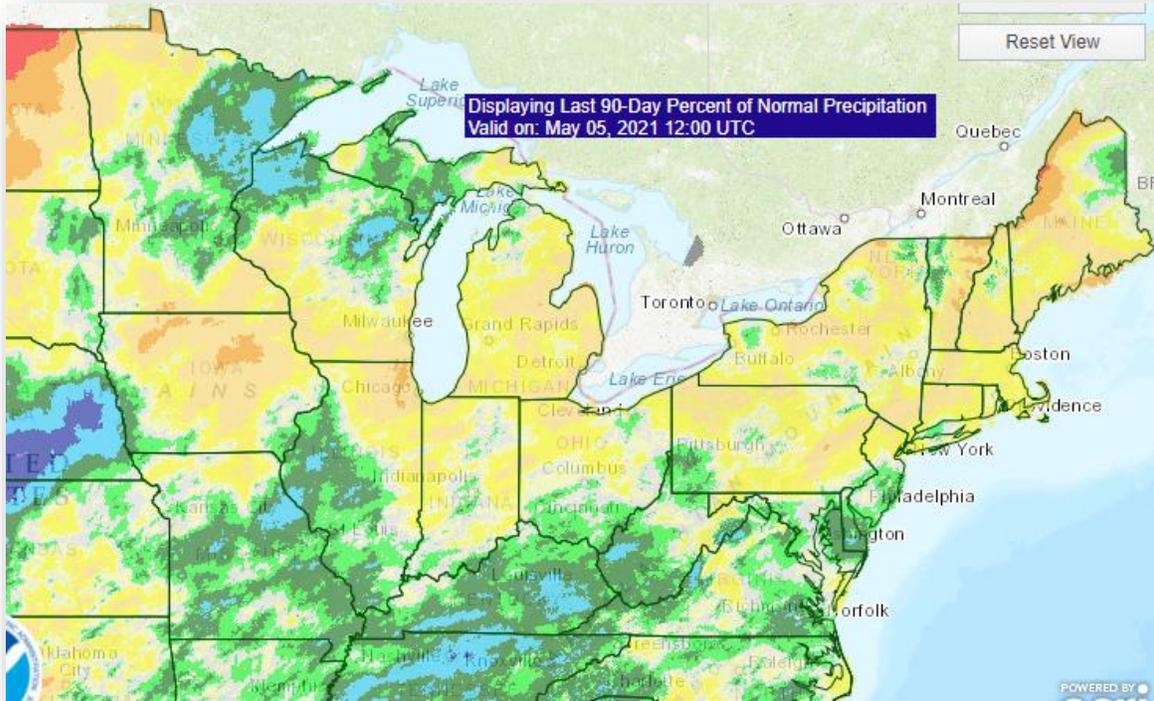


# Eastern Area Wildfire Risk Assessment Spring 2021



**Eastern Area Coordination Center  
Decision Support Team**

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## Executive Summary

The Eastern Area Geographic Area (EACC) enters their typical spring of 2021 wildland fire season with some areas experiencing prolonged rainfall deficit. The past 365 days show 50-75% percent of normal precipitation as being common throughout the GACC. Due to varying weather events over the past year coupled with La Nina weather and abnormally dry and moderate drought conditions, a Fire Risk Analysis was conducted to assess the potential and expected fire situation for the spring fire season of 2021. The assessment period extends from early April through June 2021. The analysis included a look at the current weather situation and extended forecast, fuels compared to normal for the time of year, National Fire Danger Rating System's energy release component for each Eastern Area Predictive Service Area, and fire occurrence. Recommendations are provided based on the findings and conclusions of the analysis.

This rapid risk analysis was conducted to determine:

- What is the probability of an above average spring fire season and what are the anticipated impacts?
- Where are the critical locations in the Eastern Area?
- What are the key fire environment indicators and thresholds which demonstrate above normal fire potential?
- Have drought conditions, observed over the past several years, improved?

Based on current fuel and forecasted weather conditions, the most likely scenario is an above average level of wildfire activity for the next month and beyond across far northwestern Minnesota as well as drier portions of the eastern Great Lakes and the Northeast. This level of activity will likely cause a significant increase in firefighting resources being mobilized and shared between Compacts. There is also a high probability the Eastern Area will see higher than normal mobilization across state boundaries for this time of the year. La Nina has had pronounced effects on the vegetation and soil moisture across the majority of the Geographic Area. There is currently a 60% probability of a La Nina transition to neutral in May and the primary finding of the assessment is that wildland fire managers and experts should continually assess fuel dryness. There are several areas within the Eastern Area that have observed a year of nearly 50% normal precipitation. Intermittent rain has held several of these areas at normal conditions; however, fuels in these dry areas will respond much quicker to prolonged periods of dry. And, these areas would have an increased chance of broadening from a more localized event to a wider area covering numerous Compacts.

# Analysis Findings and Recommendations

## Analysis Findings

The analysis findings indicate the following probabilities for the spring fire season for the analysis area:

Scenario Description for the 2021 Spring Fire Season (April into June)	Eastern Area Probability
<p><b>Most Likely Case*</b> The Eastern Geographic Area observes elevated wildfire risk throughout the spring wildfire season in multiple areas with pulses of improvement brought on by periodic rain events. As green up transitions from south to north fire activity will drop off quickly in the EA. Drought conditions may persist in some locations creating an increased probability of a summer fire season in some areas that are already experiencing drought conditions.</p>	85
<p><b>Best Case</b> All areas see consistent precipitation keeping fire activity to a minimum until green up occurs, bringing a reversal to all areas seeing precipitation deficits in the Great Lakes and NE Compacts.</p>	5
<p><b>Worst Case*</b> The Great Lakes Compact continues on its current trajectory while the Mid-Atlantic, Northeastern, and Big River Compacts experience continued rainfall deficits through May. This also includes expansion of drought conditions into portions of these areas currently not seeing deficits. Effects of spring green up become less noticeable and a pronounced summer fire season develops across multiple compacts.</p>	10

\* Firefighter capacity augmentations may be impacted by COVID-19.

Table 1. Analysis findings for the Eastern Area 2021 Spring Fire Season with Probability Rating

## Analysis Recommendations

- The primary areas of concern as we continue transitioning through the spring wildfire season will be northwest Minnesota, the sand plains of the Lower Peninsula (LP) of Michigan, northwest and central New England, and the northwestern Mid-Atlantic States.
  - In these areas of concern fire managers must consider potential extreme fire behavior, which can be expected with the current drought conditions under moderate fire weather conditions. As fire danger indices exceed the 97th percentile, extreme fire behavior and rapid fire spread characteristics should be expected. Tactics should be altered to provide for firefighter and public safety. Appropriate management response may be point protection rather than direct attack.
  - Do not expect any fire in the above areas of concern to be routine. Be prepared to utilize indirect tactics with extended mop-up. Utilize aerial supervision to help direct crews and keep them informed on fire behavior. Ensure that LCES is in place before engaging on any fire. Remember to STOP, THINK, and TALK before you ACT... and actively look for ways to minimize risk to firefighters in what is forecast to be a period of very high fire danger.

