

# Colorado Climate Update

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**Russ Schumacher, state climatologist**

**Water Conditions Monitoring Committee**

**February 24, 2026**



**COLORADO  
CLIMATE  
CENTER**



**ATMOSPHERIC SCIENCE**  
**COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY**

# Water Year 2026 so far

temperature, precipitation, etc.

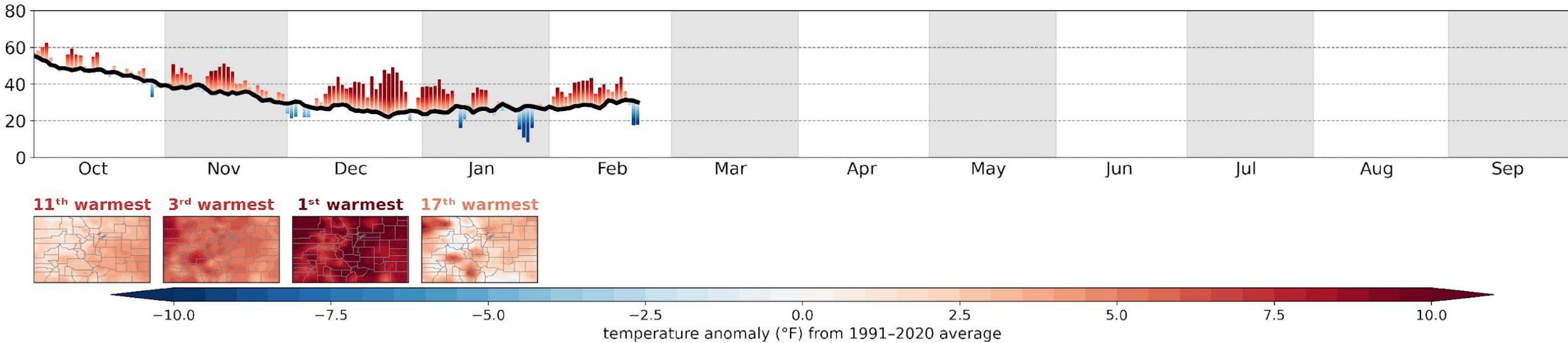


Rocky Mountain National Park,  
February 22, photo by Henry Reges



# Temperature in Water Year 2026

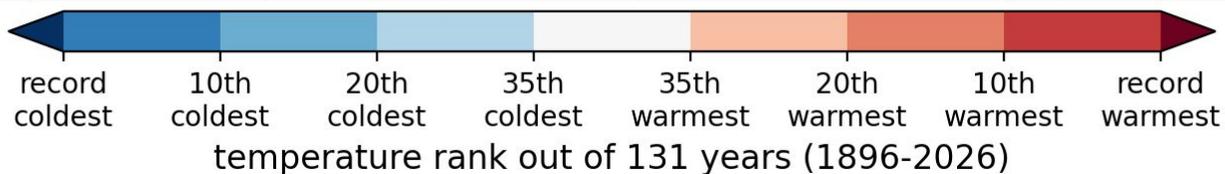
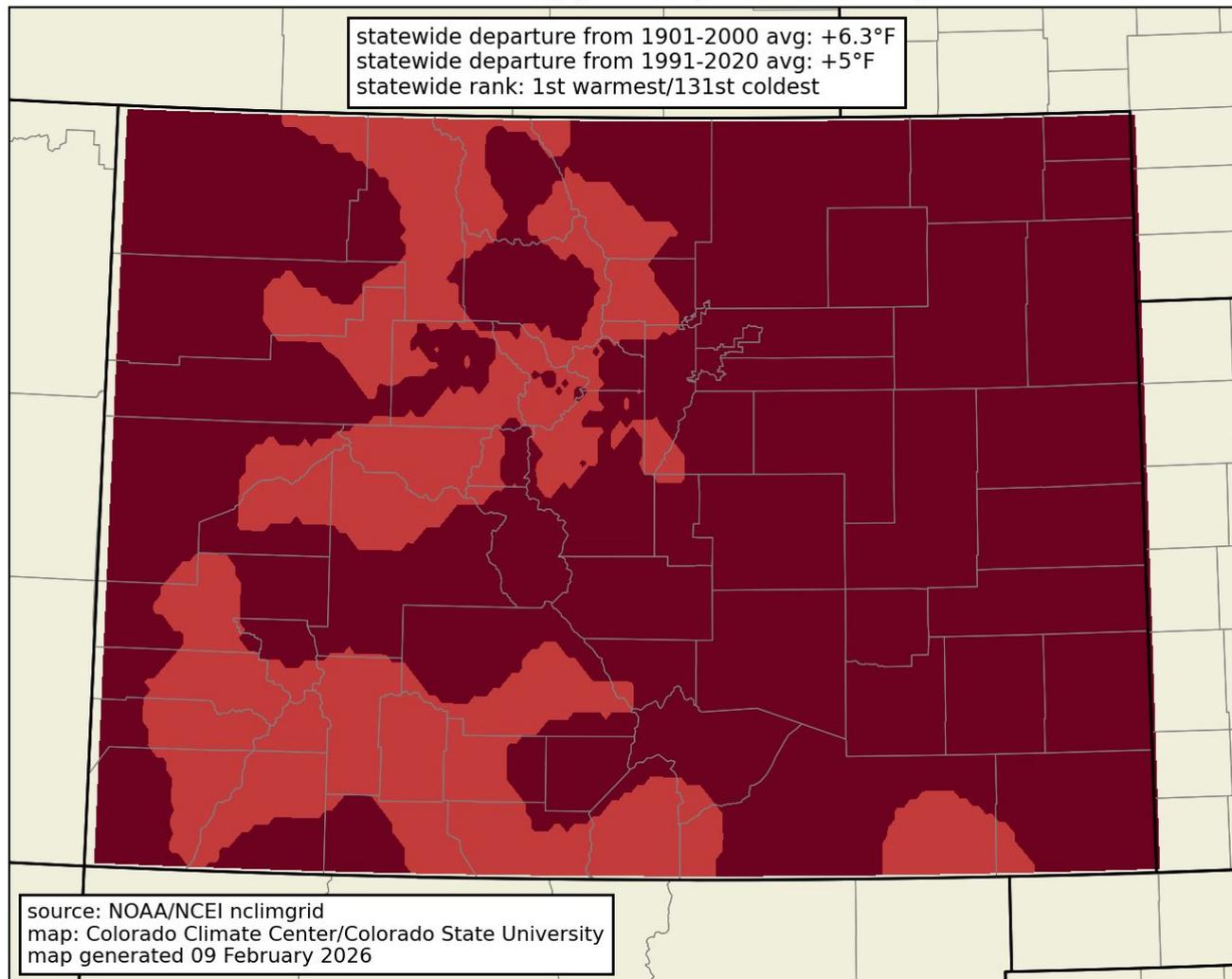
Colorado Water Year 2026 temperatures (°F) compared to 1991-2020 average



[https://climate.colostate.edu/co\\_cag/index.html](https://climate.colostate.edu/co_cag/index.html)



average temperature rank  
4 months ending January 2026 (Oct-Jan)



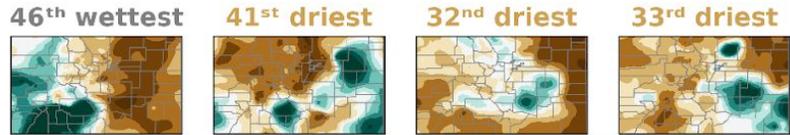
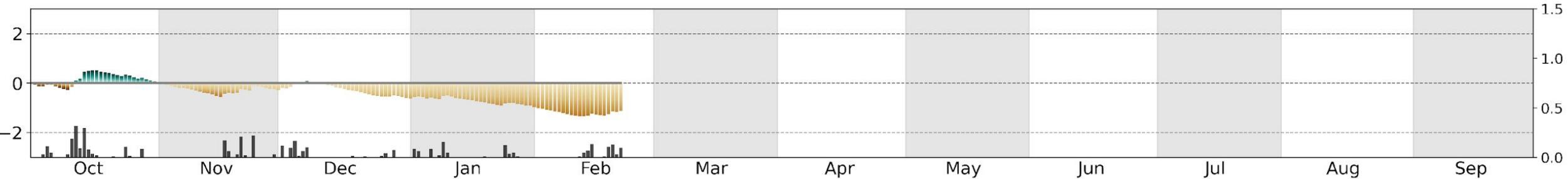
**Statewide: Warmest first four months of a water year in 131 years of records**

**5°F warmer than the 1991-2020 average**

**1.7°F warmer than the previous record (WY 2018)**

# Precipitation in Water Year 2026

Colorado Water Year 2026 accumulated precipitation (inches) compared to 1991-2020 average; daily precipitation (black bars, right axis)



data: NOAA nClimGrid  
plot by Colorado Climate Center/Colorado State Univ.

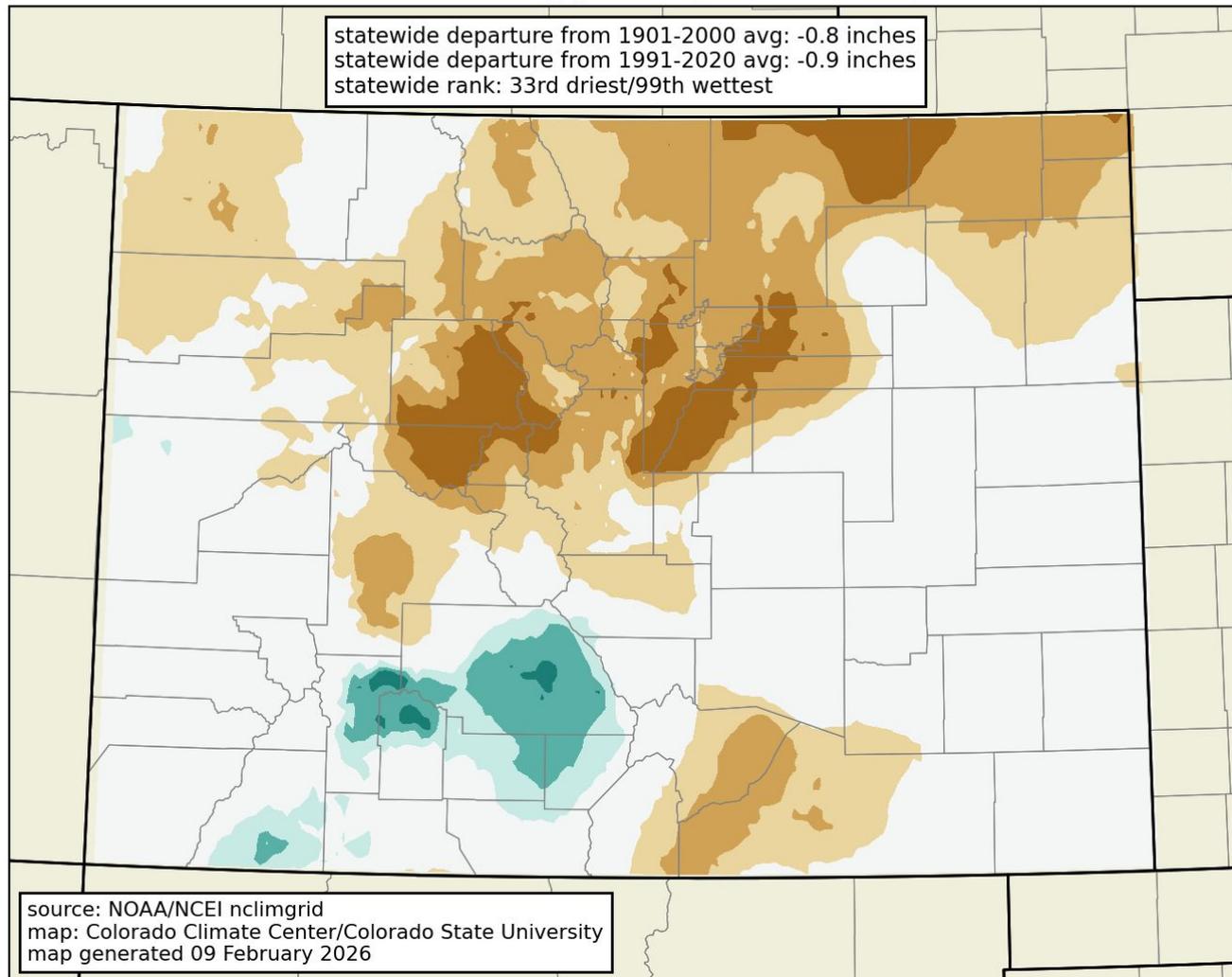


[https://climate.colostate.edu/co\\_cag/index.html](https://climate.colostate.edu/co_cag/index.html)

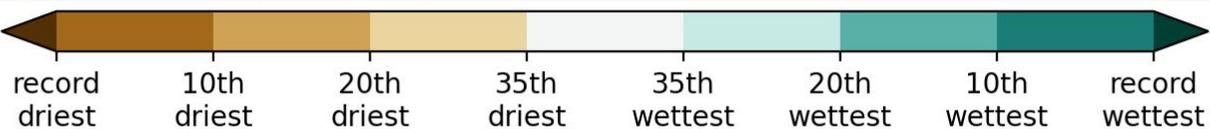


precipitation rank  
4 months ending January 2026 (Oct-Jan)

statewide departure from 1901-2000 avg: -0.8 inches  
statewide departure from 1991-2020 avg: -0.9 inches  
statewide rank: 33rd driest/99th wettest



source: NOAA/NCEI nclimgrid  
map: Colorado Climate Center/Colorado State University  
map generated 09 February 2026



precipitation rank out of 131 years (1896-2026)

**Statewide: 33<sup>rd</sup> driest start to a water year**

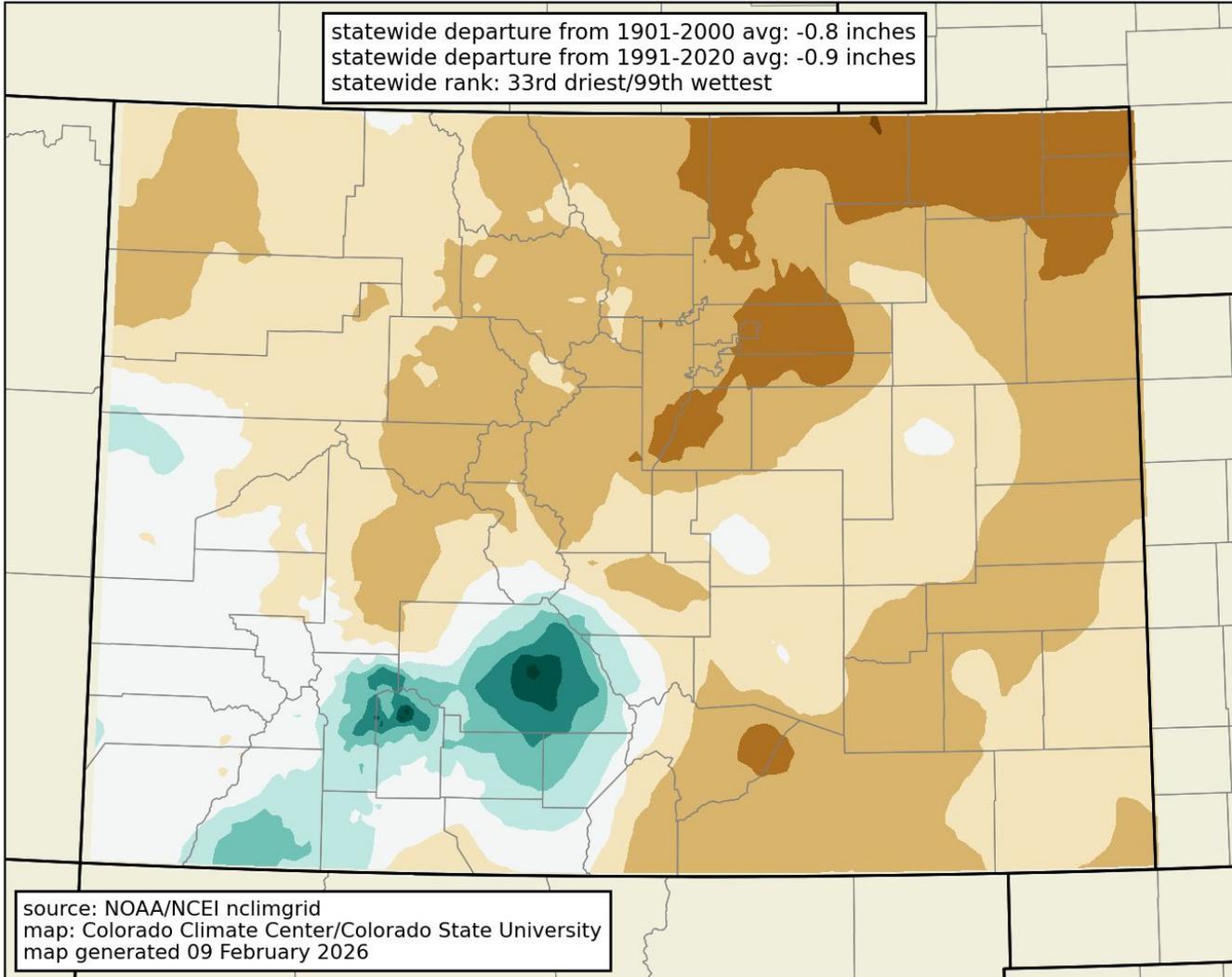
**Much drier than average in the central mountains and much of northeastern Colorado**

**Parts of southern Colorado are much wetter than average for the water year, largely from the heavy rain in October**



percent of 1991-2020 average precipitation  
4 months ending January 2026 (Oct-Jan)

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10 30 50 70 90 110 130 150 170 190

percent of average precipitation

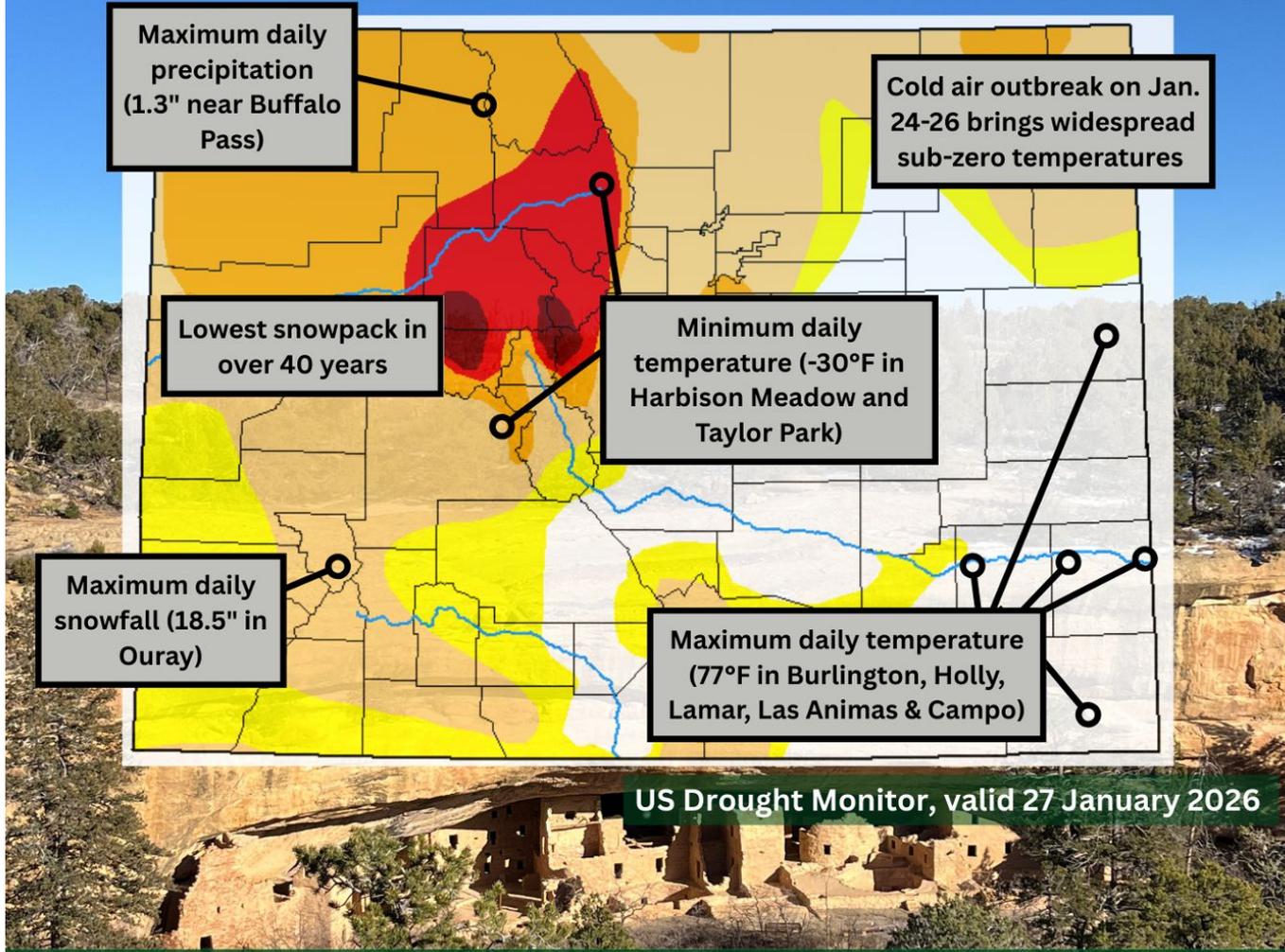
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**Parts of southern Colorado are much wetter than average for the water year, largely from the heavy rain in October**

