National Wildland Fire Outlook

National Interagency Fire Center
Predictive Services Group

Issued: September 6, 2006

Wildland Fire Outlook – September 6 through November 30, 2006

Fire potential is expected to be significantly higher than normal across portions of the West, the Dakotas, Minnesota, and Texas for the following reasons:

- A warmer and drier than normal summer over much of the West has increased significant fire potential across some areas of California, the Northwest, Great Basin, Northern Rockies, and Rocky Mountain Areas. Most of the remainder of the country is projected to be normal with the exception of Minnesota and Texas being above normal.

- Warm and dry conditions are expected to persist through the fall for portions of the Northwest, Great Basin, and portions of the Northern Rockies Area. These areas are likely to have an extended fire season.

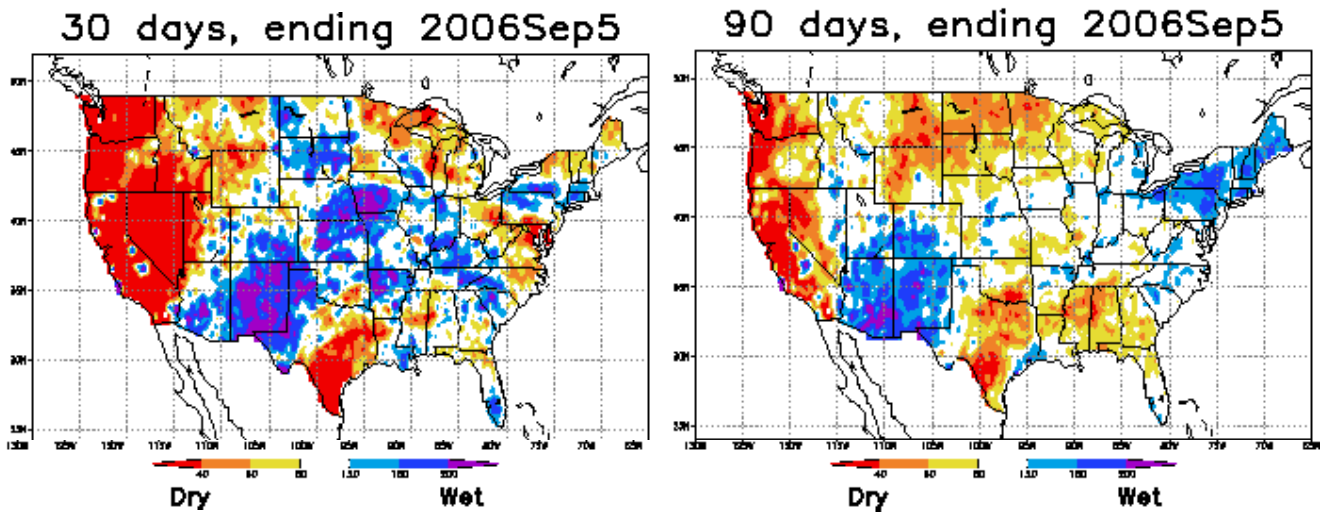
- Record level precipitation has greatly decreased fire potential across much of eastern Arizona, New Mexico and extreme west Texas.

- The western Great Lakes and portions of the northern Plains have experienced dry conditions over the last three months with the greatest wildfire risk in the western Dakotas and northern portions of Minnesota.