- Augmentation of initial attack resources will likely be required throughout the spring. This will result from increased fire behavior, fire spread, and longer mop-up times due to drought stressed fuels and soil.
- Be aware of increased fire behavior in timber fuel-types. Typically fire behavior diminishes when transitioning from prairie to timber, but a drier than normal winter has created unusual conditions in the timber areas.
- Expect fire to burn further into riparian areas that are measuring below average water and soil moisture levels for typical spring conditions.
- Lower than average snowpack created conditions for fire to move into areas that are usually wet. Use caution in these areas when using equipment and engine to avoid getting stuck.
- Don't rely on areas that typically hold water to provide a safety zone or refugium.
- Fire managers in those areas observing remnant drought conditions should continue to assess their local conditions. These isolated areas have experienced fairly prolonged drought conditions that could observe increased fire spread and fire behavior.
- Maintain the capability to mobilize resources and Incident Management Teams (IMTs) throughout the spring wildfire season.
- Ensure firefighter pocket cards are up-to-date and posted on the national website. <http://fam.nwcg.gov/fam-web/pocketcards/>
- Maintain national standardized predictive services products in a timely fashion and produce new products as requested.
- Be cognizant of COVID Impacts including firefighter capacity and long-term smoke impacts on firefighters, public and larger populations.

## Risk Analysis

The northern tier of the Eastern Area has observed below normal precipitation over the past year. As evident in the U.S. Drought Monitor image below (Figure 1), areas of Moderate Drought and abnormally Dry condition are well established across the Great Lakes states and into New England.

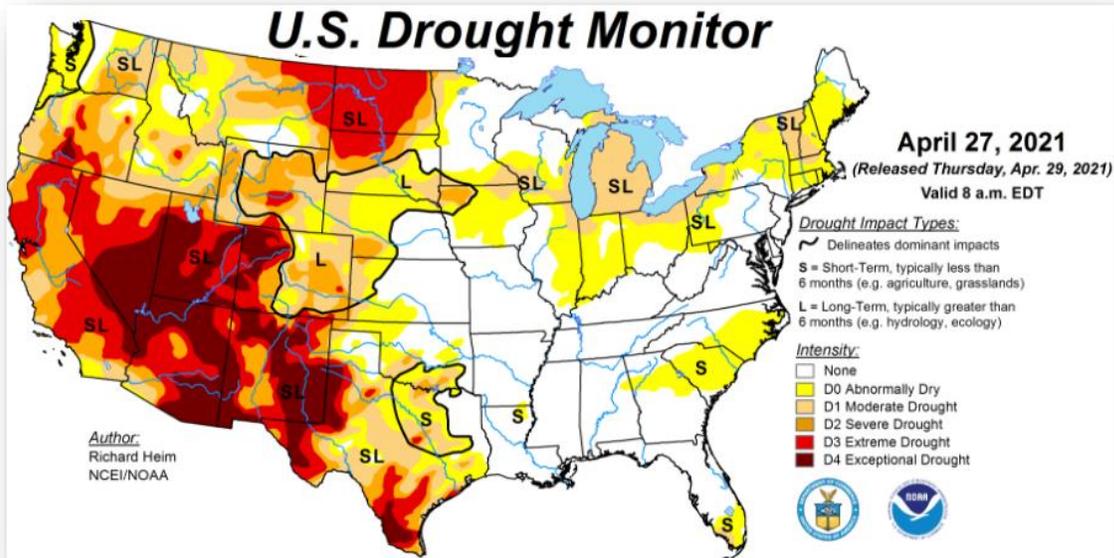
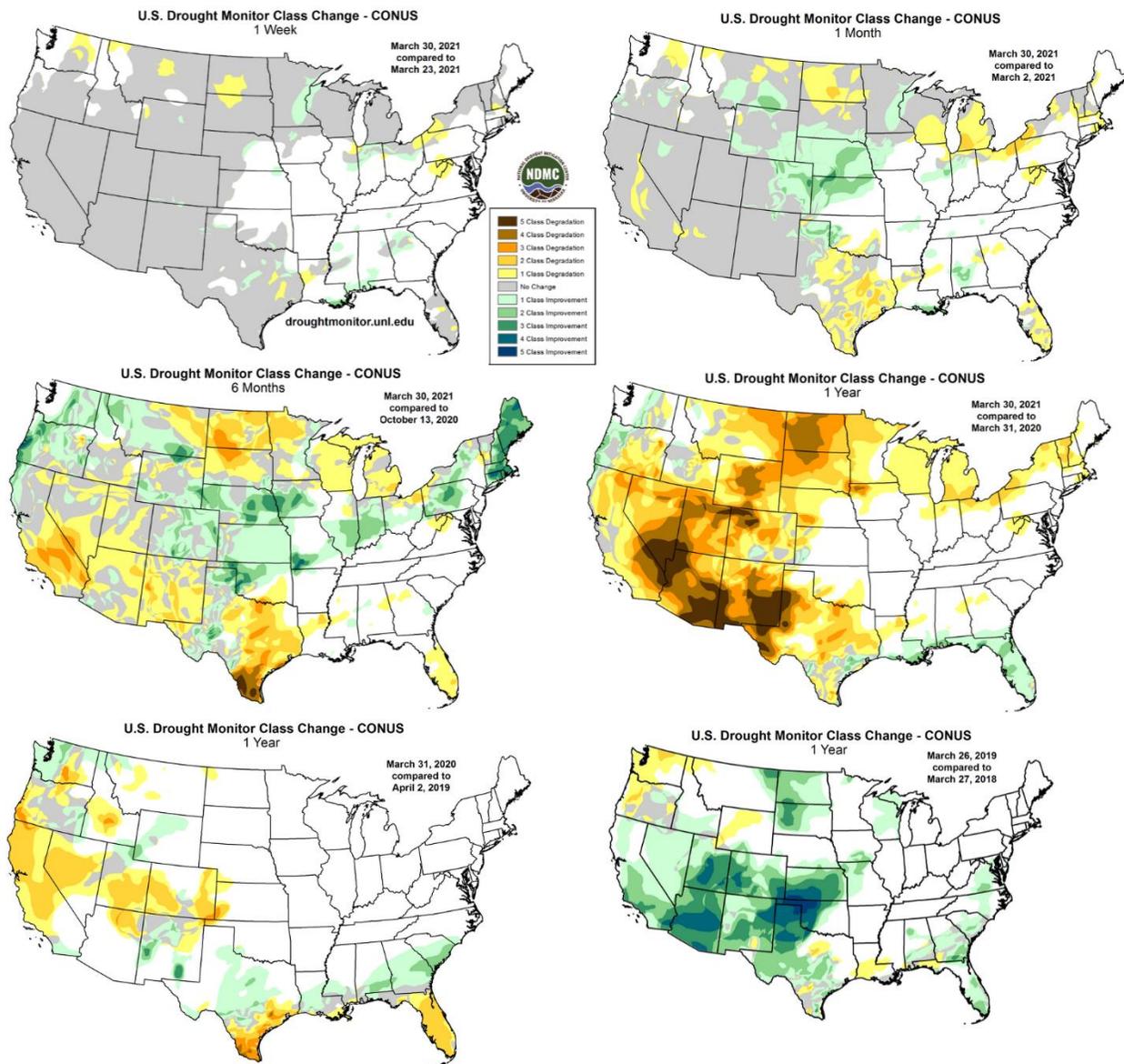


Figure 1. The National Drought Monitor displays the size and severity of drought conditions across the United States. Source: National Drought Monitor website

The different levels of drought are classified by percentiles, with exceptional rating in the top 2-3% of the historical record. It takes a several seasons of dry weather to reach the exceptional level and several seasons of wet to reduce these drought conditions.

