MONTHLY FIRE WEATHER / FIRE DANGER OUTLOOK

May 2012

1. **REPORTING UNIT**: **Northern California Geographic Area**
2. **DATE**: **April 30th, 2012**
3. **POTENTIAL FOR SERIOUS/CRITICAL FIRE PROBLEMS:**

THIS COMING MONTH	BELOW NORMAL		NORMAL	X	ABOVE NORMAL	
THIS SEASON	BELOW NORMAL		NORMAL	X	ABOVE NORMAL	X

4. **FIRE WEATHER OUTLOOK**

Review of April 2012 Weather: April began cool and wet…a continuation of the stormy March pattern. Most of April's precipitation fell in the 1st half of the month with precipitation events being lighter and less frequent during the 2nd half of the month. The only stretch of significant warmth was a three day stretch from the 20th-22nd with daytime temperatures 15-20 degrees above normal, reaching 90 degrees across parts of the Northern Sacramento Valley. However this warm/dry spell was quickly followed by significant cooling and a few more days of light to moderate precipitation. Snowpack continued to increase during the 1st half of the month with the Cascades and Siskiyou snowpack near or even slightly above normal. However, a sharp snowpack gradient exists along the Feather River drainage with much of the Sierra snowpack closer to 50% of normal. Precipitation was 100-250% of normal for most areas **(Fig 1)** except far eastern areas. Temperatures were near normal (+2 deg to -2 deg of normal) for most of the region, except 2-4 deg. above normal in the northeast (**Fig 2**).

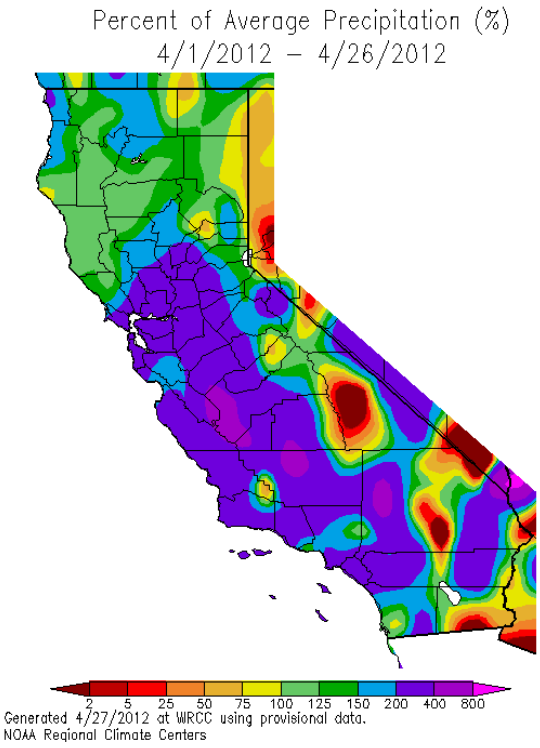


Fig. 1 Precipitation POA April. 1-26

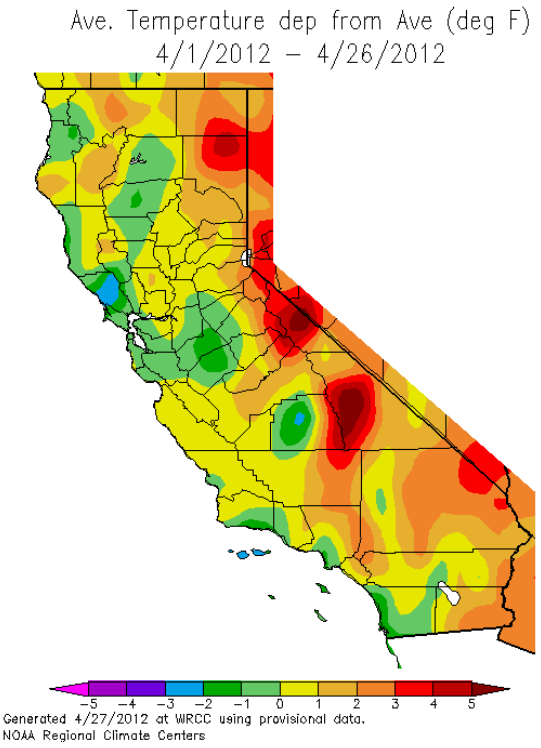


Fig. 2 Temperature DFA April. 1-26

FORECAST DISCUSSION FOR MAY 2012:

The latest computer models indicate that west to east zonal/onshore flow should be dominant thru mid-May. No prolonged periods of hot/dry weather are expected, with the Eastern Pacific high expected to remain well offshore. On the other hand, there are no larger scale low pressure systems seen on the models either. This would minimize the chances of widespread precipitation events, with any precipitation primarily coming from weak disturbances in the westerly flow every few days that could touch off scattered showers. Overall this type of pattern would lead to below normal temperatures but also near to below normal precipitation. Precipitation coverage in May tends to become more showery and scattered in areal coverage. There is much uncertainty in the latter part of the month, due mainly to the uncertainty of whether the weakening La Nina conditions will continue, or whether a quick return to El Nino begins to develop. The former scenario would likely continue the pattern of below normal precipitation, while a return to El Nino could redevelop a more cool, showery pattern like that in early April. A steady decrease in snow coverage across the mountains is expected, due to the lower density of the relatively fresh snow cover which tends to melt faster than snowpack which builds up earlier in the winter months. Overall, we are expecting a slightly drier than normal month with cooler than normal temperatures. Overall, ***Normal (minimal) Large Fire Potential*** is expected.

