Weather and Climate Summary and Forecast
April 2026 Report

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April 3, 2026

Summary:

- March was substantially warmer than average[1] across the western US and most of the country. Early bud break for most regions, followed by frost risk for some later in the month and/or stalled growth for others.
- A strong ridge of high pressure also brought an extremely dry month to most of the west, except for the northern fringe of the ridge in Washington across to Montana, where atmospheric rivers kept the region wetter than average. The ridge also influenced the Kona storms in Hawaii, leading to major flooding across the state.
- The April 1 mountain basin snowpack numbers are dismal across the West, with totals generally below 25% of normal and many below 5%. Fortunately, the overall amount of rain was closer to average, but snow melt will be minimal this year for most basins, especially in the Colorado River drainage area.
- Cooler and wetter to start the month. Frost risk is elevated over the next 10 days or so, especially in the western and eastern valleys in the PNW.
- Mid to late month, another ridge of high pressure is likely to build over the North Pacific, with the forecast pointing to the month of April likely being warmer and drier over the western US.
- The April through June seasonal forecast is leaning toward the western US seeing warmer and drier conditions. Drought conditions in the western US are likely to persist or develop over the next few months, leading to a long fire season across the West. The forecast is bolstered by the rapid transition from La Niña to ENSO-neutral to possibly El Niño later this summer or early fall.

Past Month and Water Year:

A high pressure area dominated the western US in March, with most of the region experiencing one of the warmest March months on record (Figure 1). The Southwest, Great Basin, and Rockies experienced the warmest temperatures with departures 10-15°F above average for the month. The northern edge of the ridge of high pressure allowed more seasonal temperatures across most of Washington and Oregon in March, with most areas near average to up to 3 degrees above average. The influence of the ridge of high pressure extended eastward with temperatures running 5-10 degrees above normal for most every region except the northern Plains and northern Great Lakes (not shown).

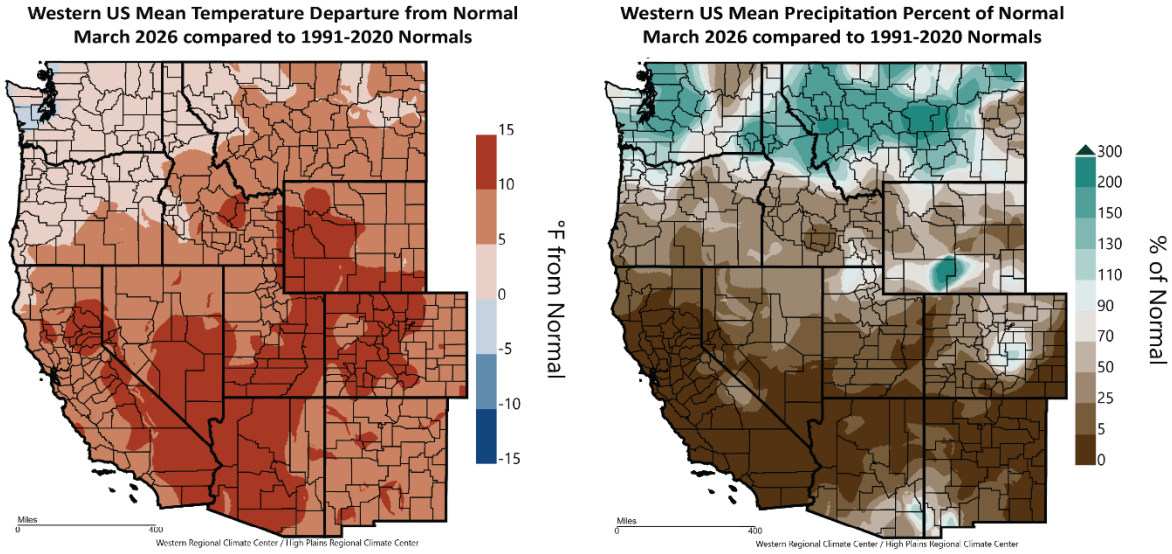

Figure 1 – Western US March 2026 temperature departure from normal (left) and percent of normal precipitation (right; images from Western Region Climate Center and High Plains Regional Climate Center).