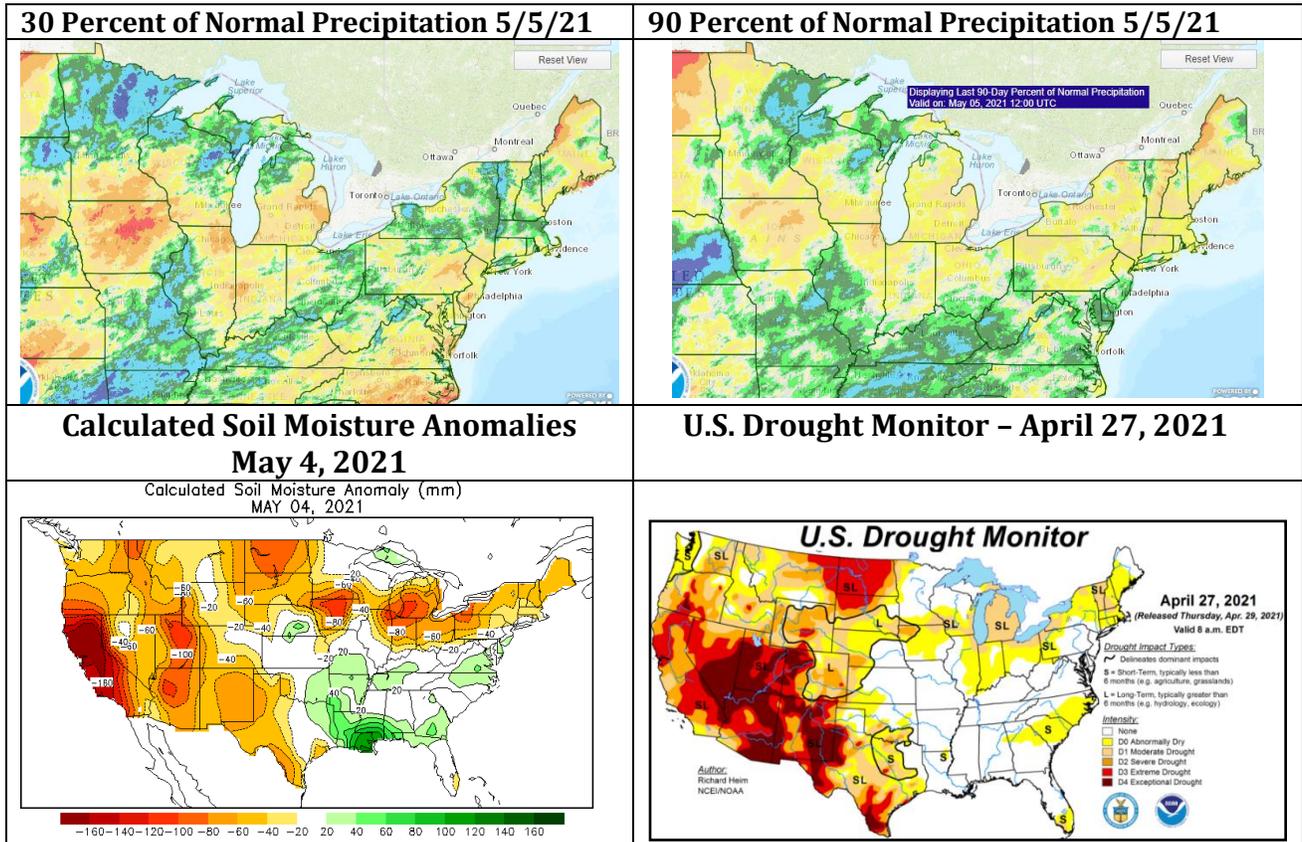
Figure 2 shows that drought conditions have been building across the northern tier of the Geographic Area for the past twelve months. The legend shows direction of change over time and is displayed as deteriorating (increasing drought) or improving (decreasing drought). Deteriorating (increasing drought) conditions are indicated over most of the area, primarily in the past year.

Figure 2. National Drought Monitor Class Change at 1 week, 1 month, 6 months, and 1 year. Source: National Drought Monitor website

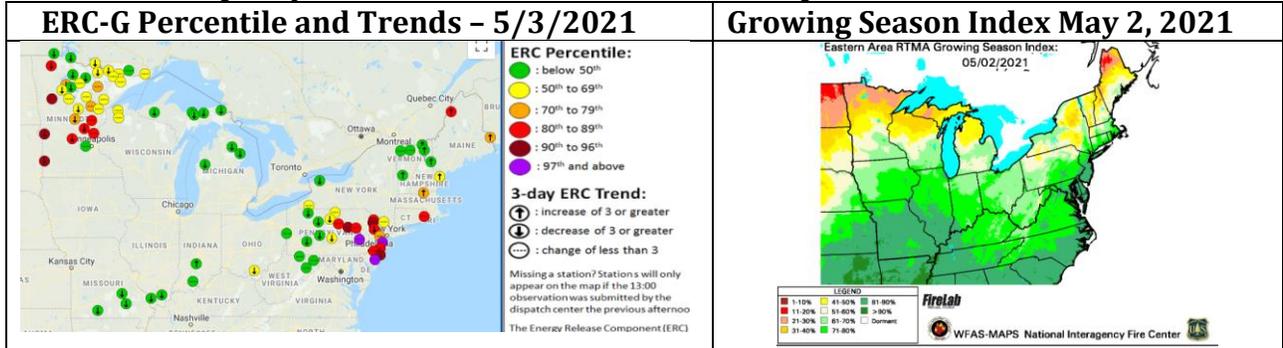


# Past Weather and Drought

30-90 day precipitation anomalies were below normal across far northwestern Minnesota, the northeastern Great Lakes and parts of the Northeast in early April 2021. Negative soil moisture anomalies were in place across parts of the northern tier of the Eastern Area in early April. Longer range drought conditions were indicated across parts of the northwestern, northwestern Pennsylvania, and north central New England.

