April 2026: Southwest Climate Outlook

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https://climas.arizona.edu/

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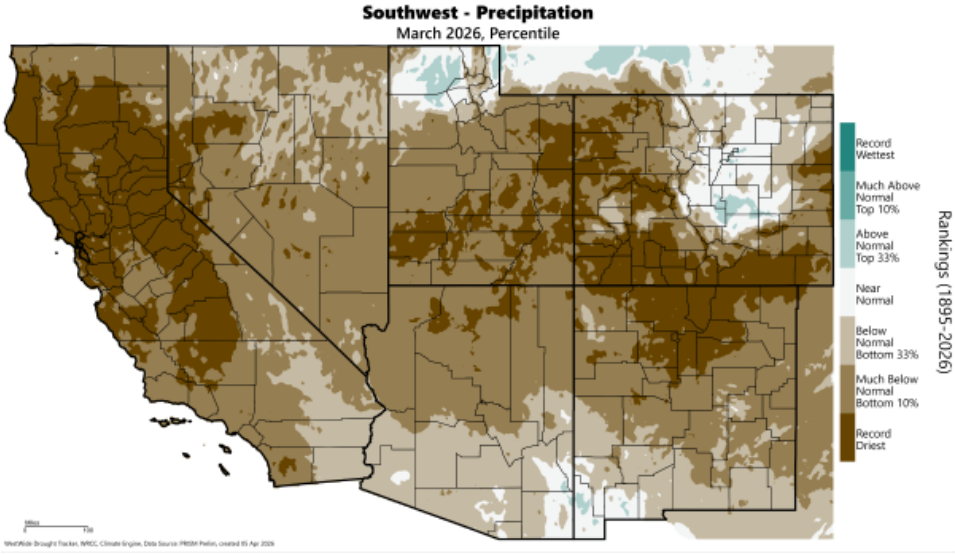
Precipitation and Temperature

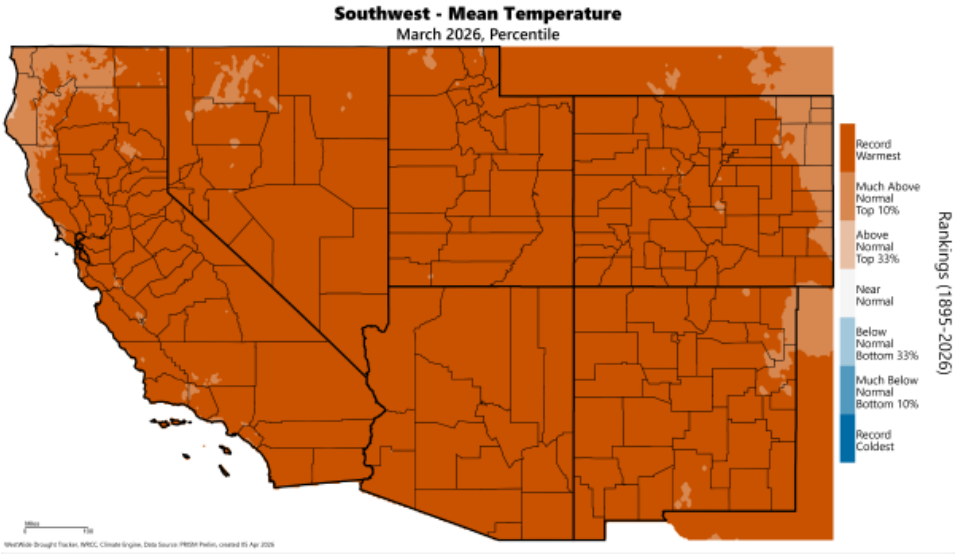
March precipitation was below normal across Arizona and New Mexico—much-below normal (falling in the bottom one-tenth of the rankings) for central-to-northern parts of either

state. For much of northern New Mexico it was the driest March on record.



Source: WestWide Drought Tracker

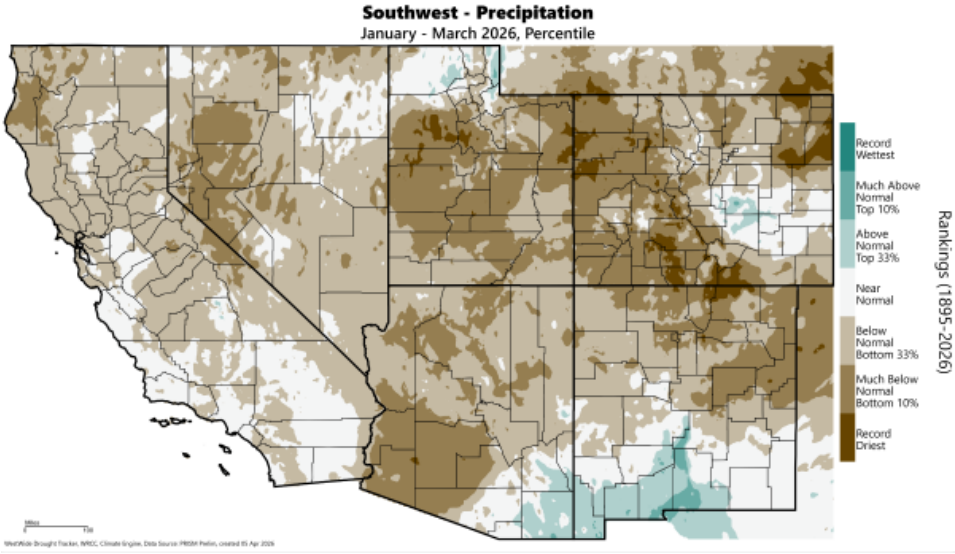
March temperatures were the warmest on record, for all of Arizona and nearly all parts of New Mexico.



