



July 2026: Southwest Climate Outlook

Stacie Reece

July 31, 2026

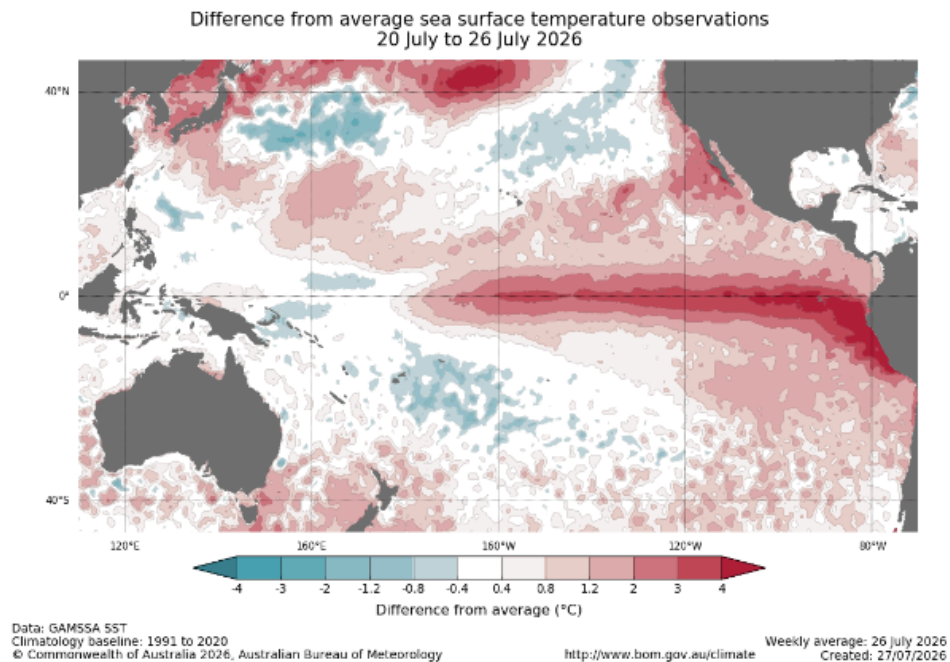


<https://climas.arizona.edu/>

The Southwest Climate Outlook is published by the Climate Assessment for the Southwest (CLIMAS), with support from University of Arizona Cooperative Extension, and the New Mexico State Climate office.

Questions/Contact: Stacie Reece, sreece@arizona.edu

El Niño Highlight



Source: Australian Bureau of Meteorology.

El Niño conditions are underway in the Pacific, and forecasts indicate with near certainty that this El Niño event will strengthen and persist through the winter and into spring. This means we can expect increased chances of above normal precipitation in the coming fall–spring, and increased chances of lower temperatures than we may otherwise expect.

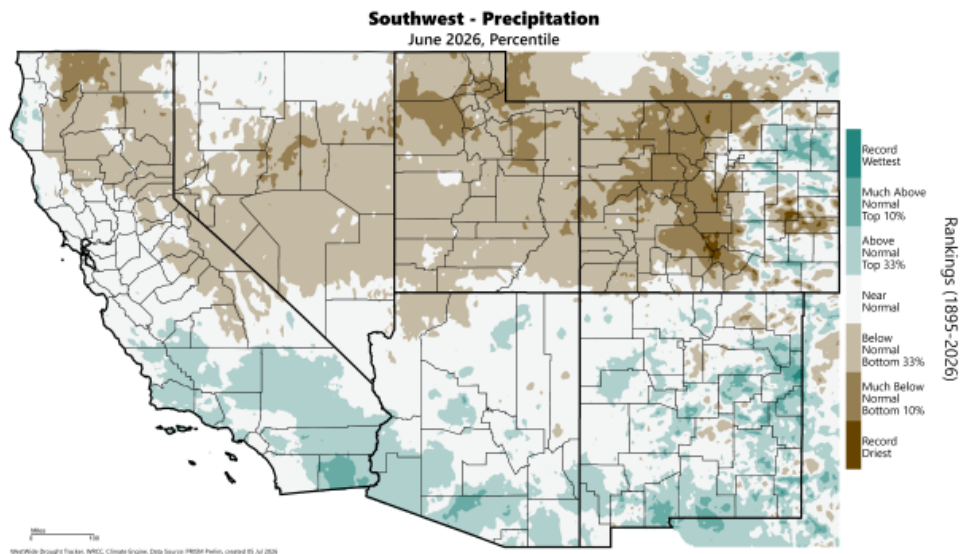
Forecast models also indicate there is a good chance this El Niño will be the strongest event ever recorded, but on the other hand, models have tended to overestimate the strength of El Niño events in the past.

In any case, a stronger El Niño does not necessarily correspond to stronger climate impacts in the Southwest. El Niño does historically correspond to increased chances of above normal precipitation, fall–spring, but stronger El Niño events have not corresponded to the wettest years—so it's best not to think of it as the *amount* of precipitation that increases in proportion to the strength of El Niño, but the *chances of above normal precipitation* that increase in proportion to the strength of El Niño.

In the near term, El Niño can also be expected to enhance the frequency and strength of tropical cyclones forming in the eastern Pacific. These storms can impact the Southwest in a variety of ways, sometimes suppressing monsoon activity and sometimes enhancing monsoon activity, depending on where they track and the surrounding atmospheric context. They can be severely impactful on the Southwest if they track directly into the region or interact with other, fall-type storm systems moving into the region, causing excessive rain and flooding.