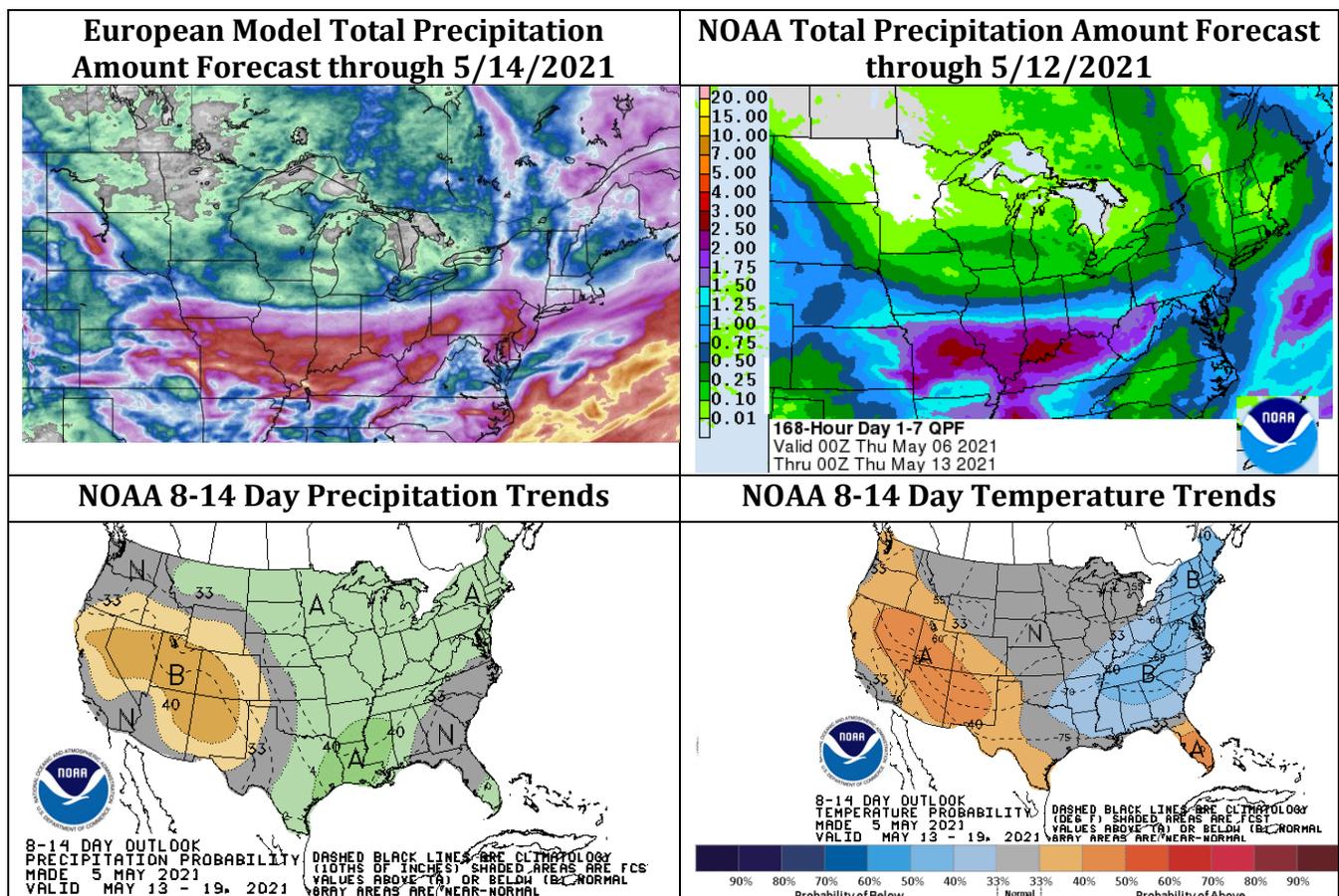


**Fuel Conditions:** Fire danger indices increased and finer fuel moisture levels decreased quite a bit across the Eastern Area through early April as widespread low RH levels prevailed. Areas of precipitation and higher RH levels increased fuel moistures over much of the Great Lakes and Big Rivers April during 7-9. **Fuel moisture levels may remain below normal across far northwestern Minnesota as well as parts of the Northeast progressing through mid-April 2021. Green-up may occur earlier than normal across portions of the Eastern Area.**



## Weather Forecast Trends into Mid-May 2021:

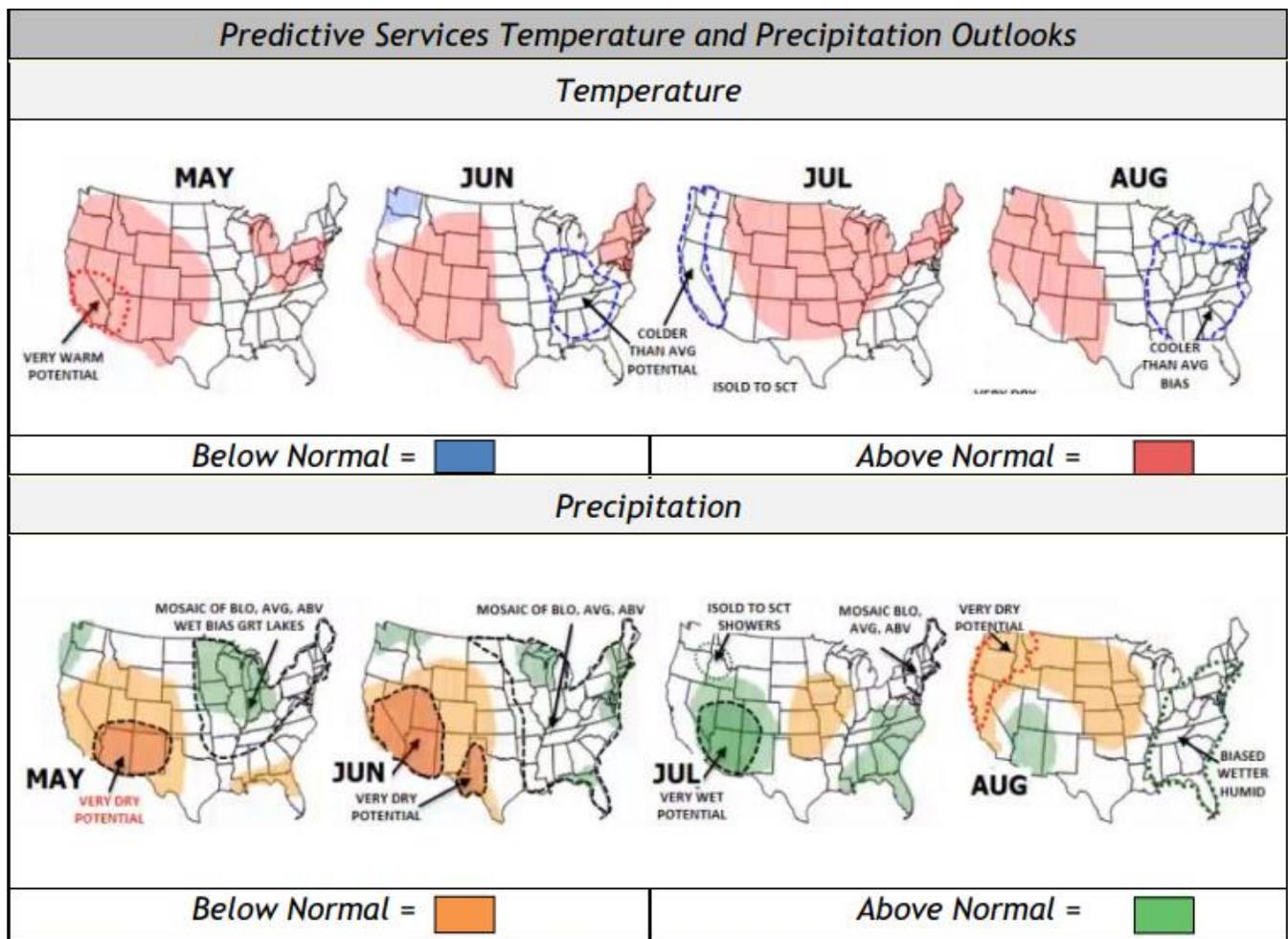
- Warmer than normal conditions affected much of the of the Eastern Area late March into early April, especially the western tier. This led to an earlier than normal spring fire season across parts of the northern tier with snow melt occurring 2-4 weeks earlier than normal.
- Much of the Great Lakes and Big Rivers compacts experienced higher RH levels and areas of precipitation April 7-9, 2021 dampening shorter term fire potential over drier portions of these compacts.
- Confidence was lower in far northwestern Minnesota and the northeastern half of the Northeast Compact in receiving adequate wetting rainfall through mid-April 2021.
- Drier conditions overall occurred through across the eastern Great Lakes and the Northeast through mid-April leading to periods of elevated fire potential.
- Cooler than normal conditions occurred across much of the EA through early May offsetting some of the drying over parts of the Great Lakes and northern Big Rivers in regards to fire potential.
- **The area which may be the most vulnerable to above normal fire potential through the first half of May 2021 is the northern tier of the Great Lakes.**