# January 2026

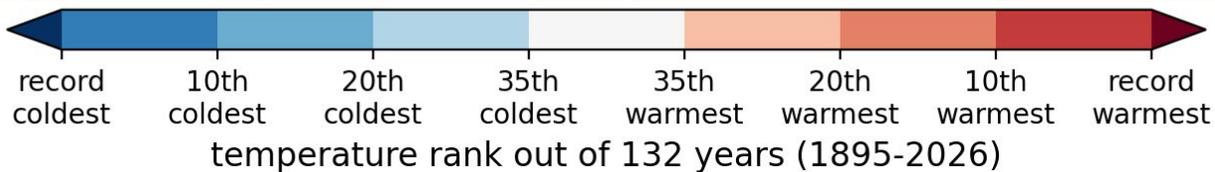
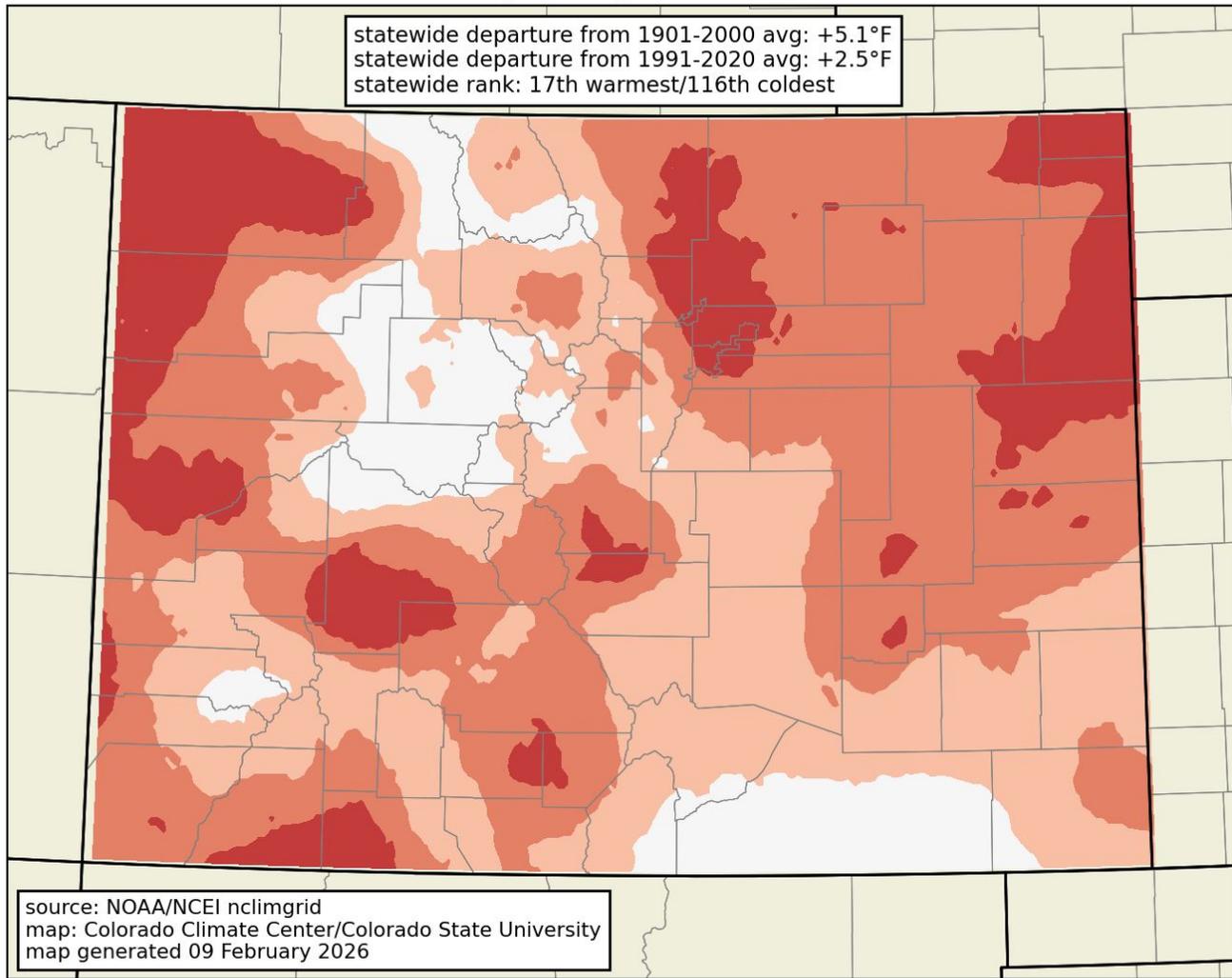
## Colorado Monthly Climate Summary



[https://climate.colostate.edu/monthly\\_summary.html](https://climate.colostate.edu/monthly_summary.html)



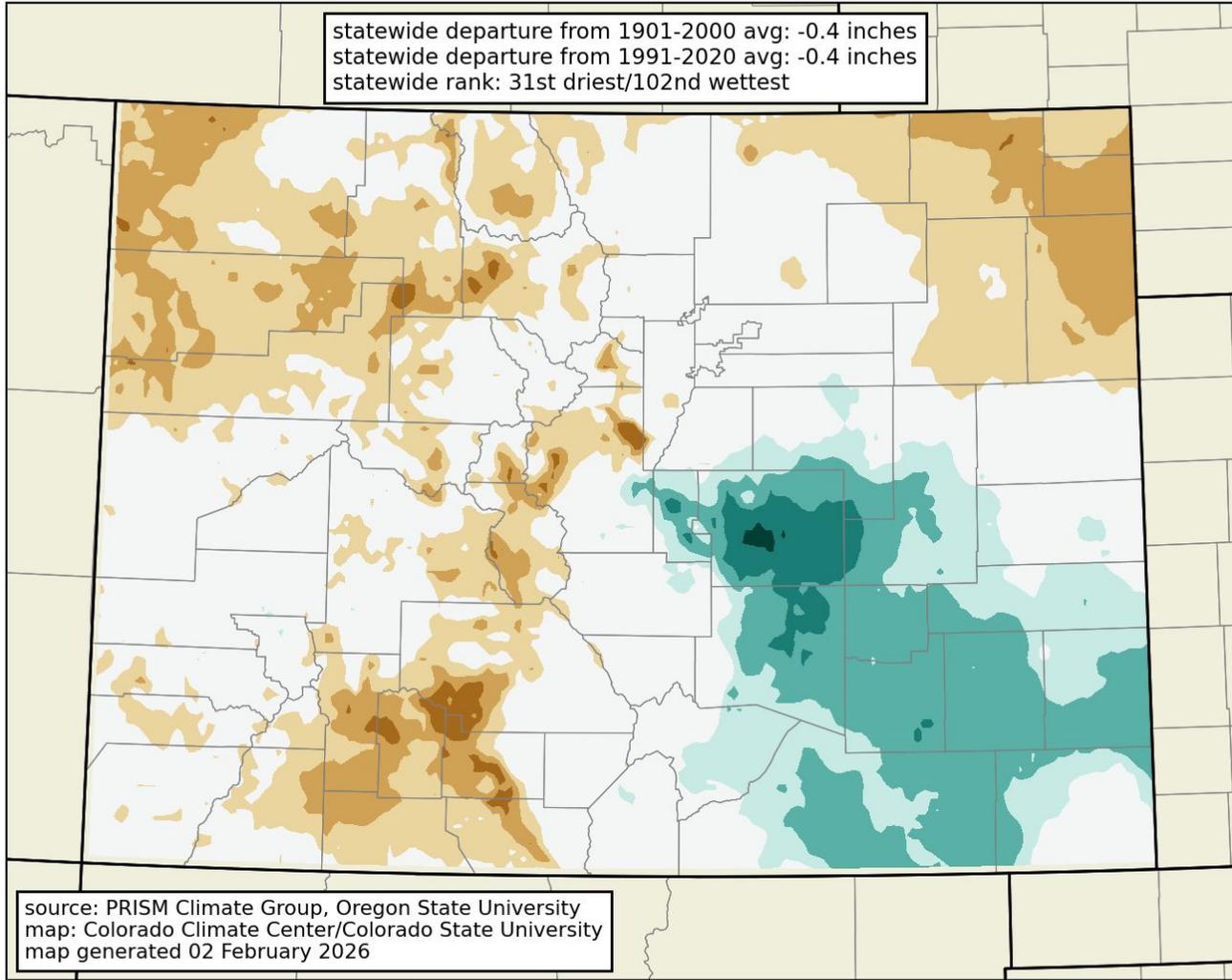
# average temperature rank January 2026



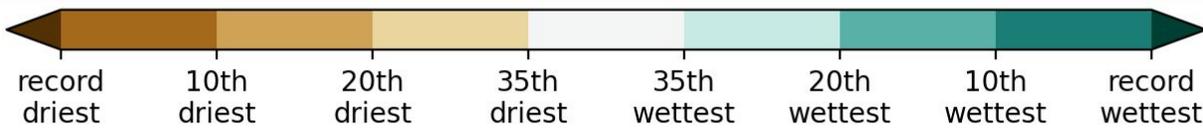
- **January wasn't as unusually warm as November and December, but still much warmer than average in most of the state**

precipitation rank (preliminary PRISM data)  
January 2026

statewide departure from 1901-2000 avg: -0.4 inches  
statewide departure from 1991-2020 avg: -0.4 inches  
statewide rank: 31st driest/102nd wettest



source: PRISM Climate Group, Oregon State University  
map: Colorado Climate Center/Colorado State University  
map generated 02 February 2026



precipitation rank out of 132 years (1895-2026)

**The mountains were generally drier than average in January, as were the northeastern plains**

**Southeastern Colorado had a couple substantial snowstorms in January, including over a foot of snow in El Paso County on January 8-9**

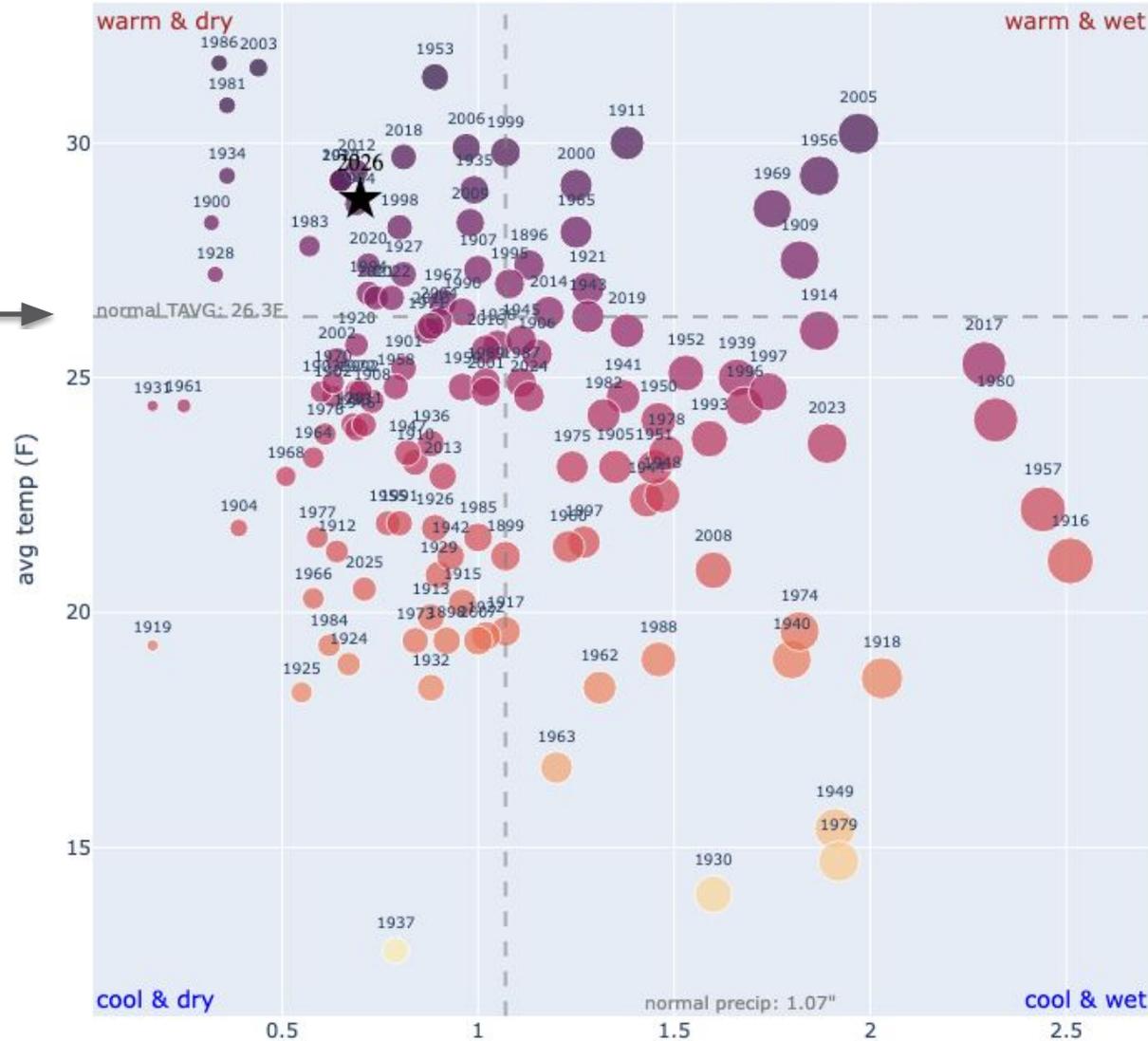


Colorado statewide average temperature and precipitation, January

Warm & dry

January 2026

1991-2020 avg temp →



avg temp (F) Warm & wet

January was in the warm and dry quadrant when averaged across the state

Cool & dry

Cool & wet

size of points proportional to precip, color shows temp normals are 1991-2020

accumulated precipitation (inches)

Colorado Climate Center/CSU Data source: NOAA/NCEI Climate at a Glance

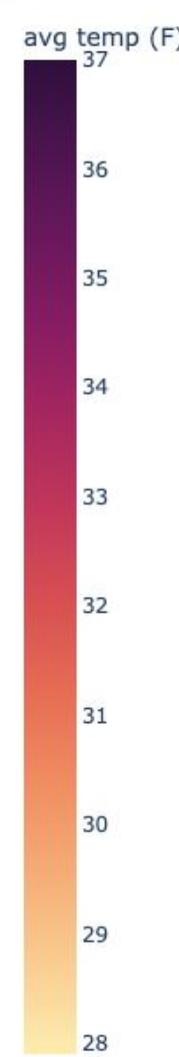
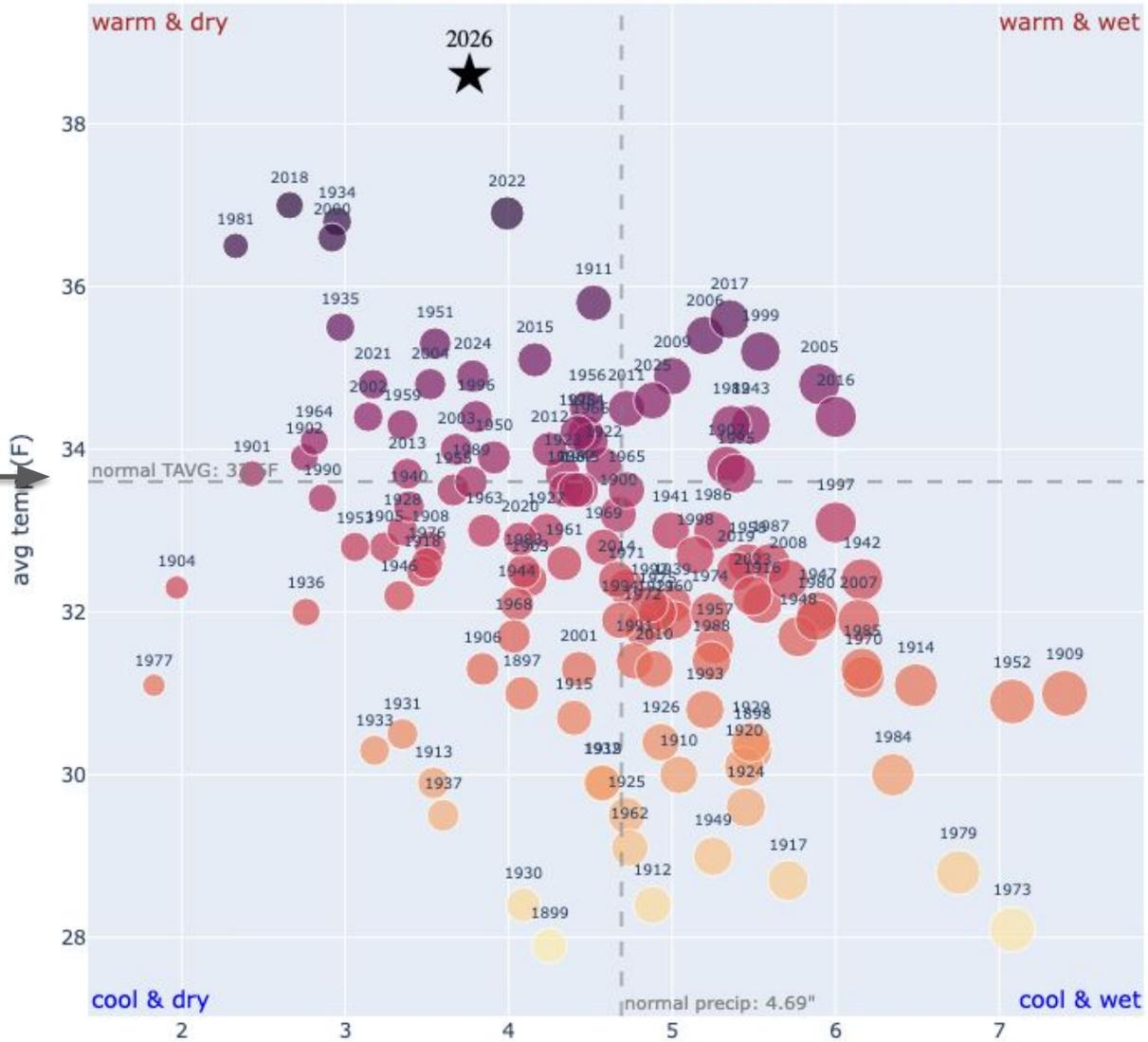