Precipitation and Temperature

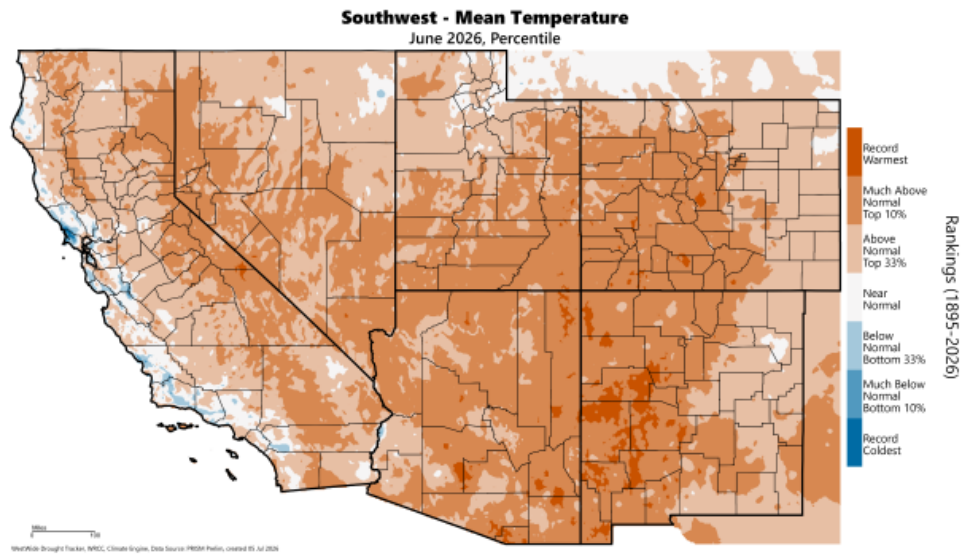
June precipitation totals were near normal or above normal across much of Arizona and New Mexico. Areas with above normal June precipitation totals—amounts that would rank among the upper one-third of all years on record—include parts of southern and eastern New Mexico, and southern Arizona.



[Source: WestWide Drought Tracker](#)

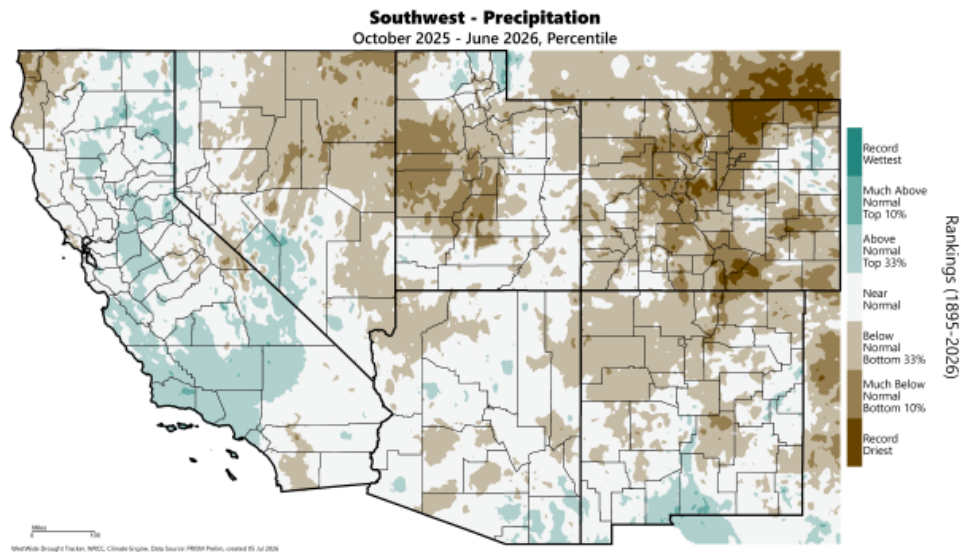
June temperatures were above normal (among the warmest one-third of Junes on record) or much-above normal (among the warmest one-tenth of Junes on record) across nearly all of

Arizona and New Mexico. Some areas recorded the warmest June on record, including parts of western New Mexico.



[Source: WestWide Drought Tracker](#)

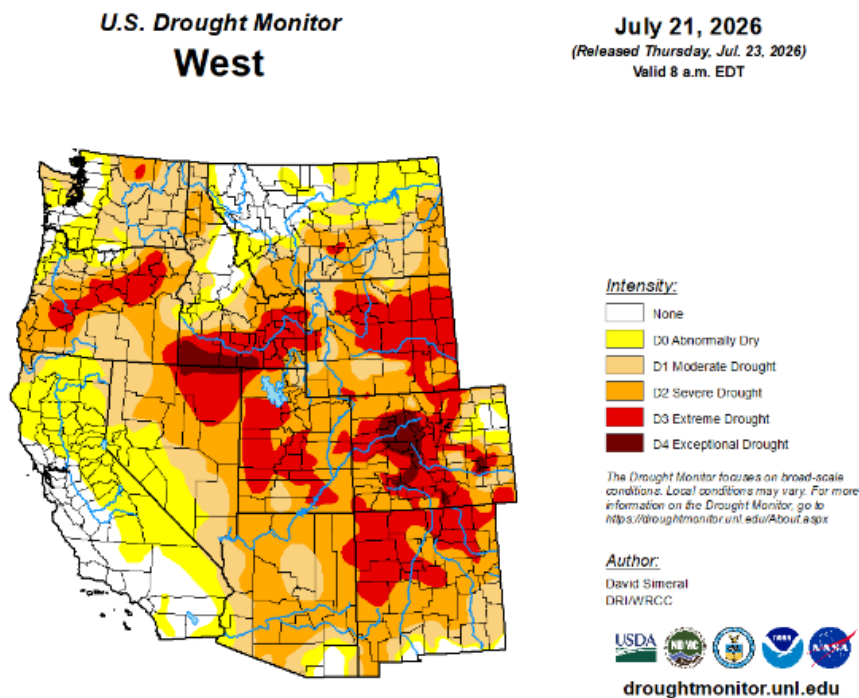
Precipitation totals for the water year so-far (October 2025–June 2026) range from below normal in northern New Mexico, the Colorado Plateau, and northwestern Arizona, to near normal totals across much of Arizona, and above normal totals in parts of southern New Mexico.