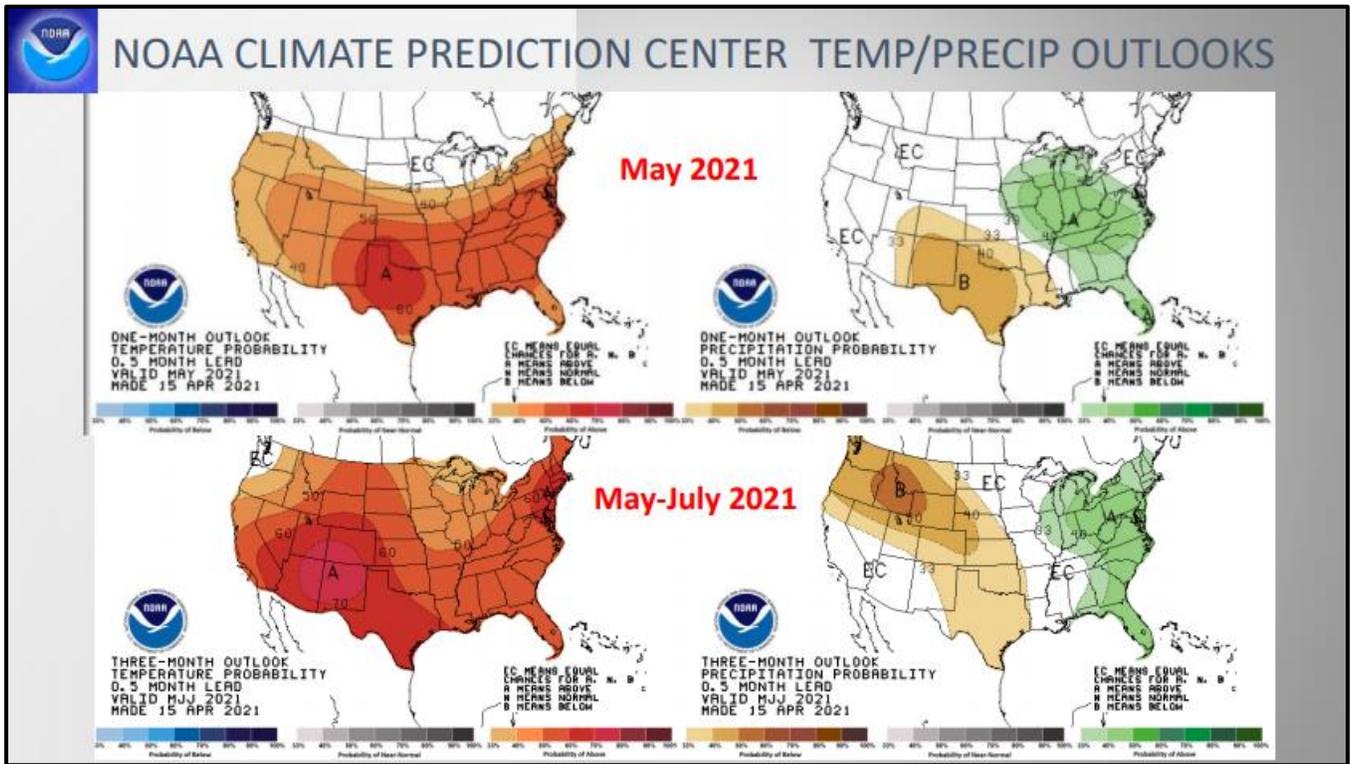
**Long Term Weather and Climate Outlook:** La Nina El Nino Southern Oscillation (ENSO) sea surface temperatures (SST) or cooler than normal SST conditions across the central Pacific persisted through the 2020-21 winter into the spring of 2021. La Nina conditions were forecast to gradually weaken into a more neutral ENSO regime progressing into the summer season. Other oceanic sea surface temperature oscillations around the globe also contribute to overall weather patterns across North America. These trends as well as long term climate models are used in producing longer range weather trend forecasts.

Warmer than normal temperature trends are forecast over the central tier of the Eastern Area in May, the eastern tier in June and much of the Eastern in July.