Source: WestWide Drought Tracker

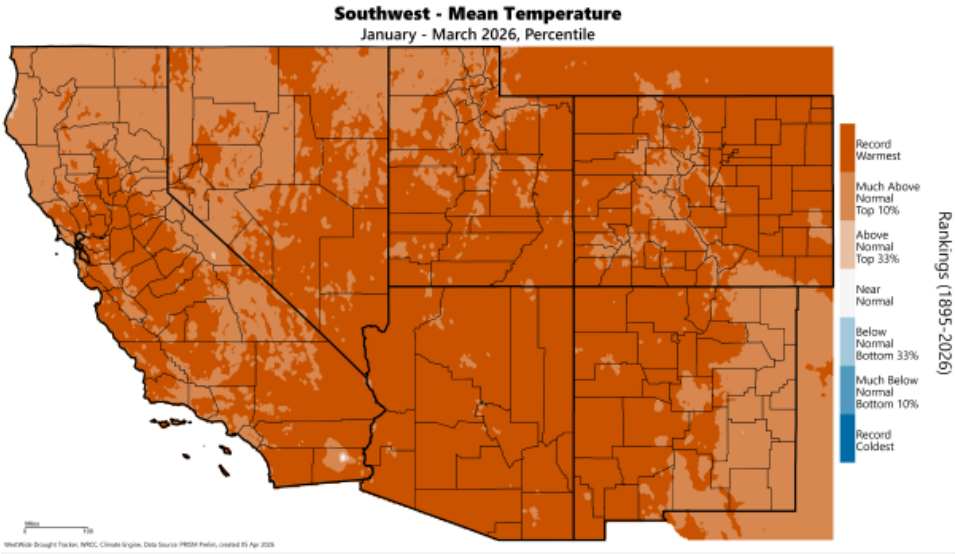
January–March seasonal precipitation totals were below normal or much-below normal across much of Arizona and New Mexico, but totals for parts of southeastern Arizona and

southern New Mexico ranged from near normal to above normal.



Source: WestWide Drought Tracker

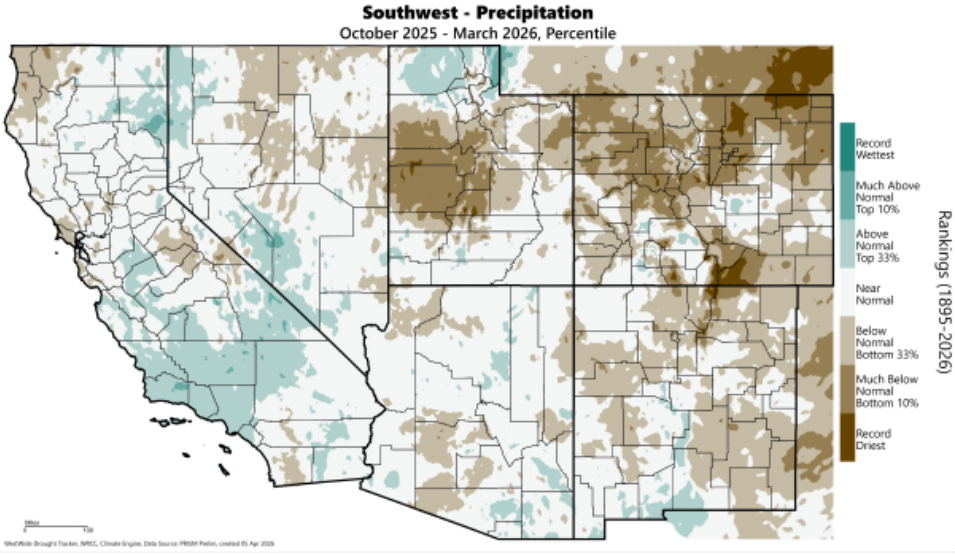
January–March seasonal temperatures averaged warmest-on-record across Arizona and much of New Mexico.



Source: WestWide Drought Tracker

October–March seasonal precipitation totals fall in the near normal range for much of Arizona and some parts of New Mexico. Totals were below normal for much of New Mexico,

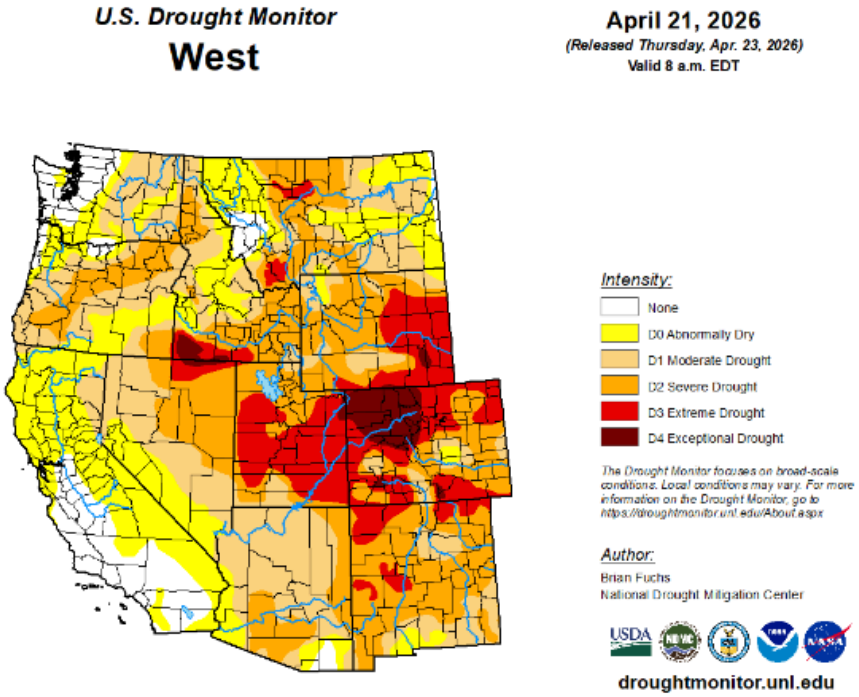
with the northern mountains seeing an especially dry six-month season—the driest on record for some locations.



Source: WestWide Drought Tracker

Drought

Drought conditions have generally worsened over the past month, with significant portions of New Mexico and Arizona seeing drought status reclassification to categories of greater drought intensity. Areas that were last month considered Abnormally Dry are now considered to be in Moderate Drought; areas that were in Moderate Drought are now considered to be in Severe Drought. The proportion of New Mexico considered to be in Extreme Drought increased from under 5% to over 13% in the past 30 days.



