

**Valid:** May – Aug. 2007  
**Updated:** May 15th, 2007

## 2007 FIRE SEASON ASSESSMENT

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### A. Introduction

The Northwest Geographic Area generally appears poised to undergo a **AVERAGE** 2007 fire season for much of the area. The exceptions are the mountains of northeastern Oregon and southeastern Washington where winter and spring precipitation and snowpack have been consistently below average. The Okanogan/Methow region is an area to watch given the frequency of large fires over the past few fire seasons in that area. However, at this time, snowpack and rainfall are close to average and lightning potential is not projected to be as great.

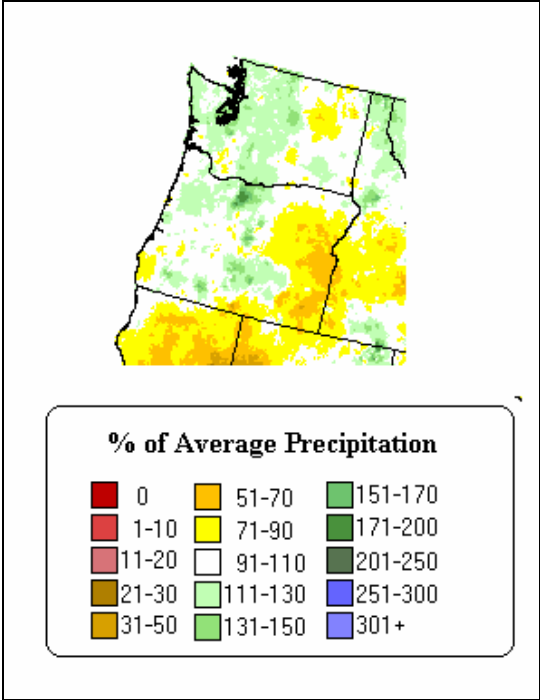
Seasonal climate forecasts for the western states indicate potentially warmer and drier than average conditions beginning in July and lasting into September. May and June conditions appear near average but afterwards warming and drying is expected to strengthen primarily in Oregon with less effect in Washington. Overall, an unusually dry fire season will likely linger throughout September.

Confidence in any climate outlook is greatly influenced by the presence of El Nino or La Nina conditions over the equatorial Pacific Ocean. For fire season 2007, however, there appears to be no strong signal for either. Climate models hint at a weak La Nina pattern but confidence in this is not high. Consequently, current climate forecasts assume neutral conditions with neither El Nino or La Nina effects and thus confidence in this outlook is not high. Outlook updates this summer may better determine if the equatorial patterns will have an effect on this summer's fire season.

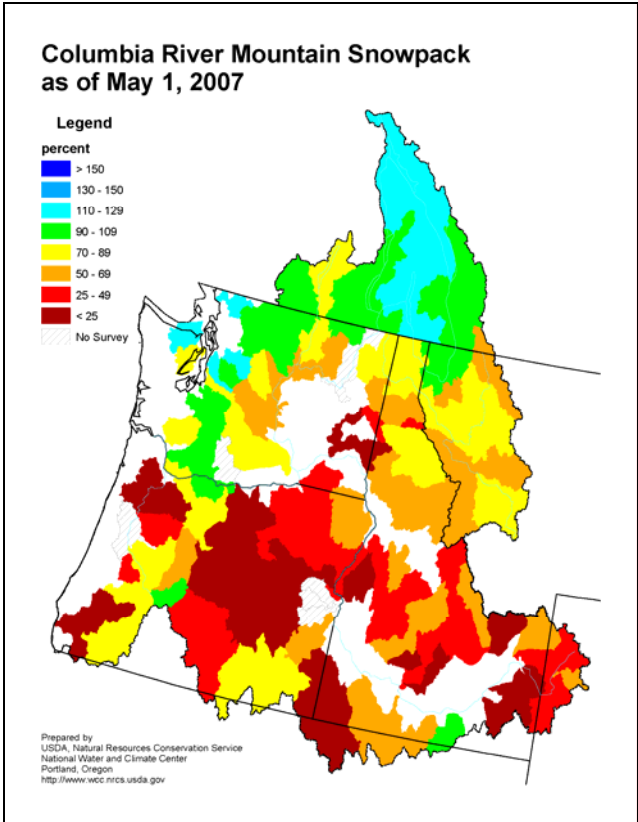
### B. Current Conditions

What we know:

- El Nino conditions have faded and a weak La Nina is possible during fire season 2007.
- Average to above average precipitation and snow pack exists for Washington but below average for much of Oregon except near the crest of the Cascades.
- The most significant deficit of rain and snow is centered over eastern Oregon and southeastern Washington. Attention centers here for the most fire potential.
- Spring greenup is proceeding as usual in western Oregon and western Washington as well as the Columbia Basin. Greenup is lagging in southeastern Oregon apparently due to the ongoing drought and cool temperatures this winter and spring.
- The weather *during* fire season is a stronger influence on wildfire potential severity than previous winter rain and snowfall amounts.



