

North American Seasonal Fire Assessment and Outlook

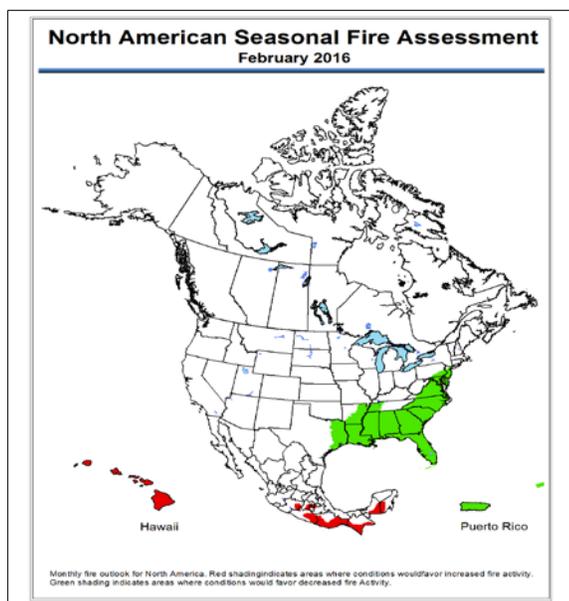
National Interagency Fire Center • Natural Resources Canada • Servicio Meteorológico Nacional
United States Canada Mexico

Outlook Period February and March 2016 Issued on 10 February 2016

Executive Summary

A progressive pattern over North America kept a series of storms moving across the continent in January. This brought several cold precipitation systems across the U.S. and Mexico but left much of Canada warm and dry for most of the month, especially in the western provinces where much of Alberta and British Columbia were snow-free at lower elevations. The warm and dry conditions spread into the northern regions of the U.S. where much warmer-than-normal weather extended into the northern Rockies and Plains, the Great Lakes region and New England. Much of Interior West and the South were cooler-than-normal. Precipitation was above normal in the West but below normal for most of the rest of the nation. A large part of the Plains had less than 25 percent of normal precipitation, including Texas and Oklahoma where fire activity began to increase. Western U.S. systems dropped into northern Mexico where cooler and wetter conditions continued in January. Farther south, temperatures were warmer but precipitation was below normal, contributing to increasing drought conditions in the southern states.

Canada and most of the U.S. have little fire this time of year. Dry conditions in Texas and Oklahoma could continue through March, supporting normal pre-greenup fire activity. Dry season conditions in Mexico, along with worsening drought in the south, will increase the fire potential for southern Mexico through March.



Monthly fire outlook for North America for February (left) and March 2016 (right). Red shading indicates areas where conditions would favor increased fire activity. Green shading indicates areas where conditions would favor decreased fire activity.



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Critical Factors

The critical factors influencing significant fire potential for this outlook period are:

El Niño-Southern Oscillation: El Niño conditions (warming of the equatorial Pacific Ocean) are slowly weakening moving into late Northern Hemisphere winter. This trend is expected to continue but strong El Niño conditions will still have a significant effect on North American climate patterns at least through spring. Warm conditions are expected to remain in place across most of Canada and the northern U.S. while wet patterns persist in the southern U.S. and northern Mexico. Latest trends suggest dry conditions will remain in western and southern Mexico.

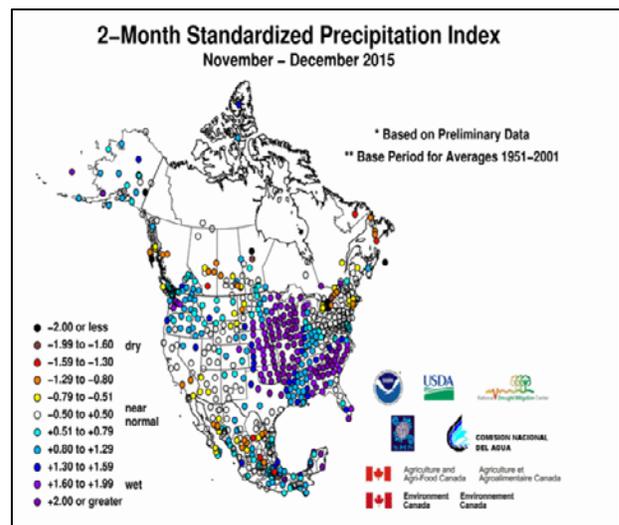
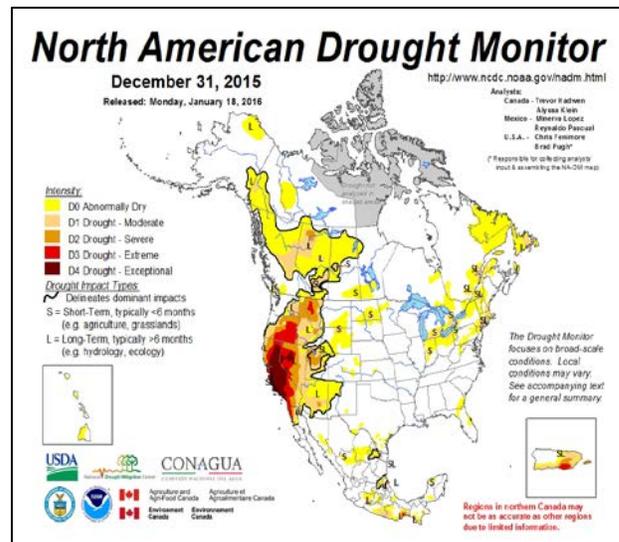
Drought: The North American Drought Monitor from 31 December 2015 (top right) shows severe to exceptional drought over most of the western U.S. with the worst conditions in California, Oregon, Washington, Nevada, western and northern Idaho, western Montana, and western Utah. A steady stream of rain and snow events along the northwestern U.S. and western Canada coasts reduced some of the western drought, especially in British Columbia, Washington, Oregon and northern California. Small pockets of severe or worse drought are scattered across southern Mexico with the worst conditions in Oaxaca, Guerrero, Chiapas and northern Baja California.