Colorado statewide average temperature and precipitation, October - January

**Warm & dry**

October through January (first four months of water year)

1991-2020 avg temp



**Warm & wet**

Warmest start to a water year by a large margin, and drier than average

**Cool & dry**

**Cool & wet**

size of points proportional to precip,  
color shows temp  
normals are 1991-2020

Colorado Climate Center/CSU  
Data source: NOAA/NCEI Climate at a Glance

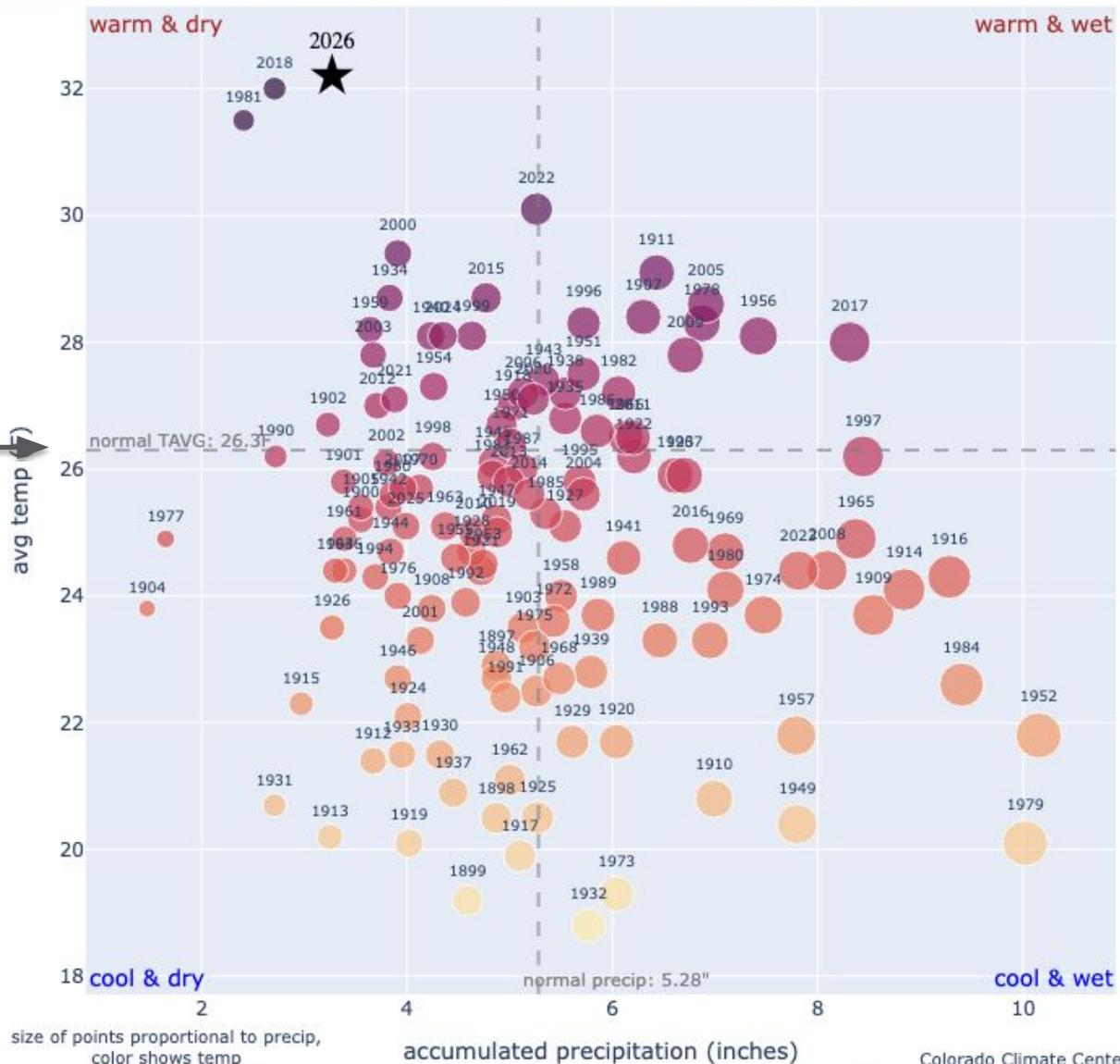


Colorado CD2 (Colorado drainage) average temperature and precipitation, November - January

**Warm & dry**

November through January, Colorado River Drainage

1991-2020 avg temp



**Warm & wet**

When taking out the very wet October, Nov-Jan was way up in the warm and dry quadrant with two other very bad years in western Colorado: 1981 and 2018

**Cool & dry**

**Cool & wet**

size of points proportional to precip, color shows temp normals are 1991-2020

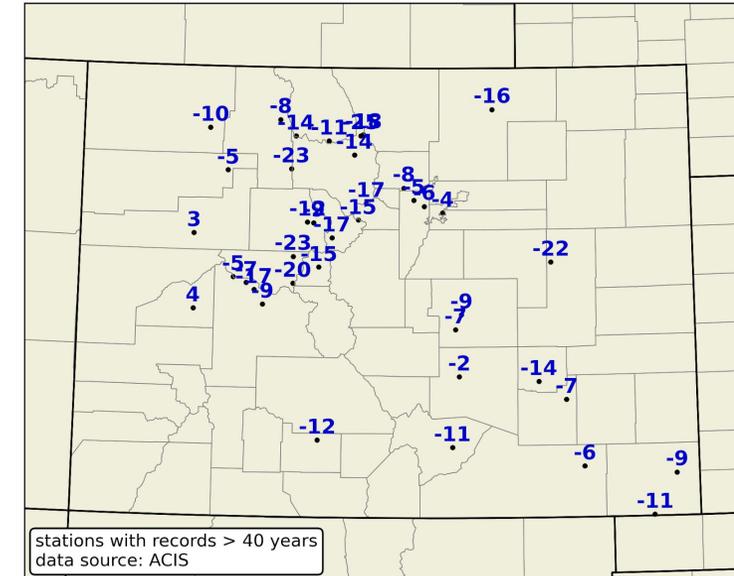
Colorado Climate Center/CSU  
Data source: NOAA/NCEI Climate at a Glance



# Arctic blast in late January

Despite January being yet another warm month statewide, Colorado saw a notable cold snap around Jan. 24-26. Temperatures fell well below 0°F across portions of the Eastern Plains and in the mountains, which broke daily minimum temperature records throughout the state. Daytime temperatures were also cold: on Jan. 25, temperatures didn't make it out of the teens in many areas, leading to numerous record low daily *maximum* temperatures as well.

record daily low minimum temperatures for 2026-01-26 (°F)



**STATION RECORDS (PREVIOUS)**

BERTHOUD SUMMIT	-17	(-14; 1989)
BRIGGS DALE	-16	(-16; 1996)
BUTTE	-9	(-6; 2017)
CAMPO 7 S	-11	(6; 1996)
COLORADO SPRINGS MUNICIPAL AP	-9	(-3; 1976)
COLUMBINE	-14	(-16; 1943)
COLUMBINE	-14	(-10; 1989)
COPPER MOUNTAIN	-17	(-13; 2017)
CRAIG 4SW	-10	(-9; 1989)
DEAD HORSE COLORADO	-5	(-3; 2017)
DEL NORTE 3ENE	-12	(-12; 2010)
DENVER LOWRY AFB	-4	(-1; 1963)
DOWD JUNCTION COLORADO	-12	(-4; 2017)
DRY LAKE COLORADO	-8	(-4; 2009)
FORT CARSON BUTTS AAF	-7	(-3; 1996)
GRIZZLY PEAK	-15	(-9; 2017)
GROSS RESERVOIR	-8	(-2; 2025)
INDEPENDENCE PASS	-20	(-19; 1996)
JAY COLORADO	4	(9; 2023)
KILN	-23	(-15; 2017)
KIM 15 NNE	-6	(-0; 1996)
LA JUNTA MUNICIPAL AIRPORT	-7	(-6; 1996)
LAKE IRENE	-18	(-13; 2017)
LEADVILLE LAKE COUNTY AP	-15	(-14; 2017)
LIMON	-22	(-19; 1980)
MC CLURE PASS	-5	(-4; 2017)
NORTH LOST TRAIL	-7	(-7; 2017)
ORDWAY 4 W	-14	(-8; 1996)
PHANTOM VALLEY	-25	(-16; 1989)
PORCUPINE CREEK COLORADO	-23	(-17; 2017)
PUEBLO RESERVOIR	-2	(-1; 1996)
RALSTON RESERVOIR	-5	(3; 2025)
RIFLE COLORADO	3	(6; 2004)
SCHOFIELD PASS	-17	(-16; 2017)
STILLWATER CREEK	-14	(-10; 2017)
VAIL MOUNTAIN	-9	(-6; 2017)
WALSBURG 1 NW	-11	(-3; 1940)
WALSH 1 W	-9	(-2; 1978)
WHEAT RIDGE 2	-6	(-6; 1996)
WILLOW CREEK COLORADO	-11	(-5; 2004)



# Persistent record warmth in Colorado

At timescales from 3 to 24 months, the time periods ending in January were all the warmest on record

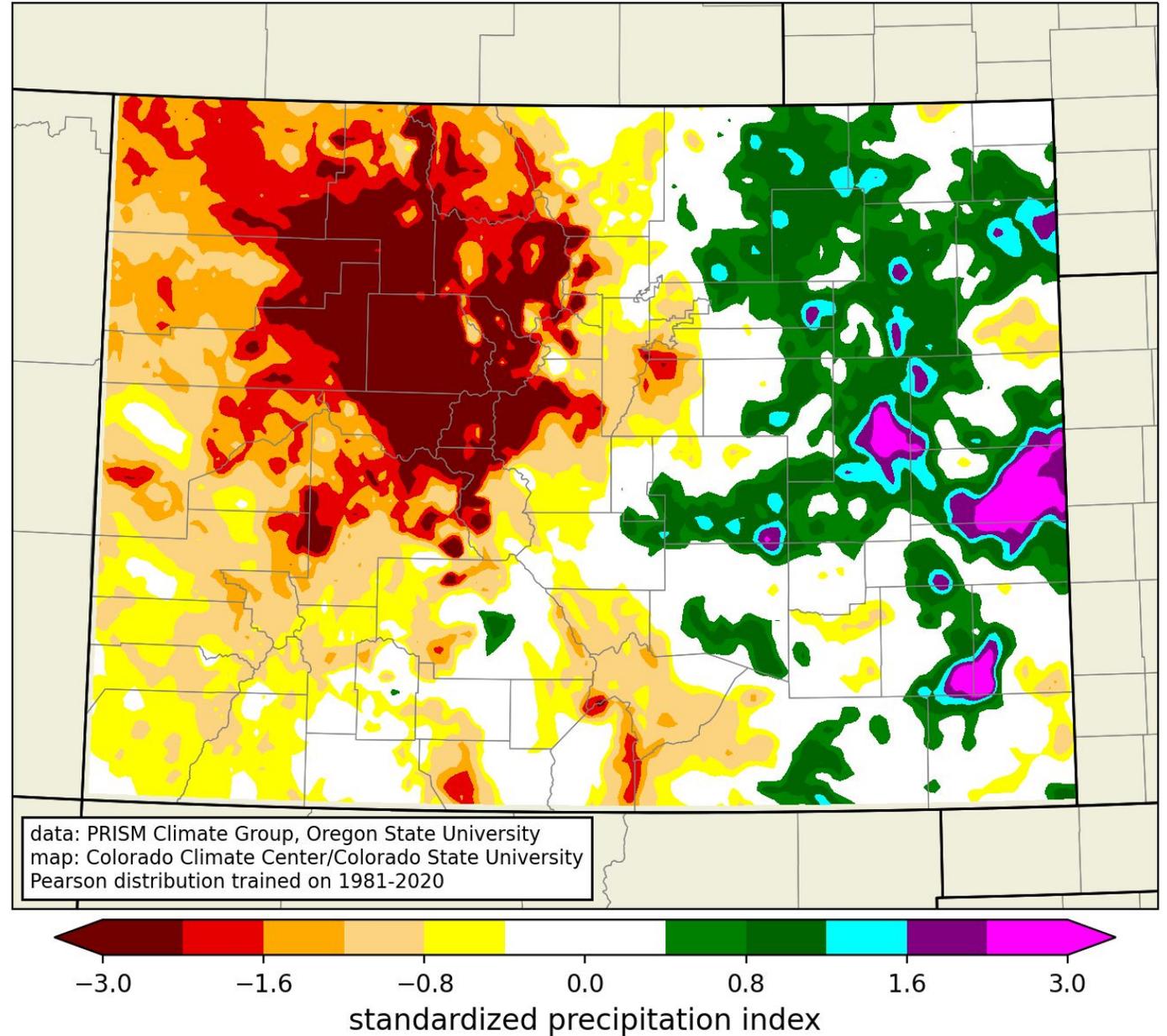
*January 2026 statewide average temperature rankings and temperature anomalies across different timescales. From NOAA's Climate at a Glance*

Period	Value	1901-2000 Mean	Anomaly	Rank (1895-2026)
<a href="#">January 2026</a> 1-Month	28.8°F (-1.8°C)	23.7°F (-4.6°C)	5.1°F (2.8°C)	116th Coldest
				17th Warmest
<a href="#">Dec 2025–Jan 2026</a> 2-Month	32.0°F (0.0°C)	24.5°F (-4.2°C)	7.5°F (4.2°C)	130th Coldest
				2nd Warmest
<a href="#">Nov 2025–Jan 2026</a> 3-Month	35.0°F (1.7°C)	27.5°F (-2.5°C)	7.5°F (4.2°C)	131st Coldest
				1st Warmest
<a href="#">Oct 2025–Jan 2026</a> 4-Month	38.6°F (3.7°C)	32.3°F (0.2°C)	6.3°F (3.5°C)	131st Coldest
				1st Warmest
<a href="#">Sep 2025–Jan 2026</a> 5-Month	42.8°F (6.0°C)	37.3°F (2.9°C)	5.5°F (3.1°C)	131st Coldest
				1st Warmest
<a href="#">Aug 2025–Jan 2026</a> 6-Month	46.9°F (8.3°C)	41.9°F (5.5°C)	5.0°F (2.8°C)	131st Coldest
				1st Warmest
<a href="#">Jul 2025–Jan 2026</a> 7-Month	50.1°F (10.1°C)	45.5°F (7.5°C)	4.6°F (2.6°C)	131st Coldest
				1st Warmest
<a href="#">Jun 2025–Jan 2026</a> 8-Month	51.9°F (11.1°C)	47.5°F (8.6°C)	4.4°F (2.4°C)	131st Coldest
				1st Warmest
<a href="#">May 2025–Jan 2026</a> 9-Month	51.9°F (11.1°C)	48.0°F (8.9°C)	3.9°F (2.2°C)	131st Coldest
				1st Warmest
<a href="#">Apr 2025–Jan 2026</a> 10-Month	51.2°F (10.7°C)	47.4°F (8.6°C)	3.8°F (2.1°C)	131st Coldest
				1st Warmest
<a href="#">Mar 2025–Jan 2026</a> 11-Month	50.1°F (10.1°C)	46.2°F (7.9°C)	3.9°F (2.2°C)	131st Coldest
				1st Warmest
<a href="#">Feb 2025–Jan 2026</a> 12-Month	48.5°F (9.2°C)	44.6°F (7.0°C)	3.9°F (2.2°C)	131st Coldest
				1st Warmest
<a href="#">Aug 2024–Jan 2026</a> 18-Month	47.2°F (8.4°C)	43.7°F (6.5°C)	3.5°F (1.9°C)	130th Coldest
				1st Warmest
<a href="#">Feb 2024–Jan 2026</a> 24-Month	47.9°F (8.8°C)	44.6°F (7.0°C)	3.3°F (1.8°C)	130th Coldest
				1st Warmest



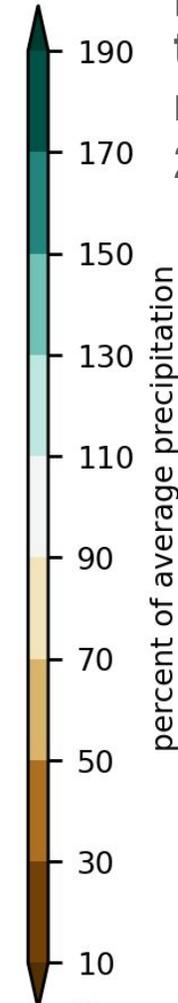
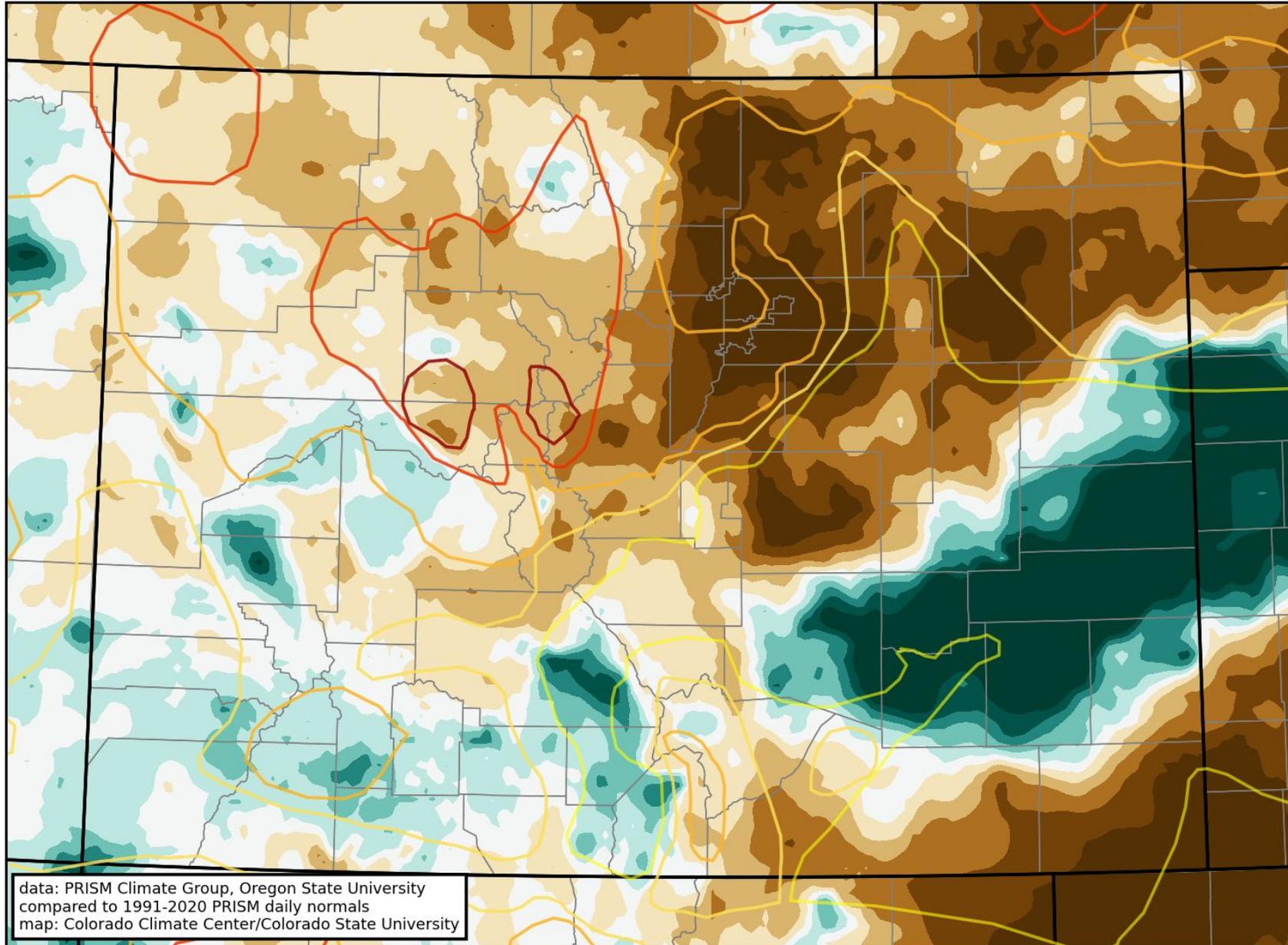
# Standardized Precipitation Index over 360 days