[Source: WestWide Drought Tracker](#)

Drought

Drought conditions have not improved in the past month—96% of lands in Arizona and New Mexico are considered in drought or abnormally dry. Drought conditions are Severe (D2; conditions that occurred historically every 10-20 years) or worse for 77% of lands within New Mexico and 62% of Arizona. Large parts of northern and western New Mexico—amounting to more than a third of the state’s area—are classified under Extreme (D3) drought, which are conditions that historically have occurred every 20–50 years, on average.



Source: U.S. Drought Monitor

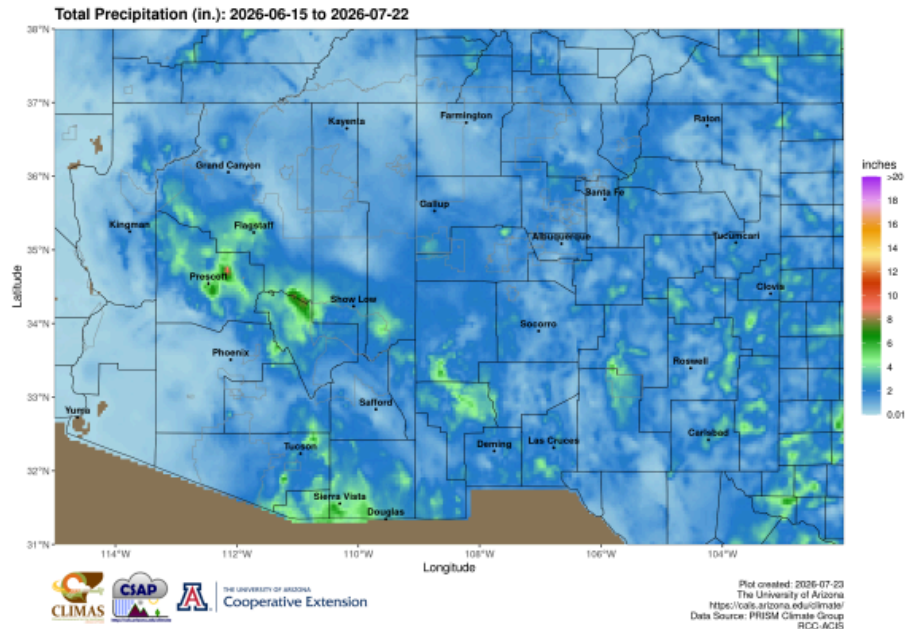
NIDIS Improved and Expanded State Pages on Drought.Gov

New Mexico

Arizona

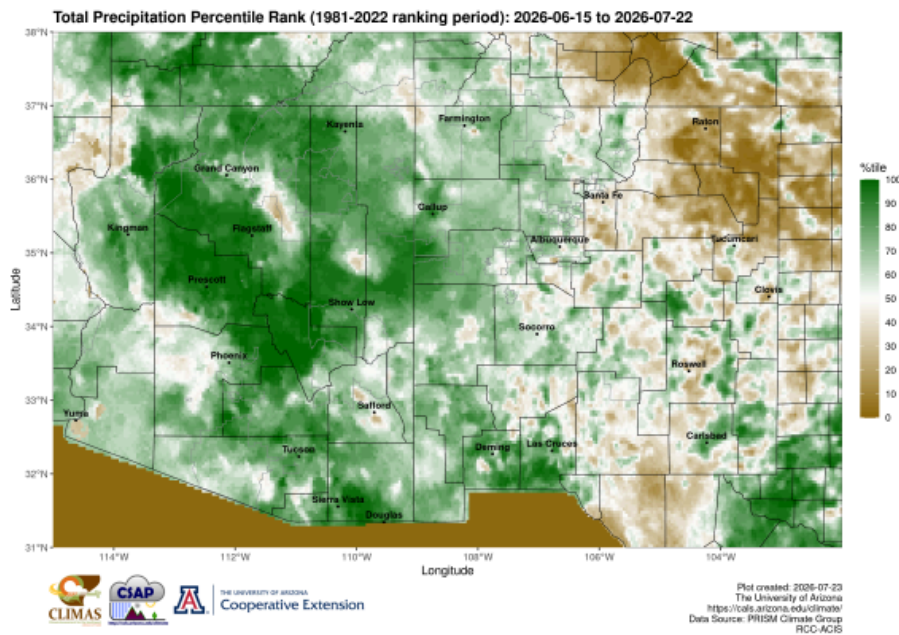
Monsoon

Monsoon precipitation totals (since June 15) have ranged from trace amounts in typically drier parts of the region like southwestern Arizona, to a regional maximum of over 8 inches near Jerome, AZ.



Source: University of Arizona Cooperative Extension - CSAP

Monsoon totals plotted as percentile rankings compared to all other years on record show that totals are above normal (above the 50th percentile) for much of Arizona and western New Mexico. Monsoon totals are below normal for much of northeastern New Mexico.



Source: [University of Arizona Cooperative Extension - CSAP](https://cats.arizona.edu/climate/)

Water Supply

Reservoir storage in Arizona is generally below normal levels and down compared to last year, especially at San Carlos, where the effects of long-term drought on the Gila River watershed have left the reservoir nearly dry.

New Mexico reservoir storage is generally below normal and down compared to last year, with some exceptions in the eastern part of the state where reservoirs of the Canadian River are at near or above normal levels.