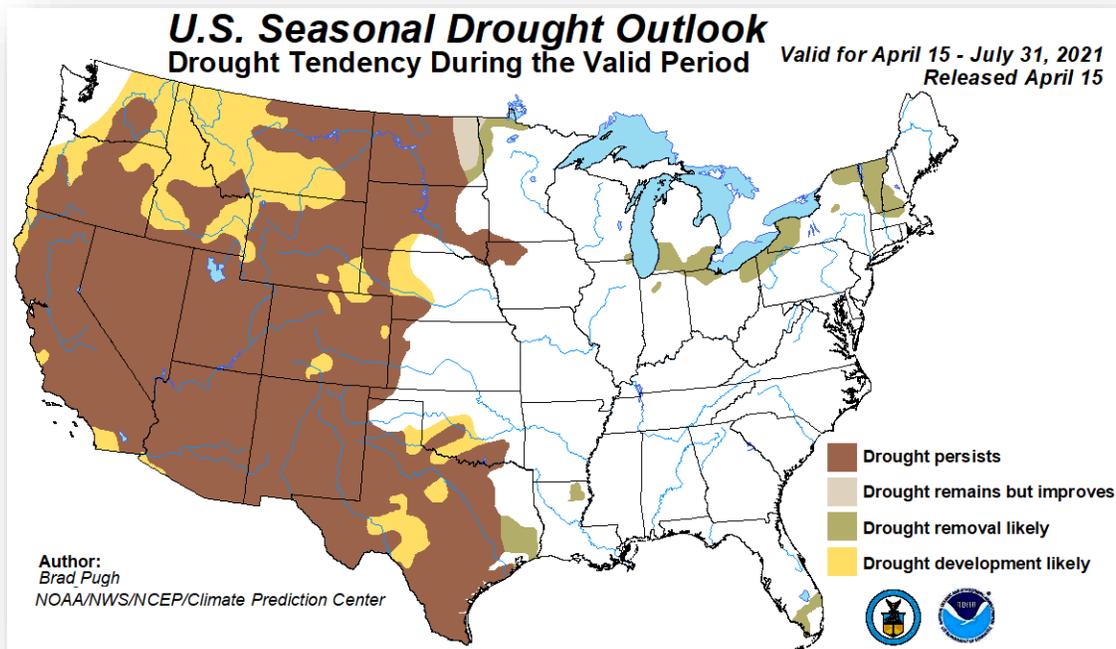
Wetter than normal trends are expected across parts of the Midwest May into June. Some drying is possible across parts of the Mississippi Valley in July into August.



## NOAA Climate Prediction Center's Longer Term Outlooks



## NOAA's Seasonal Drought Outlook through July 2021



**Fire Season Timing:** The spring fire season began earlier than normal across parts of the Great Lakes with periods of warm, dry conditions occurring from March into early April. If the forecast above normal precipitation trends do not develop into May, periods of above normal fire potential are likely over drier parts of the Great Lakes. If precipitation events do not increase over the Northeast, periods of above normal fire potential are likely as well. Warmer than normal trends are forecast across much of the Eastern Area into May. If these warmer trends come to fruition, green up will likely occur sooner than normal across the southern tier where near to above normal precipitation amounts were in place leading into April.

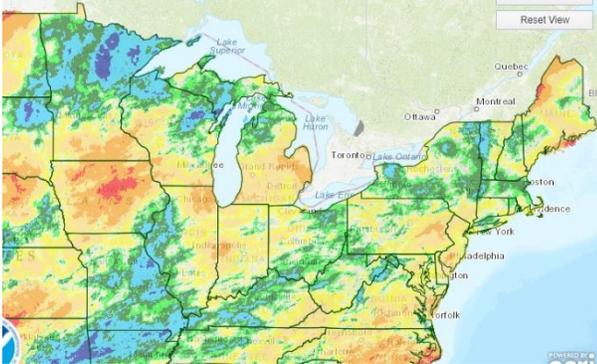


Figure 3.

Figure 3 demonstrates the short-term percent of normal precipitation for the past 30-days. Overall, the past 30-days have observed below normal precipitation with ranges of 50 to 75 percent of normal being observed across portions of the northern and eastern tiers of the Geographic Area. Far northwest MN stands out as having observed 5-10% of normal over the past 30-days and 25% of normal over the past three-months.

## Areas of Concern

### Minnesota

#### *Overview*

Minnesota is experiencing an early start to fire season with estimate of being 3-4 weeks ahead of schedule. This is due largely to a low snowpack and seasonable warm temperatures taking what snow was in place off near the beginning of March. This low snow condition has had numerous other impacts to the fire environment described further below including standing grass fuel where they might normally be matted.

#### *Fuels and Fire Environment*

##### *Typical Spring Extensive Dead Fuel*

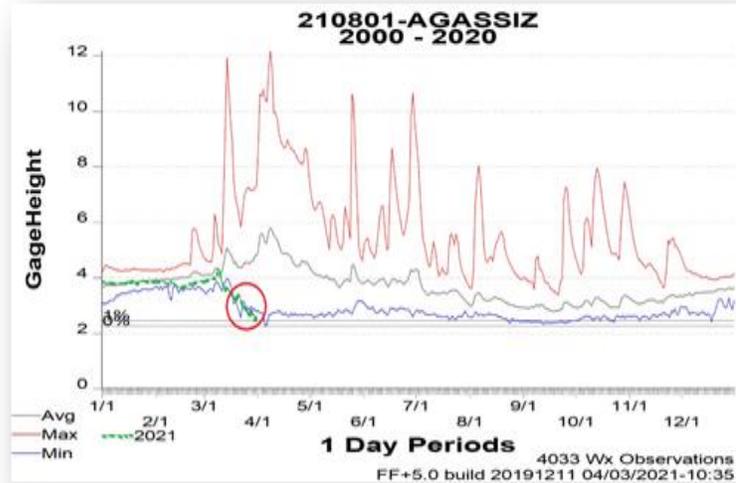
Fire season in Minnesota is typified by extensive decadent fully cured fuel at the landscape level due to normal seasonal senescence and over wintering. This creates a situation where even on an average fire season small scale favorable fire weather patterns can quickly develop creating noticeable increases in activity; potentially leading to significant growth and intensity of fires.

##### *Standing Grass*

Heavy snow loads commonly result in grass fuel types being laid down into a compressed matt. This vertical arrangement of fuels results in a change to the drying properties of the fuel bed and generally results in lower probabilities of ignition and impacts ROS and flame lengths. With the current predominate standing grass fuel types we are seeing high rates of ignition, rapid rates of spread and very high intensities that are challenging the seasoned fire fighters' mental picture of normal conditions.

### Low Water

Many areas in Minnesota including northwest Minnesota are characterized by extensive low ground conditions resulting in wetlands. Many observations of low water levels of in drainage ditches and ponds have corresponded with observations of fires burning across wetland areas that otherwise would be barriers to spread at this time of year. This allows for already rapidly spreading fires to extend to greater limits and reduces the options for containment especially when indirect tactics are used due to elevated fire behavior and for fire fighter safety reasons.

