Colorado's Spring Fire Seasonal Outlook

March 2026

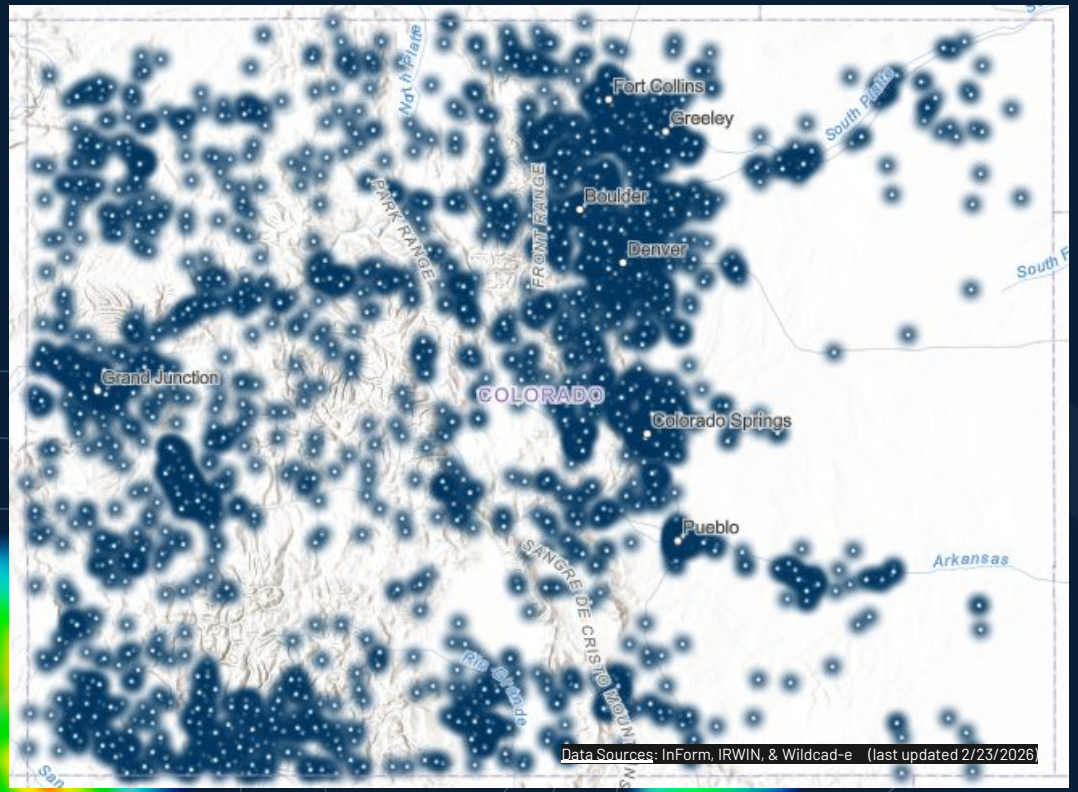
Colorado DFPC Intelligence Unit
Rocky Mountain Area Predictive Service
National Weather Service Climate Prediction Center
CSU Colorado Climate Center
Natural Resources Conservation Service
Fire Environment Mapping System
National Drought Mitigation Center UN-Lincoln
High Plains Regional Climate Center (HPRCC)

Last Update: 3/24/2026

2025 Fire Season Stats

***This is an approximation of data sets that are not entirely complete**

2025 Wildfire point locations

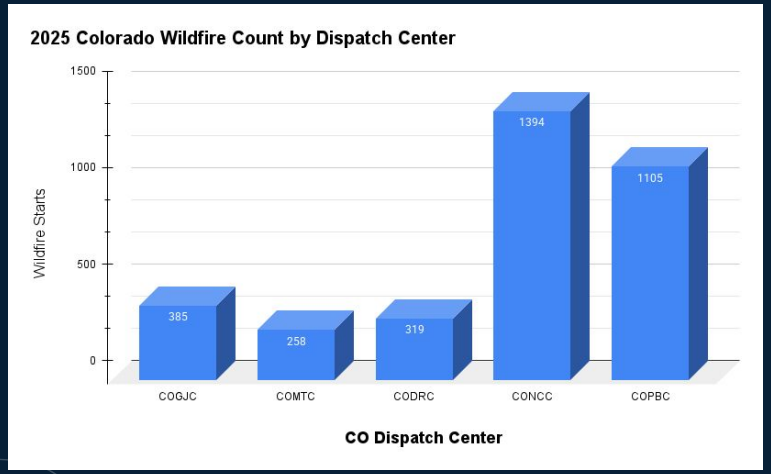


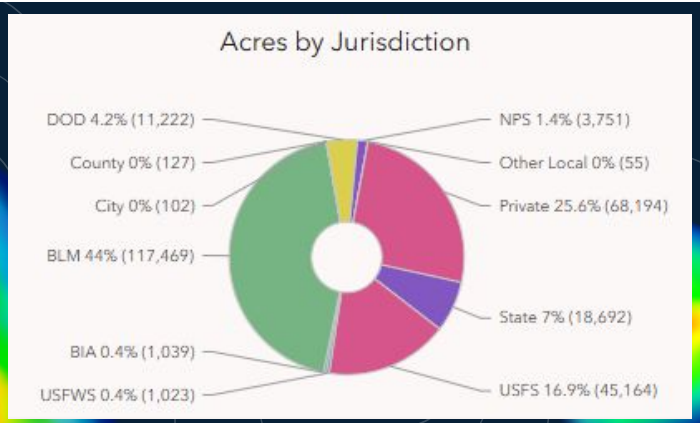
- Colorado had approximately **3,722** wildfire starts in 2025 for a total of **270,903** acres
- There were 21 fires ≥1000 ac in 2025
- Notable large incidents
  - **Lee**: 137,758 ac
  - **Turner**: 31,699 ac
  - **Elk RBX**: 14,518 ac
  - **Stoner Mesa**: 10,249 ac