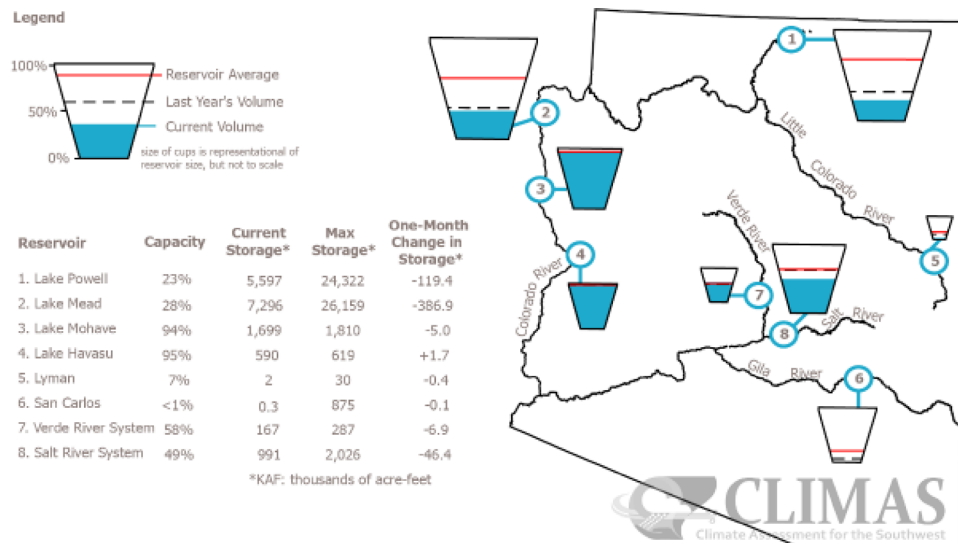


Figure 1. Arizona reservoir volumes for the end of June 2026 as a percent of capacity. The map depicts the average volume and last year's storage for each reservoir. The table also lists current and maximum storage, and change in storage since last month.

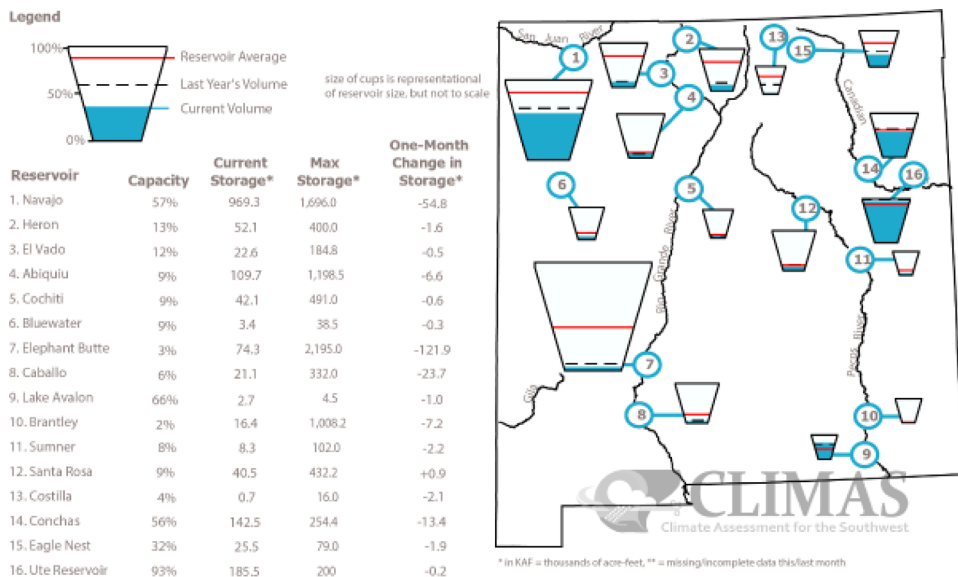


Figure 2. New Mexico reservoir volumes for end of June 2026 as a percent of capacity. The map depicts the average volume and last year's storage for each reservoir. The table also lists current and maximum storage, and change in storage since last month.

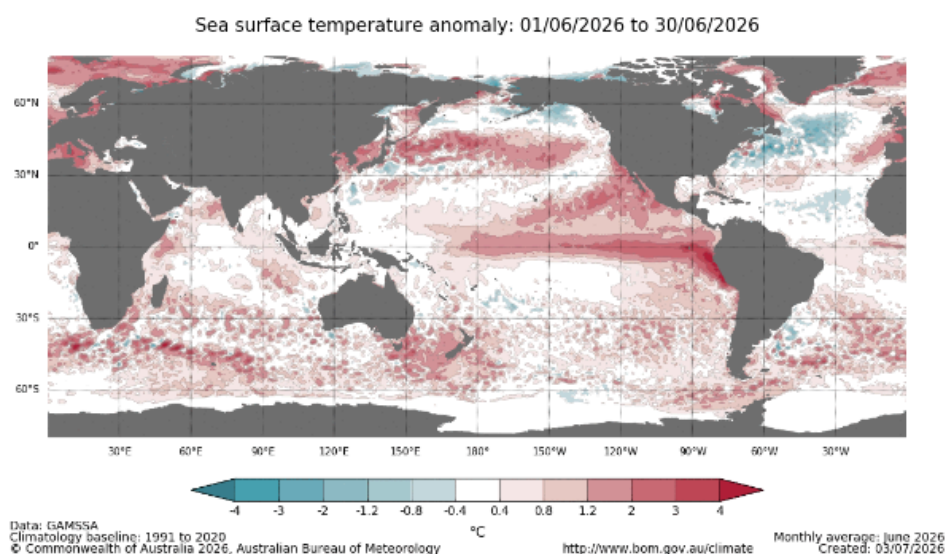
The map gives a representation of current storage for reservoirs in Arizona and New Mexico. Reservoir locations are numbered within the blue circles on the map, corresponding to the reservoirs listed in the table. The cup next to each reservoir shows the current storage (blue fill) as a percent of total 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 \(USDA\)](#).