[1] Note that unless stated otherwise, all references to normal or averages in this report are to the 1991-2020 climate normal for each weather/climate parameter. See this website for more information on climate normals.

The high pressure also influenced precipitation during the month, both on the dry side and wet side. The strength of the high pressure resulted in a month with essentially no precipitation for most of the west, with many locations seeing 0-25% of the normal precipitation for the month. But the position and strength of the high pressure created the conditions that drove the Kona storms in Hawaii northward, resulting in extreme flooding over the state (not shown). The flow path of the circulation around the ridge also brought atmospheric river precipitation events over the northern fringe of the ridge and into Washington, as well as portions of the northern Rockies and Plains. Many areas in the path of the atmospheric rivers received 150-200% of normal precipitation for March, while locations just southward received very little, if any (Figure 1). The effects of the ridge were also seen across the rest of the country, with most areas of the Plains, Gulf Coast states, and Southeast experiencing a dry month, while a strong storm track developed across the Ohio River valley, Great Lakes, and into New England, bringing 150-200% or more of average precipitation (not shown).

The 2025-2026 water year has ended with temperatures warmer than average over the entire western US (Figure 2). Temperatures over the winter were 1-5 degrees warmer than average for most of California and Oregon, and all of Washington, while from the Southwest into the Great Basin and throughout the Rockies and into the Plains temperatures were 5-10 degrees above average. Warmer than average temperatures during the water year also extended from the Rockies into the Plains and across the Mississippi River valley to portions of the Southeast and Midwest. The coolest region in the US during the water year was the Great Lakes across to New England and portions of the mid-Atlantic, where Arctic air had a strong influence on temperatures (not shown).

Western US precipitation for the water year ended up mixed, with some regions wetter than average and some drier than average (Figure 2). Wetter than average conditions occurred in some areas of California, portions of the southwest, and from Washington across the northern Rockies and into the Plains (Figure 2). Drier than average conditions occurred over most of Oregon, southwest Idaho, eastern Nevada, central Utah, and much of the central and southern Rockies, with 20-80% of normal precipitation. Figure 2 also shows that the eastern portions of Colorado and New Mexico experienced a drier than normal water year, which extends across the central Plains, the Mississippi River valley, and over most of the eastern third of the country, with water year to date precipitation running 10-60% of normal (not shown). Portions of the Great Lakes and New England were the only regions in the eastern US to see a wetter than average water year.