A large area of western Colorado has had near-record low precipitation over the last year





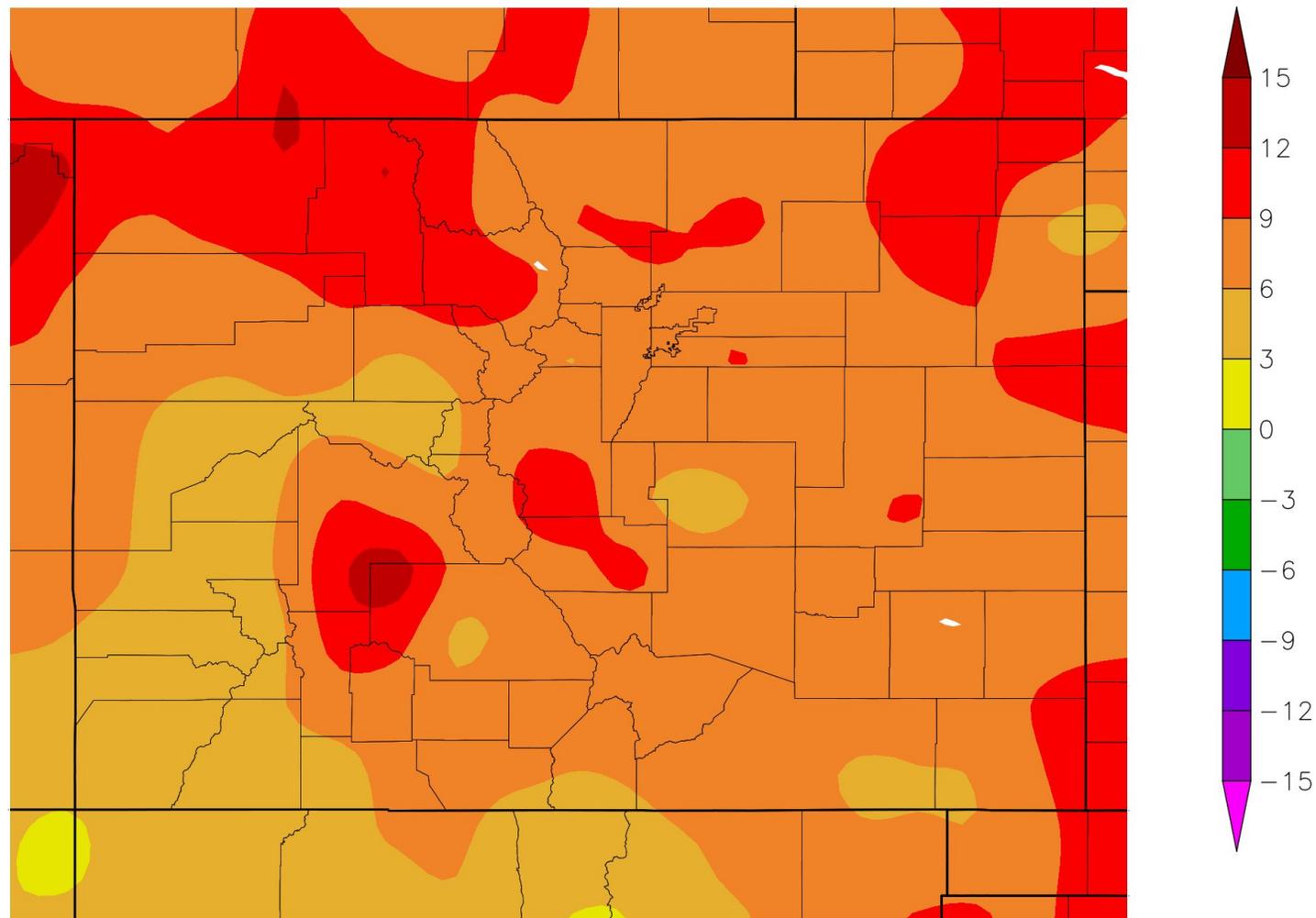
February percent of normal precipitation through the morning of the 23<sup>rd</sup>



# Departure from Normal Temperature (F) 2/1/2026 – 2/23/2026

**February departure  
from normal  
temperature through  
the 23<sup>rd</sup>**

**Yet another very warm  
month to date, with  
more warmth on the  
way to close out the  
month**

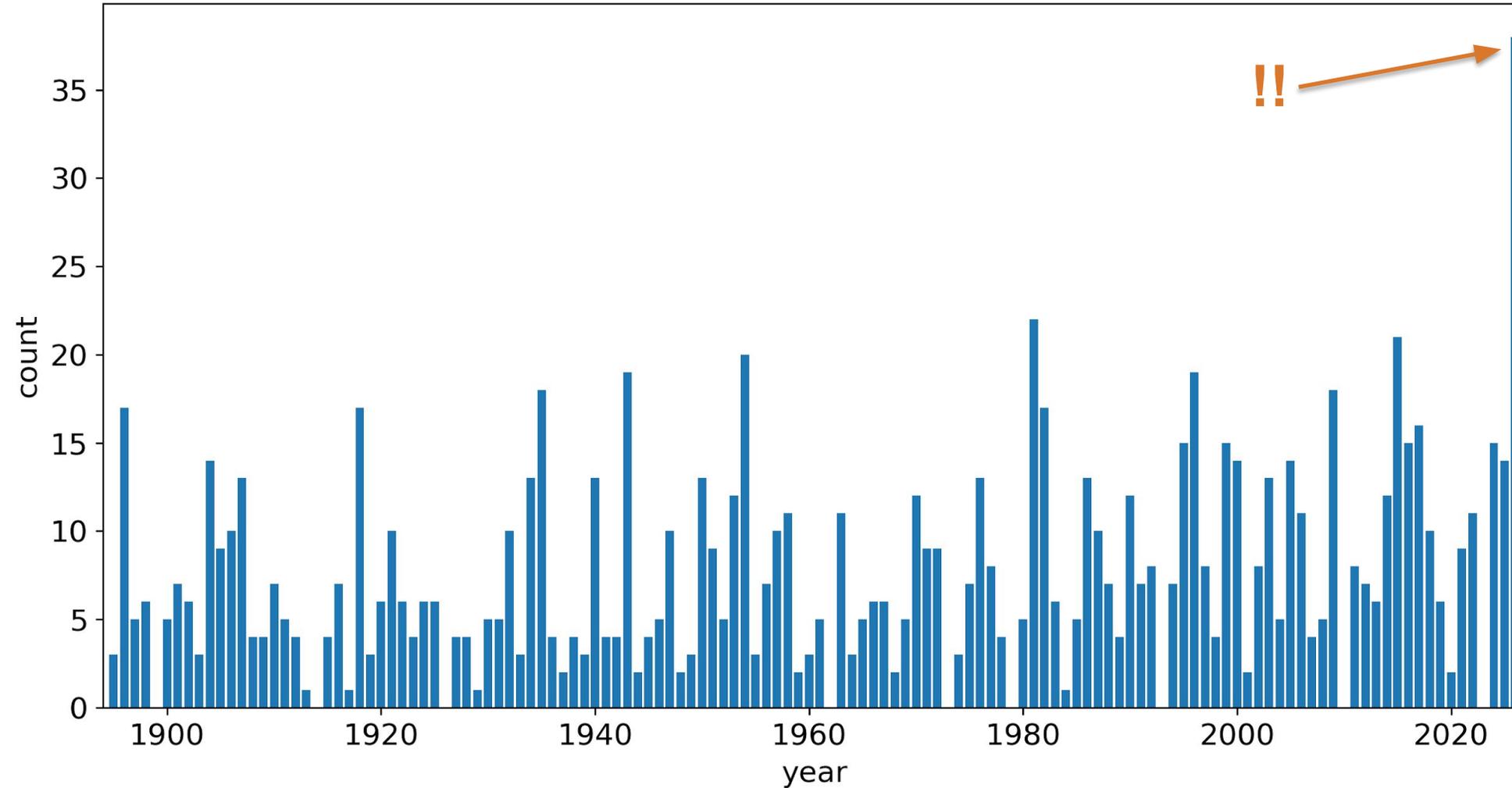


Generated 2/24/2026 using provisional data.

ACIS Web Services



Fort Collins number of days with TMAX  $\geq 60^{\circ}\text{F}$ , December through February



!!

Fort Collins has recorded 38  $60^{\circ}\text{F}$  days this winter

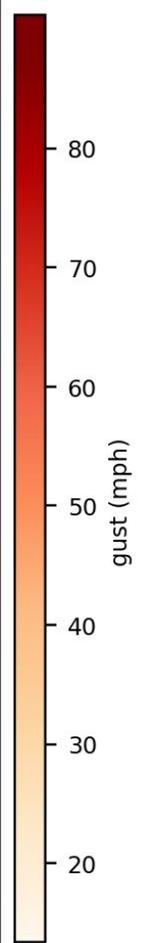
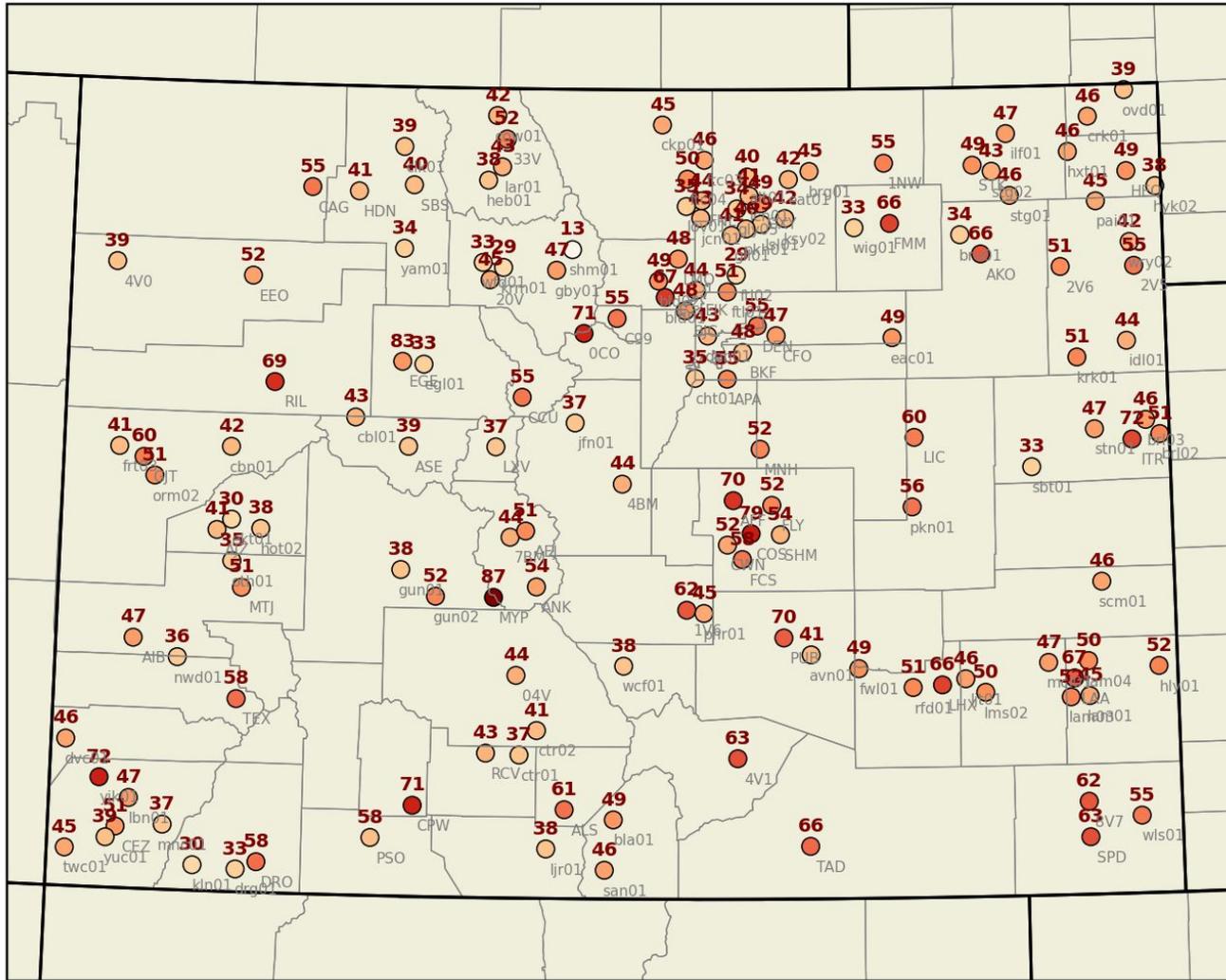
Previous high was 22 (1980-81)

The remaining days in the month are all forecast to be  $60$  or above (five more)



# Strong winds on the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>

Colorado ASOS, CoAgMET, Northern Water max wind gusts (mph): 17-18 February 2026



US  **THE COLORADO SUN** 

NEWS: TRANSPORTATION

## 5 killed, 29 injured in 36-vehicle pileup on Interstate 25 near Pueblo

Heavy winds and blowing dirt at the time of the crash caused “brown out conditions” and low to no visibility for some drivers, Colorado State Patrol says

 Olivia Prentzel 12:42 PM MST on Feb 17, 2026

 Share

 Original Reporting |  The Trust Project



# Drought conditions

For some comparisons to the 1976-77 and 1980-81 winters, see our blog post:

<https://climate.colostate.edu/blog/index.php/2026/02/09/how-does-this-year-compare-to-the-snow-droughts-of-the-past/>



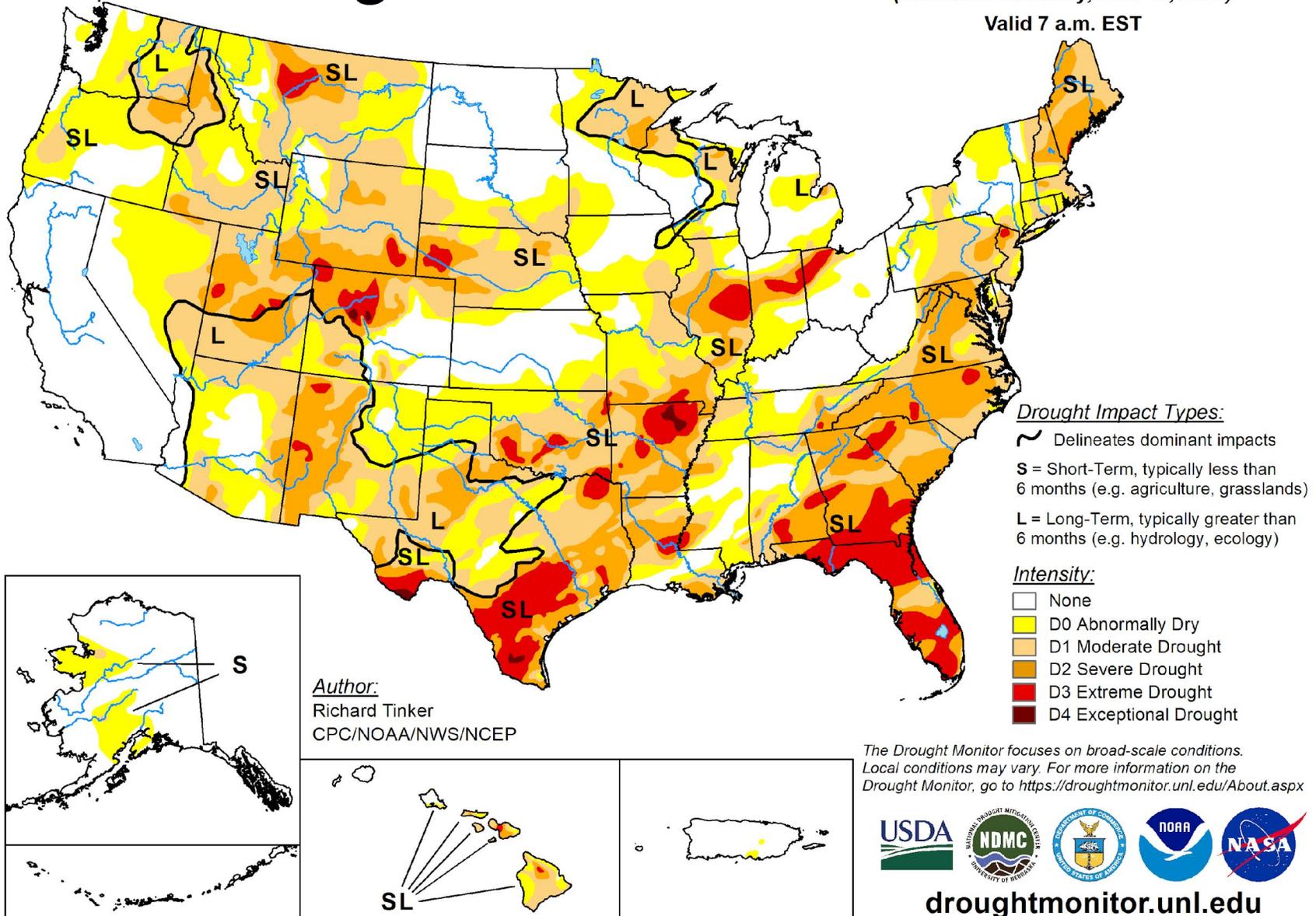
Photo from January 1981, approaching Dillon  
Provided by Nolan Doesken



# U.S. Drought Monitor

February 17, 2026  
(Released Thursday, Feb. 19, 2026)

Valid 7 a.m. EST

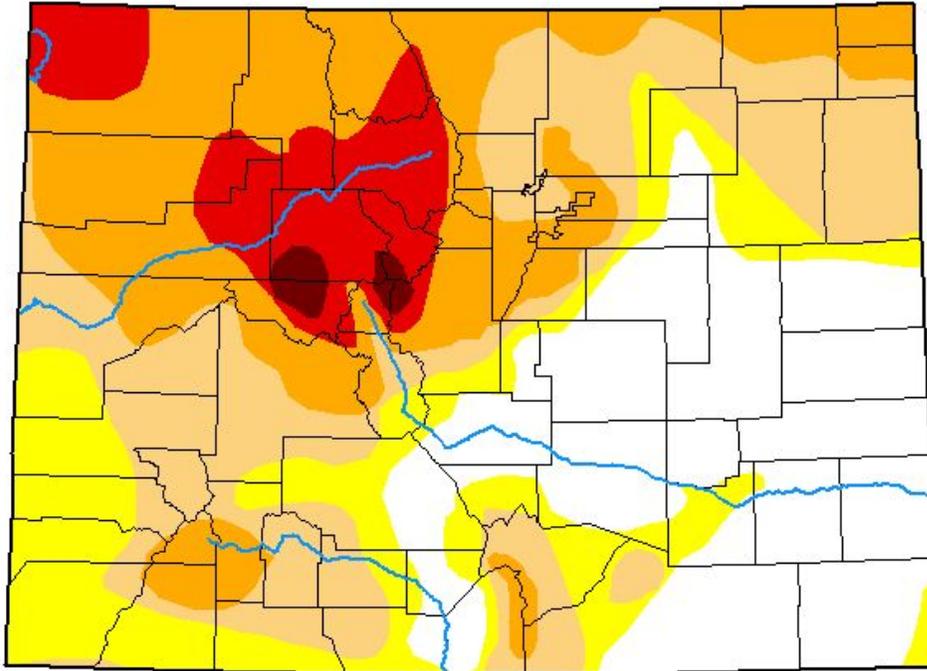


[droughtmonitor.unl.edu](https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu)