Source: U.S. Drought Monitor

NIDIS Improved and Expanded State Pages on Drought.Gov

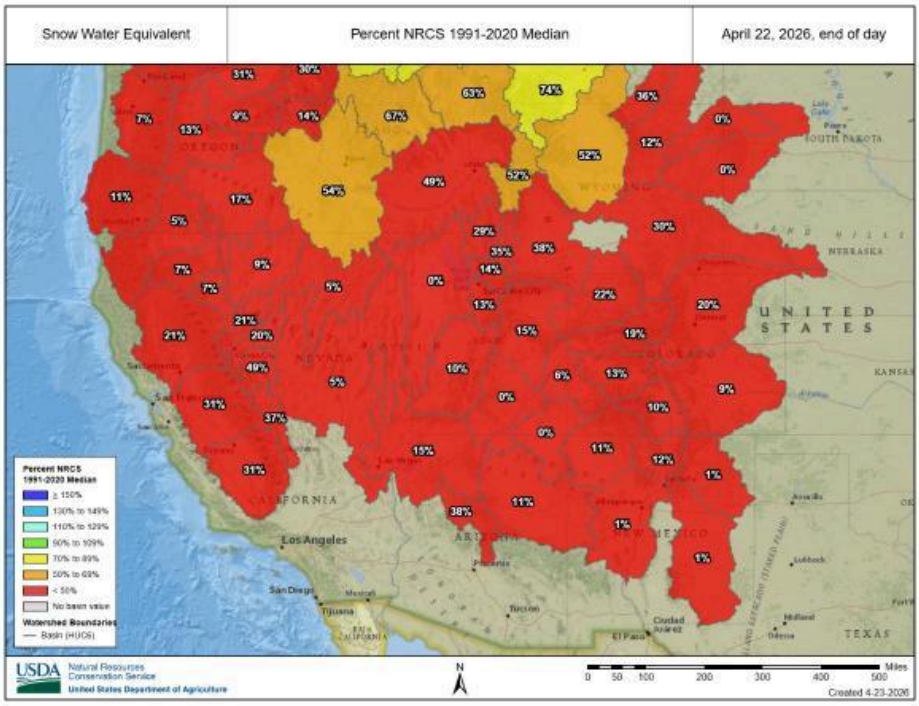
New Mexico

Arizona

Snowpack & Streamflow

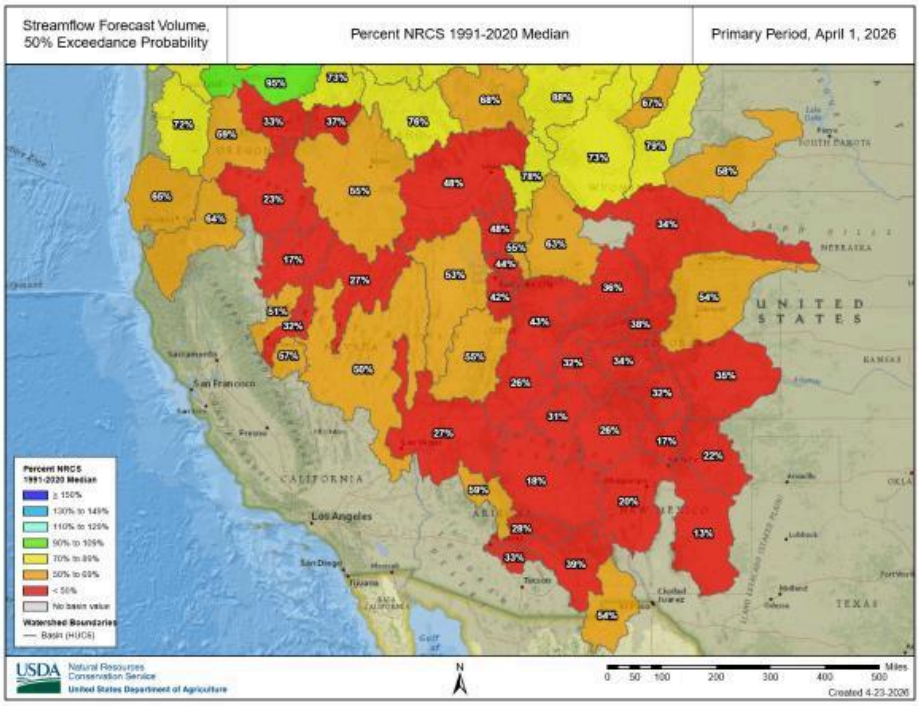
Winter snowpack is generally far below normal for this time of year, across the Southwest—snow water equivalent (SWE) for basins of Arizona and New Mexico ranges from 38% of normal for the Verde River basin to zero in the lower San Juan River basin. Part of the snowpack deficit is due to early, rapid melting from exceptionally warm temperatures, but SWE has generally been below normal all season long, region wide. In

some cases, below normal precipitation played a role, but overall above normal temperatures throughout the season negatively impacted snow accumulation.



USDA: Natural Resources Conservation Service

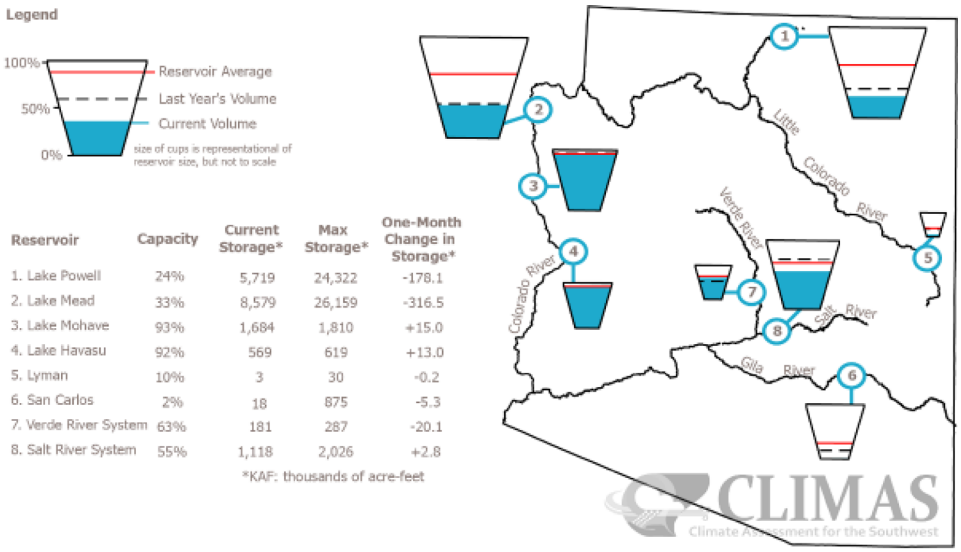
Streamflow forecasts generally indicate much-below normal volumes of streamflow during primary period—the window of snow-fed runoff—for stream basins of Arizona and New Mexico. Rio Grande headwaters streamflow volume is expected to be 32 percent of normal. Upper Colorado River Basin forecasts are for 37 percent of normal streamflow volume.