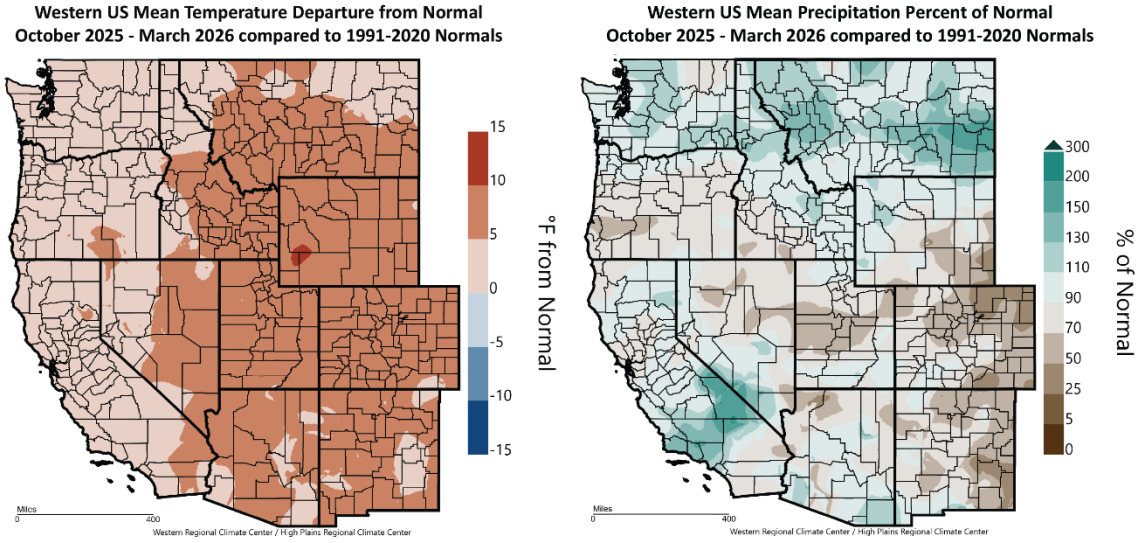

Figure 2 – Western US water year (October 2025 through March 2026) temperature departure from normal (left) and percent of normal precipitation (right; images from Western Region Climate Center and High Plains Regional Climate Center).

Snowpack and Drought Watch – April 1 snow water equivalent (SWE) maps have been released by the NRCS, showing the culmination of a very warm and dry winter, with record-breaking low percentages of SWE. The vast majority of the western US basins ended the winter with 0-40% of average SWE on April 1, with only portions of the northern Rockies and northern Cascades seeing above 50% (50-85%). This is a result of both the lower precipitation amounts and the extremely warm temperatures (Figure 2). The NRCS also has precipitation index maps for the winter, which show that most basins did much better with rain than snow, with most seeing 70-125% of normal rainfall.

With the extreme heat over much of the western two-thirds of the country in March (Figure 1), the overall drought footprint has risen to 80% of the US in drought, with nearly 35% now in the more extreme categories (Figure 3). The overall drought pattern in the west continues across the same regions but has expanded with the warm and dry March. Currently, over 86% of the western US is in some level of drought, with the more extreme categories rising to nearly 32%. Being on the northern edge of the month's ridge brought significant precipitation to Washington (Figure 1), ultimately lowering its overall drought area to nearly 65%, while the most extreme categories remained close to 2%. Oregon did not benefit as much as Washington from a wet March, with the state's drought footprint rising to just over 86%, with the extreme drought categories (severe, extreme, and exceptional) jumping to 21%. Montana remained dry, with its overall drought footprint rising to just under 94% of the state in some level of drought, with the extreme categories increasing to just over 21% of the state. Idaho's drought footprint increased to nearly 100% of the state now in some level of drought, with the more extreme categories of drought jumping to just over 34%. Last month saw California with no drought category in the state, but the warm and dry March has moved 38% of the state into the abnormally dry category (Figure 3, left panel).

Heading into summer, the seasonal drought outlook has a similar spatial pattern of the likelihood of drought remaining in the western US, but the very warm and dry March has expanded the area (Figure 3; right panel). The vast majority of the western US is forecast to either see drought conditions persist or develop over the next three months. The drought area also expanded from the Rockies into the Plains, while drought improvement or removal is now likely across portions of Texas, the upper Mississippi River valley, and along the mid-Atlantic, Southeast, and Florida.

