analyst:

Erin Noonan-Wright US Forest Service