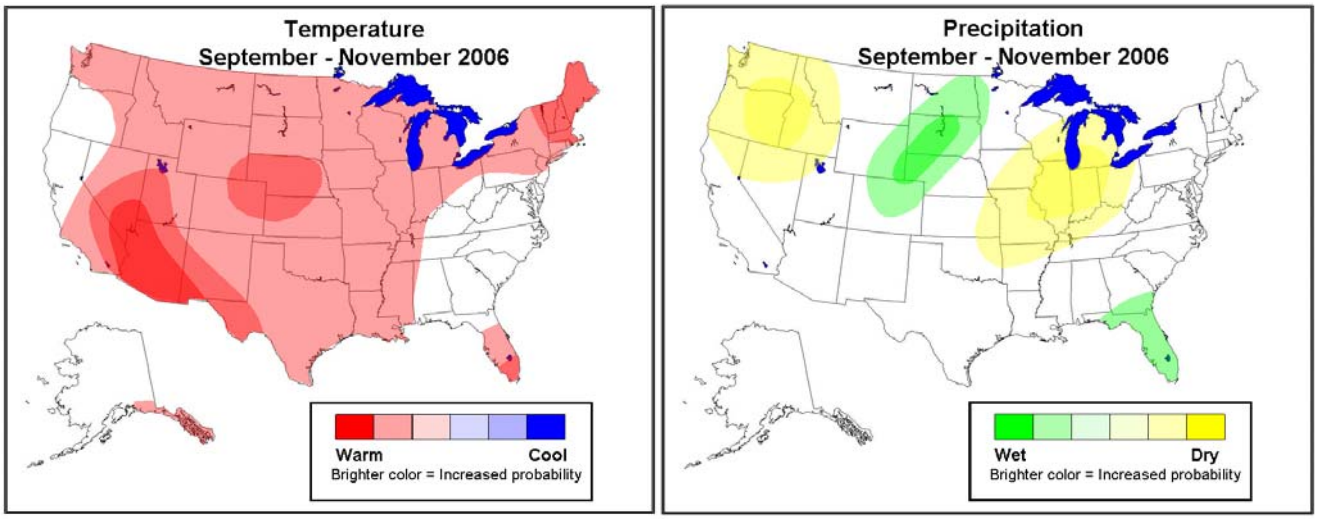
*Note - Not all Geographic Areas will remain in fire season throughout the entire forecast period. This forecast applies to the time period for which each Geographic Area remains in fire season.

Weather

This summer has been much warmer than normal across most of the West. It was also much drier than normal with the exception of the Southwest. The monsoon was very active with some locations, including Albuquerque, seeing their wettest summer on record. Portions of Texas, Oklahoma, Minnesota and the Southeast remain abnormally dry.



The outlook for September through November from the National Weather Service Climate Prediction Center is shown below. A warmer than normal fall is expected over most of the country with dryness expected to persist in the Northwest and Midwest. The Atlantic hurricane season, which typically lasts through the end of November, is expected to be near normal.

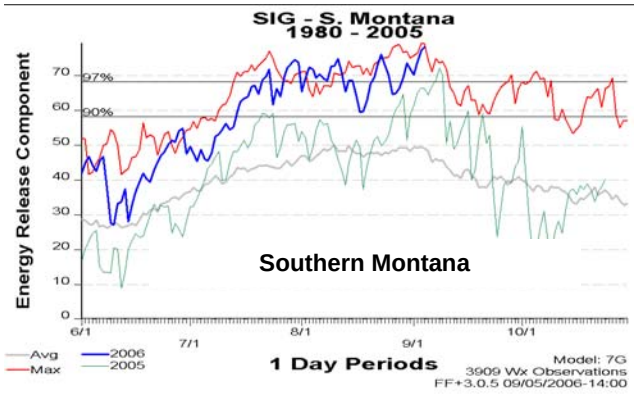


Area Discussions

Alaska: Potential: Normal. A cool and damp season, combined with delayed lightning activity have resulted in a below average fire season this year to date. Through the end of August, Alaska has burned less than 20% of their average acres for the past ten years. Although warmer than normal temperatures are forecast for September, they are expected to be accompanied by above normal rainfall. Overall, normal fire potential is forecast for the outlook period.

Southwest: Potential: Normal. Fire potential is expected to be normal and fuel moisture conditions across the Area have improved markedly over the past two months but are expected to remain dry across the lowlands of western Arizona. Robust monsoonal moisture this summer benefited much of New Mexico and parts of eastern/central Arizona and west Texas causing drought conditions to improve significantly. This rainfall has increased the abundance of fine fuels, which will need to be considered during prescribed fire operations after any sustained periods of warm, dry conditions this fall.

Northern Rockies: Potential: Normal to Above Normal. Above normal fire potential is expected across northern Idaho, portions of western and southern Montana, and southwest North Dakota. Fuels remain very dry across most of the Area. Energy Release Component (ERC) values, an indication of the potential "heat release" per unit area in the flaming zone, across southern Montana have been running near or above historic 25-year maximums since late June (see image at right). Long-range outlooks indicate above average temperatures and below normal precipitation for the remainder of the outlook period. However, cooler temperatures and higher relative humidity should keep fire potential normal in most northern portions of Montana and North Dakota.