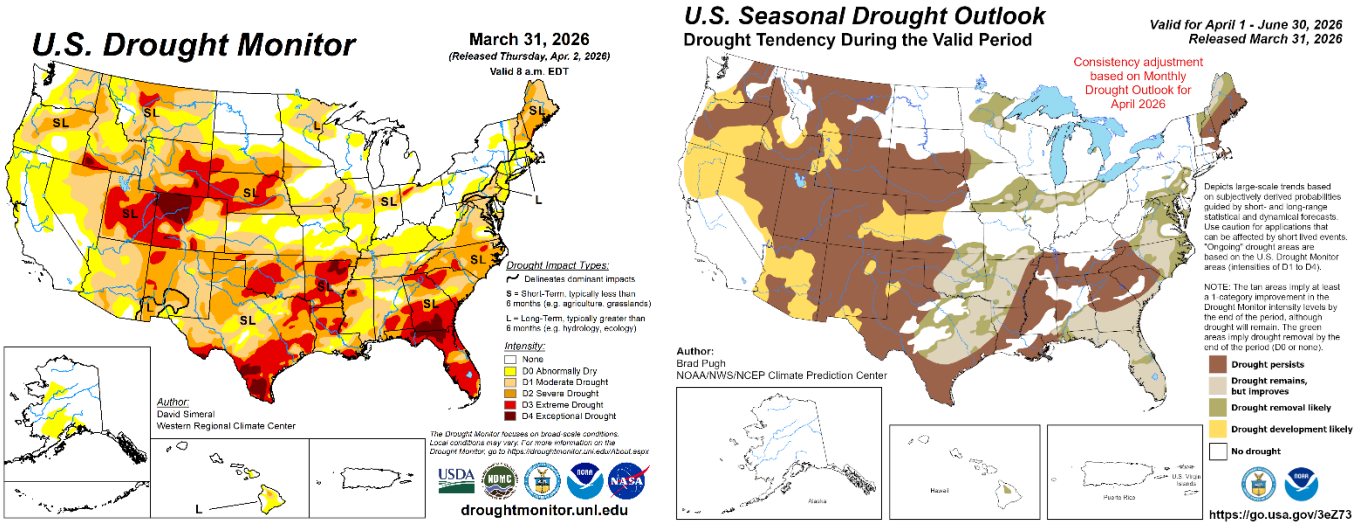

Figure 3 – Current US Drought Monitor and seasonal drought outlook.

ENSO Watch – Rapid changes in equatorial Pacific region sea surface temperatures (SSTs) continue with declining La Niña conditions (warming surface waters) and movement toward ENSO-neutral. The Climate Prediction Center currently has the ENSO alert system in a La Niña Advisory / El Niño Watch. Very little below average SSTs remain in the central-eastern equatorial Pacific (Figure 4), with warming offshore of South America becoming more and more evident. The current state of other key oceanic and atmospheric variables remains consistent with declining La Niña conditions. Models continue to indicate a likely gradual warming trend over the next few months, with the Climate Prediction Center forecasting a transition from La Niña to ENSO-neutral over the next month, with ENSO-neutral favored through May-July 2026 (55% chance). In June-August 2026, El Niño is likely to emerge (62% chance) and persist through at least the end of 2026.

North Pacific Watch – The pattern in SSTs in the North Pacific remains similar to previous months, with cooler surface temperatures in the Gulf of Alaska and warmer temperatures out over the central North Pacific and along the west coast (Figure 4). The conditions continue to exhibit the negative or cool phase of the Pacific Decadal Oscillation (PDO), which has been in place since late 2019. However, the last few months have seen the magnitude of the negative values decline closer to neutral. Forecasters are pointing to the likelihood of the North Pacific warming even more than it is currently.

This warming would enhance the seasonal forecast, which is tilting the odds to warmer and drier conditions in most of the western US (as shown in Figure 5 and described in the 90-day forecast below).