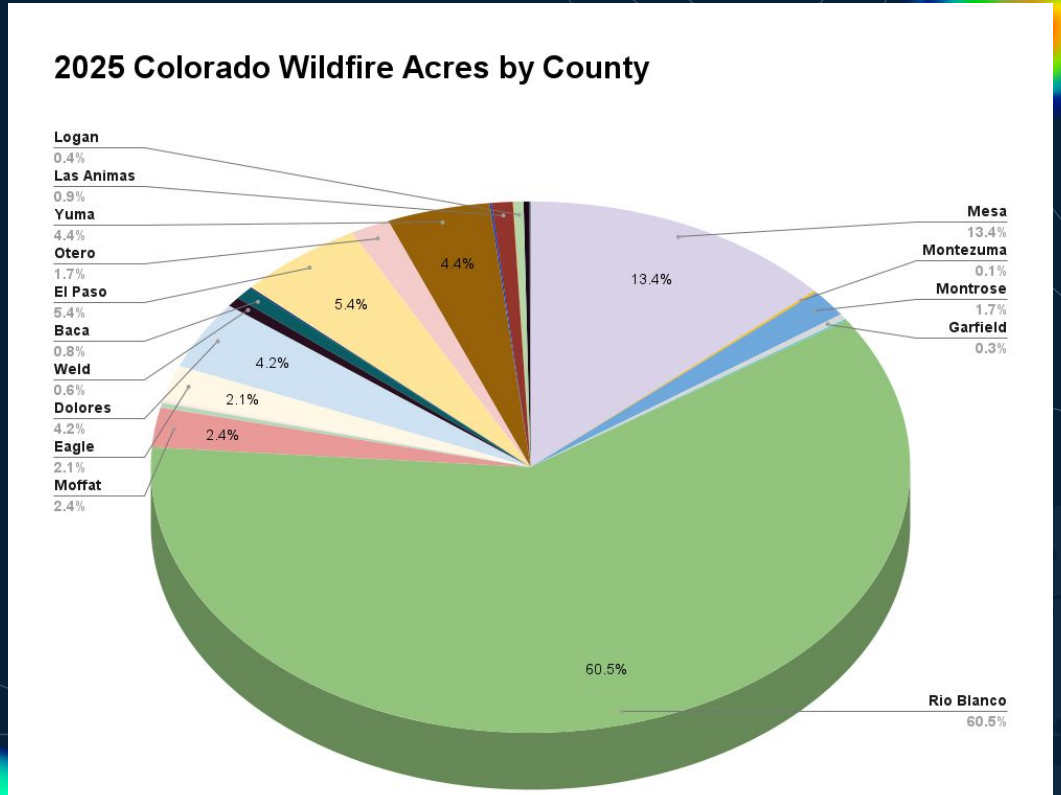
View Interactive YTD Colorado fire statistics Dashboard

2025 Fire Season Charts

*This is an approximation of data sets that are not entirely complete

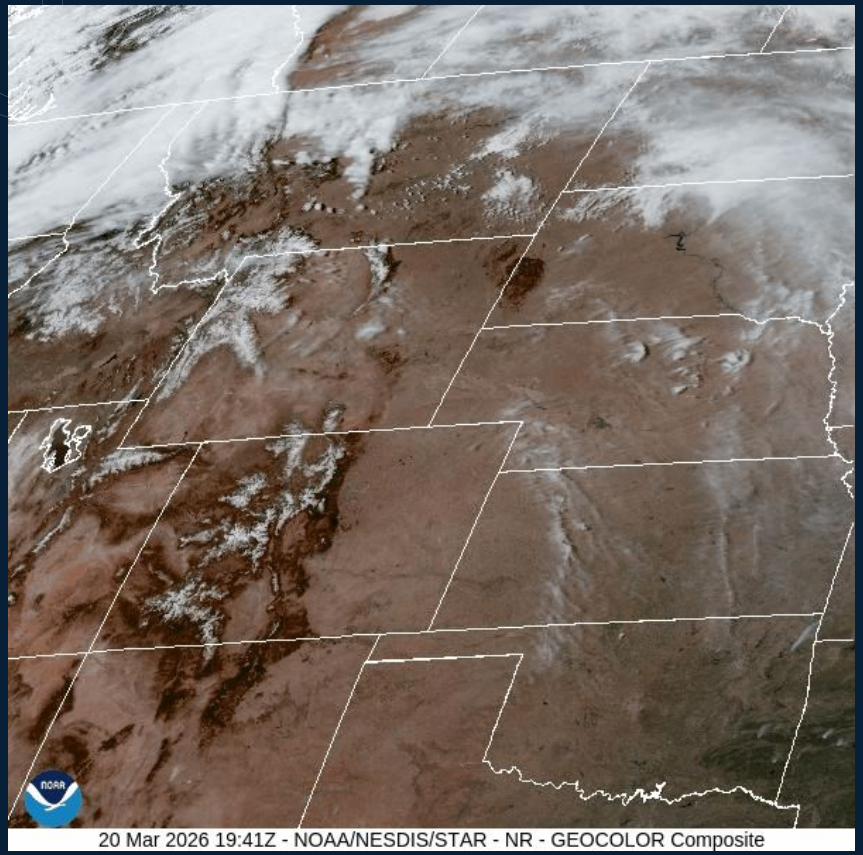






Data Sources: InForm, IRWIN, & Wildcad-e

Colorado's Spring highlights



• Winter 25/26 was characterized by record-low snowpack, unseasonably warm temperatures, and persistent windy conditions.

• February remained well above normal in temperature across Colorado, continuing the warm trend since December. Precipitation was below normal, with limited snowfall worsening severe drought conditions along the Upper Colorado River Basin.

• Spring fire potential is **above normal east of the Continental Divide** and near normal across western Colorado.

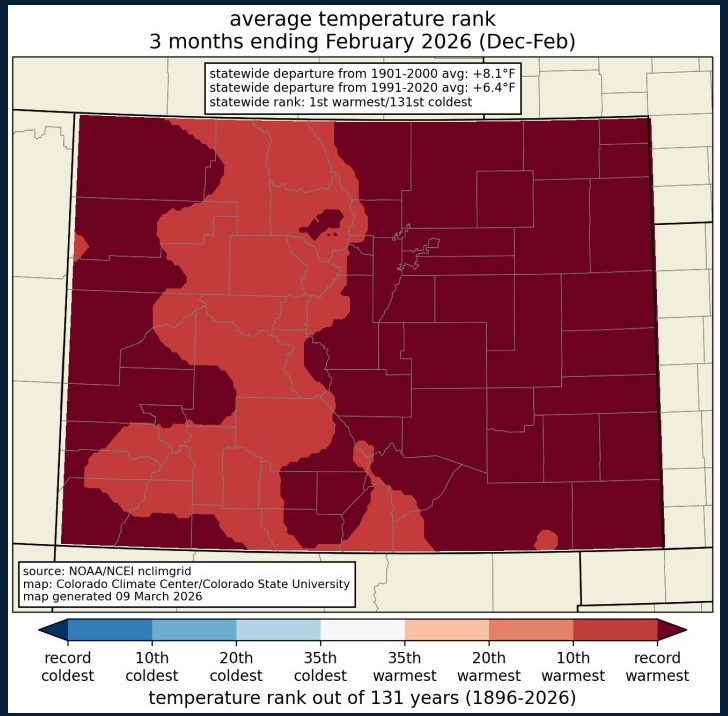
• Elevated temperatures, increased availability of fine fuels in eastern Colorado, and recurring wind events have resulted in an active winter fire season across the eastern plains.

• The transition from La Niña toward neutral conditions, with potential El Niño development this summer, suggests a shift toward increased storm activity, though temperatures are still expected to remain above normal.