Great Basin: Potential: Normal to Above Normal. Above normal fire potential is forecast for much of northern Nevada. Central Idaho will have above normal fire potential for September, then normal fire potential for October and November. Lightning activity is expected to continue across much of the Area into early September. Abundant fine fuel loadings across much of the northern Nevada rangelands are very receptive to ignition and will continue to support large fire growth in the lower elevations, even in the absence of strong winds. Fuels in the mountains of central Idaho have generally been much drier than normal since mid-July and will continue to remain at critical levels until significant rain or snow alleviate the situation. Abundant fuels also remain dry across the Snake Plain of Idaho and the West Deserts of Utah, but increased humidity, cooler nights, and shorter burn periods should decrease large fire potential in these areas. Fuel conditions in eastern and southern Utah have moderated considerably with recent widespread wet thunderstorms.

Northwest: Potential: Normal to Above Normal. Most of western, along with a small portion of eastern, Washington and Oregon will likely see an above average fire season this fall. Fuels dried out rapidly across the Area during the month of August with many weather stations reporting near (or exceeding) record high Energy Release Component values by the end of the month. This rapid increase in severity along with some episodic lightning events resulted in an above normal amount of

acres burned during the month of August. In September, large fire occurrence typically declines despite the often very dry fuels. Severity indexes fall gradually as the length of the burning period diminishes and longer, cooler nights allow for better relative humidity recovery. Another significant factor is the sharp drop off in the probability of dry lightning episodes after early September. Generally, there is about a 50% chance of a season ending event by early October. Abnormally dry fuels on the west side of the Cascades, associated with fall east wind events, have the highest potential for large fires during the outlook period.

Northern and Southern California: Potential: Normal to Above Normal. Above normal fire potential is expected in portions of northern California and the coastal and mountain areas in southern California. The remainder of the area is expected to have normal fire potential through the forecast period. Fuels remain very dry over much of northern California and portions of southern California. Typically, the likelihood of north to east (i.e. offshore) wind events increases during the second half of September in northern California, and these winds also tend to be stronger and of greater duration. Offshore winds in combination with very dry fuels, along with live fuel moisture levels that will continue to track downward this fall, will likely worsen fire potential in Northern California. Fire potential is expected to be normal in southern California during September, but above normal temperatures, near normal rainfall and the onset of Santa Ana wind events will create above normal fire potential for the southwest portion of southern California later in the forecast period.

Rocky Mountain: Potential: Normal to Above Normal. Above normal fire potential is expected for much of northern Wyoming during the early part of the outlook period. This is especially true in the lower elevation areas due to the abundance and continuity of very dry fine fuels. Normal fire potential is expected elsewhere. Persistent fuel dryness has been observed mainly in the northern half of Wyoming, however there were significant improvements to dry conditions in the Black Hills and eastern sections of Wyoming in late August. Currently, drought conditions prevail across much of the Area. The seasonal Drought Outlook (issued August 17, 2006 from the National Drought Mitigation Center) anticipates persistent or intensifying drought conditions in the western half of Wyoming and some improvement likely elsewhere, especially across the southern two-thirds of Colorado extending eastward into Kansas.

Eastern Area: Potential: Normal to Above Normal. Above normal fire potential is forecast for the majority of northern Minnesota where fire danger indices have recently resurged to critical levels. This area missed out on the fairly frequent and widespread shower and thunderstorm activity which affected the majority of the Great Lakes in August. Above normal temperatures are forecast through the fall period and soil moisture anomalies indicate continued drying over this area through mid-September. The remainder of the Area is expected to have normal fire potential for the period.

Southern Area: Potential: Normal to Above Normal. Drought conditions are expected to persist over a portion of central and southern Texas leading to continued above normal fire activity. Otherwise, normal fire potential is expected for the remainder of the Area during the fall. On September 1, Colorado State University updated their Atlantic hurricane forecast calling for a near-normal season with 13 named tropical storms; five becoming hurricanes; two of which are projected to be major hurricanes (Category 3 or higher). Any tropical storms or hurricanes that make landfall could cause significant storm damage and flooding.

Note: This national outlook and some geographic area assessments are currently available at the NICC and GACC websites. The GACC websites can also be accessed though the NICC webpage at:

www.nifc.gov/news/pred_services/Main_page.htm