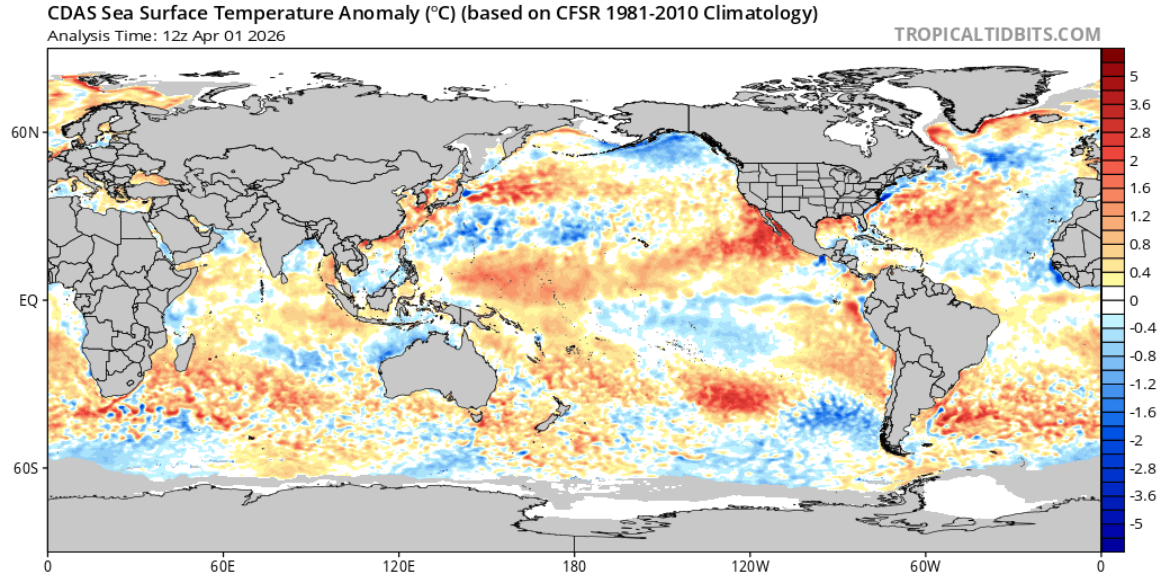

Figure 4 – Global sea surface temperatures (°C) for the period ending April 1, 2026 (image from Tropicaltibits.com).

Forecast Periods:

Next 5 Days: The month has started cool and wet as the persistent high pressure of March finally moved out. Precipitation has occurred from the Bay Area northward over most of the PNW. The system will move out quickly, but usher in a couple of nights of potentially frosty to freezing temperatures. Afterwards, a nice warm up occurs for most of the west as high pressure builds back in over the Gulf of Alaska and the western US.

6-10 Day (valid April 7-11): High pressure along the west coast provides warmer and drier conditions until April 9-10, when a system off the Pacific will likely bring the next best chance of rain to most of the west coast. Overall, temperatures in the west are likely to remain above average during this period; however, another night of frost risk is likely after the frontal system passes through next week. Precipitation amounts are forecast to be near normal or below normal compared to average conditions. The middle of the US warms up and turns wetter than average, while the rest of the Eastern US is likely to see near normal temperatures and drier than average conditions.

8-14 Day (valid April 9-15): Once the system on April 9 moves through the region, conditions return to being dominated by high pressure. However, clear skies will likely bring frost risk to western valleys, especially in Oregon and Washington. After the 11th, mild to warm conditions and little to no precipitation is likely to dominate the western US through mid-month. The eastern US warms to above average temperatures mid-month, while the middle of the country is forecast to stay wet during this period, while the eastern coast is forecast to see below average precipitation.

30 Day (valid April 1-30): The overall April forecast is pointing to most of the US seeing above average temperatures for the month (Figure 5). The warmest conditions are likely to be seen in the Great Basin, Four Corners region, and Florida. The northern tier of states, from the PNW across to the Great Lakes, have equal chances of slightly below to slightly above temperatures for the month. As high pressure builds in over the west, precipitation during the month is forecast to be below average for most of the region. A very common spring storm track over the middle of the country is forecast to bring a wet April to the Mississippi River valley and the Great Lakes, while Florida is forecast to see a dry month (Figure 5).

90 Day (valid April-May-June): The seasonal temperature outlook points to warmer than average conditions likely over the vast majority of the US (Figure 5). The warmest conditions are most likely in the Great Basin, Four Corners, and Southeast. The 90-day precipitation forecast through to June points to drier than average conditions likely across the

central Rockies to the PNW, while the east coast states are forecast to see a wetter than average period. The middle of the country has equal chances for below to above average precipitation (Figure 5).