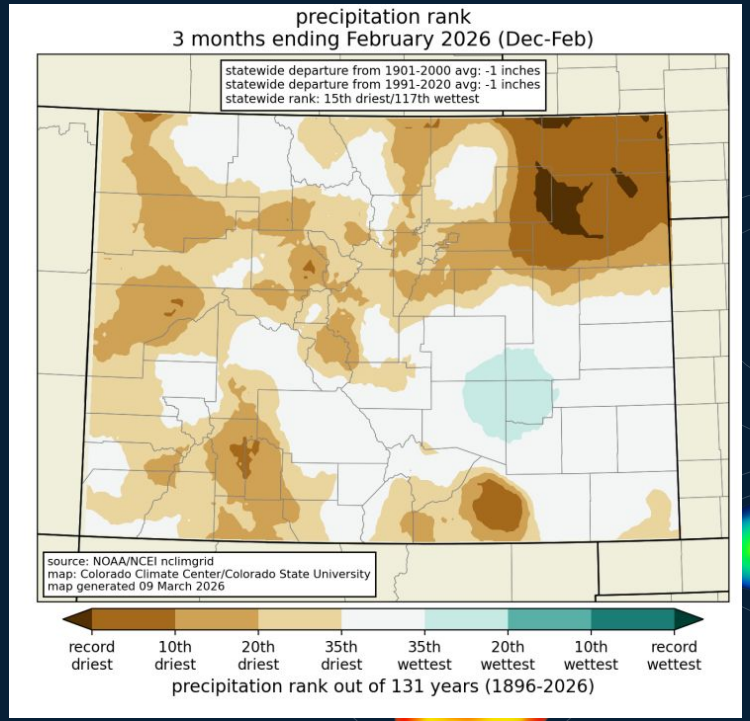
Colorado's Winter Summary

"Climatological winter (Dec-Jan-Feb) was the warmest on the 132 year record for Colorado, standing 1.6°F above the previous warmest winter of 1981. Two brief cold blasts in late January and mid-February were the only breaks from the persistent winter warmth."

"Most of the state was drier than average during climatological winter. The mountains received below-average snowfall and the western slope remained dry as well. Only a small portion of southeastern Colorado had above-average winter precip."

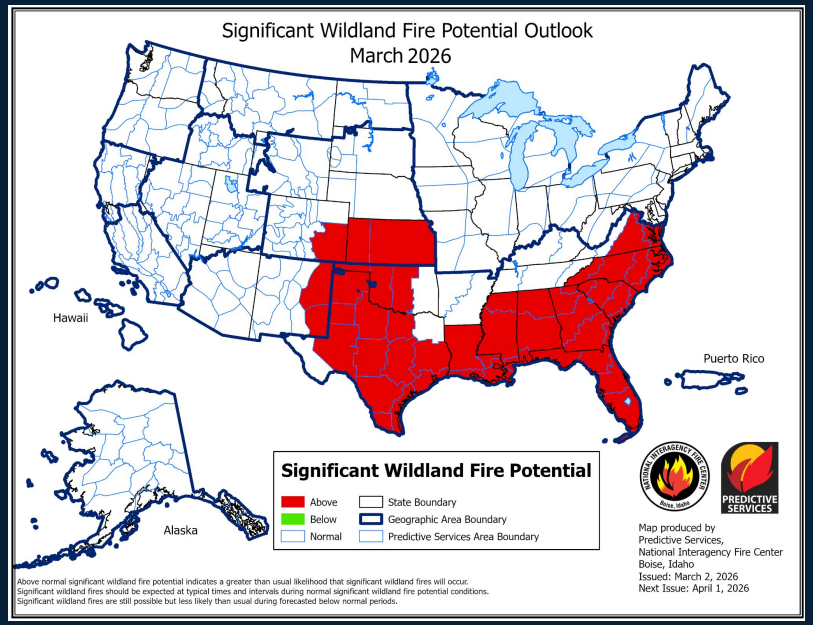


COLORADO CLIMATE CENTER



NIFC Seasonal Outlook

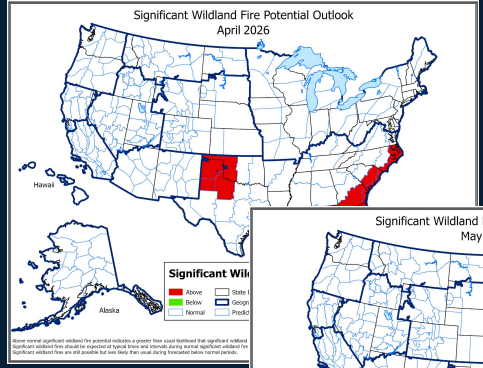
• A dry and warm winter of 2025/26 has kept the fire potential elevated east of the continental divide for Spring 2026. Wind events including Colorado's first PDS (Particularly Dangerous Situation) have defined the winter and spring conditions.



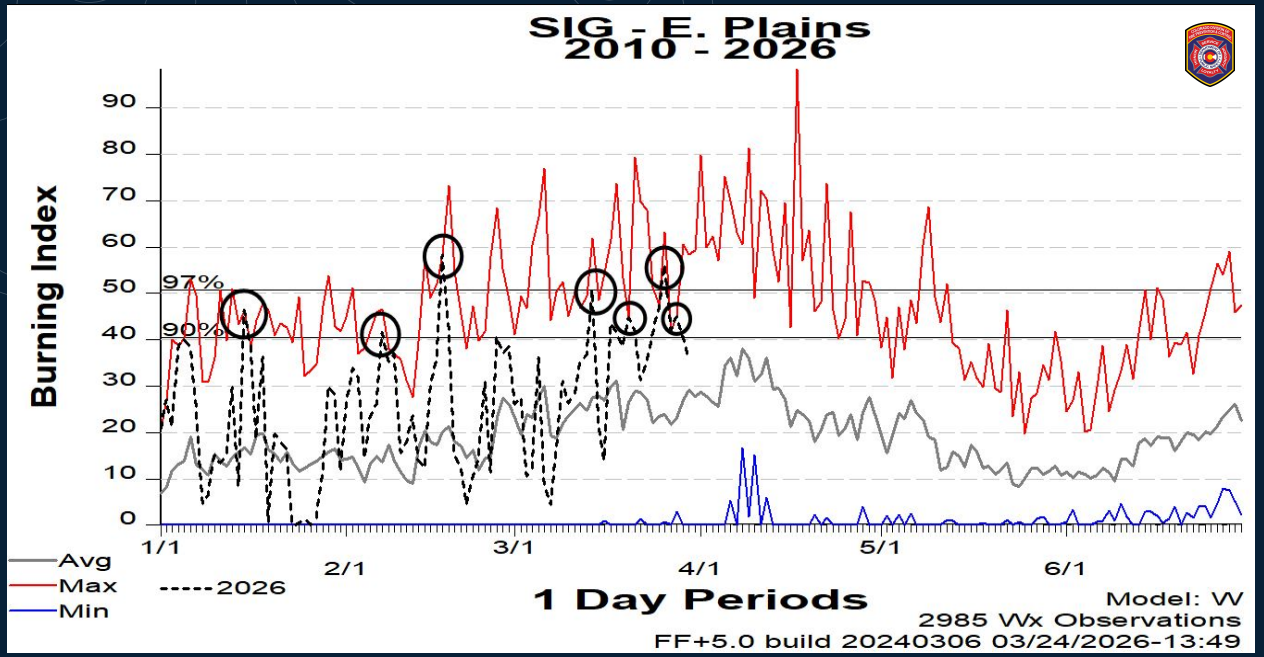
March: Continued warm, dry pattern with periodic strong winds.