BOR: New Mexico Dashboard

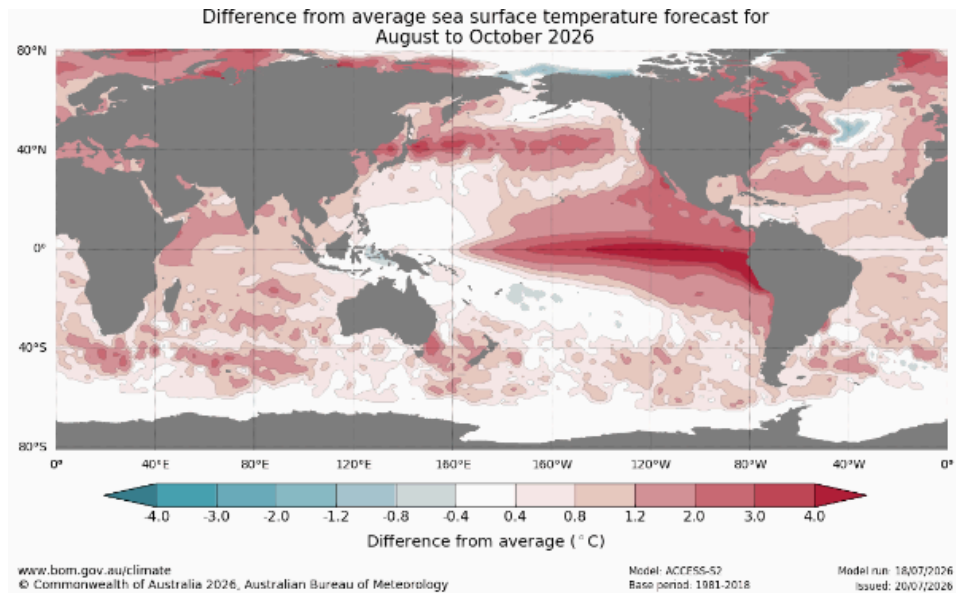
ENSO Tracker

June sea surface temperature (SST) anomalies (departure from long-term average) reflect El Niño conditions—warmer than normal SSTs along the equator in the central and eastern Pacific. SST anomalies greater than 0.5°C are the threshold criteria for diagnosing El Niño conditions; June anomalies in the central–eastern equatorial Pacific range from 1–3°C.



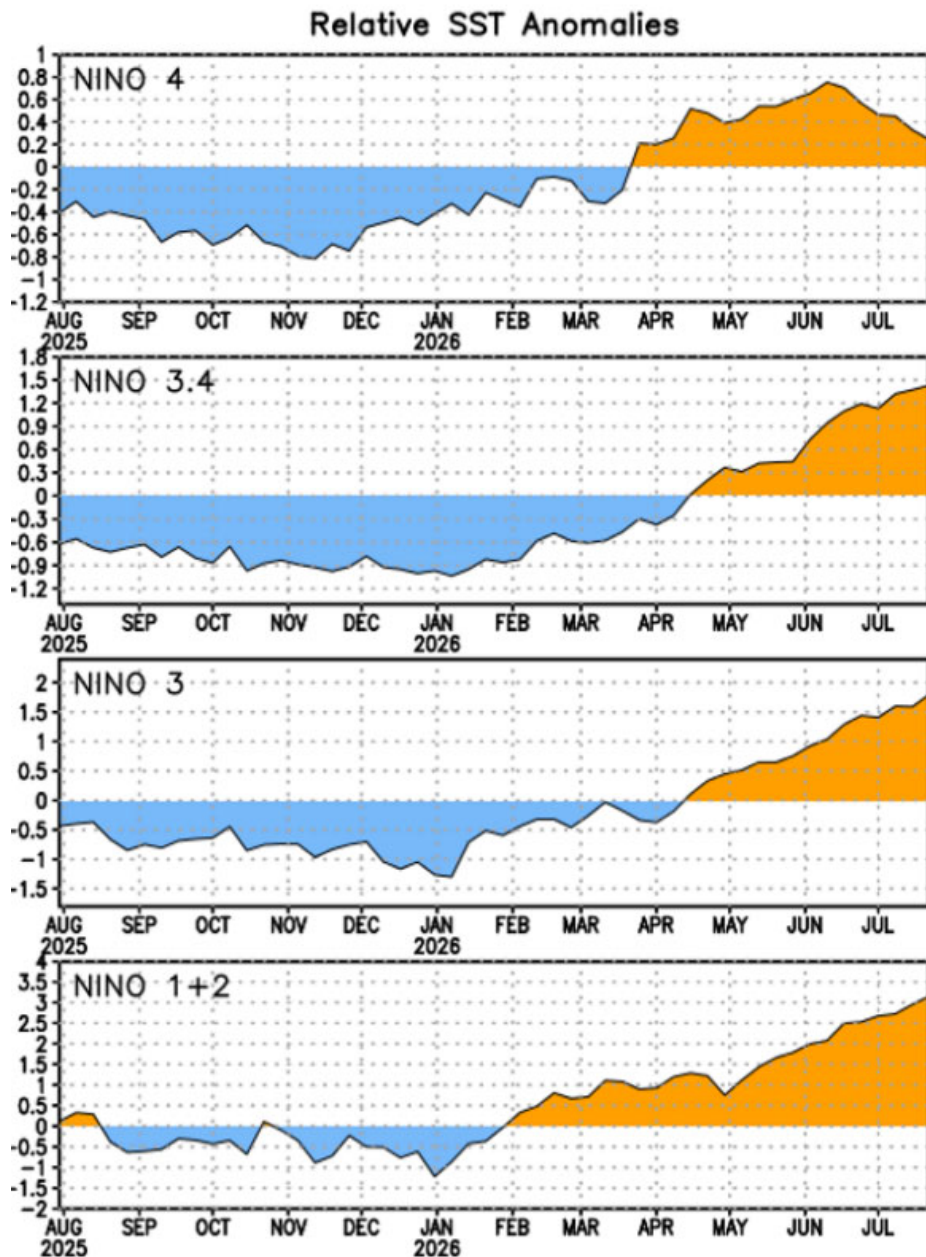
Source: [Australian Bureau of Meteorology](#).

Model-forecast SST anomalies for August–October from the Australian ACCESS model show a strengthened El Niño, with SST anomalies of 3–4°C in the central–eastern equatorial Pacific.