5. FUELS

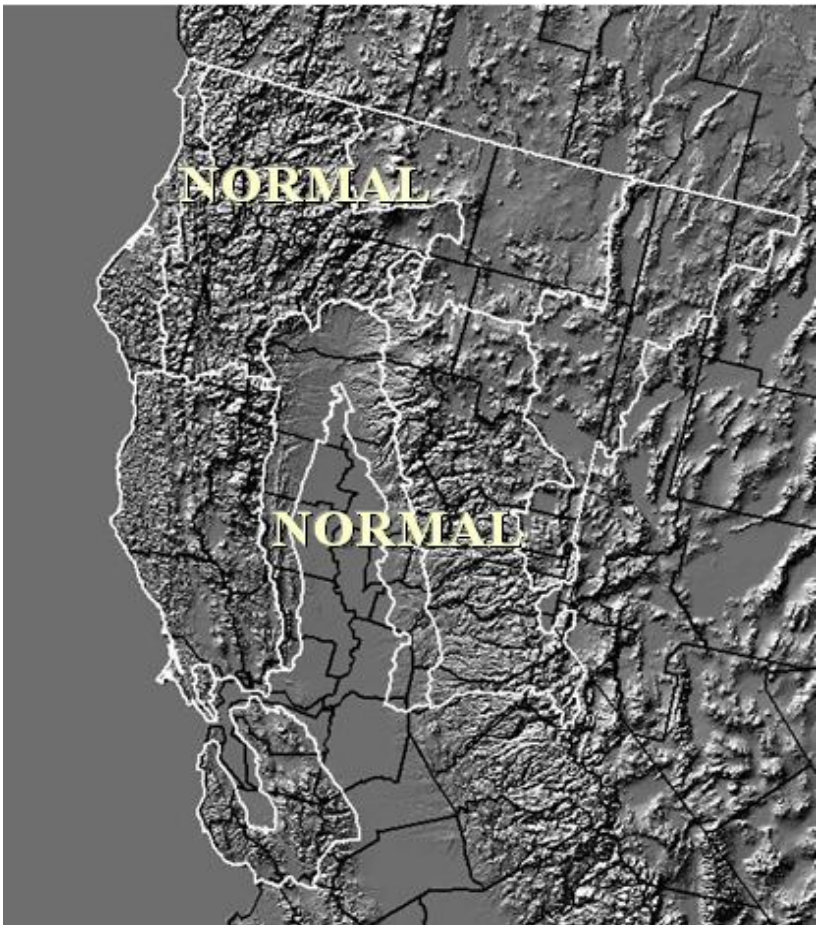
Live Woody Fuel Moisture:	**56% to 207%**
100-Hour Dead Fuel Moisture:	**14% to 33%**
1000-Hour Dead Fuel Moisture:	**18% to 46%**
ACTUAL OCCURRENCE /ACRES BURNED YEAR TO DATE:	**Fires and Acres**
	386 618

WRITTEN FORECAST SUMMARY FOR MAY 2012:

Geographic Area	**Northern California**
Precipitation Outlook	**Near to Slightly Below Normal:** Ranging from 65**% to 100% of Normal.**
Temperature Outlook	**Cooler than Normal:** Departures ranging from **-3.0 F** to **+0.5º F.** .
Fuels and Fire Danger Concerns	Fuels conditions have moderated to normal to below-normal seasonal averages; however, many areas of North Ops still have not recovered fully from short-term drought conditions. The fuels in the eastern half of the Area have been the most affected by the dry conditions, with standing residual grass still present from last year. New grass growth is occurring across Northern California, and lower elevations will see curing during any north to east winds. Rx projects will see windows of opportunity increasing during periods of lower humidities in the first part of May, but steady greenup of brush will hamper any brush removal objectives. Increased moisture content in tree cambium could cause greater mortality when exposed to sustained fire. At higher elevations, much of the fuels that would normally be covered in snow are now exposed, and will continue to dry throughout the month. Large fire potential in Northern California is expected to be Normal during May due to recent precipitation. Hawai'i fuel conditions continue to moderate, except for the western half of the Big Island, which remains at Above Normal large fire potential.
Prescribed fire implications	Steady drying of fuels is expected…without any severe periods of heat or dryness. The decreased frequency of widespread precipitation events should allow for more favorable burning conditions across many areas. Snow cover should retreat back above the 6000 ft level in most areas by mid-May. Main wind flow should be more S to W with any NE/offshore wind events being relatively few and far between.
Miscellaneous	*Weather forecast confidence: Precipitation: **55%**. Temperatures: **60%*** **Resources** are adequate for conditions

For additional input regarding forecasted May 2012 weather, see the NWS 30- and 90-day temp and precipitation maps for the month. The recently updated forecasts can be found at this URL:
http://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/products/predictions/multi_season/13_seasonal_outlooks/color/page2.gif

MAY 2012
Northern California Monthly Outlook



Hawaii Monthly Outlook – MAY 2012

Most of the Hawaiian Islands had below normal precipitation last month. Moderate drought conditions continue across some of the drier leeward pockets north of the Big Island. Still, because of the rain of the past few months we expect ***Normal Fire Potential*** across most areas, except for ***Above Normal*** Fire Potential across the most extreme drought stricken areas of the Big Island. With the end of the traditional "wet season" there is the possibility of expanding drought and fire potential in the coming months.