April–May: Near-normal fire potential statewide.

June: Above-normal significant fire potential expected on Colorado's West Slope, driven by ongoing drought and below-average precipitation west of the Continental Divide.



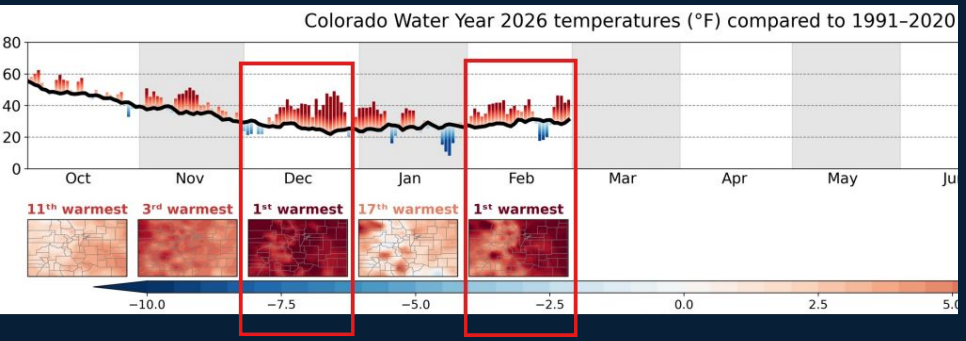
Eastern Plains



•This Burning Index compiles 10 RAWS stations around the eastern plains. B.I. combines Spread Component and ERC trends to represent a *Difficulty to Control.*

•The plains have been pushing towards winter seasonal ERC's and Burning Index maximums. Exceeding the 90th-97th percentiles numerous times in 2026 (Circled in black)

• Abnormally warm winter temperatures—highlighted by the hottest December and February in Colorado — with little relief in January, combined with record-setting wind events, have driven an unusually active winter fire season across the plains.



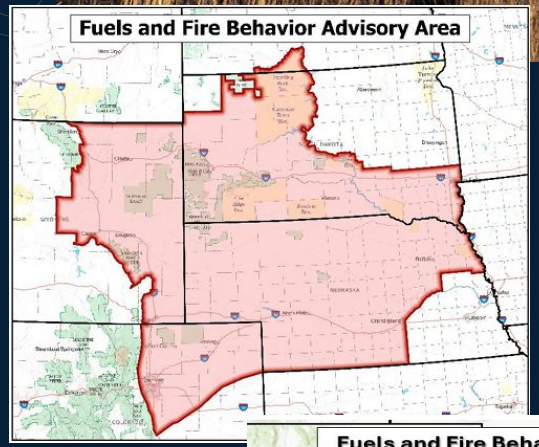
• Recent fires have shown us that fuels are available and when wind is present wildfires can move and cross some of the barriers that normally hold.

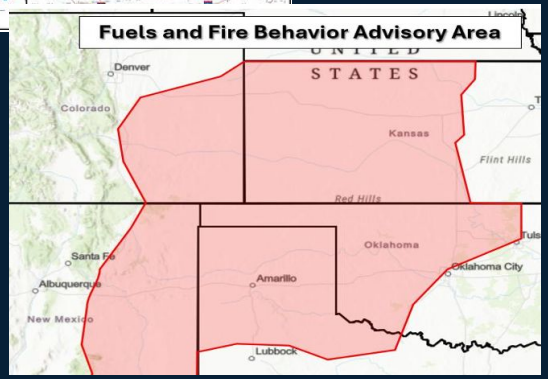
Fuels and Fire Behavior Advisory

Central and Southern Great Plains

Date Advisory Effective - March 18, 2026

PREDICTIVE SERVICES





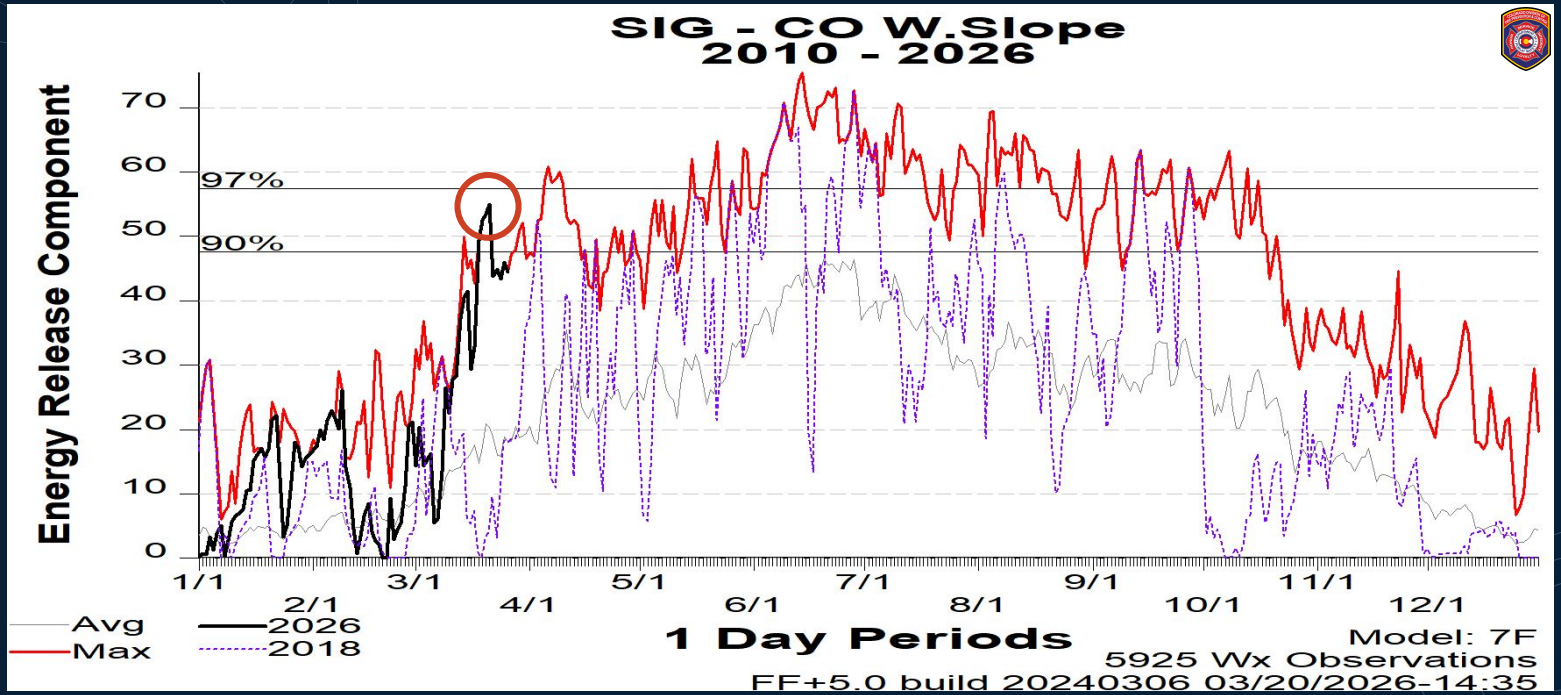
- Affected Region: The advisory encompasses the vast majority of the grass-dominant Great and Central Plains including all of Eastern Colorado.