# U.S. Drought Monitor Colorado

**February 17, 2026**  
(Released Thursday, Feb. 19, 2026)  
Valid 7 a.m. EST



Drought Conditions (Percent Area)

	None	D0-D4	D1-D4	D2-D4	D3-D4	D4
<b>Current</b>	27.24	72.76	55.70	31.98	9.20	0.83
<b>Last Week</b> 02-10-2026	26.60	73.40	55.70	31.66	9.20	0.83
<b>3 Months Ago</b> 11-18-2025	33.27	66.73	31.14	13.49	1.29	0.00
<b>Start of Calendar Year</b> 01-06-2026	25.96	74.04	46.22	15.77	4.35	0.67
<b>Start of Water Year</b> 09-30-2025	45.82	54.18	45.19	35.88	14.34	0.00
<b>One Year Ago</b> 02-18-2025	61.40	38.60	19.89	3.20	0.85	0.00

Intensity:



The Drought Monitor focuses on broad-scale conditions. Local conditions may vary. For more information on the Drought Monitor, go to <https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/About.aspx>

Author:

Richard Tinker  
CPC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP

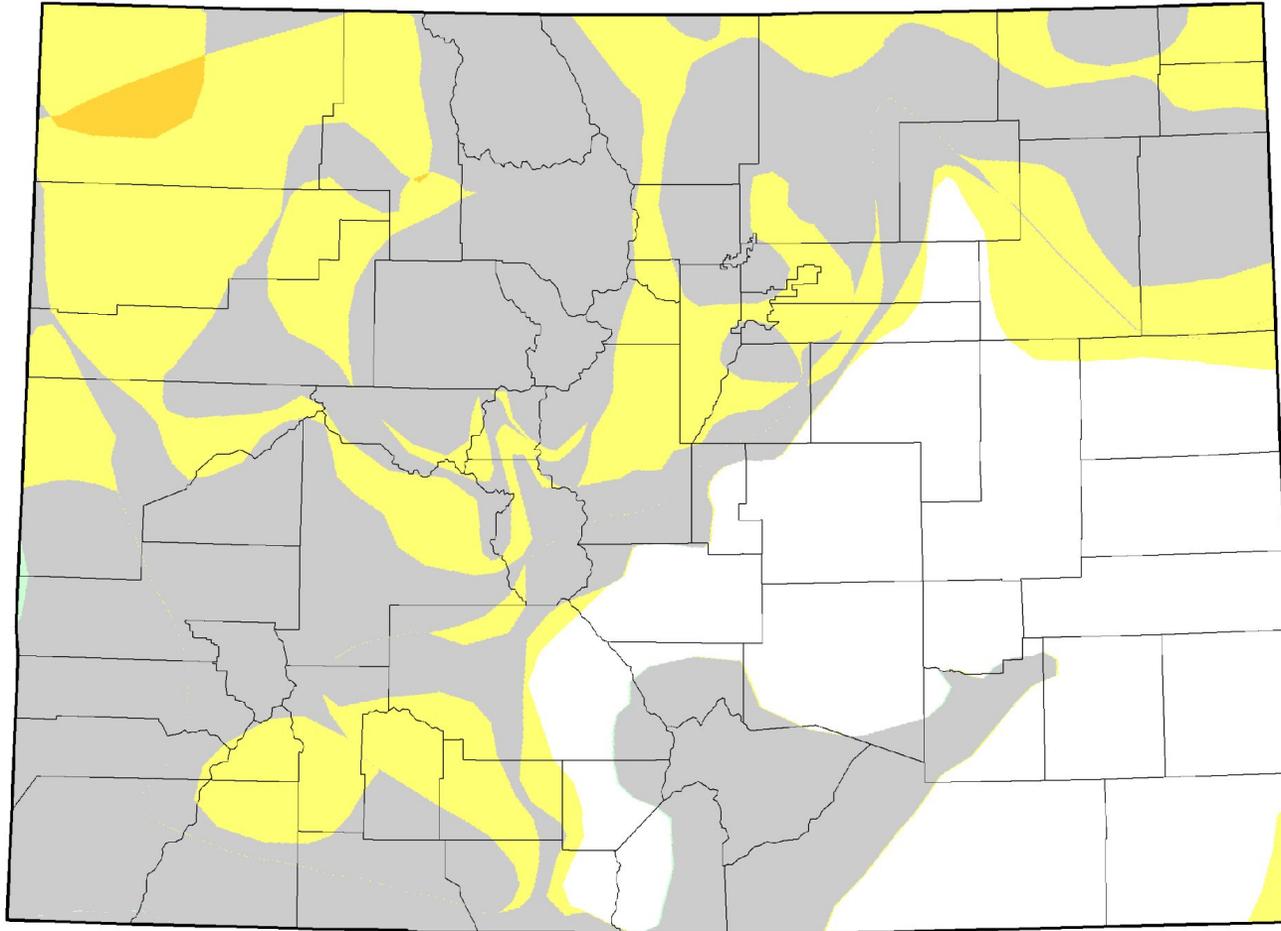


[droughtmonitor.unl.edu](https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu)



# Change in the last 4 weeks

## U.S. Drought Monitor Class Change - Colorado 4 Week



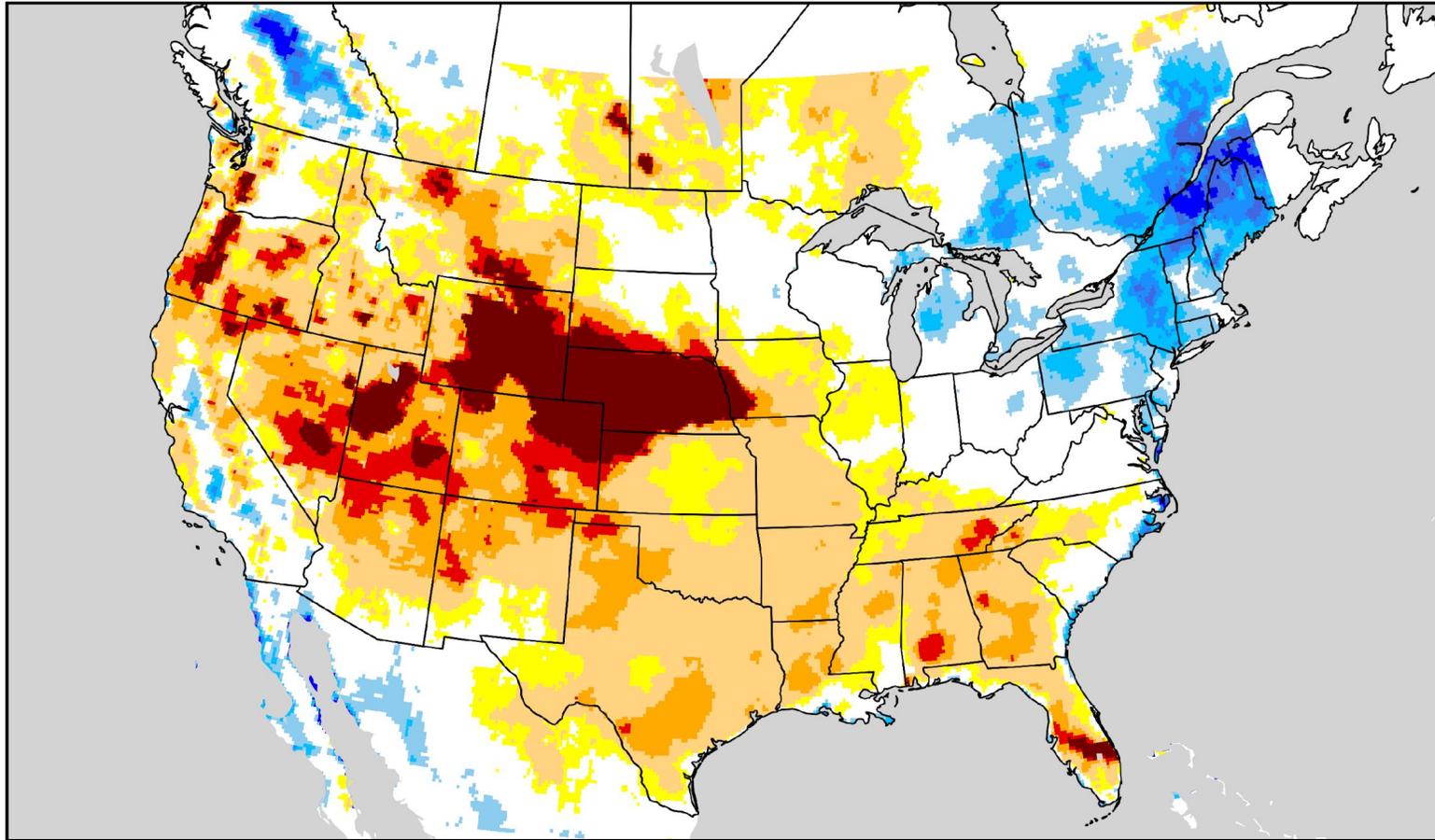
- 5 Class Degradation
- 4 Class Degradation
- 3 Class Degradation
- 2 Class Degradation
- 1 Class Degradation
- No Change
- 1 Class Improvement
- 2 Class Improvement
- 3 Class Improvement
- 4 Class Improvement
- 5 Class Improvement

February 17, 2026  
compared to  
January 20, 2026

[droughtmonitor.unl.edu](http://droughtmonitor.unl.edu)



3-month EDDI categories for February 18, 2026



## Evaporative Demand Drought Index

Evaporative demand has been high across all of Colorado over the last 3 months, and especially in the northeast and northwest, driven by the record warmth

Drought categories

Wetness categories



100% 98% 95% 90% 80% 70% 30% 20% 10% 5% 2% 0%

(EDDI-percentile category breaks: 100% = driest; 0% = wettest)

Generated at NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Climate Prediction Center





# Outlook





# Critical Fire Weather This Week

February 23, 2026

5:18 PM

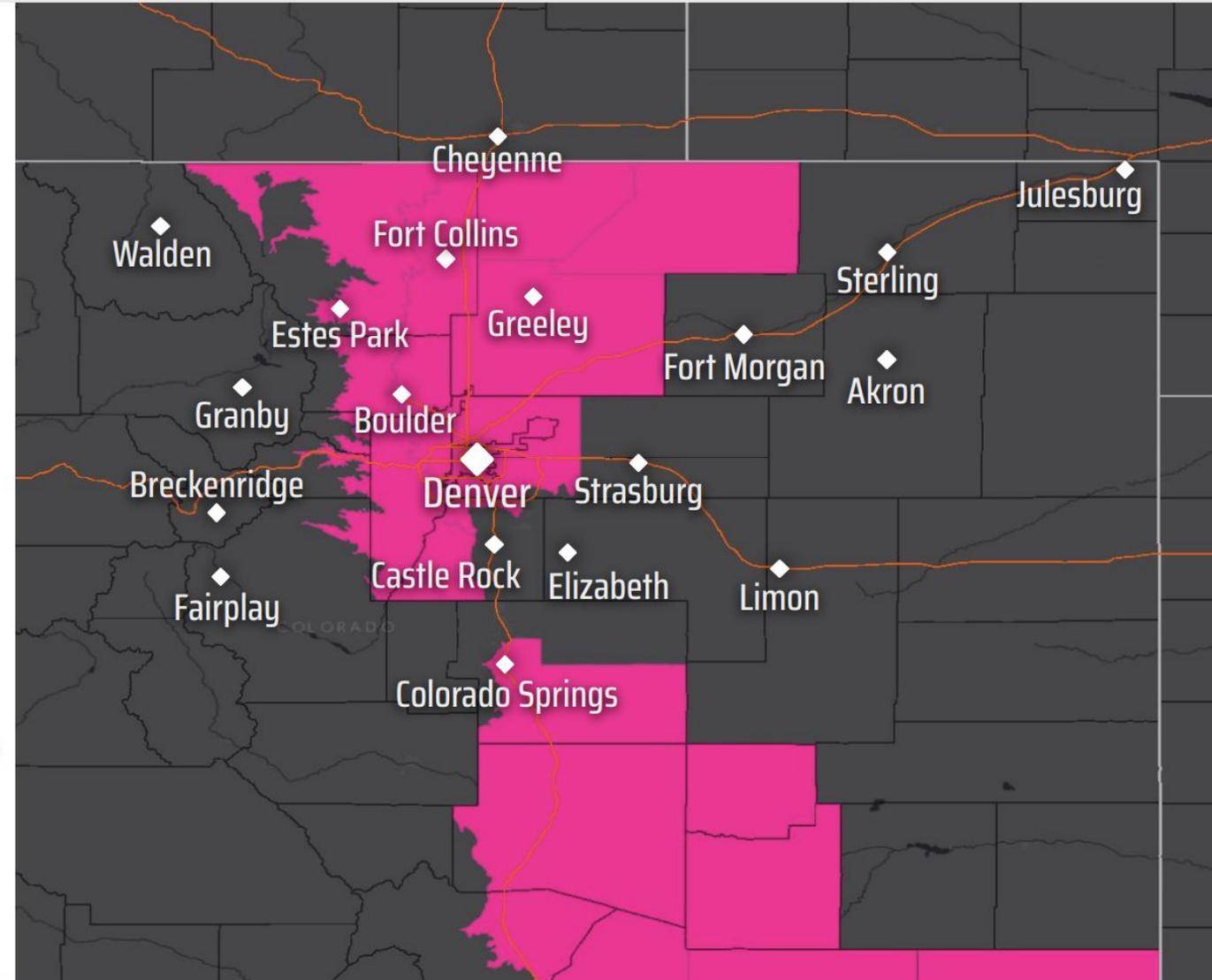
## Red Flag Warning Issued for Tuesday

### Key Messages

- Critical fire danger on Tuesday for the foothills, I-25 corridor, and the adjacent plains. Channels of stronger winds are possible where winds could gust to 45 mph.
- Potential for elevated to critical fire weather conditions Wednesday through Friday across the plains.

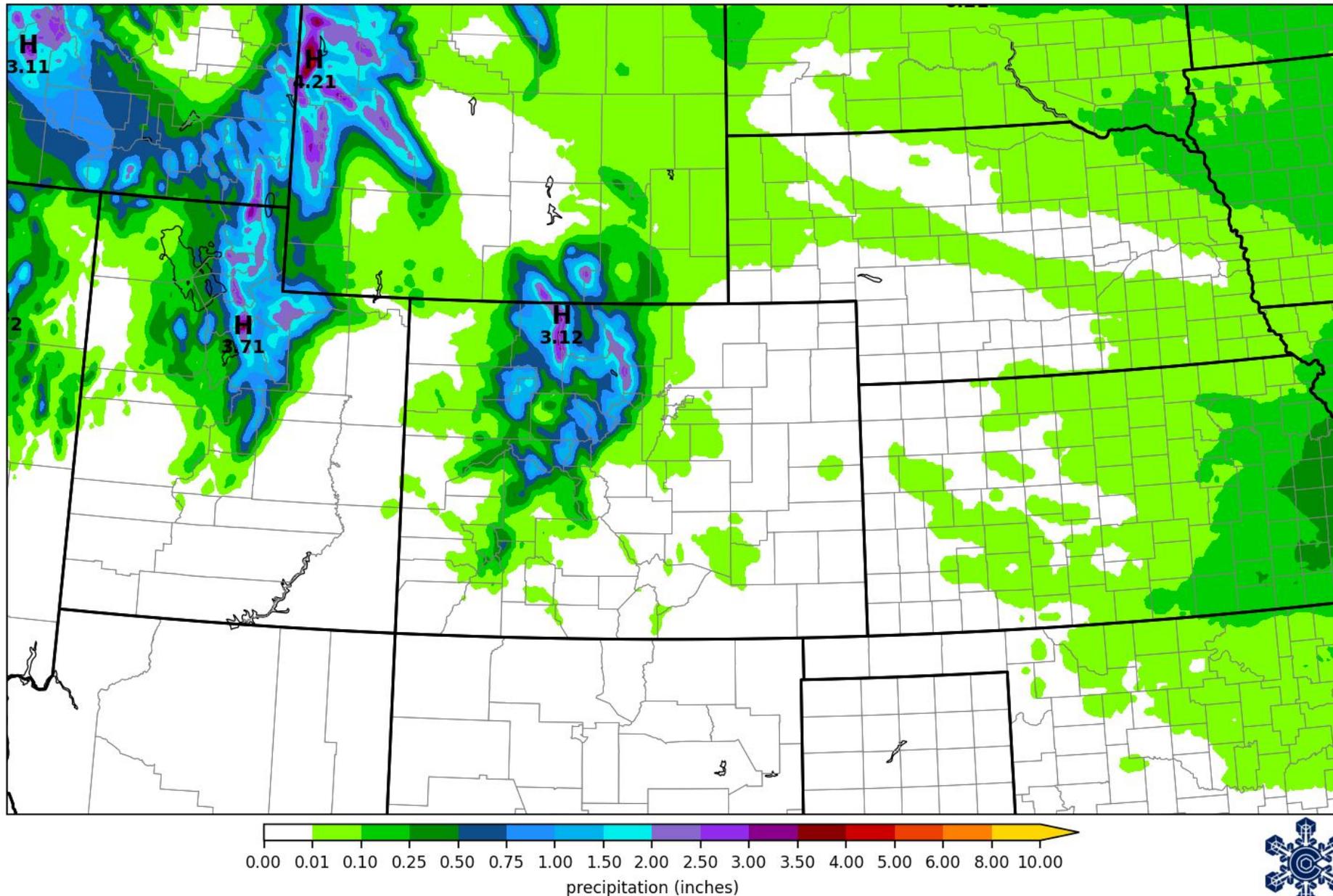
### → Red Flag Warning

- ◆ **WHEN:** 10 AM to 5 PM Tuesday
- ◆ **WHERE:** Foothills, I-25 Corridor, and adjacent plains
- ◆ **WHAT TO EXPECT:**
  - West winds 10-20 mph with gusts up to 30 mph. Isolated gusts up to 45 mph
  - RH of 10-15%
  - Critically Dry Fuels