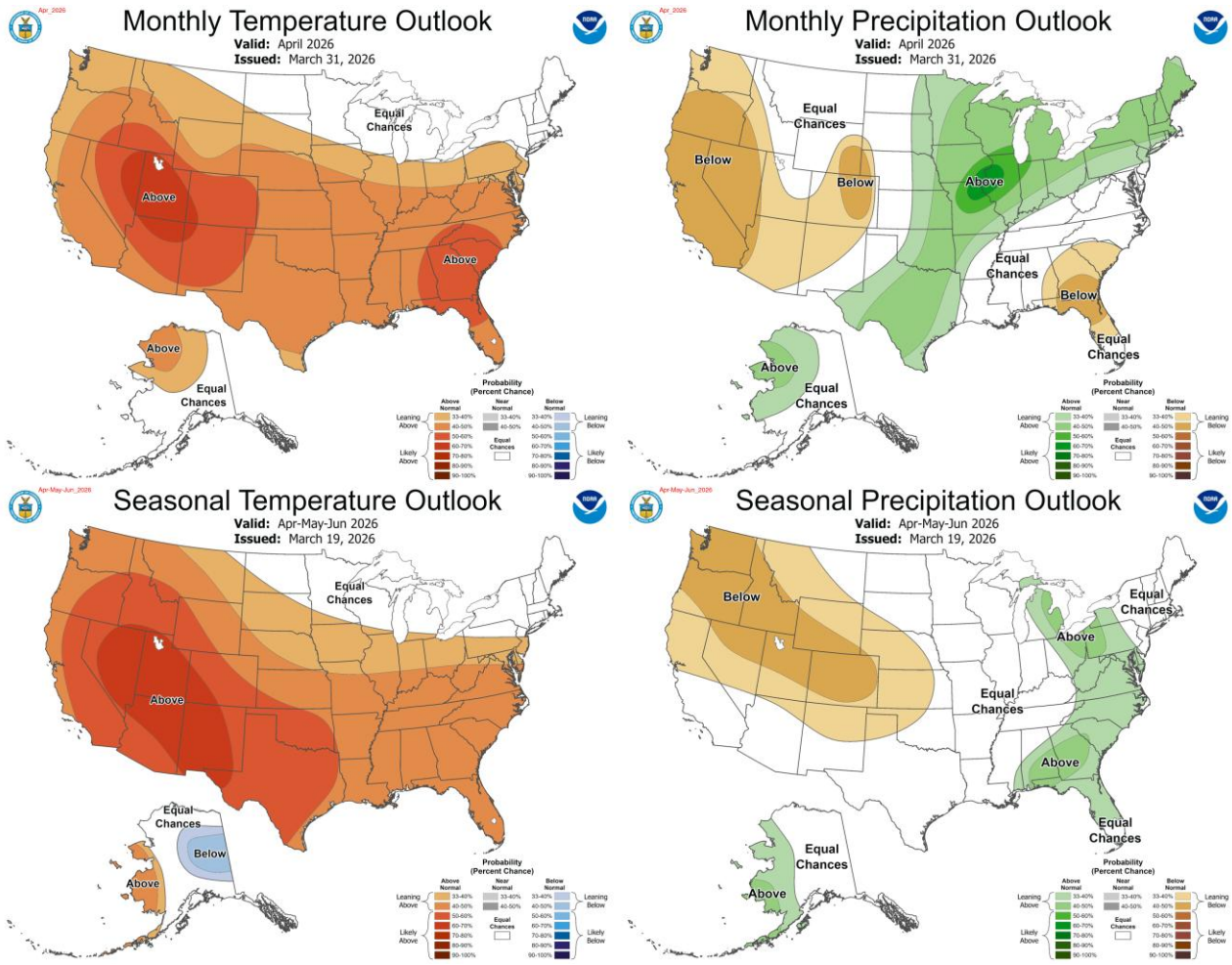

Figure 5 – Temperature (left panel) and precipitation (right panel) outlooks for the month of April (top panel) and April, May, and June (bottom panel) (Climate Prediction Center, climate.gov).

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