USDA: Natural Resources Conservation Service

Water Supply

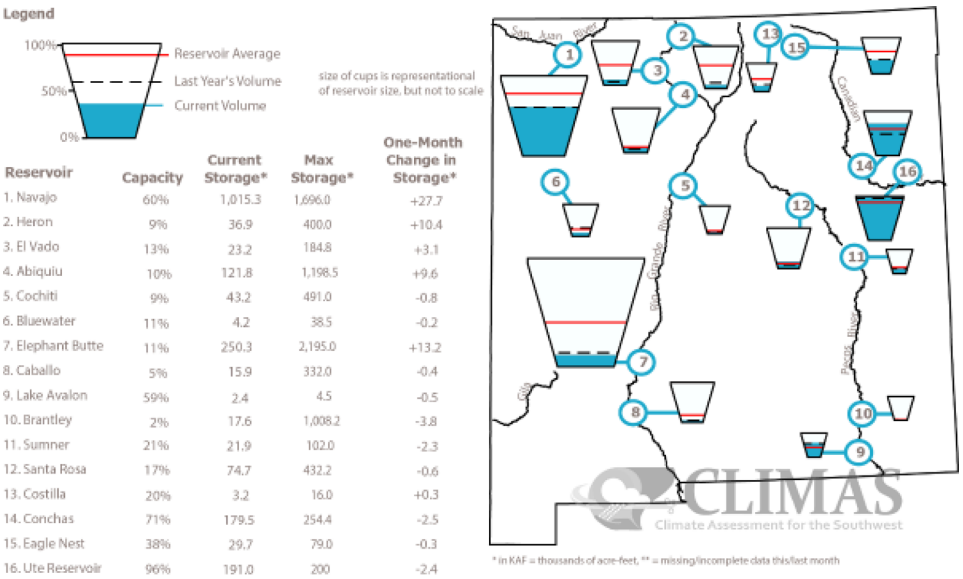
Reservoir storage in Arizona is generally below normal and down compared to last year. New Mexico reservoirs follow a similar pattern, except for eastern New Mexico reservoirs, which are storing near or above normal volumes for this time of year.



Reservoir	Capacity	Current Storage*	Max Storage*	One-Month Change in Storage*
1. Lake Powell	24%	5,719	24,322	-178.1
2. Lake Mead	33%	8,579	26,159	-316.5
3. Lake Mohave	93%	1,684	1,810	+15.0
4. Lake Havasu	92%	569	619	+13.0
5. Lyman	10%	3	30	-0.2
6. San Carlos	2%	18	875	-5.3
7. Verde River System	63%	181	287	-20.1
8. Salt River System	55%	1,118	2,026	+2.8

*KAF: thousands of acre-feet

Figure 1. Arizona reservoir volumes for the end of March 2026 as a percent of capacity. The map depicts the average volume and last year's storage for each reservoir. The table also lists current and maximum storage, and change in storage since last month.



Reservoir	Capacity	Current Storage*	Max Storage*	One-Month Change in Storage*
1. Navajo	60%	1,015.3	1,696.0	+27.7
2. Heron	9%	36.9	400.0	+10.4
3. El Vado	13%	23.2	184.8	+3.1
4. Abiquiu	10%	121.8	1,198.5	+9.6
5. Cochiti	9%	43.2	491.0	-0.8
6. Bluewater	11%	4.2	38.5	-0.2
7. Elephant Butte	11%	250.3	2,195.0	+13.2
8. Caballo	5%	15.9	332.0	-0.4
9. Lake Avalon	59%	2.4	4.5	-0.5
10. Brantley	2%	17.6	1,008.2	-3.8
11. Sumner	21%	21.9	102.0	-2.3
12. Santa Rosa	17%	74.7	432.2	-0.6
13. Costilla	20%	3.2	16.0	+0.3
14. Conchas	71%	179.5	254.4	-2.5
15. Eagle Nest	38%	29.7	79.0	-0.3
16. Ute Reservoir	96%	191.0	200	-2.4

Figure 2. New Mexico reservoir volumes for end of March 2026 as a percent of capacity. The map depicts the average volume and last year's storage for each reservoir. The table also lists current and maximum storage, and change in storage since last month.

The map gives a representation of current storage for reservoirs in Arizona and New Mexico. Reservoir locations are numbered within the blue circles on the map, corresponding to the reservoirs listed in the table. The cup next to each reservoir shows the current storage (blue fill) as a percent of total capacity. Note that while the size of each cup varies with the size of the reservoir, these are representational and not to scale. Each cup also represents last year's storage (dotted line) and the 1991–2020 reservoir average (red line). The table details more exactly the current capacity (listed as a percent of maximum storage). Current and maximum storage are given in thousands of acre-feet for each reservoir. One acre-foot is the volume of water sufficient to cover an acre of land to a depth of 1 foot (approximately 325,851 gallons). On average, 1 acre-foot of water is enough to meet the demands of four people for a year. The last column of the table lists an increase or decrease in storage since last month. A line indicates no change. These data are based on reservoir reports updated monthly by the Natural Resources Conservation Service - National Water and Climate Center (USDA)

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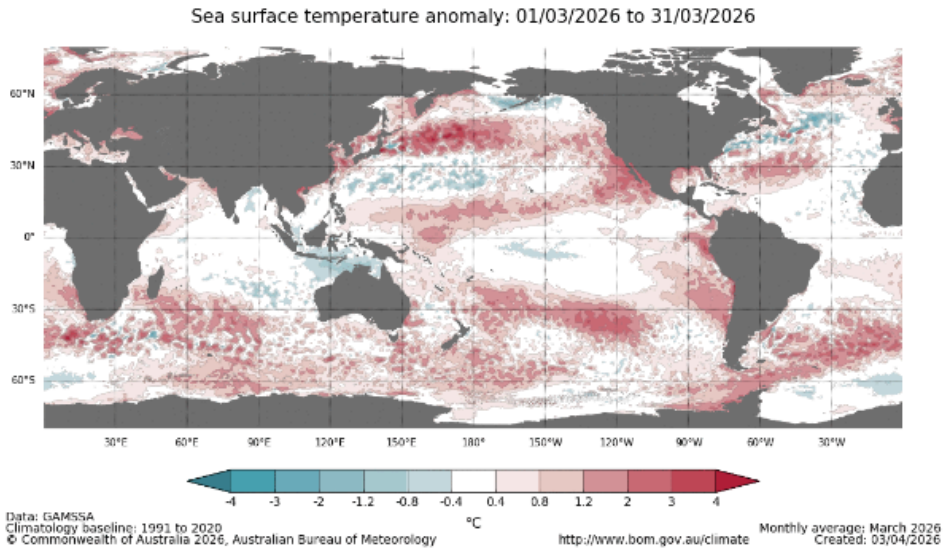
BOR: New Mexico Dashboard