- Much of the region has seen less than 50% of its average 90-day precipitation along with much above average temperatures. Many RAWS stations across the advisory area have been showing record or near-record high ERCs. Several wildfires in Nebraska grew in excess of 100,000 acres.
- Fire Behavior Concerns: The environment is highly primed for above normal fire occurrence and intensity. Personnel should anticipate extreme rates of spread in fine fuels and increased fireline intensity across all portions of a fire. Notably, spread rates of 2 to 5 miles per hour have already been observed.

- Tactical Warnings: **A frontal assault on wind-driven fires should not be considered.** Furthermore, fire spread will change dramatically with any shifts in wind direction or increases in wind speed. Lower-than-normal humidity levels may also increase burn periods and lead to active burning during the night.

Western Slope

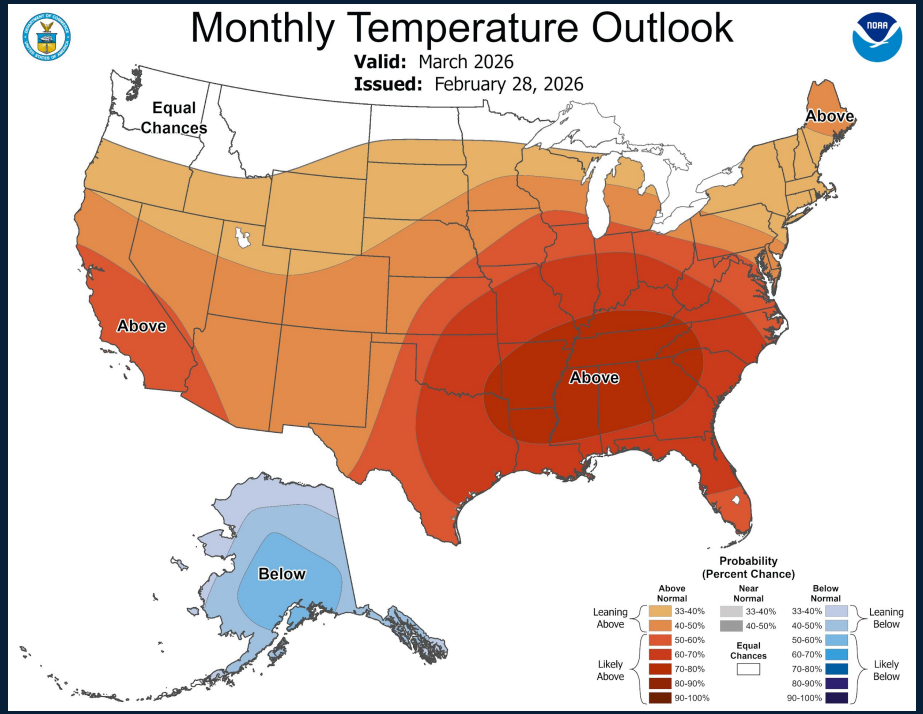
This Western Slope SIG, derived from 10 RAWS stations along Colorado's far western border, shows a statistically dry winter generally following seasonal maximums for 2026.



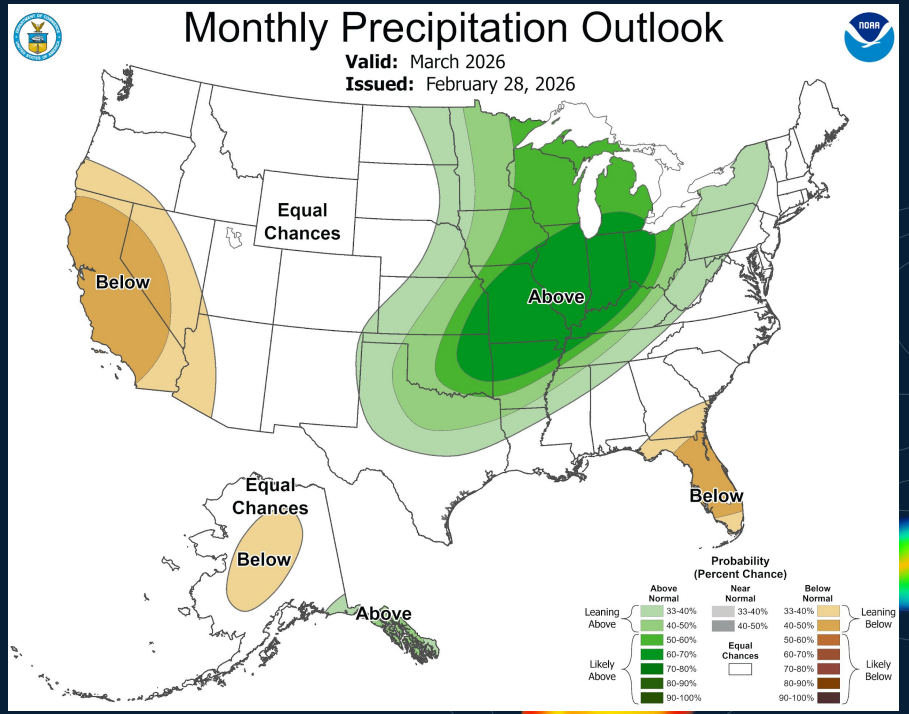
ERC trends indicate an earlier-than-normal rise in brush dominated fuel availability, with values already approaching or exceeding the 90th percentile. Green up is starting state-wide which may keep some fire potential lower if last years freeze-dried grass fuels have been removed. If the current warming and drying pattern persists, a westward shift in elevated fire danger is likely by early summer, with peak concern developing by June. Ongoing drought, especially across northwest Colorado, is expected to accelerate fuel availability and increase ignition potential. Confidence in this outlook is moderate, as the timing and strength of monsoonal moisture could significantly mitigate or delay peak fire danger.

Climate Prediction Center March outlook

Temperatures are expected to be leaning above-normal for most of Colorado in March. Continuing the warm winter trend.

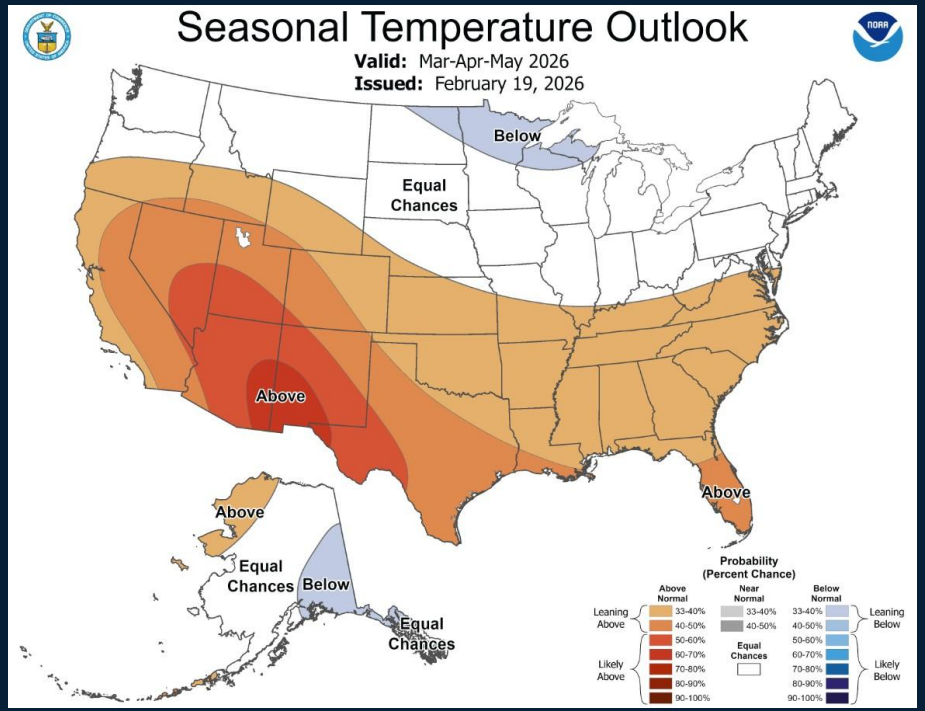


Precipitation outlook for the greater Rockies in March is indeterminate with equal probability of being above or below seasonal norms.

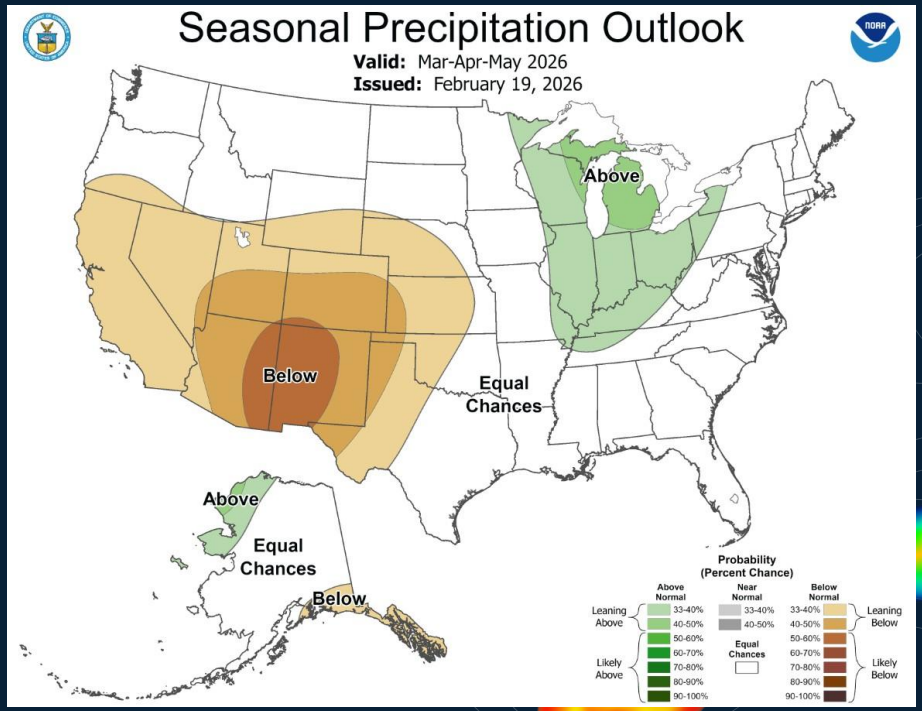


Climate Prediction Center March-April-May

Spring temperature outlooks are likely above average for south and west Colorado and likely above average for the north and east half of the state.



3 month precipitation outlook for Colorado is likely below normal in the southern ¾ of Colorado and leaning below normal across the northern tier.

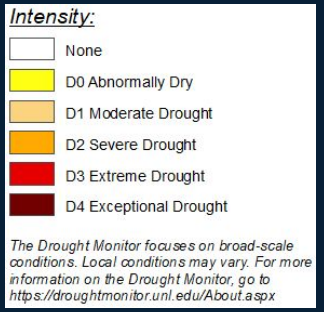


Drought Analysis

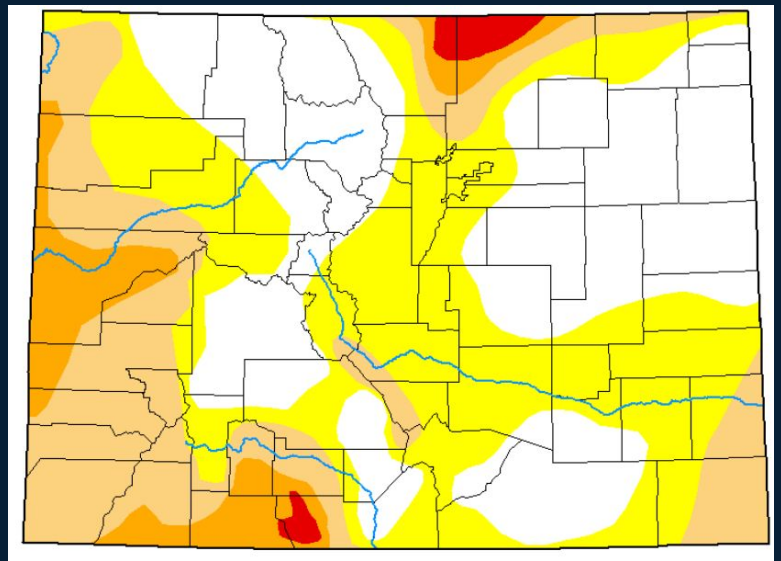
- Drought has returned after the late monsoon of 2025.

- Extreme Drought conditions are present in the the Flat Tops, Gore, Mosquito and Sawatch Ranges.

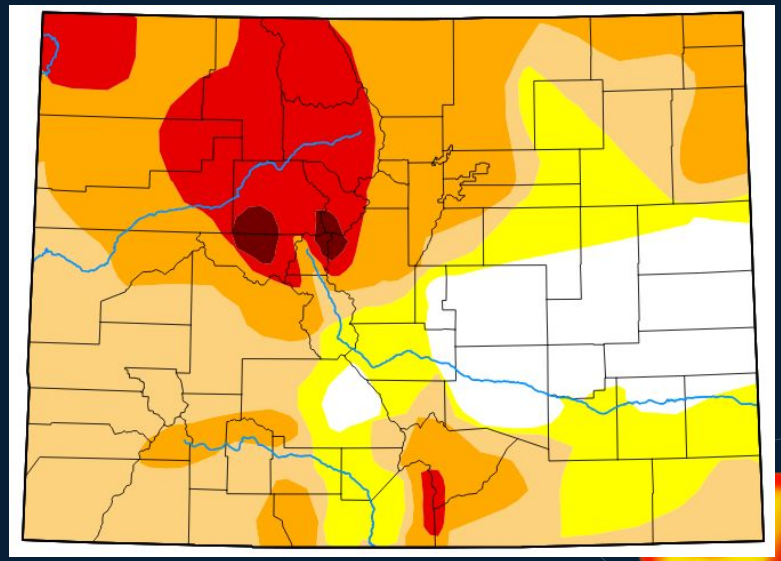
- Compared to this time last year, drought has spread and increased significantly across the northern tier of Colorado..



March 25, 2025



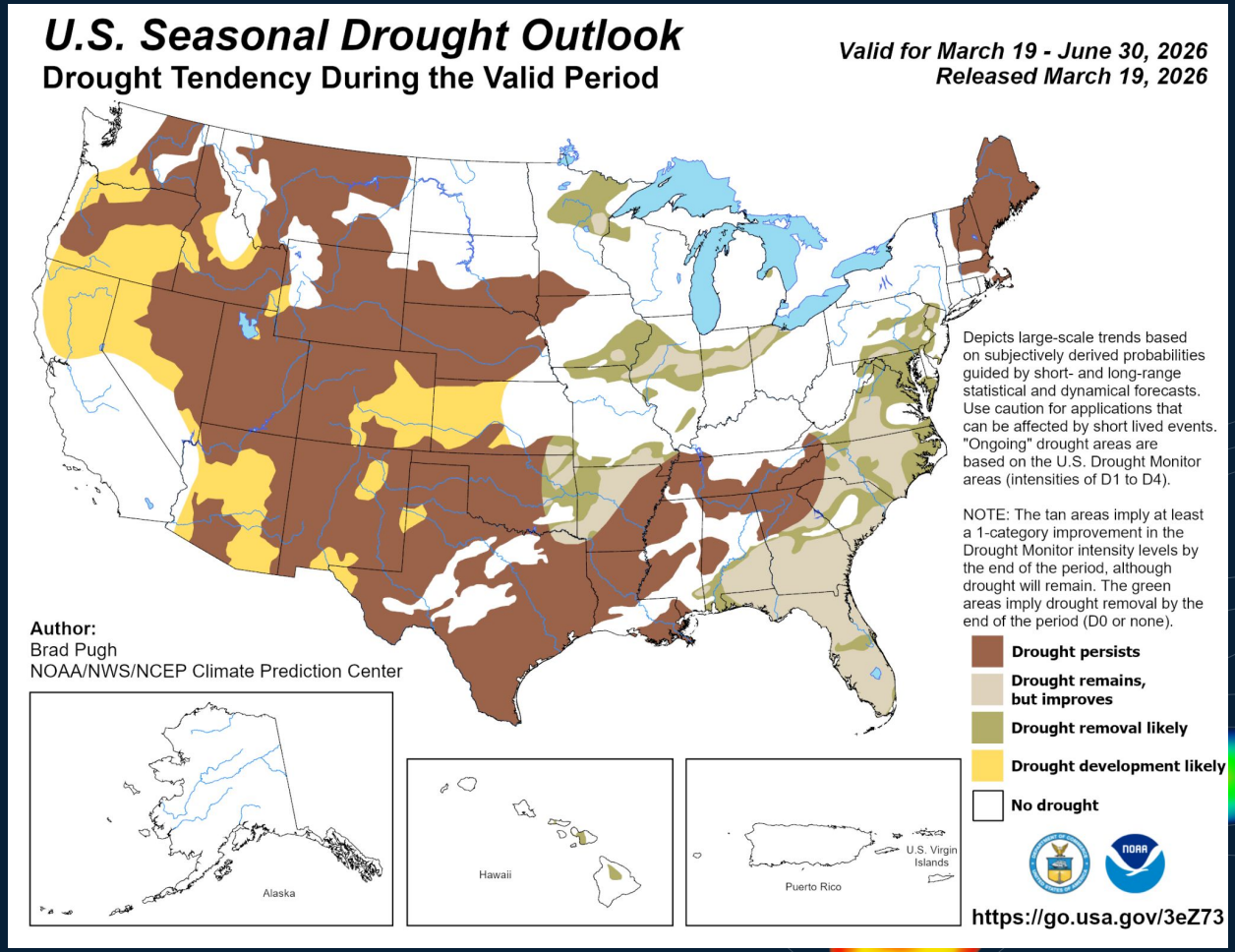
March 24, 2026



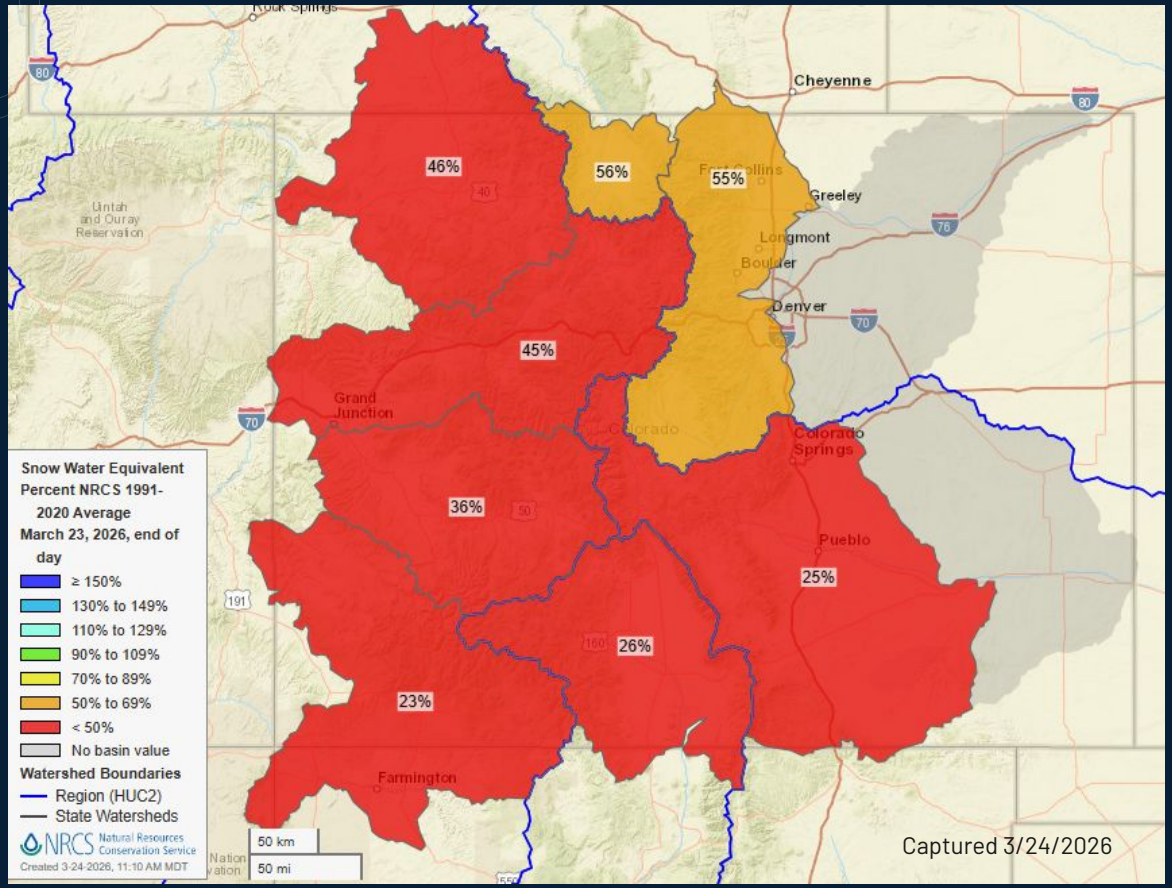
Drought Outlook

- Most areas in drought currently, will continue to see drought conditions through at least April.

- Southeastern Colorado will see drought conditions developing further.



Snowpack



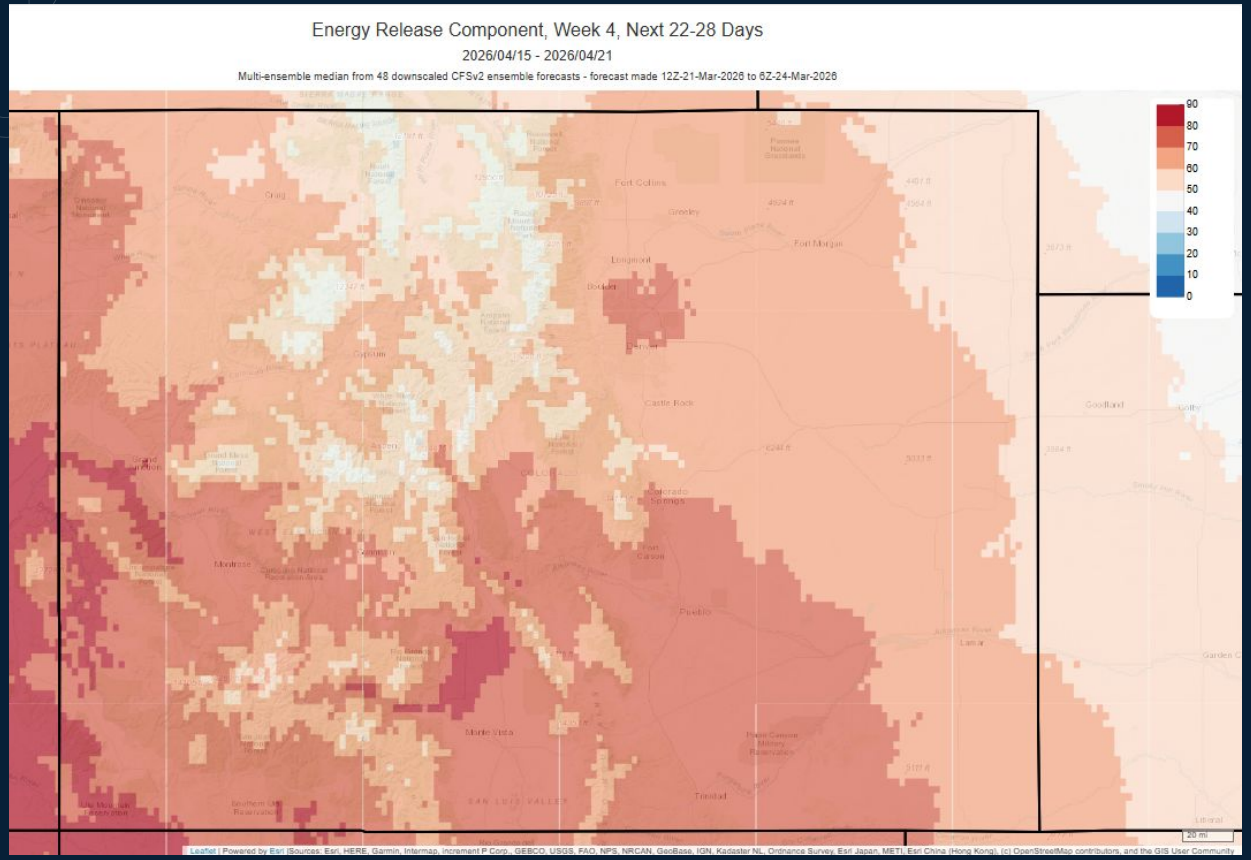
- Snowpack in Colorado's watersheds are about 40% of their historic medians.

According to CSU's Climate Center - "Statewide snowpack is at its lowest in over 40 years. January brought little moisture to the mountains.."

- The lowest snow-water equivalent totals are in the San Juans, Arkansas River and Upper Rio Grande watersheds.

- Late winter storms and accumulations may still alter the spring melt-out.

March Forecasted Fire Danger



Energy Release Component Forecast Model for the next 4 weeks

ERC percentiles are forecasted to remain moderately high in most of the lower elevations in Colorado. In the early spring most of the front range and urban corridor is expected to continue its above-normal fire danger until green up. While the Grand Valley, Animas and Green River Basins in the far western slope are expected to dry out next.

Thank You!

Questions, Comments or Concerns? CDPS_WFMSINTEL@state.co.us

***Sources*:**

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