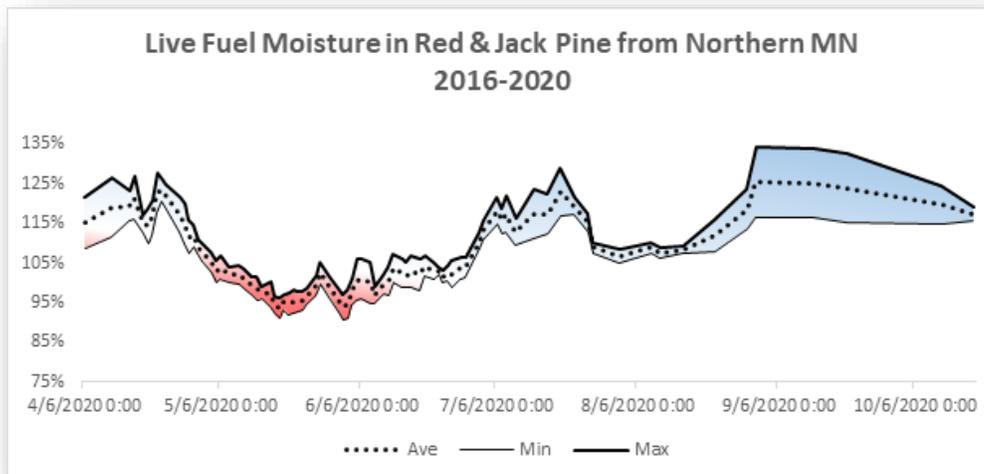


### Organic and Heavy Fuels

Minnesota has extensive organic soils in the numerous wetlands in the state, as well as timber types with typically deep duff layers, and areas with heavy down woody debris loading. These fuels have been observed to be generally becoming available to burn much sooner in the year than is typical and on the current trajectory in the NW corner of the state will become extremely problematic. These organic soils and heavy fuels can become very resource intensive to extinguish.

### Spring Dip

A phenomenon commonly referred to as the spring dip in coniferous fuels, namely Jack and Red pines, occurs every year. When these fuel types are in the deepest part of the spring dip the pines species become what is commonly described as explosive or gasoline on a stump. The timing of the spring dip is typically from the first week of May through the first week of June in Minnesota. Seasonal variability can cause this timing to shift forward or backward by a couple weeks. When this time period aligns with favorable fire weather conditions large rapidly spreading fires may occur in upland fuel types often in conjunction with WUI.



## Minnesota Fire Activity to Date

### Observed Fire Behavior

Numerous reports of very active fire behavior have come in from fire personnel in the field. Routinely this behavior is reported as being surprising or beyond expectations for the time of year. Active crown fire behavior has been witnessed on multiple fires throughout the northwest corner of Minnesota. In non-timber types abnormally, high intensities are being reported supported by the current observations of standing heavy grass fuel beds.



*Crown Fire Behavior in Spruce/Cedar Photo by D. Krause MN DNR*

### Occurrence and Acres Trends to Date

To date there have been 304 MNICS fires reported, this is twice the average number that typically occur. If this trajectory continues into April typically the busiest month in Minnesota there may be higher levels of activity to be expected.

## Northern Michigan

### Overview

Lower than average snowpack during the winter has created a condition where fire may be found in wet areas that don't typically burn. [In addition, lack of snowfall leads to less fuel compaction and more aeration of fuels.](#) The areas that are in dry sandy outwash plains, supporting conifer and oak forest types with low site indexes are not as dependent on snowpack. These areas are typically comprised of red pine (*Pinus resinosa*), northern pin oak (*Quercus ellipsoidalis*), and jack pine (*Pinus banksiana*). The active fuels in these areas are typically grasses, sedges, blueberry, leaf litter and needle cast. The larger fuels usually are unavailable until summer because of higher fuel moisture from the previous winter snow. With early snowmelt this year there is potential for the larger fuels to become available earlier this year. The modeled fire behavior between the trending conditions and the average conditions are nominal (Tables 1 & 2).

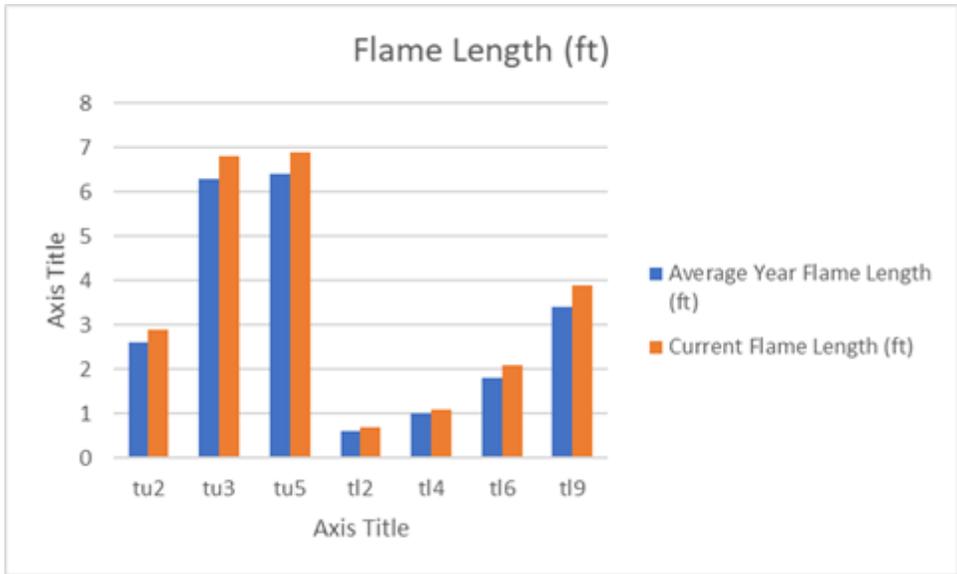


Table 1. Flame length Departure from Average Year for Northern Michigan

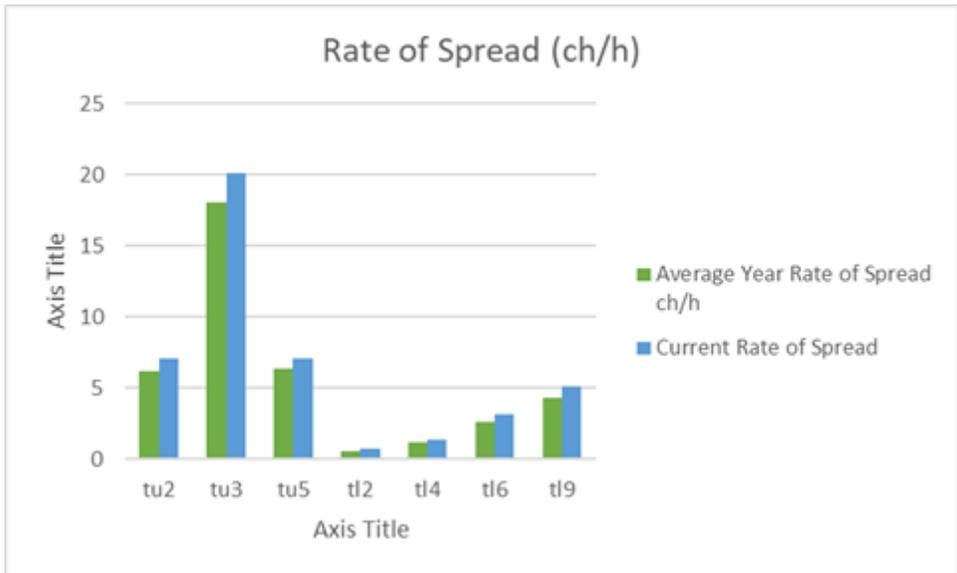


Table 2. Rate of Spread Departure from Average Year for Northern Michigan

### Needle Density

In addition to foliar moisture or needle moisture measurements, needle density can help predict when the conifer species are capable of initiating and sustaining a crown fire.