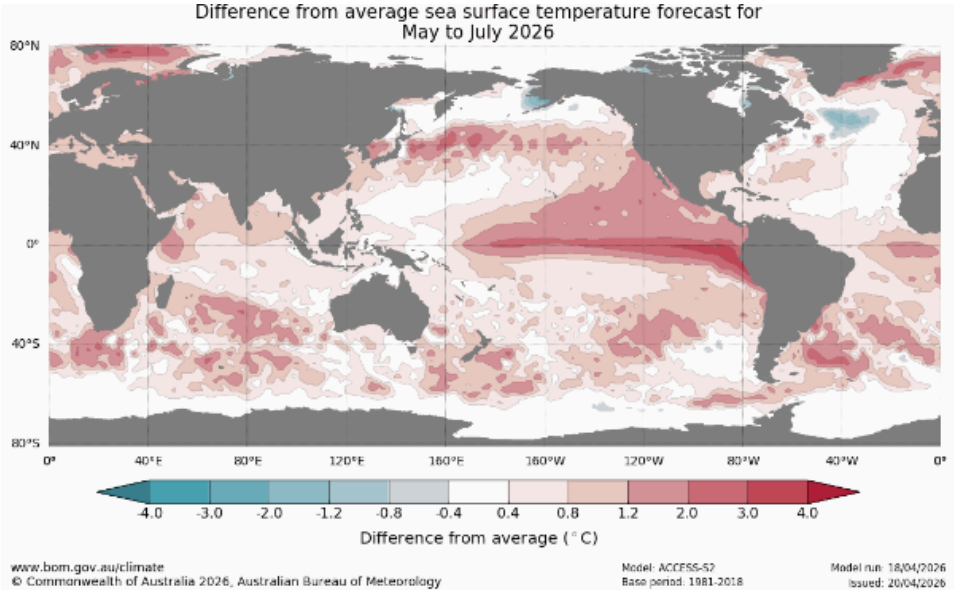
ENSO Tracker

March sea surface temperatures (SSTs) ranged from near normal to above normal along the equator in the central and eastern Pacific, the region of SST variability associated with El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO). Cooler-than-normal SSTs south of the equator centered at 150°W are the fading remnants of this past winter's La Niña.



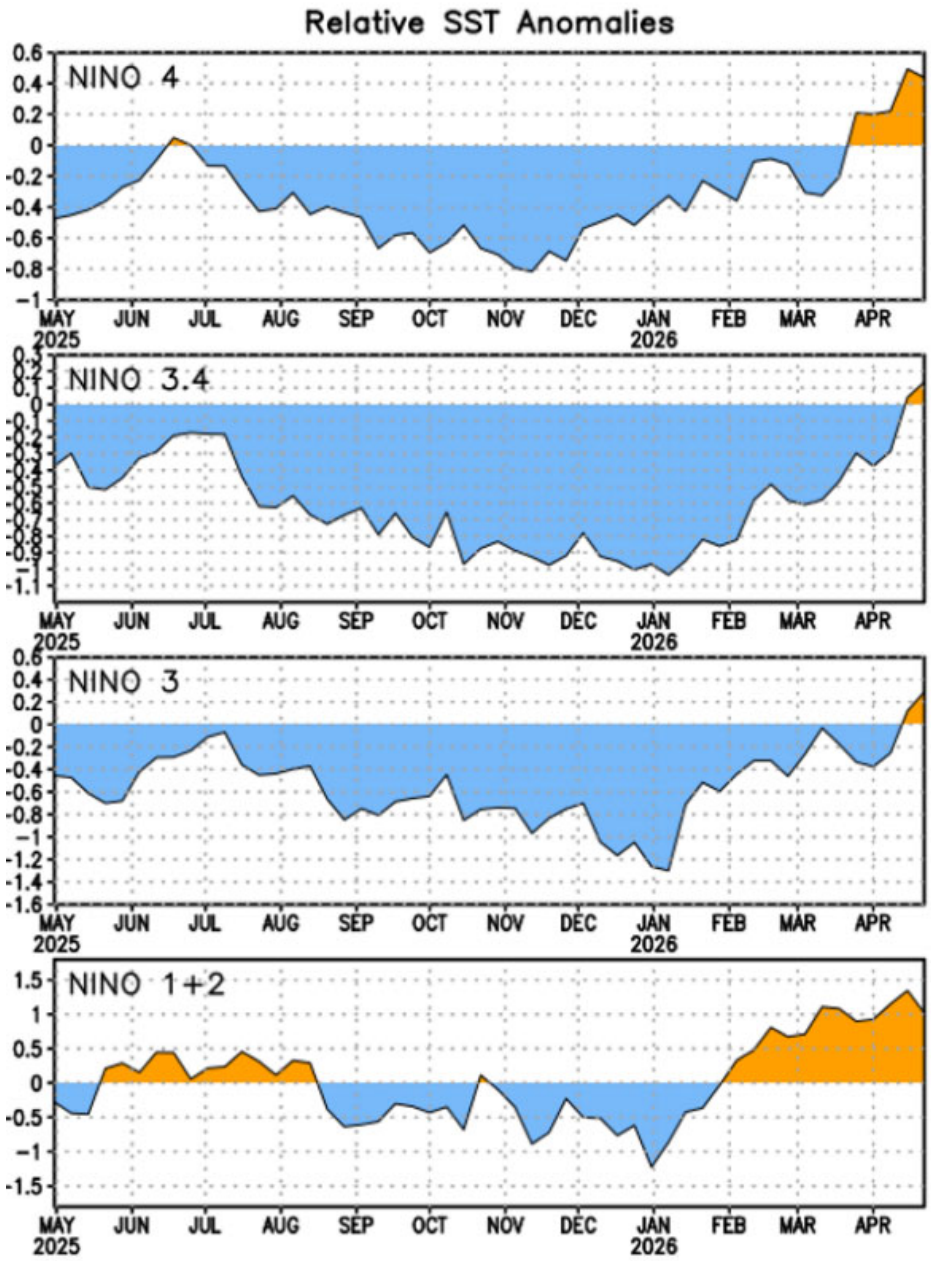
Source: Australian Bureau of Meteorology

The May–July forecast from one of the models trending more aggressively toward El Niño shows equatorial SSTs over 2°C warmer than normal in the central and eastern Pacific—conditions consistent with a very strong El Niño.