Precipitation percentage of average  
November 2006 through April 2007

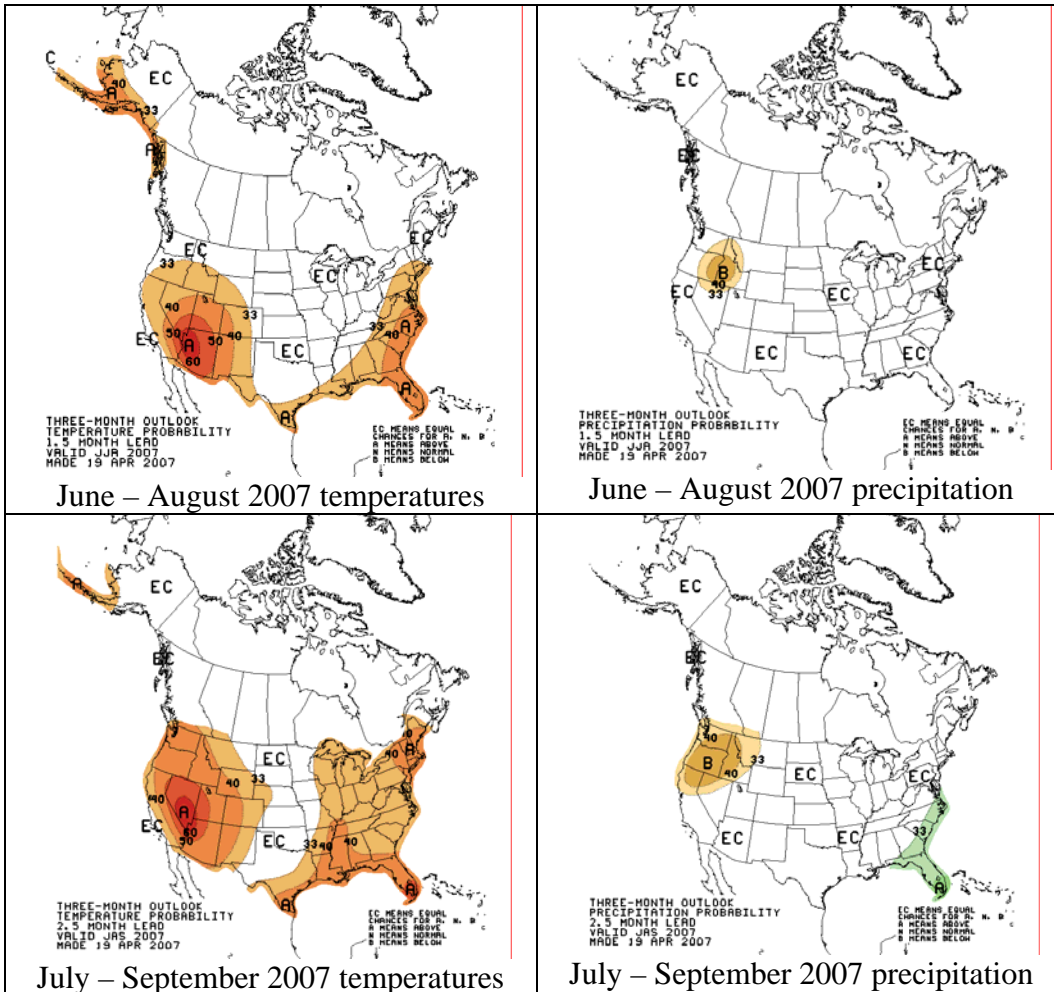


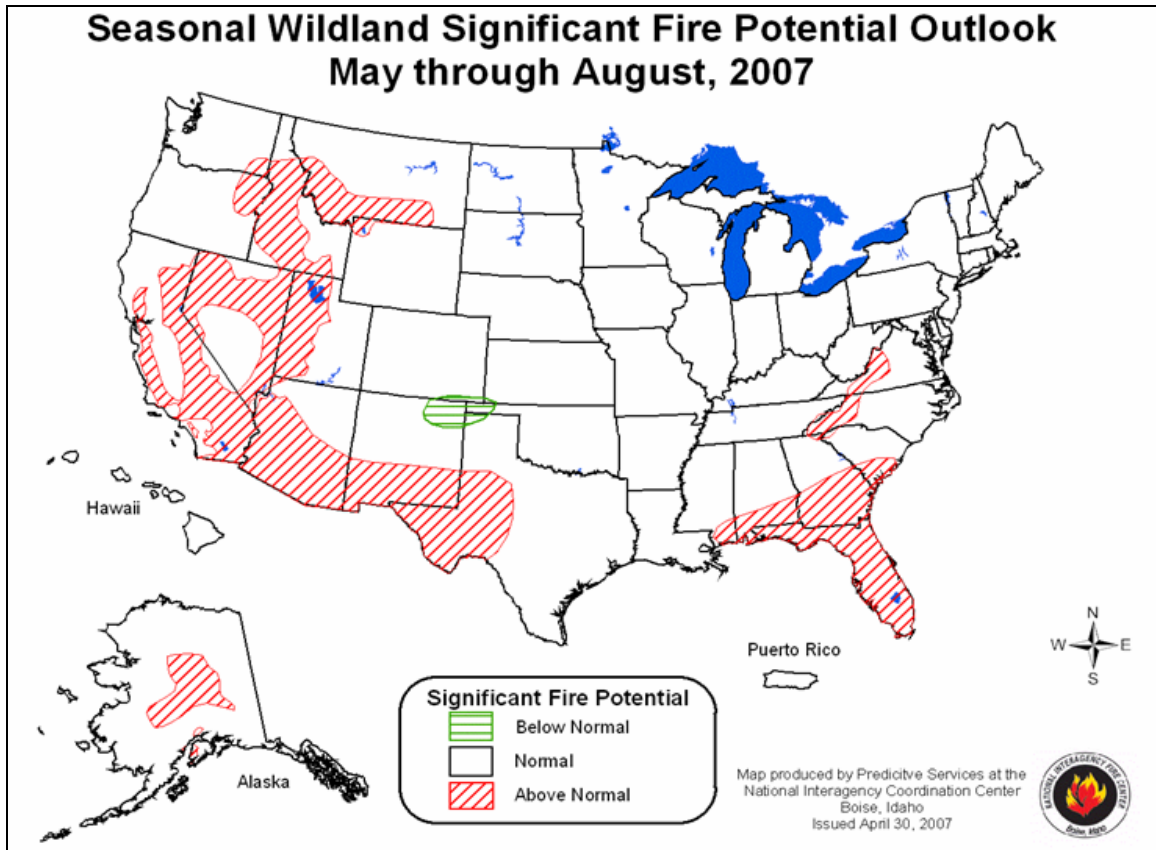
## C. Weather and Climate Outlook

What we are predicting:

- Neutral or weak La Nina conditions to continue near the equator through fire season 2007. This tends to diminish the confidence in the outlook for the later portion of the fire season (August – September).
- Average temperatures and rainfall are expected in Washington and Oregon for May and June with a warming, drying trend expected for July through September. Warming and drying are most likely over Oregon and lasting through September.

The potential for a large active fire season depends upon the severity of drying during the peak months of July and August combined with the frequency of lightning outbreaks. Surges of monsoon moisture from the desert southwest are likely to be weaker than during 2006. This would tend to provide fewer lightning outbreaks for the Pacific Northwest and thus a lower potential for mass ignitions and campaign wildfire outbreaks.





## D. Fire Occurrence and Acreage

An average fire season will result in about 10-15,000 acres burned on state protected forest land in Oregon and roughly 10,000 acres in Washington. Acreage burned on federal land in the two states during a average season would be no more than about 230,000 acres.

## E. Management Implications and Concerns

There are no significant management implications under the expected scenario. The only area that appears poised for above average fire season potential is northeast Oregon and southeastern Washington. Realization of that potential depends on the number of lightning ignitions from thunderstorm surges with little moisture. At this point, these surges do not look unusually heavy due to a weaker monsoon than what occurred in 2006.

## F. Summary and Recommendations

The Pacific Northwest experienced a generally wet winter from the Cascade crest westward. East of the Cascades the rain and snowfall totals were near normal in Washington and well below normal in Oregon. Earlier melt-off in the deficient spots could lead to an earlier start for fire season at lower elevations in eastern Oregon. However, large fire threat depends mainly upon lightning outbreaks with little precipitation that typically don't arrive until July. This is when fire danger is approaching its peak anyway.

Warmer than average temperatures and dry conditions during July and August will result in fire danger indices rising to above average levels, similar to those observed during the 2006 fire season. These potentially could approach record values in Oregon and slightly lower values in Washington.

It should be reemphasized that the primary driver of fire season severity is the weather conditions during the fire season, not the preceding winter's snow and rain. Lightning events with little precipitation that occur during periodic summer hot spells tend to be the primary ignition source leading to significant wildfire outbreaks. Human caused ignitions tend not to be numerous enough to overwhelm initial attack efforts unless weather conditions are critical.

Demand for firefighting resources is likely to be high across the western states in fire season 2007. While the Pacific Northwest is not expected to be a particularly busy region, demand for scarce resources could prove to be a problem if significant outbreaks occur here.