Predictive Services Newsletter

Serving Central and Southern California

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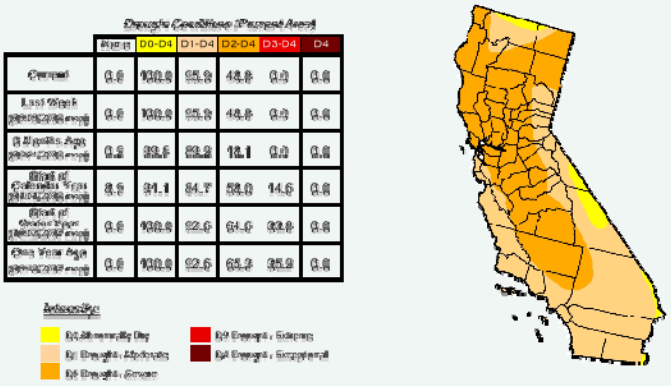
Changing Seasons

As the 2008 fire season comes to a close and the winter season approaches, the focus now turns toward a growing concern about the ongoing drought situation across the state. Over the last decade, rainfall amounts across southern and central California have been below normal seven out of the ten years with the all-time record dry year occurring two years ago. This has resulted in a prolonged drought across much of the state with only temporary relief during the winter months. Consequently, fuels have been exceeding record dry levels each year, breaking new records that had been set from the previous year. Should this trend persist, there will continue to be brush dieback and drought stressed fuels over a more widespread area.



Last year, sea surface temperatures over the equatorial Pacific region cooled to produce a strong La Niña event which led to below normal rainfall over the southern two thirds of California. More significantly, most of the substantial winter precipitation ended by mid February which led to a very dry spring. Since then, the sea surface temperatures have warmed to where conditions are considered to be neutral. This condition is likely to last through the upcoming winter and spring months which means that there is really nothing that would suggest anything other than a normal winter in terms of temperature and precipitation, at least with regard to *this* type of climate signature. However, there are some other long range features that might suggest a drier than normal winter and therefore our prediction for rainfall this year is expected to range from between 80 to 110 percent of normal across the southern and central part of the state. Should this prediction verify, then the region will experience a temporary break in the current dry situation with little relief in the long term drought.

Many questions have been raised as to whether or not this current dry spell signifies a climate pattern change. Statistically there have been other periods of four to five consecutive years in which annual precipitation amounts have been below normal. Reviewing the climatological data from Riverside shows that the period between 1959 and 1962 was quite dry, with another very dry period between 1984 and 1990. Both of these times were followed by several years of above normal rainfall. And since these patterns tend to be cyclical, there is a good chance that the area will encounter appreciable (continued on Page 2)

Visit our GACC webpage at: http://gacc.nifc.gov/oscc/index.htm

About this newsletter

This Newsletter is designed to inform the fire community about what's new with the Predictive Services program across southern and central California. Updates on new products and services will be discussed as well as Predictive Services' point of view on the current fire season. We hope to issue this newsletter several times a year, especially as we transition in and out of fire season. We welcome your feedback on how we can better serve you in the future, so please send any comments to:

Tom.Rolinski@ca.blm.gov

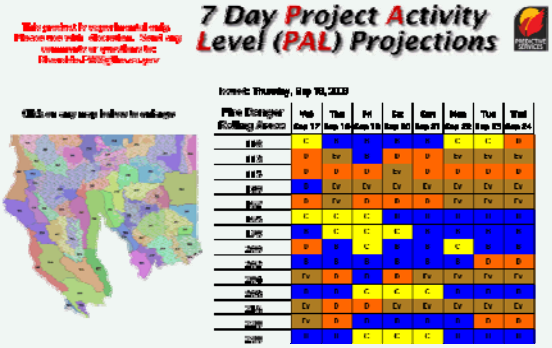
Other Topics of Interest

New Predictive Service Areas

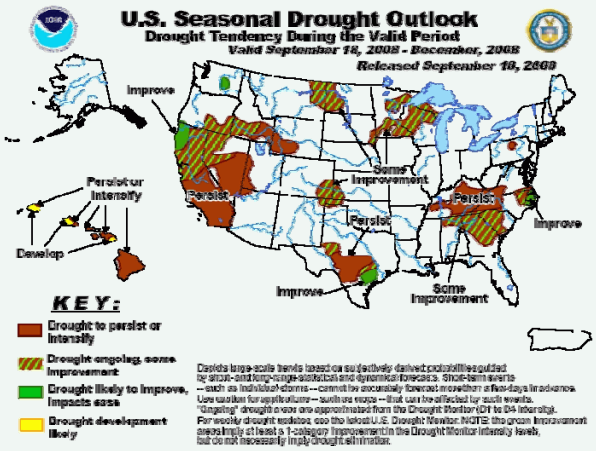
During this past year much work was done to change the current structure of the Predictive Service Areas (PSAs) to better accommodate critical weather patterns that lead to an increase in large fire potential. One of the more significant changes consisted of splitting up the old desert zone into smaller areas. Since then there has been an ongoing analysis to determine the fuel dryness level breakpoints for each of the new PSAs. Once this work is completed (which should be sometime this fall or early winter), then the new PSAs will be incorporated into the 7-Day Significant Fire Potential product and NFDRS graphs.

PAL Projections

This past summer, PAL (Project Activity Level) projections were made available online as an experimental product. These projections extend out to seven days for most Fire Danger Rating Areas across California. This product is based off of the current and forecasted IC (Ignition Component) and the ERC (Energy Release Component) and is updated daily. PAL is mainly used by the Forest Service to determine the kinds of activity and equipment use that may permitted by a forest each day. This product can be found on the web at: **http://gacc.nifc.gov/oscc/predictive/outlooks/PAL_Projections.html**



Changing Seasons (Cont'd)



amounts of rainfall within the next one to three years. So while it is doubtful that the current dry spell is indicating that the climate in California is changing, it is certain that the current drought will not be eliminated until several years of significant rainfall occur. This means that, in the meantime, fuels will continue to be stressed and large fire potential will increase with more fires exhibiting extreme behavioral conditions.