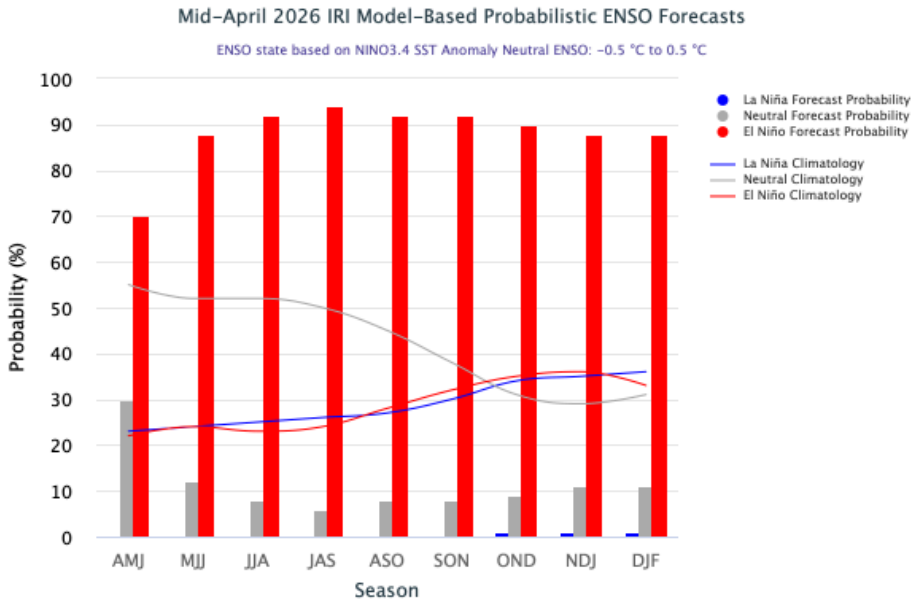
Source: Australian Bureau of Meteorology

SSTs in the Nino 3.4 monitoring region used for official classification of ENSO conditions have for months trended away from the La Niña conditions that prevailed through fall and winter. The most recent weekly observations of Nino 3.4 relative SST anomalies were positive, meaning they were warmer than the long term average SST, and accounting for warmer oceans globally. To qualify as the beginning of an El Niño event, the trend will have to continue past the threshold relative SST anomaly of 0.5 °C.



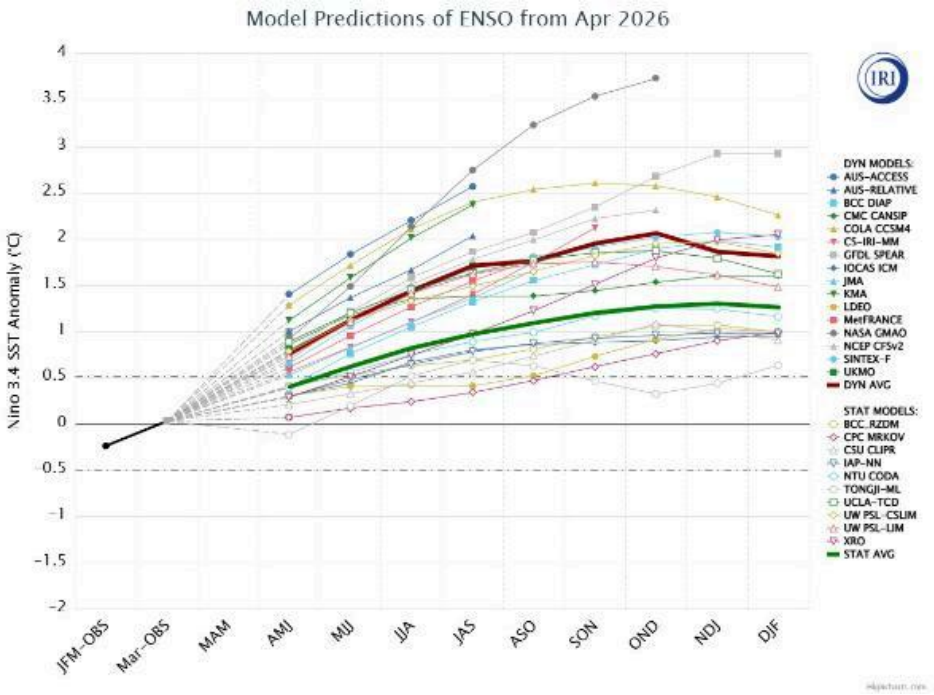
Source: Climate Prediction Center (NOAA)

Forecasts favor El Niño (70% chance) over ENSO-neutral conditions (30% chance) as the prevailing state of the Pacific for the April–June (AMJ below) forecast window. El Niño is favored for all subsequent forecast windows, through the end of the year, with probabilities over 80% chance.



Source: The International Research Institute for Climate and Society, Columbia University Climate School