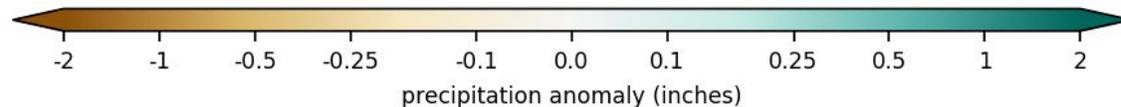
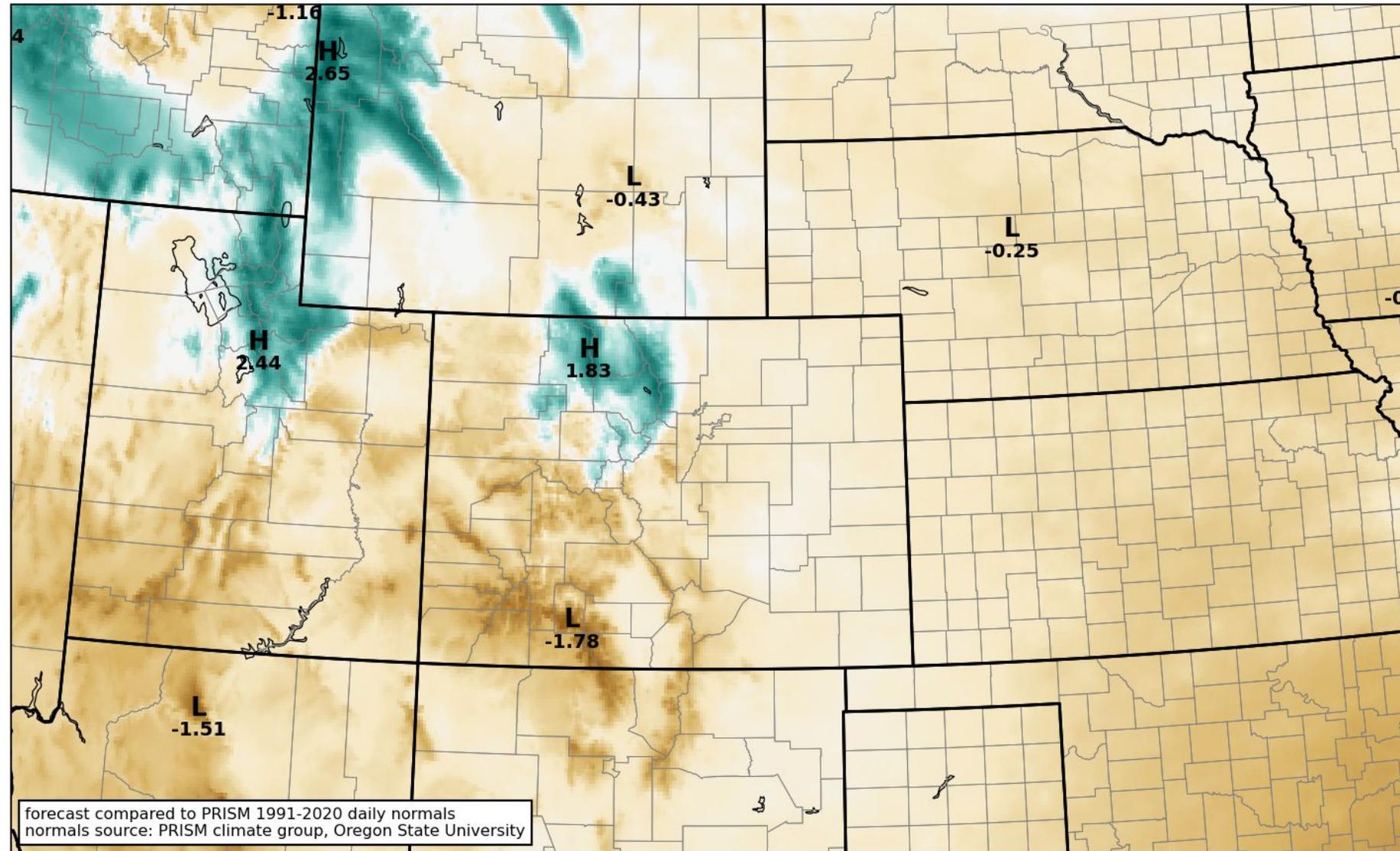


# NOAA 7-day precipitation forecast

A decent-looking  
snowstorm for the  
northern mountains  
the next two days;  
largely dry to the  
south and east

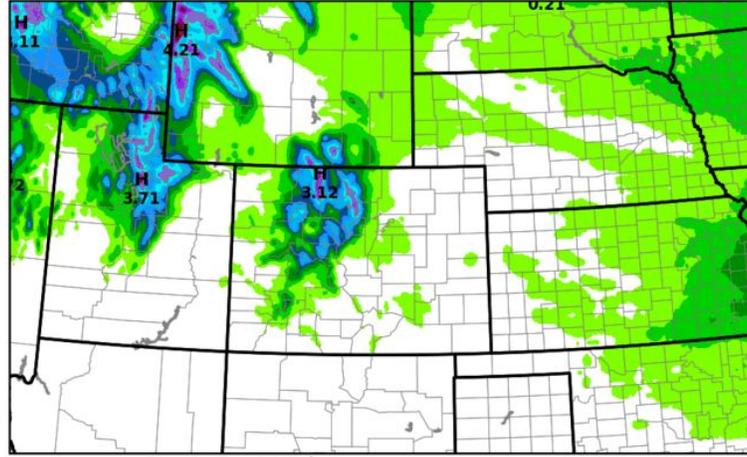


# NOAA 7-day precipitation forecast (difference from average)

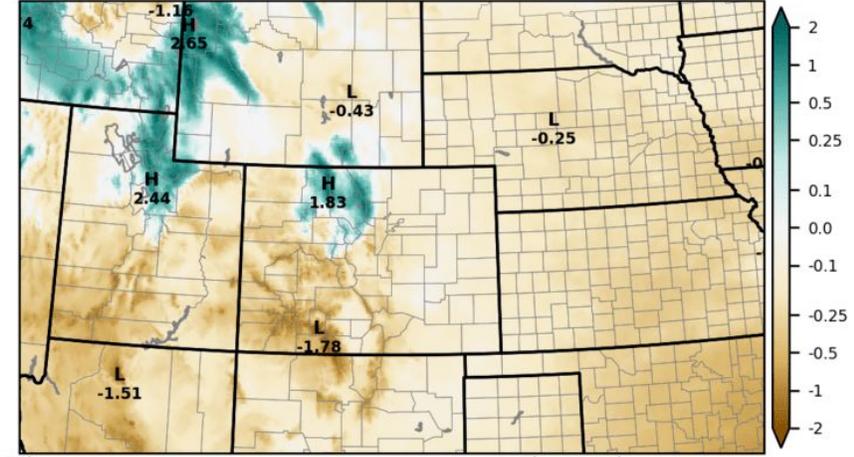


# NOAA 7-day precipitation forecast

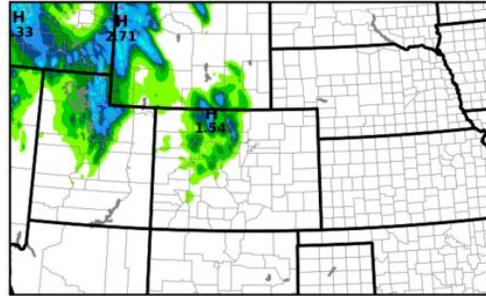
7-day total precipitation forecast



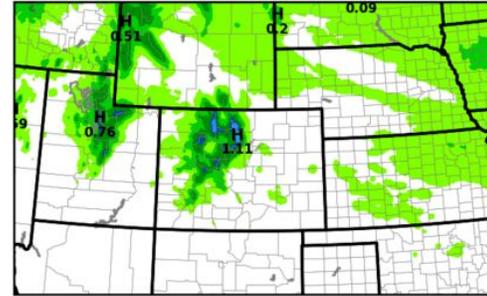
7-day precipitation forecast departure from average (inches)



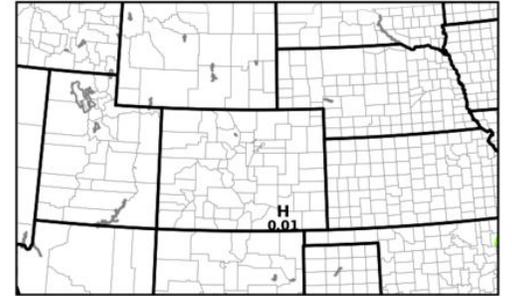
Day 1 Tue 24 Feb



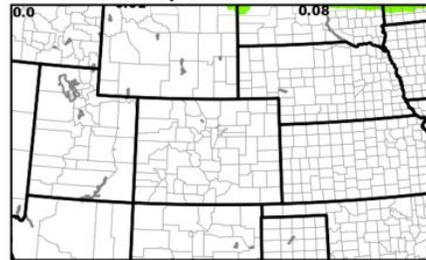
Day 2 Wed 25 Feb



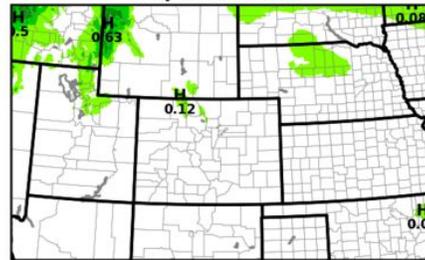
Day 3 Thu 26 Feb



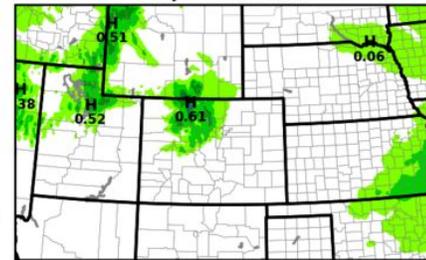
Day 4 Fri 27 Feb



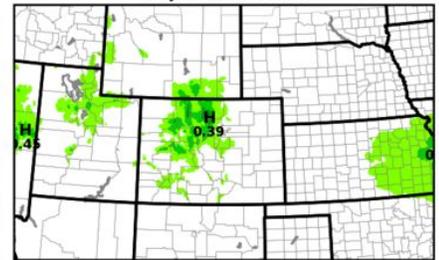
Day 5 Sat 28 Feb



Day 6 Sun 1 Mar



Day 7 Mon 2 Mar



forecast compared to PRISM 1991-2020 daily normals  
normals source: PRISM climate group, Oregon State University



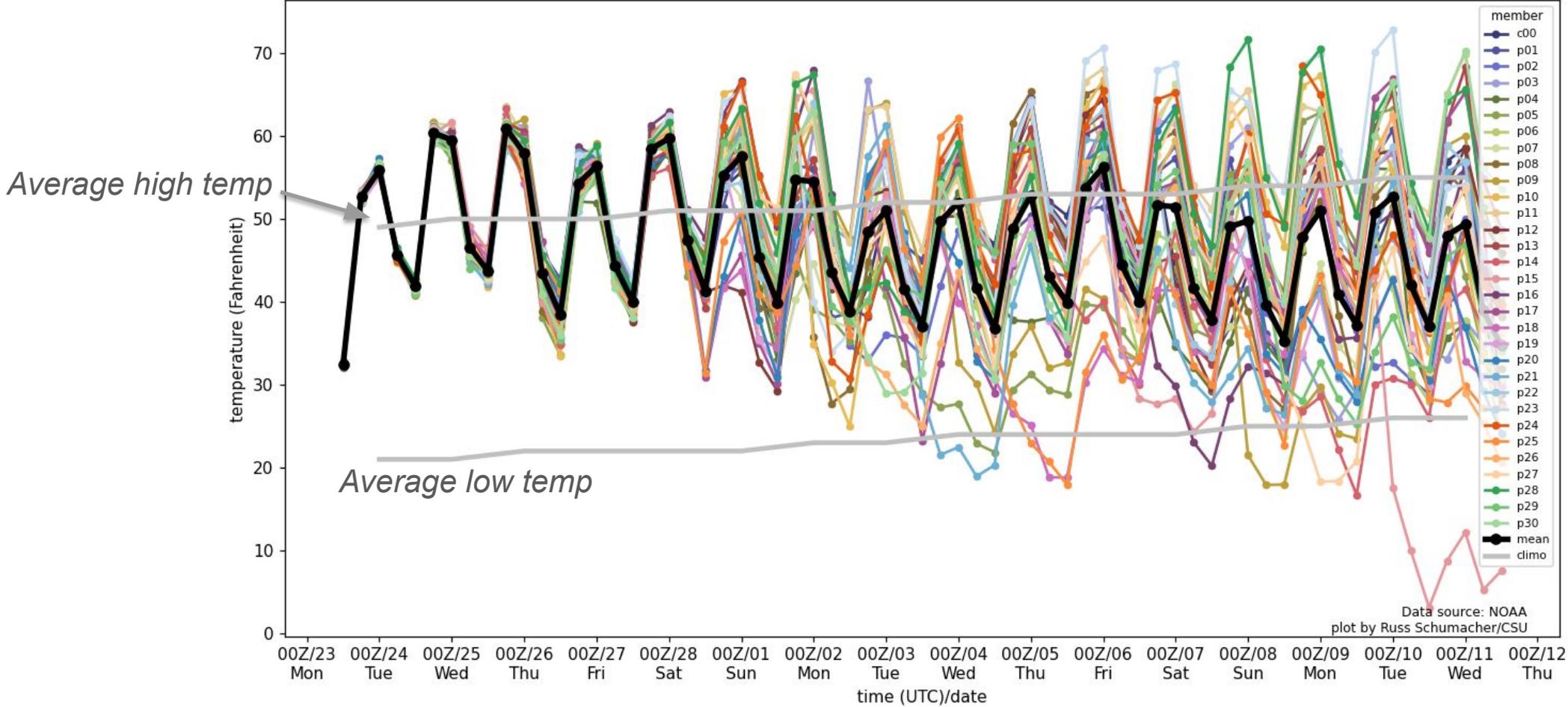
Quick-look maps on our drought page:

<https://climate.colostate.edu/drought/#outlook>



# Much warmer than average for the rest of the week, and likely beyond

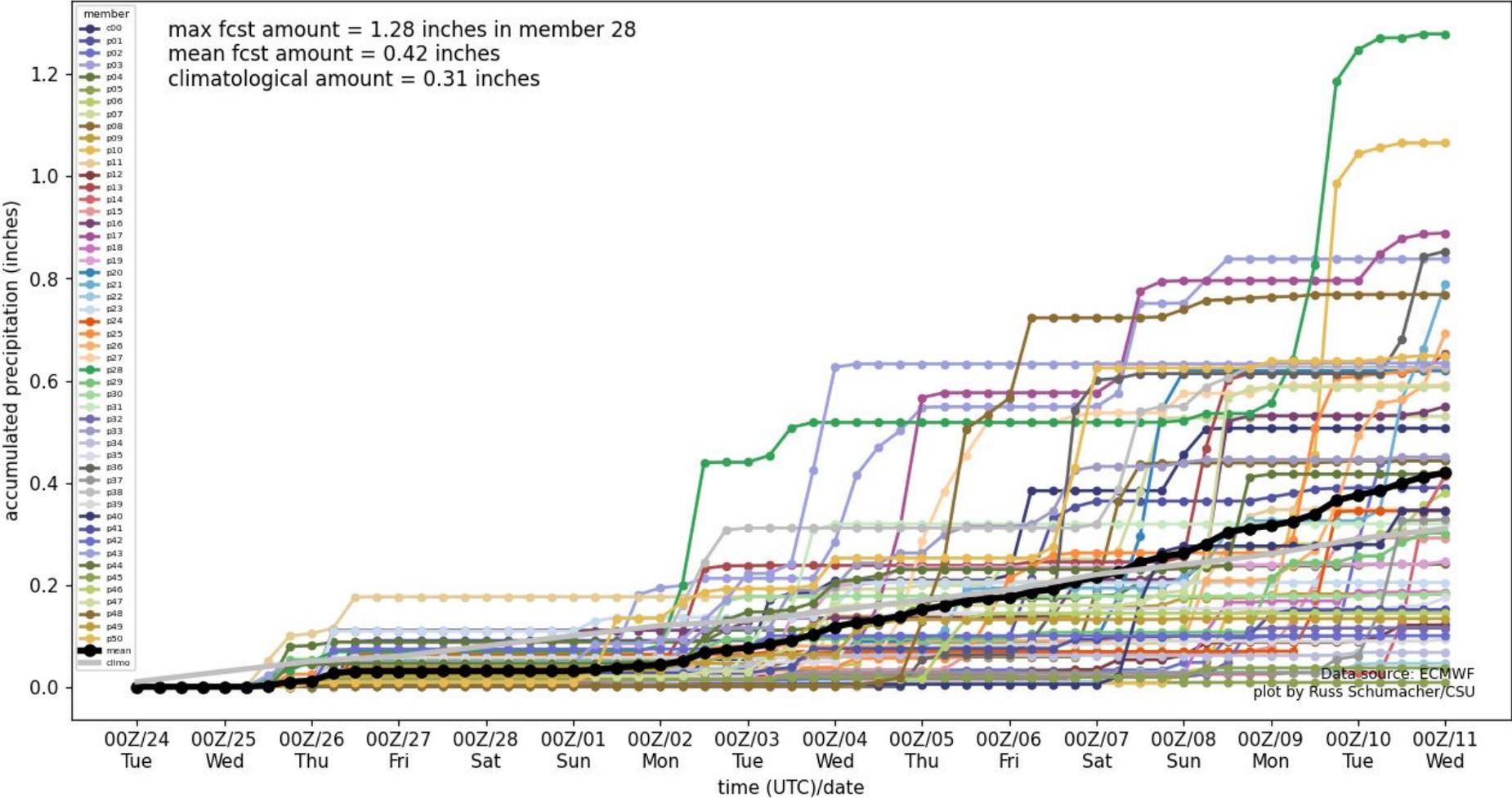
NCEP GEFS 2-m temperature at Denver  
init: Monday 2026-02-23 1200 UTC



# Precip chances on Eastern Plains start to increase in early March

ECMWF Ensemble Prediction System accumulated precipitation at Akron

init: Tuesday 2026-02-24 0000 UTC

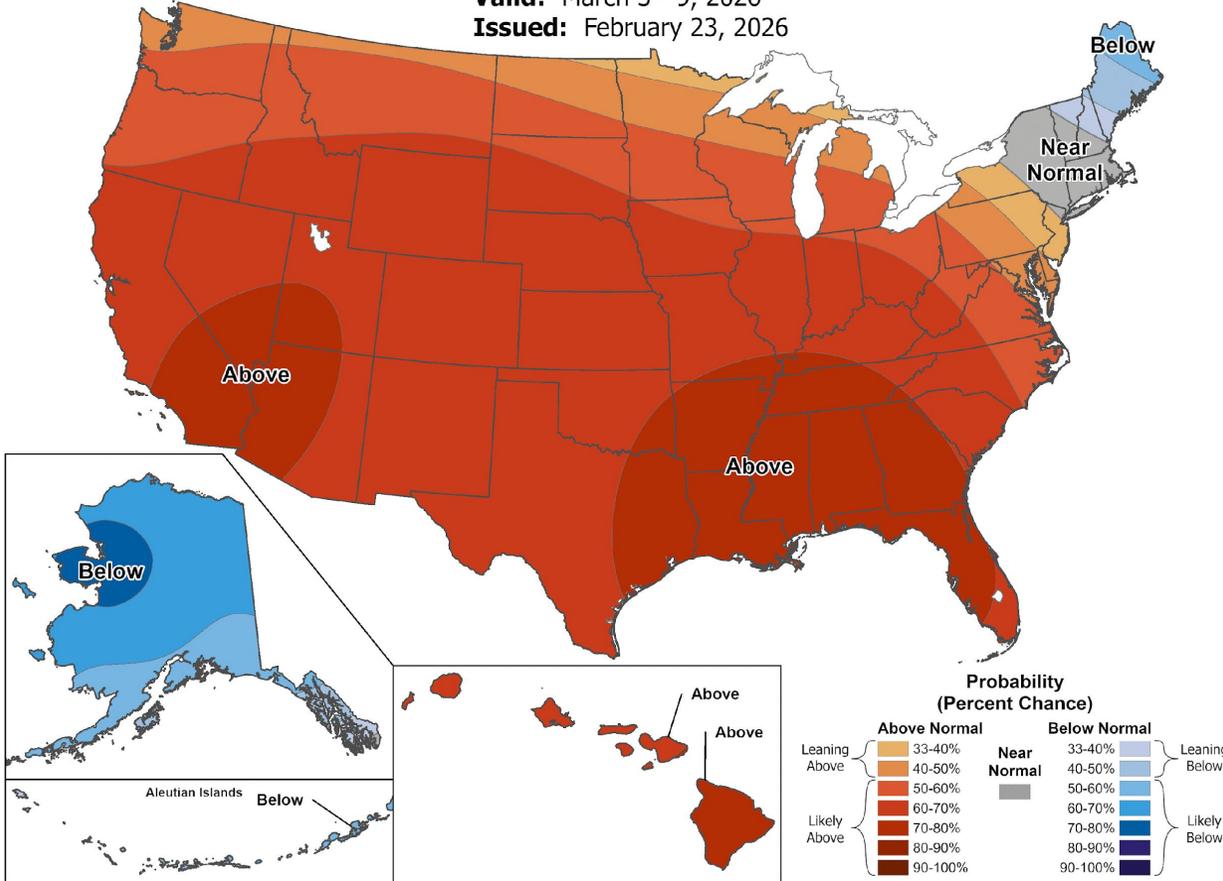


For the period from March 3-9, high confidence in above-average temperature, and the odds slightly tilted toward above-average precip