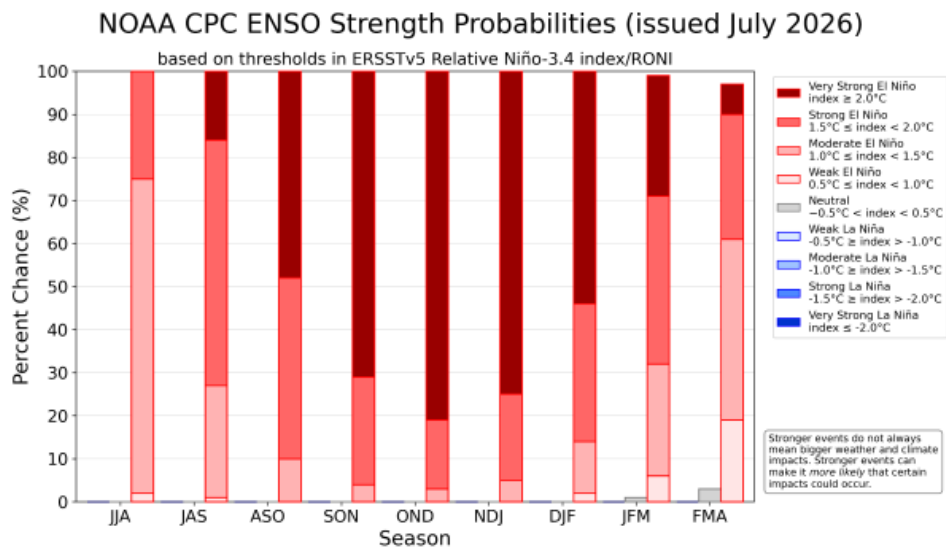
Source: Australian Bureau of Meteorology.

SST anomalies in the Nino 3.4 monitoring region, which are used to diagnose official ENSO status, have risen steeply in June and July, with the most recent weekly observation measuring just short of 1.5°C, the threshold temperature for “strong” El Niño conditions.



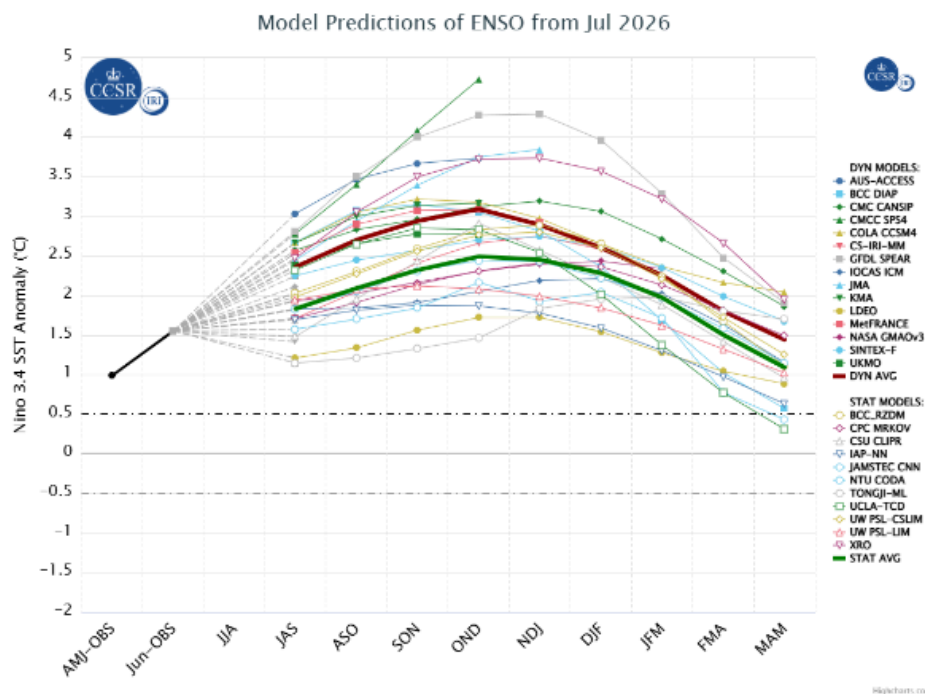
[Source: NOAA Climate Prediction Center - ENSO](#)

Forecast models are favoring El Niño conditions with near 100% chance probability through the December–February season, and with over 90% chance probability through the February–April season. Chances of very strong El Niño conditions are greatest during October–December at over 80%. There is a near 50% chance of very strong El Niño conditions during the August–October season, and a greater-than 50% chance of very strong El Niño conditions persisting through the December–February season.



Source: NOAA Climate Prediction Center - ENSO

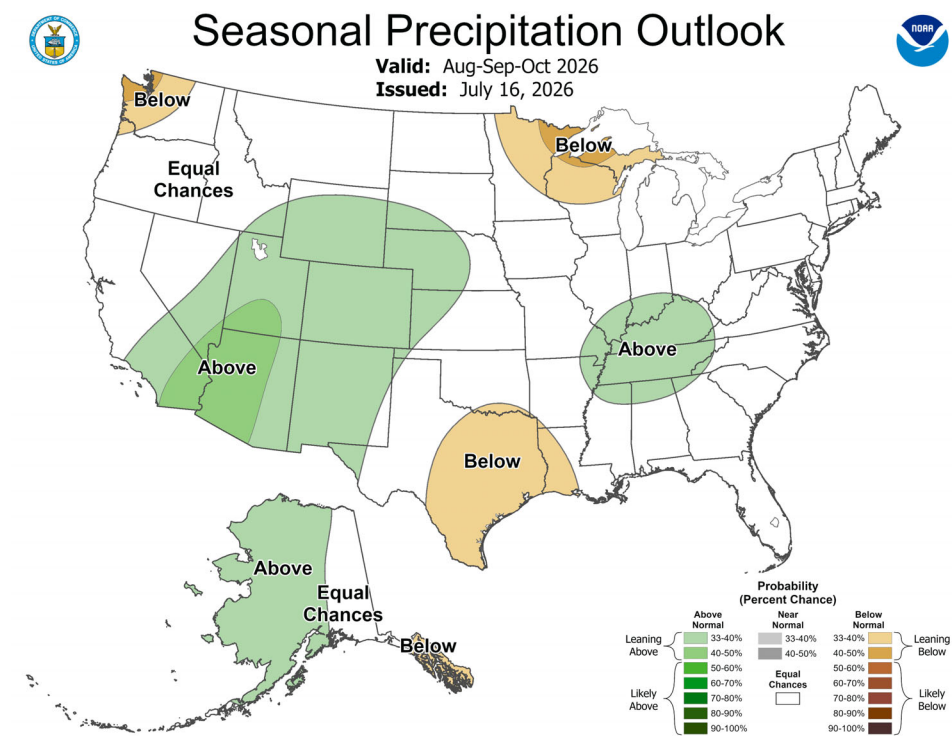
The plume-plot of individual model ENSO forecasts shows the range of intensities possible for this El Niño event as it progresses through the coming seasons. The lower end of the range of predictions is for a strong El Niño with SST anomalies $1.5\text{--}2^{\circ}\text{C}$, but most models show the event strengthening to a very strong El Niño, which is defined by SST anomalies over 2°C .