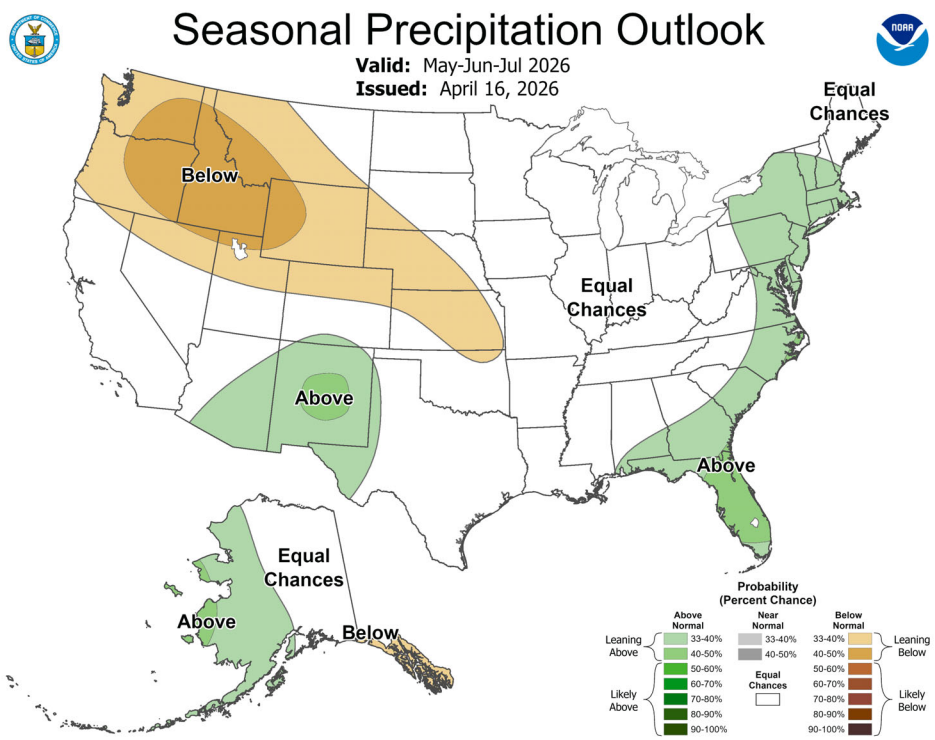
Individual model ENSO forecasts agree unanimously that El Niño conditions will be met this year, but they differ with respect to the timing of the start of El Niño and the ultimate strength of the event. Some models indicate a very strong El Niño event—Nino 3.4 SSTs more than 2 °C above average—developing as early as the June–August (JJA) forecast window. At the other extreme, there are models that show a slow progression with El Niño conditions met as late as the September—November forecast window (SON), reaching only weak-to-moderate intensity (Nino 3.4 SSTs 0.5–1.5 °C above average) by the end of the year.



Source: The International Research Institute for Climate and Society, Columbia University Climate School

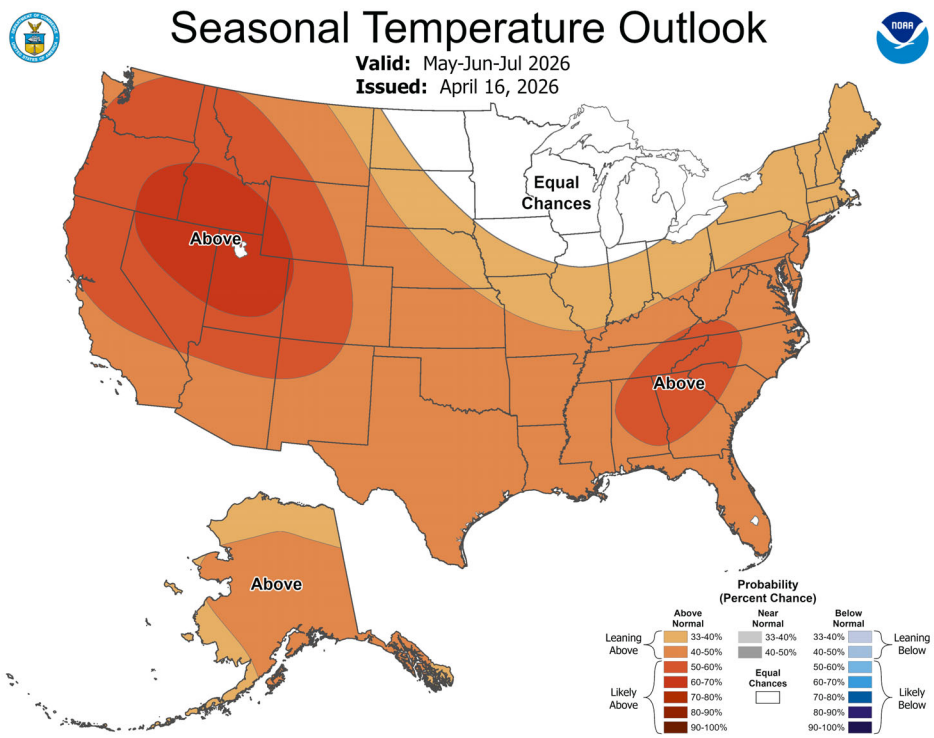
Seasonal Forecasts

The May–July seasonal precipitation forecast has probabilities leaning (33–50% chance) in the direction of above normal precipitation for an area that includes New Mexico and much of Arizona.



Source: Climate Prediction Center (NOAA)

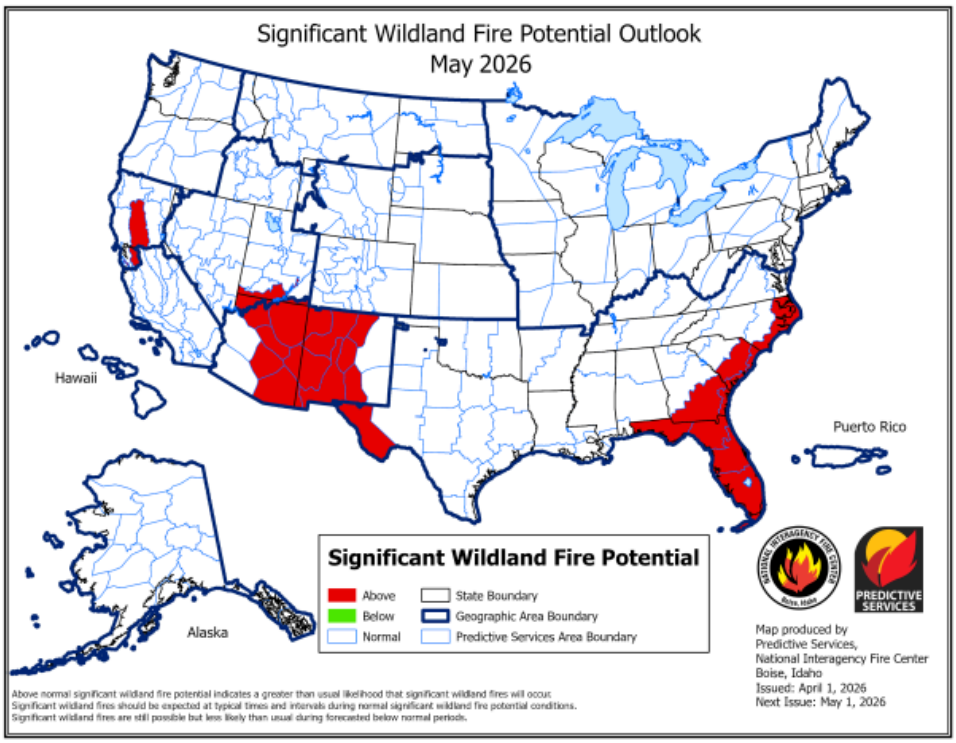
The May–July seasonal temperature forecast indicates a likely (40–50%) chance of above normal temperatures for an area that includes parts of northern Arizona and northeastern New Mexico. Forecast probabilities are only leaning toward above normal temperatures for the rest of Arizona and New Mexico (40–50% chance).



