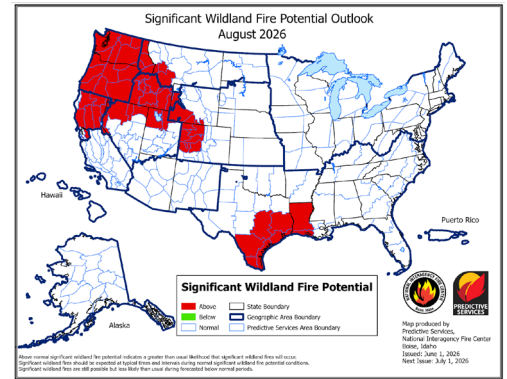
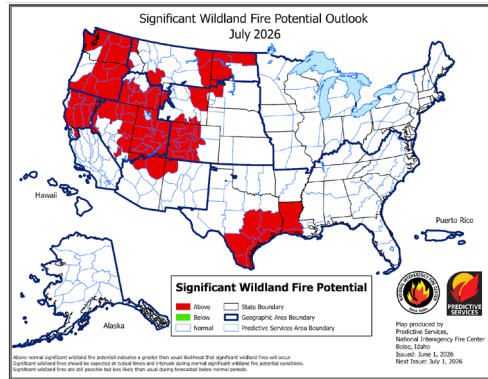
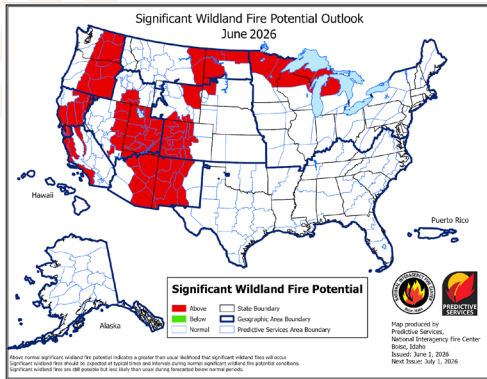


U.S. Wildfire Outlook – Summer 2026

By Haley Sisk, Research Analyst

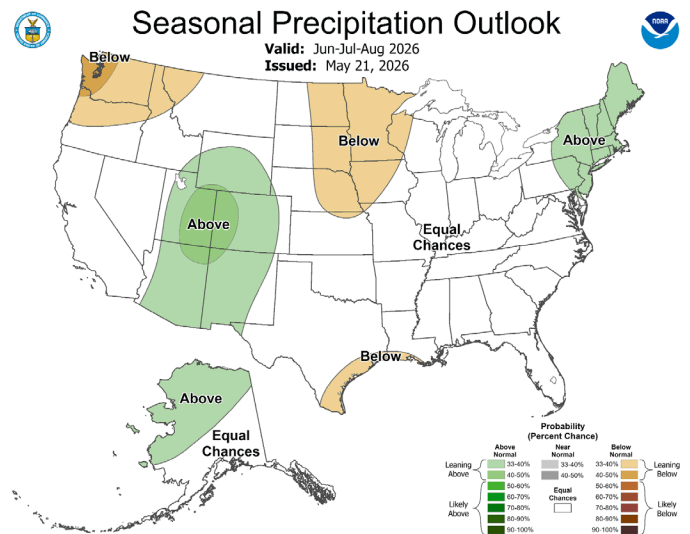
This updated wildfire outlook reflects new early season information, with elevated risk now emerging in the Upper Midwest and reduced risk across the South compared with the prior forecast, reshaping expectations for Summer 2026 fire activity.

- The latest forecast indicates that wildfire risk remains historically high across much of the United States, driven by widespread drought conditions and persistent heat.
- Elevated risk of wildfire is currently concentrated in the Southwest interior due to an unusually warm start to summer, with risk expected to shift northward and peak in the Pacific Northwest by August.



Regional Developments

- **Upper Midwest:** A warm, dry spring (below-normal May rainfall and early heat) dried fine fuels and raised early-summer fire risk in parts of the Upper Midwest.
- **Southeast & Florida:** Heavy late-spring rains decreased drought and boosted humidity, lowering expected wildfire potential as the wet summer pattern sets in.
- **South-Central U.S.:** Emerging dryness in parts of southeast Texas and western Louisiana could raise mid-summer fire risk if forecast rainfall deficits persist.
- **Southwest:** The onset on monsoon season is expected to increase humidity and rainfall across Arizona, New Mexico, and nearby areas, causing fire risk to peak early and then decline through July–August.



Aerial Fire Suppression

- Jet fuel prices have risen sharply (~70–80% higher YoY), increasing the cost of aerial wildfire suppression
- The United States Forest Service allocated \$45M for aviation fuel in 2026, ~\$7M below 2025 spend, increasing the likelihood of mid season funding adjustments if activity remains high.
- California inventories are at a three year low (~20% below 2024), tightening logistics and prompting pre positioning/stockpiling, though capacity is expected to be maintained.



Source: NPR