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

Seasonal Forecasts

The August–October seasonal precipitation forecast is leaning toward above normal precipitation for Arizona and New Mexico (33-50% chance three-month totals will rank among the upper one-third of all years on record). Forecast confidence is greater for western Arizona and decreasing toward eastern New Mexico.



Source: [Climate Prediction Center \(NOAA\)](#)

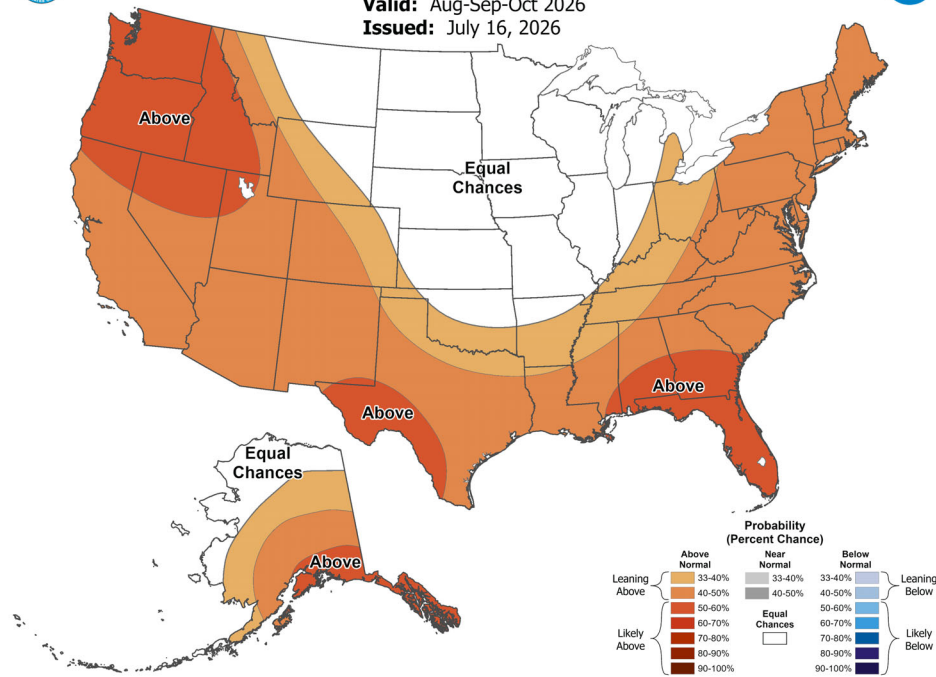
The August–October seasonal temperature forecast is leaning toward above normal temperatures for Arizona and New Mexico, giving a 40–50% chance three-month temperature averages will fall in the upper one-third of the rankings across all years on record.



Seasonal Temperature Outlook

Valid: Aug-Sep-Oct 2026

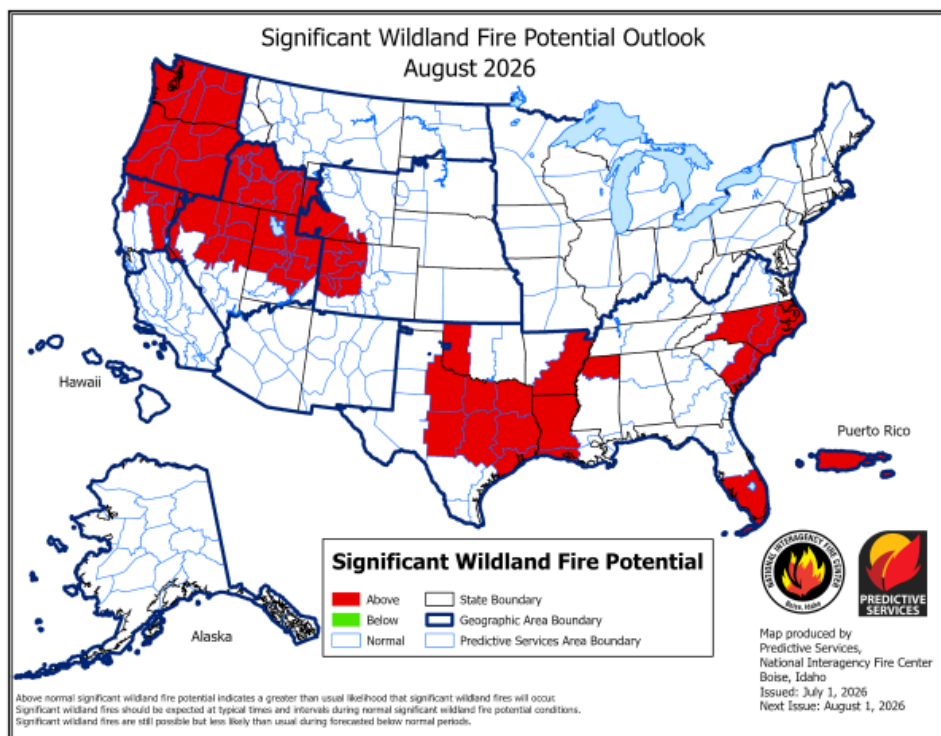
Issued: July 16, 2026



Source: [Climate Prediction Center \(NOAA\)](https://climatepredictioncenter.noaa.gov/)

Wildfire

Near normal significant wildland fire potential is expected for Arizona and New Mexico in August. This year, over 47,000 acres were burned by over 1,000 individual fires in Arizona and over 153,000 acres were burned by over 1,000 fires in New Mexico.