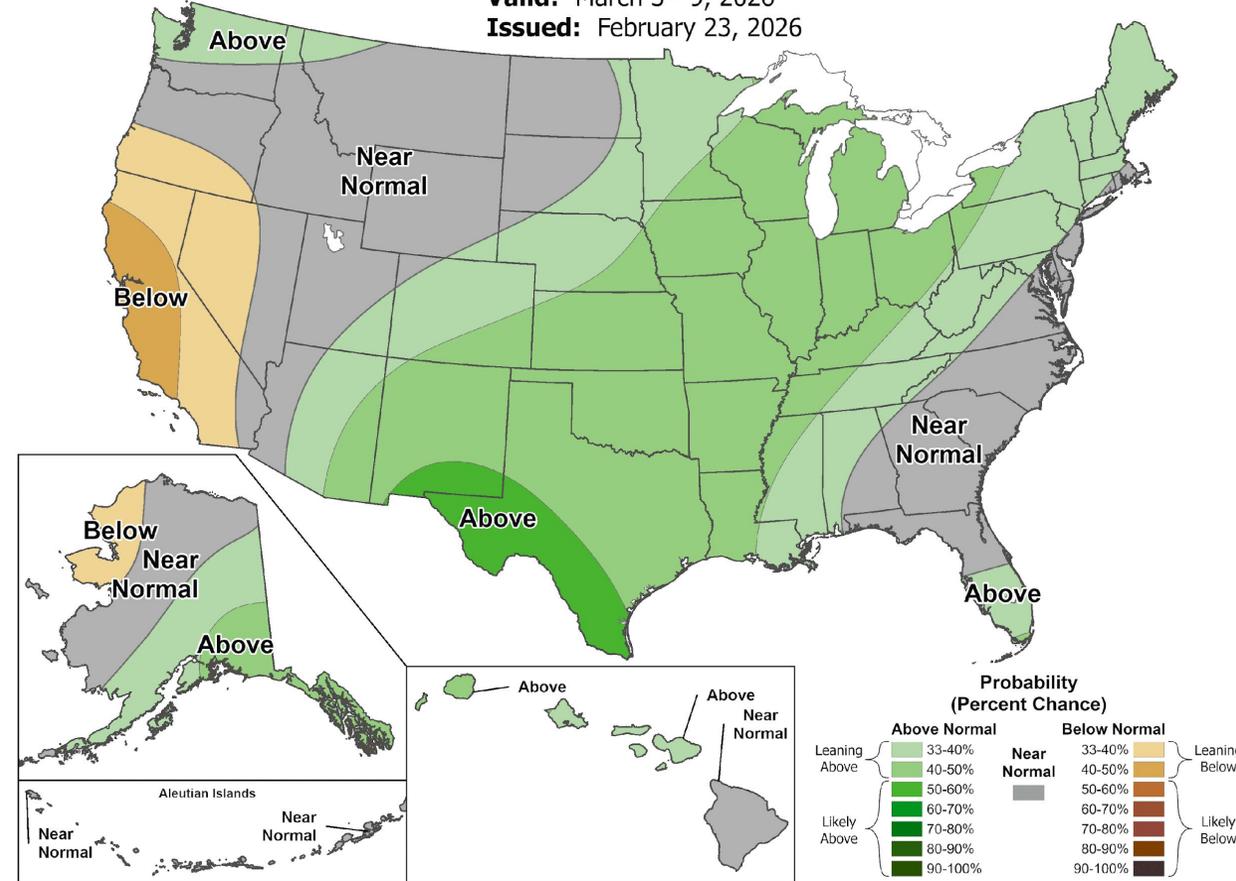
## 8-14 Day Temperature Outlook

**Valid:** March 3 - 9, 2026  
**Issued:** February 23, 2026



## 8-14 Day Precipitation Outlook

**Valid:** March 3 - 9, 2026  
**Issued:** February 23, 2026



# Will the next 15 days be above, below, or near average precipitation?

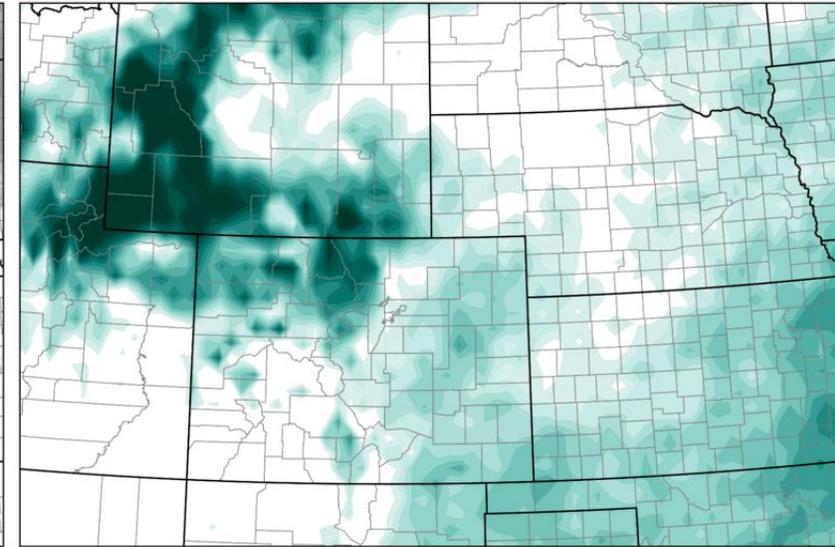
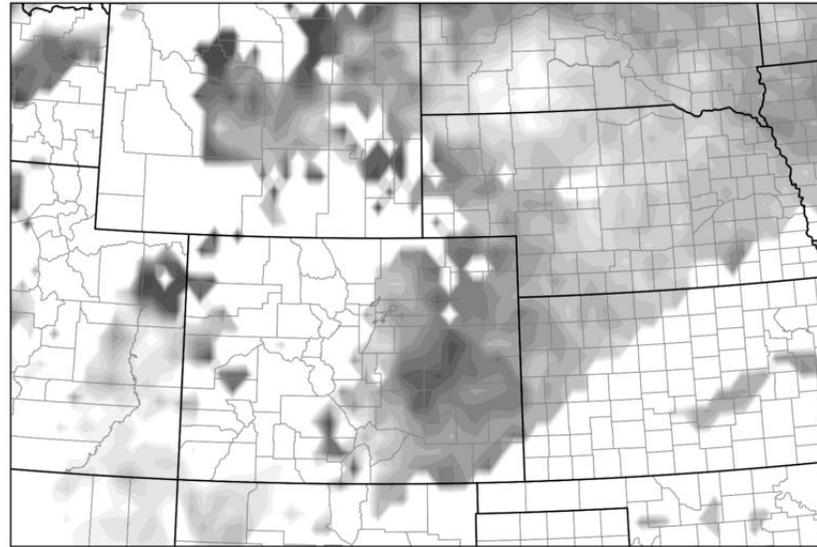
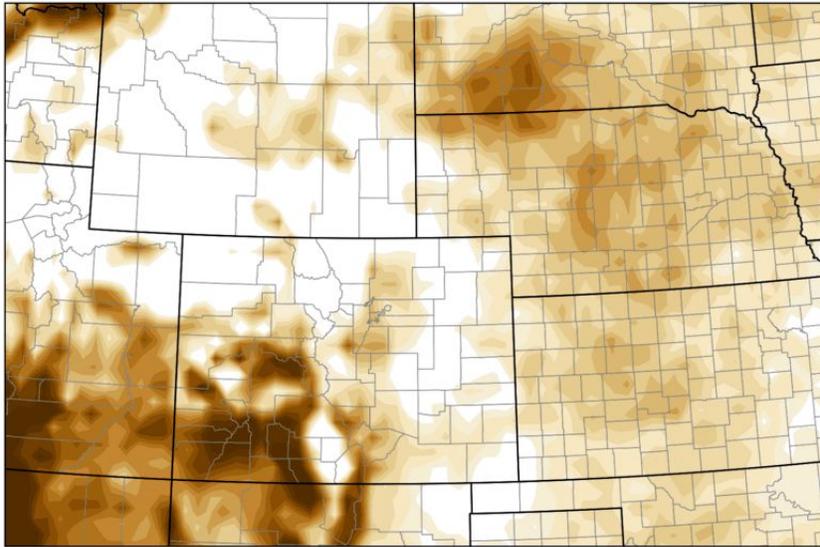
Out of 50 different model forecasts, how many are at least 0.1" above/below average, or within 0.1" of average

**ECMWF Ensemble Prediction System**  
accumulated precipitation departure from average through 15 days (baseline: PRISM 1991-2020 daily normals)  
percent of EPS members at least 0.1" below average

initialized 0000 UTC Tue 24 Feb 2026  
360-h forecast valid 0000 UTC Wed 11 Mar 2026

percent of EPS members within 0.1" of average

percent of EPS members at least 0.1" above average



30 40 50 60 70 80 90

30 40 50 60 70 80 90

30 40 50 60 70 80 90

data: ECMWF; plot: Russ Schumacher, Colorado State Uni

Percent of members below average

Percent of members within 0.1"

Percent of members above avg

<https://schumacher.atmos.colostate.edu/weather/ecmwf.php>



# La Niña is on its way out – possible that El Niño will emerge later this year

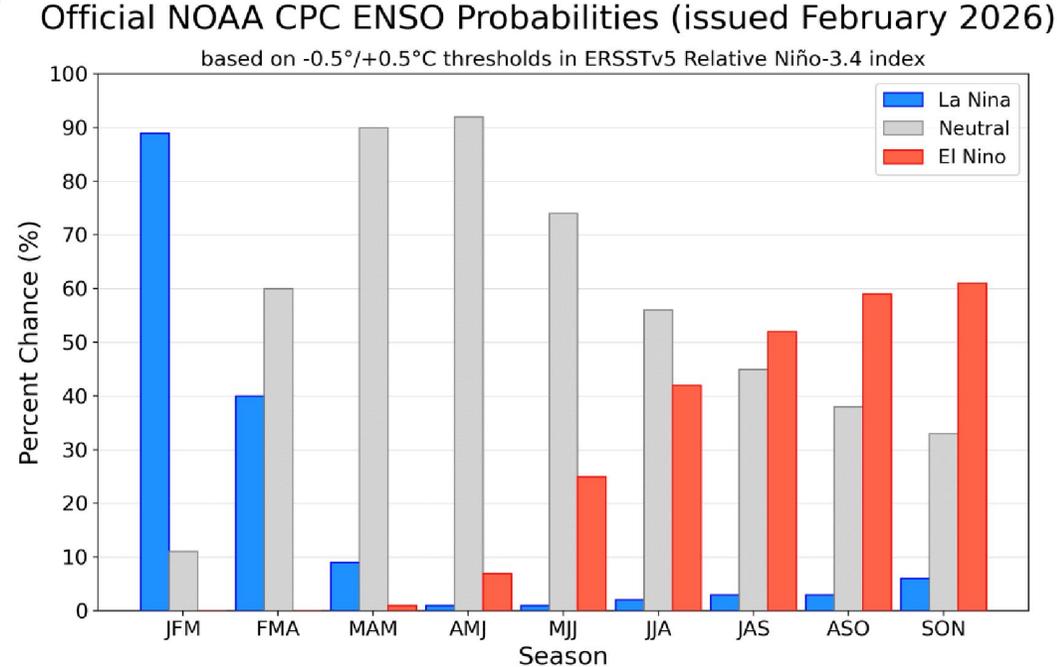


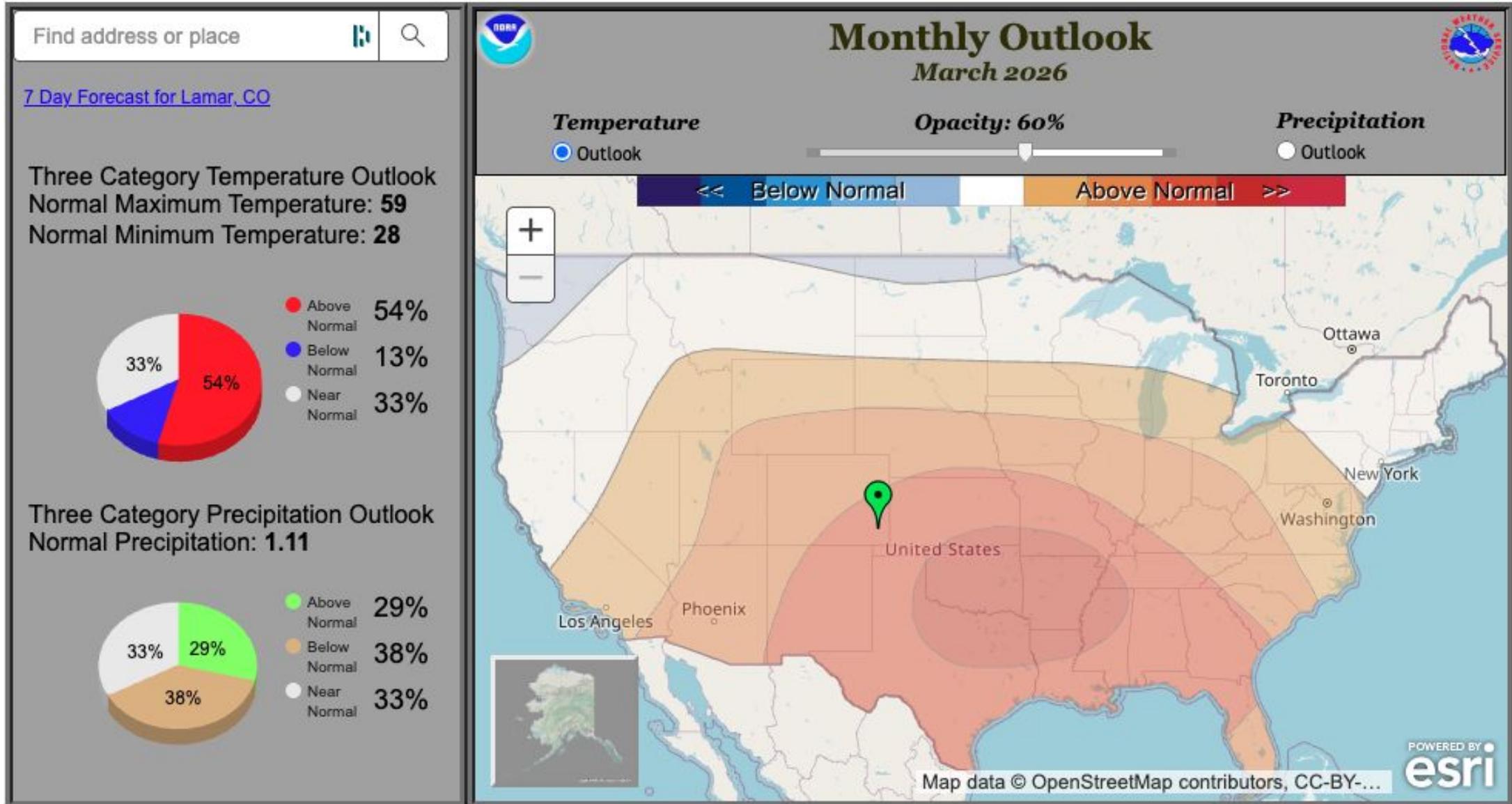
Figure 7. Official ENSO probabilities for the Niño 3.4 relative sea surface temperature index ( $5^{\circ}\text{N}$ - $5^{\circ}\text{S}$ ,  $120^{\circ}\text{W}$ - $170^{\circ}\text{W}$ ). Figure updated 12 February 2026.

“A transition from La Niña to ENSO-neutral is expected in February-April 2026 (60% chance), with ENSO-neutral likely persisting through the Northern Hemisphere summer (56% chance in June-August 2026)”

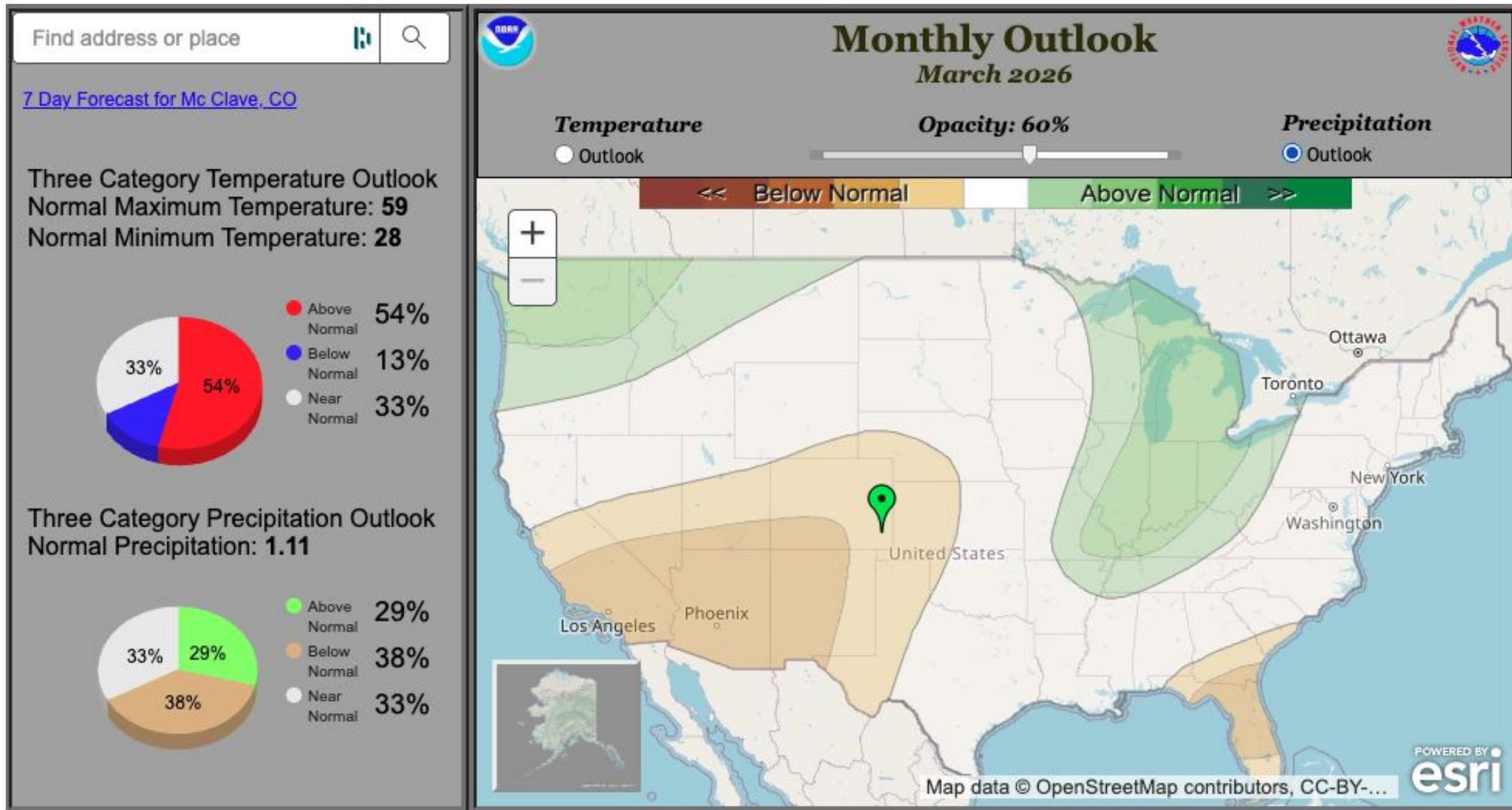
[https://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/products/analysis\\_monitoring/enso\\_advisory/ensodisc.shtml](https://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/products/analysis_monitoring/enso_advisory/ensodisc.shtml)