Fire Season Status: Winter months typically have very little fire activity across Canada and most of the United States. However, recent dry weather across the south central U.S. coupled with a good grass crop have supported some fire activity in Oklahoma and Texas. Cold and wet weather in January across northern Mexico reduced fire activity. However, drier and warmer conditions elsewhere contributed to an increase in fire activity in central, eastern and southern states.

Canada Discussion

February and March 2016: Winter conditions continue throughout Canada, although much of the country has experienced warmer-than-normal conditions. Parts of western Canada, including southern Alberta and British Columbia, are snow free and could see grass fires by late March and April. Warm weather over much of eastern Canada has resulted in well below normal snow depth in Ontario, southern Quebec and the Maritimes. This is likely to lead to above average fire danger heading into April and May. Continuation of the warm conditions will lead to an early fire season across the entire country.

United States Discussion



Top: North American Drought Monitor from 31 December 2015. **Bottom:** 2-month Standardized Precipitation Index for November-December 2015. (Both from U.S National Centers for Environmental Information, NCEI/NOAA)

February and March 2016: Most of the western and northern states are in winter and are generally considered out of fire season through March. A persistent wet pattern over the southern half of the country, especially over the Gulf States to Mid-Atlantic Coast, will reduce wildland fire potential. Some seasonal grass fire activity will continue across Texas and Oklahoma where drier weather and good grass fuel availability exists. Ongoing dry conditions in Hawaii will lead to an increasing potential for wildland fires through March.

Mexico Discussion

February 2016: Continuing El Niño conditions along with other large-scale circulation patterns suggest a wet trend for much of northern and central Mexico through February, while an enhancement of dry season weather in the southern states continues. Above normal temperatures will also contribute to increasing fire potential in the southern states of Chiapas, Oaxaca, Guerrero and the southern Yucatan Peninsula. There could also be some increased fire potential in Puebla, México, Morelos, Michoacán, and the Federal District.

March 2016: Though weakening, a still strong El Niño in March will keep a wet trend through much of northern and central Mexico while dry and warm conditions persist in the south. This will keep the increased fire potential in place across the southern states of Guerrero, Oaxaca, Chiapas, Quintana Roo, Campeche, and Yucatan and the central states of Michoacán, Morelos, southern Puebla, and the Federal District.

Additional Information

Additional and supplemental information for this outlook can be obtained at:

United States:

National Significant Wildland Fire Potential Outlook

http://www.predictiveservices.nifc.gov/outlooks/monthly_seasonal_outlook.pdf

Canada:

Canadian Wildland Fire Information System

<http://cwfis.cfs.nrcan.gc.ca/home>

Mexico:

Servicio Meteorológico Nacional

http://smn.cna.gob.mx/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=156&Itemid=113

Outlook Objective

The North American Seasonal Fire Assessment and Outlook is a general discussion of conditions that will affect the occurrence of wildland fires across Canada, the United States, and Mexico. Wildland fire is a natural part of many ecosystems across North America. This document provides a broad assessment of those factors that will contribute to an increase or decrease of seasonal fire activity. The objective is to assist wildland fire managers prepare for the potential variations in a typical fire season. It is not intended as a prediction of where and when wildland fires will occur nor is it intended to suggest any area is safe from the hazards of wildfire.

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