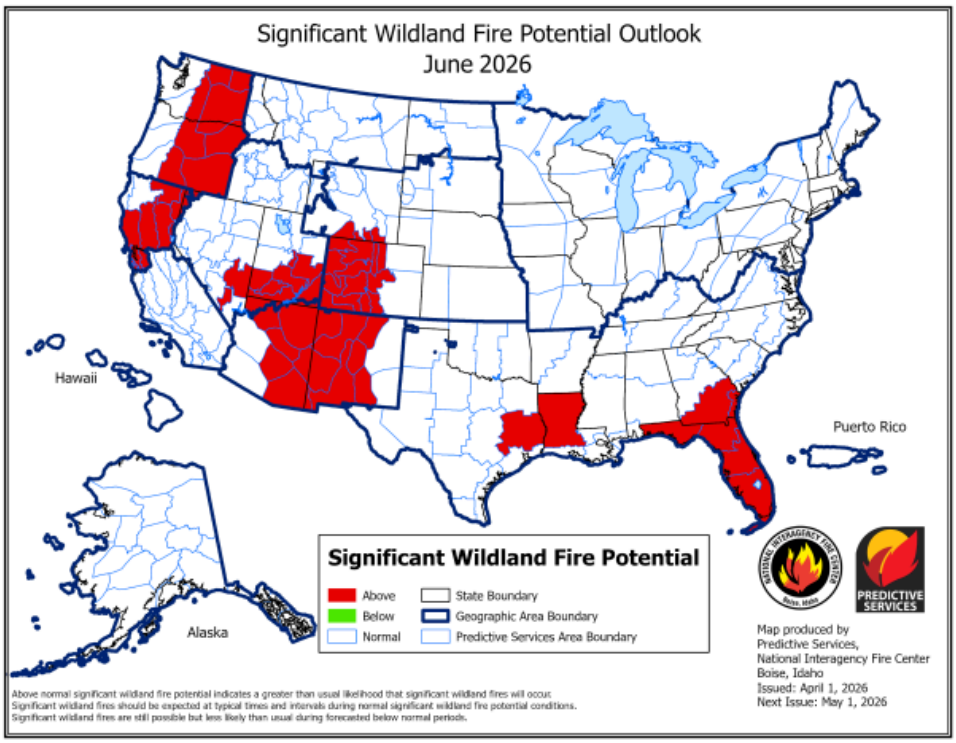
Source: Climate Prediction Center (NOAA)

Wildfire

Significant wildland fire potential is above normal for much of Arizona and New Mexico, for May and continuing through June. Factors contributing to elevated potential include the winter precipitation drought, below normal snowpack, record dry vegetation following the March heatwave, and expansive mortality of trees in pinyon-juniper and ponderosa pine stands.



Source: National Interagency Coordination Center



Source: National Interagency Coordination Center

Southwest Climate Podcast

April 2026 SW Climate Podcast - Mind-blowing March Meltdown

Recorded 04/03/2026, Aired 04/07/2026

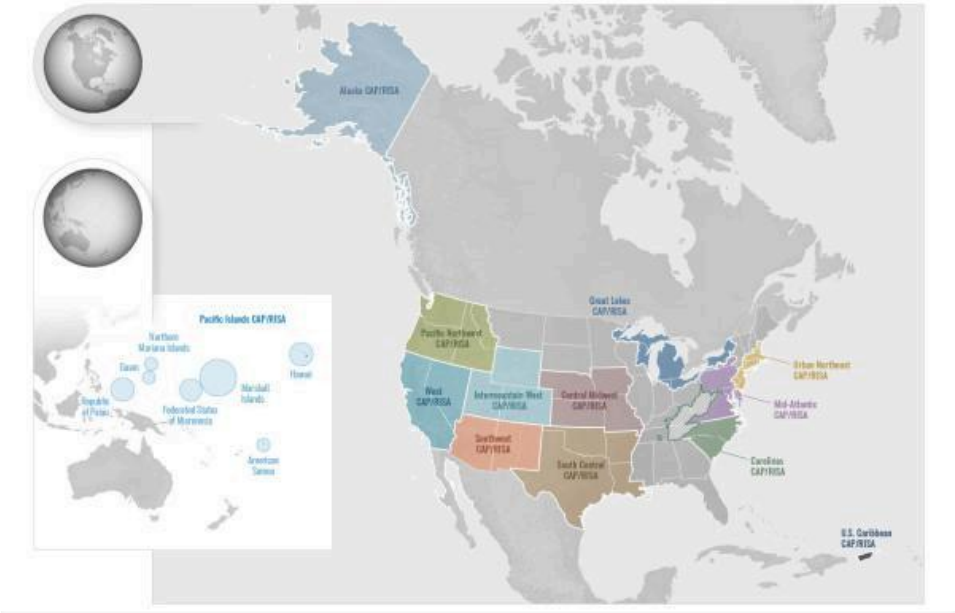
Hosts Zack Guido and Mike Crimmins go full coroner in this month's episode of the Southwest Climate Podcast and do an autopsy of the record-setting March heat wave. Expect fluid dynamics, conservation of angular momentum, and level of divergence type of nerding for this deep dive. They go over the heat impacts to snowpack and forecasted streamflow, and the end of month precipitation event which looked monsoonal. Lastly there is some excitement for the upcoming super El Niño that's brewing. Stick around on this long-ish one for a full explainer on the Pacific Decadal Oscillation - at the 1:02:43 mark.

Listen Here

About CLIMAS

The Climate Assessment for the Southwest (CLIMAS) program was established in 1998 as part of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Regional Integrated Sciences and Assessments (RISA) Program. CLIMAS—housed at the University of Arizona's Institute of the Environment—is a collaboration between the University of Arizona and New Mexico State University. The CLIMAS team is made up of experts from a variety of social, physical, and natural sciences

who work with partners across the Southwest to develop sustainable answers to regional climate challenges.



Learn more about the NOAA RISA program here

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