Source: [National Interagency Coordination Center](#)

SOUTHWEST AREA

2026 YEAR-TO-DATE FIRES & ACRES

By Protection Unit (State & Agency)

UPDATED:

7/28/26 5:45 AM

ARIZONA

	CAUSE	HUMAN		NATURAL		UNKNOWN/UNDETERMINED		TOTAL	
		Fires	Acres	Fires	Acres	Fires	Acres	Fires	Acres
Arizona State Forestry & Fire Mgmt	AZS	135	1,800	24	402	3	9	162	2,211
Bureau of Indian Affairs	BIA	244	191	56	1,069	21	9	321	1,269
Bureau of Land Management	BLM	46	1,821	2	0	7	16	55	1,837
Bureau of Reclamation	BOR	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Department of Defense	DDO	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Department of Energy	DOE								0
National Park Service	NPS	2	0	7	3	4	378	13	380
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service	FWS	3	3	3	3	3	3	9	9
U.S. Forest Service	USFS	226	951	199	12,902	24	27,917	449	41,769
	TOTAL ARIZONA	656	4,765	291	14,379	62	28,332	1,009	47,476
BLM - Arizona Strip District *	AZ-ASD *	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL ARIZONA (W/ AZ-ASD)	656	4,765	291	14,379	62	28,332	1,009	47,476

(* = AZ-ASD reports via G8CC)

NEW MEXICO

	CAUSE	HUMAN		NATURAL		UNKNOWN/UNDETERMINED		TOTAL	
		Fires	Acres	Fires	Acres	Fires	Acres	Fires	Acres
New Mexico State Forestry	NMS	352	11,374	82	14,012	132	55,044	566	80,430
Bureau of Indian Affairs	BIA	68	373	27	12	9	5	104	389
Bureau of Land Management	BLM	53	1,596	33	246	2	5	88	1,847
Bureau of Reclamation	BOR								0
Department of Defense	DDO	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Department of Energy	DOE	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
National Park Service	NPS	0	0	7	9	3	1	10	10
U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service	FWS	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
U.S. Forest Service	USFS	65	31,911	156	32,606	38	5,874	259	70,390
	TOTAL NEW MEXICO	538	45,253	305	46,884	184	60,928	1,027	153,066

Source: [NIFC Southwest Coordination Center](#)

Southwest Climate Podcast

July 2026 SW Climate Podcast - Ready, Set, Let's Go!



Recorded 07/10/2026, Aired 07/14/2026

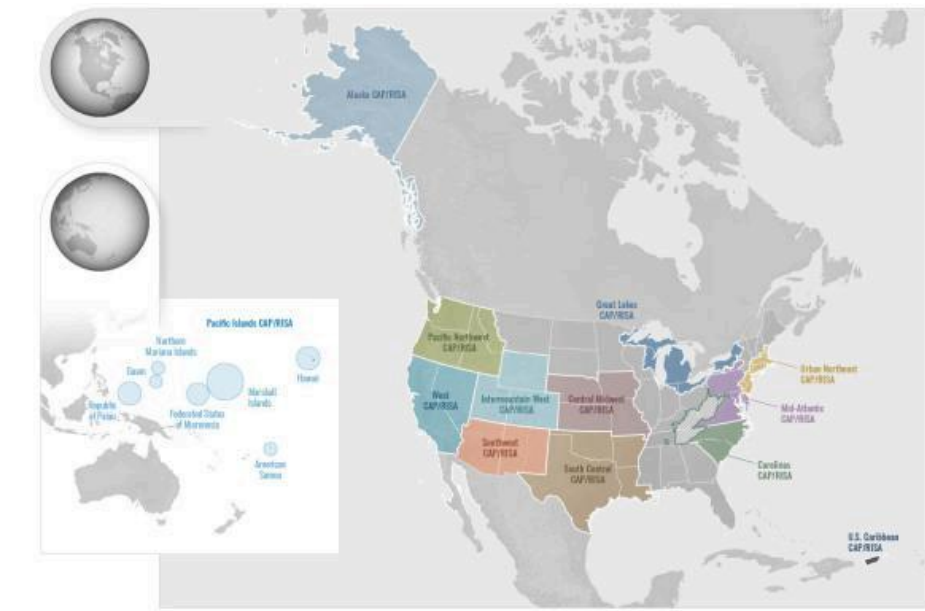
In this month's Southwest Climate Podcast, hosts Zack Guido and Mike Crimmins say 'get ready' for an interesting monsoon. Although the onset has had a sluggish start, the weekend into this week shows promise for a more active pattern in July. They review the precipitation event that happened at the start of the monsoon on 6/15 as well as the characteristics

thus far. Also discussed is the strong El Niño taking shape and its influence in the region. Expectations are leaning toward a more optimistic yet not normal monsoon.

[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](#)



Disclaimer

This packet contains official and non-official forecasts, as well as other information. While we make every effort to verify this information, please understand that we do not warrant the accuracy of any of these materials. The user assumes the entire risk related to the use of this data. CLIMAS, and UA Cooperative Extension disclaim any and all warranties, whether expressed or implied, including (without limitation) any implied warranties of merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose. In no

event will CLIMAS, UA Cooperative Extension, or The University of Arizona be liable to you or to any third party for any direct, indirect, incidental, consequential, special or exemplary damages or lost profit resulting from any use or misuse of this data.

Southwest Climate	Mike Crimmins & Matt
Outlook contributors:	Meko