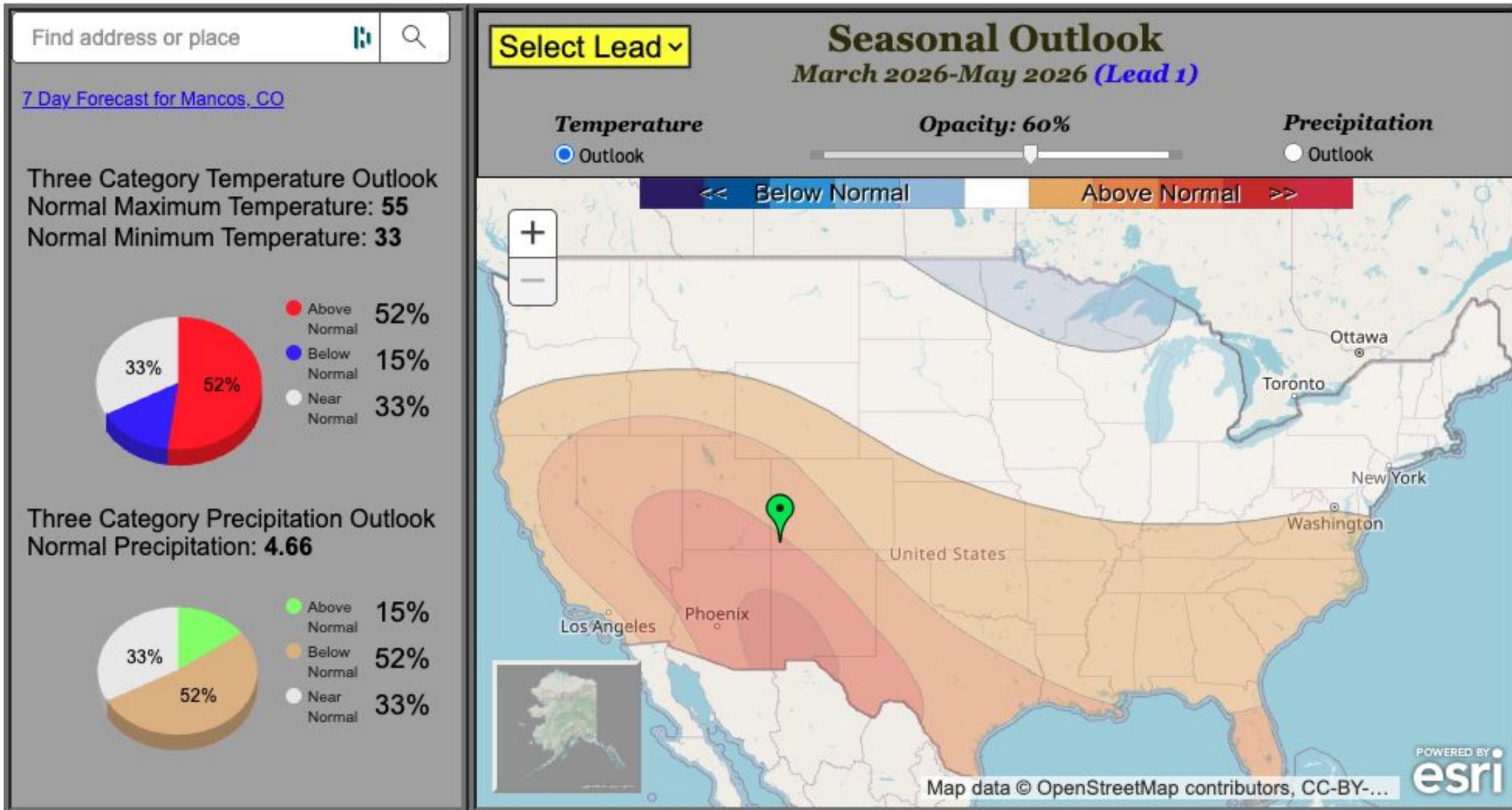
# NOAA's March temperature outlook



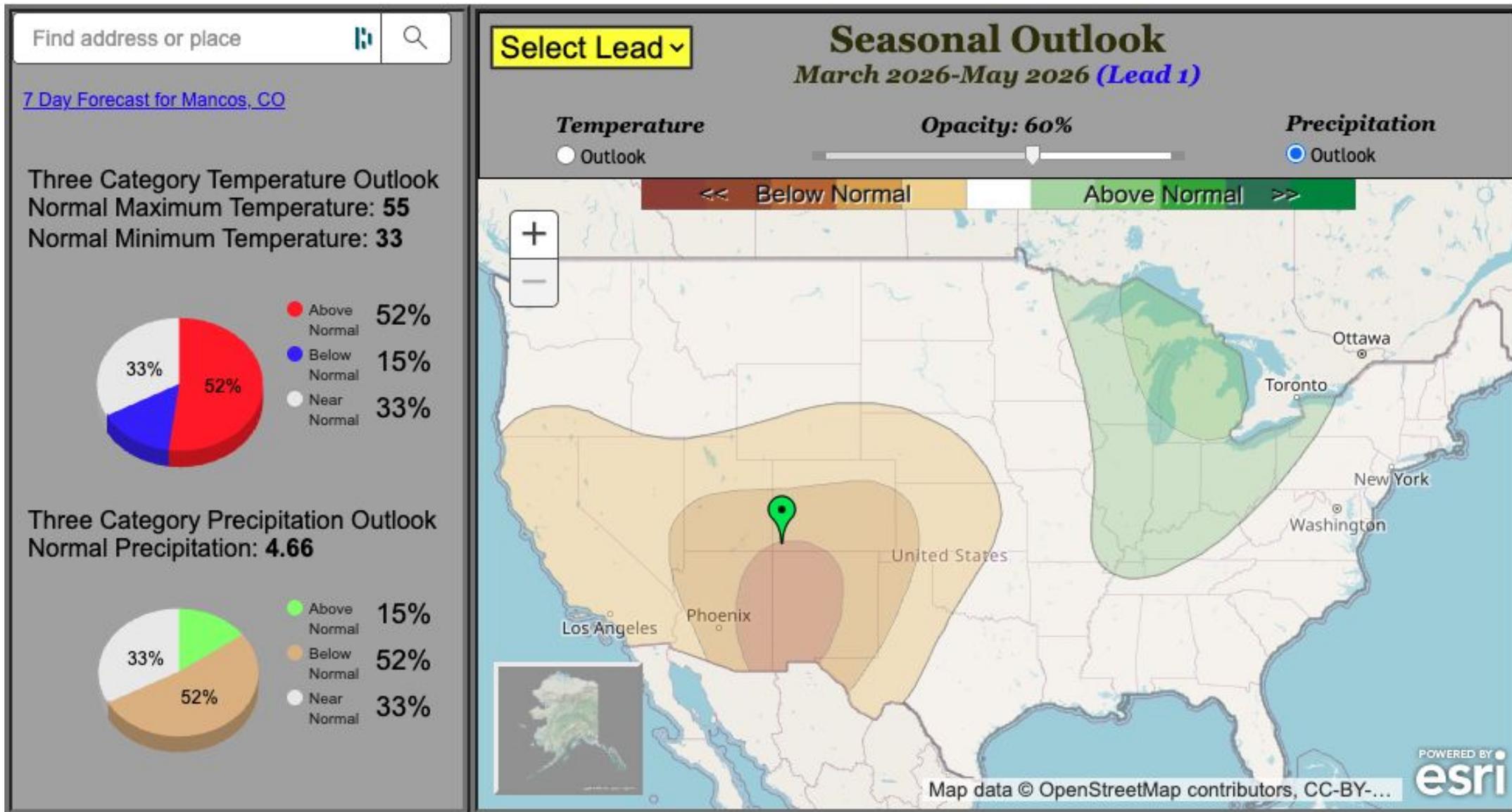
# NOAA's March precipitation outlook



# NOAA's spring (Mar-Apr-May) temperature outlook

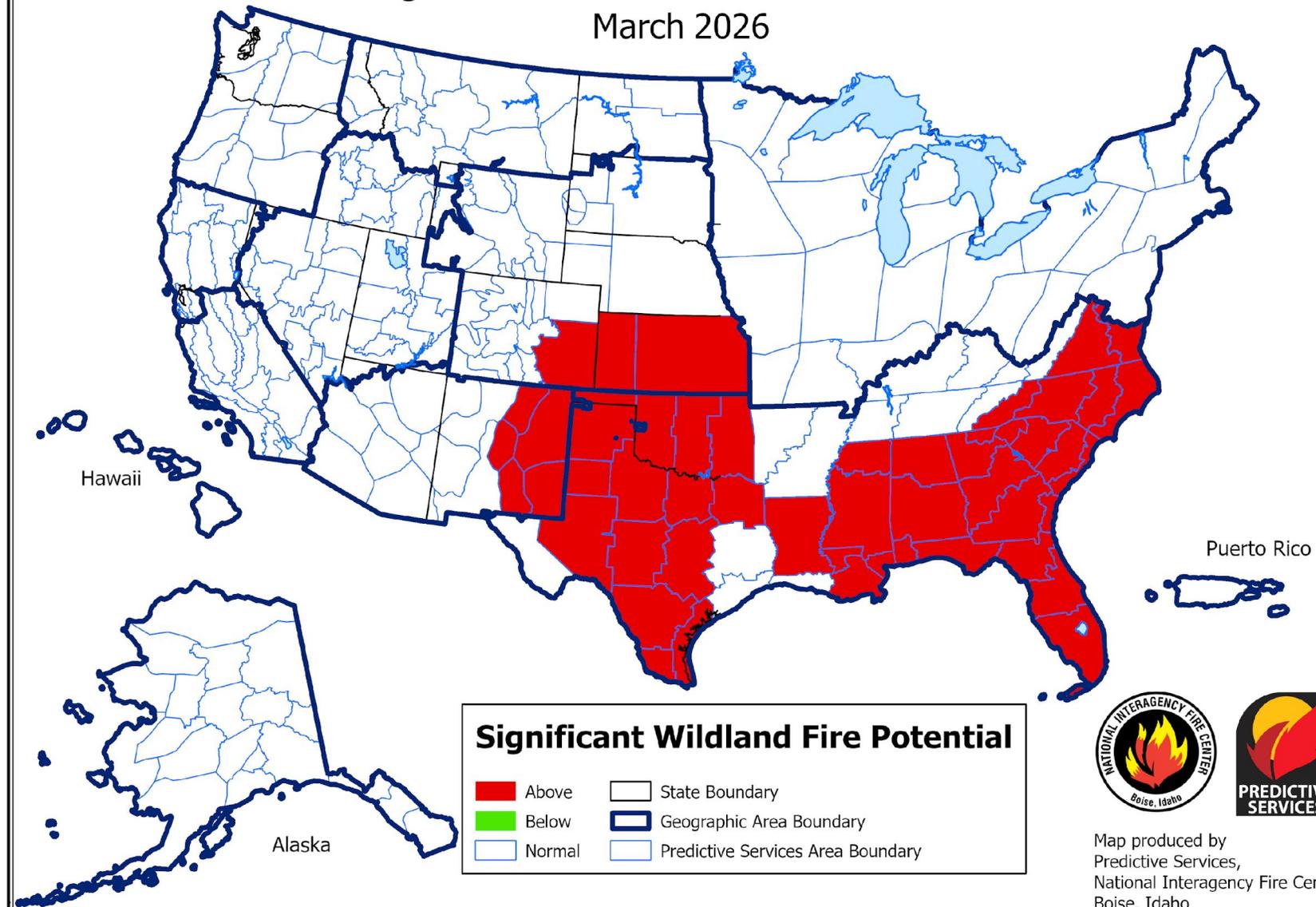


# NOAA's spring (Mar-Apr-May) precipitation outlook



# USDA outlooks for wildfire potential show above average risk in southeast Colorado during March

## Significant Wildland Fire Potential Outlook March 2026



Above normal significant wildland fire potential indicates a greater than usual likelihood that significant wildland fires will occur. Significant wildland fires should be expected at typical times and intervals during normal significant wildland fire potential conditions. Significant wildland fires are still possible but less likely than usual during forecasted below normal periods.



Map produced by  
Predictive Services,  
National Interagency Fire Center  
Boise, Idaho

Issued: February 2, 2026  
Next Issue: March 2, 2026

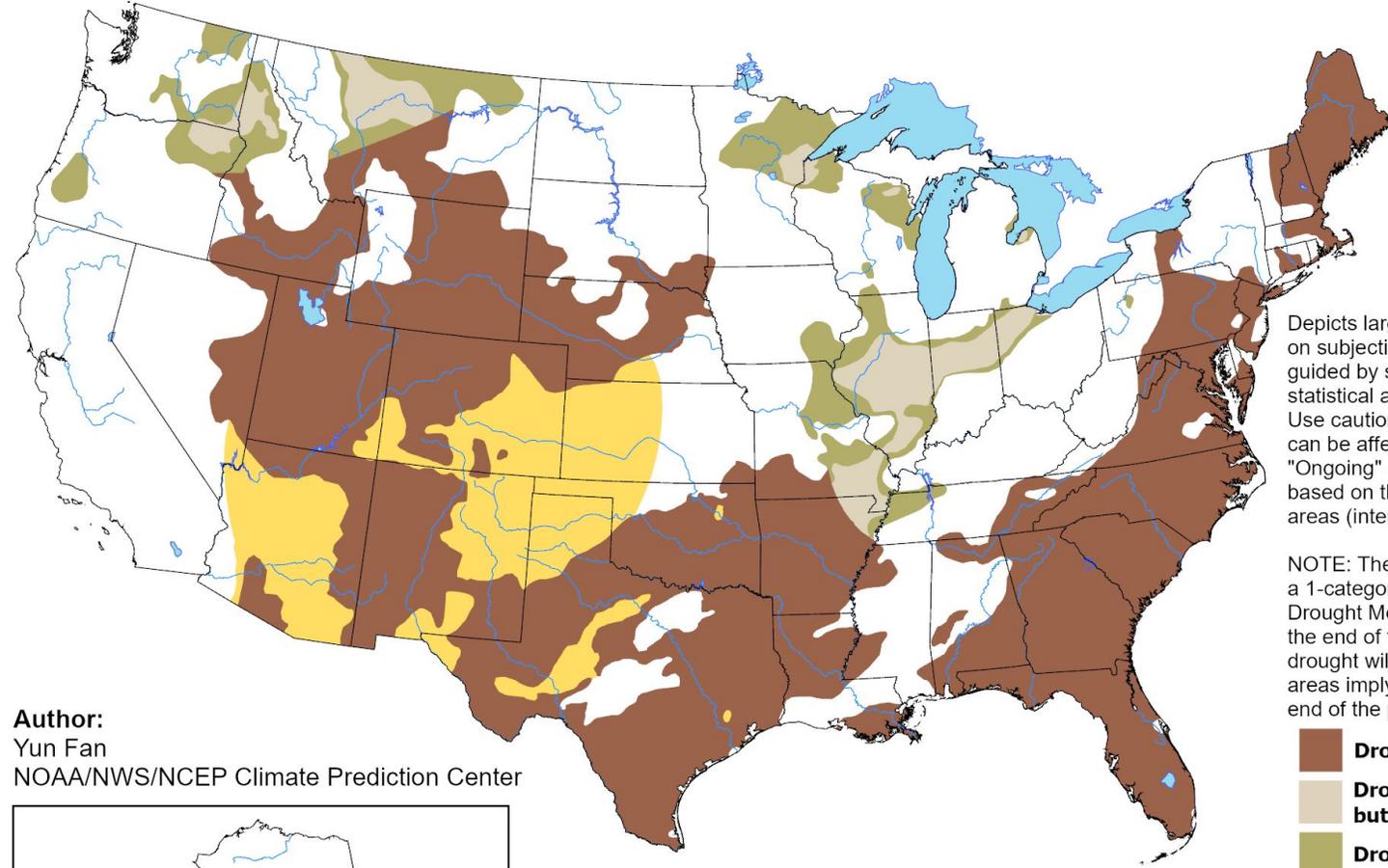


# U.S. Seasonal Drought Outlook

## Drought Tendency During the Valid Period

Valid for February 19 - May 31, 2026  
Released February 19, 2026

NOAA's drought outlook suggests that all the parts of Colorado not currently in drought will be by the end of spring

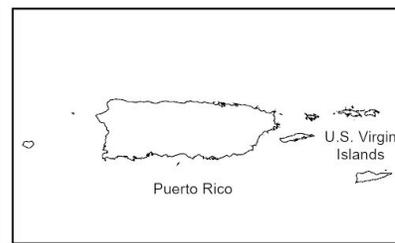
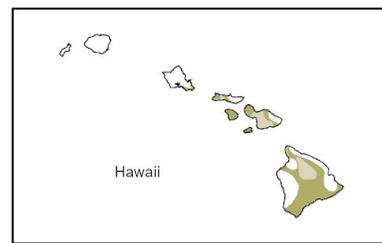
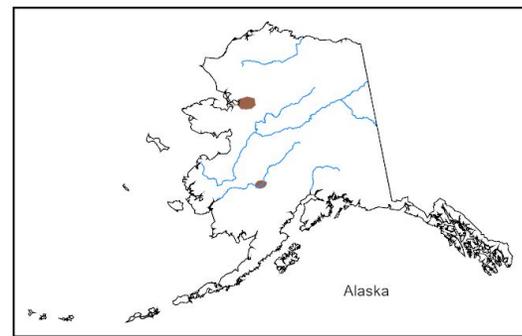


Depicts large-scale trends based on subjectively derived probabilities guided by short- and long-range statistical and dynamical forecasts. Use caution for applications that can be affected by short lived events. "Ongoing" drought areas are based on the U.S. Drought Monitor areas (intensities of D1 to D4).

NOTE: The tan areas imply at least a 1-category improvement in the Drought Monitor intensity levels by the end of the period, although drought will remain. The green areas imply drought removal by the end of the period (D0 or none).

- Drought persists**
- Drought remains, but improves**
- Drought removal likely**
- Drought development likely**
- No drought**

Author:  
Yun Fan  
NOAA/NWS/NCEP Climate Prediction Center



<https://go.usa.gov/3eZ73>



# Takeaways

- Water Year 2026 so far has been exceptionally warm across Colorado.
- Since the big rainfall and flood in October, precipitation has been below average in most parts of the state
- Last week's mountain snowstorm was helpful, but we're still way behind
- Another period of very warm weather is underway for much of the state, except for the northern mountains which will see a decent snowstorm this week
- La Niña is on its way out, with ENSO-neutral conditions expected through spring and early summer
- **Considering the warm and dry winter and an unfavorable outlook through spring, expect significant drought impacts, including reduced water supply and increased wildfire risk, in the coming months**





# Thank you!

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COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY