
Large wildfire risk is high through September

June 16, 2020



Federal officials who track weather and climate are seeing an above normal significant large wildfire potential for Northern California and Southern Oregon in the current fire season.

According to the National Significant Wildland Fire Potential Outlook, Predictive Services section of the National Interagency Fire Center, the areas are still in drought despite above-normal precipitation in May.

Precipitation in May was above normal over a large portion of the region. However, precipitation totals since the rainy season began on October 1, 2019 have been below normal in all but a small portion of far northeastern California. Some central and western areas have received less than half of the normal rainy season precipitation. This has led to a weak snowpack that will be almost entirely gone by early June and very light snow melt runoff.

Current outlooks call for warmer and drier than average conditions from June through September. Pacific frontal systems are expected to occasionally move across the region in June, and some will bring lightning.

Dry north to northeasterly wind events will follow frontal systems. Dead fuels are expected to dry to critical levels in June and the annual fine fuel crop will be sufficiently cured to carry fire in June.

In the Pacific Northwest, most areas west of the Cascade-Sierra crest that are below 6000 feet will have Above Normal Significant Fire Potential in June. Areas above 6000 feet are will still receive the benefits from the weak snowpack in June. In July and August north to northeasterly winds are less likely, so elevations below 3000 feet (west of the crest) return to Normal Significant Fire Potential.

The summer monsoon is expected to be close to normal, in terms of its impact on California. Due to the overall precipitation deficit and spreading drought conditions, dead fuels at all elevations are expected to be sufficiently dry to carry fire beginning in July. Even below average lightning occurrence and amounts will pose a high risk of large fires in timber. Elevations above 3000 feet and PSAs dominated by timber (the northwestern mountains) have Above Normal significant large fire potential in July through August. In September, there is a transition from the lightning threat back to the offshore wind threat. So due to these potential weather triggers and the expectation of very dry fuels in all areas, all areas have Above Normal Significant Fire Potential in September.

Because of the added challenge of fighting wildfires with COVID-19 restrictions, fire officials are asking the public to be especially diligent in preventing fires and fire restrictions have been imposed in many locations