Needle Densities for northern lower Michigan are as follows:

Red pine **0.1158** g/cm<sup>3</sup>                      Red pine three-year average 0.1574 g/cm<sup>3</sup>

Jack pine **0.4164** g/cm<sup>3</sup>                      Jack pine three-year average 0.4964 g/cm<sup>3</sup>.

This measurement helps determine changes in crown bulk density which is a driving factor for crown fire (a measure of how much fuel is in the crown). Current trends indicate average or slightly below average densities. This means the conifers are close to average this time of year for the potential to sustain a crown fire. See figures 1 and 2 for graphs denoting the calculated 20' wind speed and minimum crown base height to initiate and sustain a crown fire in jack pine.

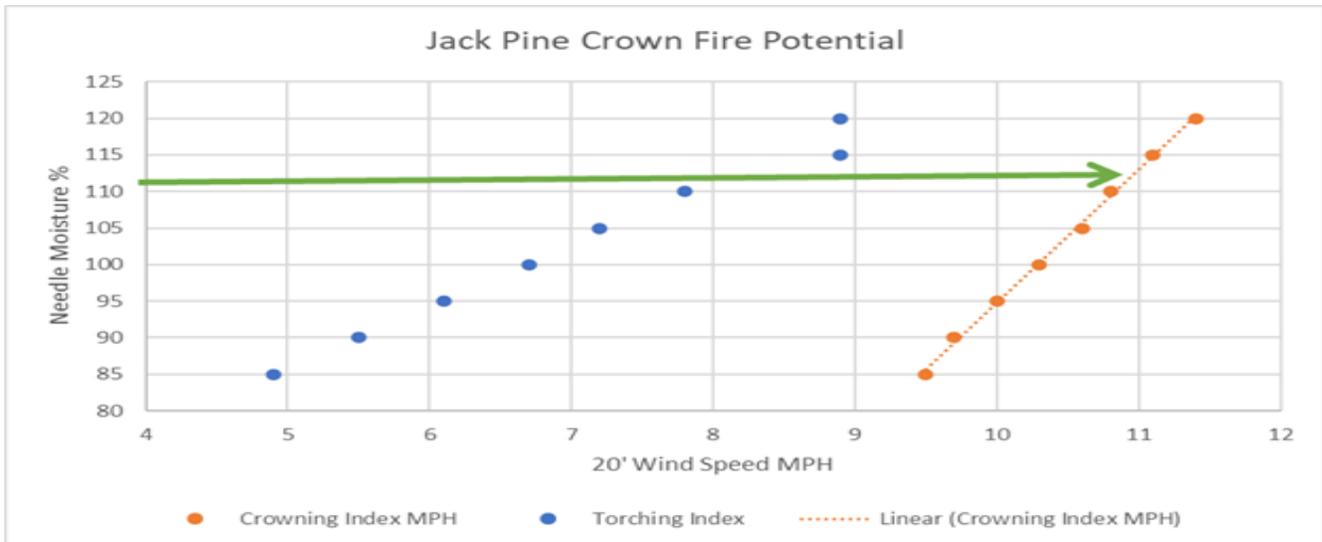


Figure 1. Predicted Wind and Needle Moisture Chart for Crown Fire in Jack Pine (*Pinus banksiana*). The green arrow shows wind speed needed to sustain a crown fire under current conditions.

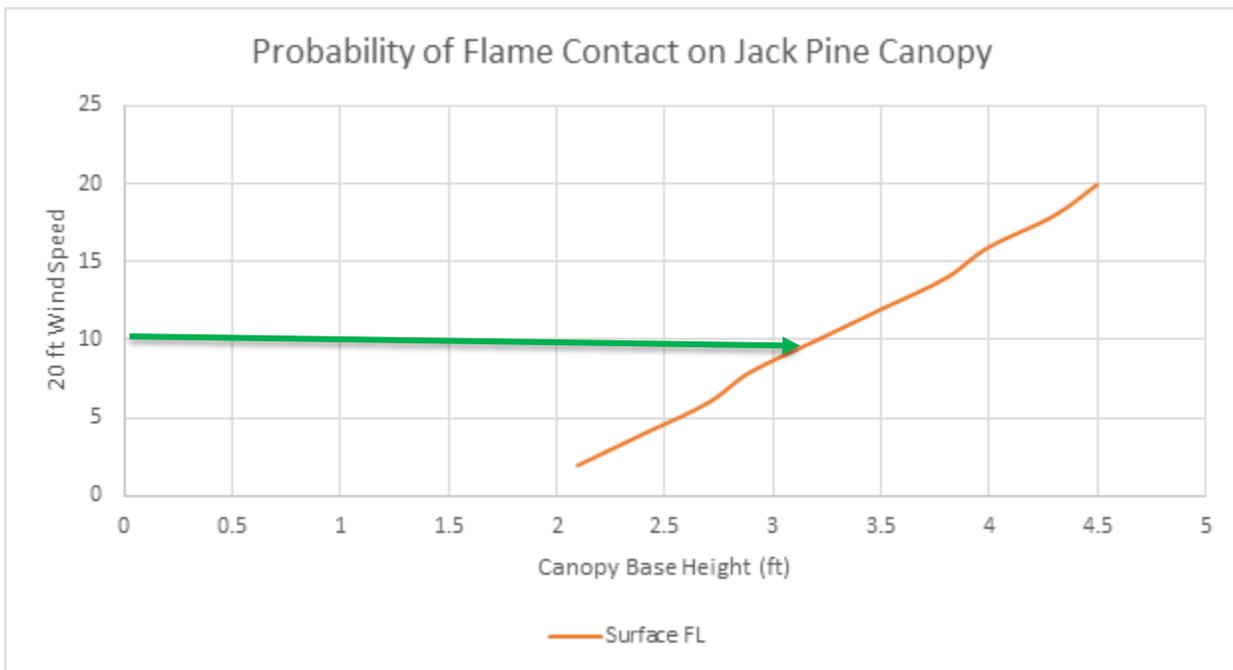


Figure 2. Wildfire Probability of Flame Contact on Jack Pine Canopy. The green arrow shows that under current conditions that a canopy base height less than 3 ½ ft is more susceptible to initiating a crown fire in jack pine stands.

- Fuel data is based on jack pine (*pinus banksiana*) stands that meet habitat requirements for Kirtland’s Warbler (*dendroica kirtlandii*). The stands are typically 3-8 year old trees with a diameter at breast height of 2-6”, and stand densities of 900-1400 trees / acre.
- Wind adjustment factor for all calculations is 0.2.
- Fuel moistures are set for average low % during fire season (March – June).

## Phenology

Tracing phenology is a simple way to anticipate potential crown fire, and track green up. The Map in figure 3 depicts the number of days for predicted green up based on current conditions.

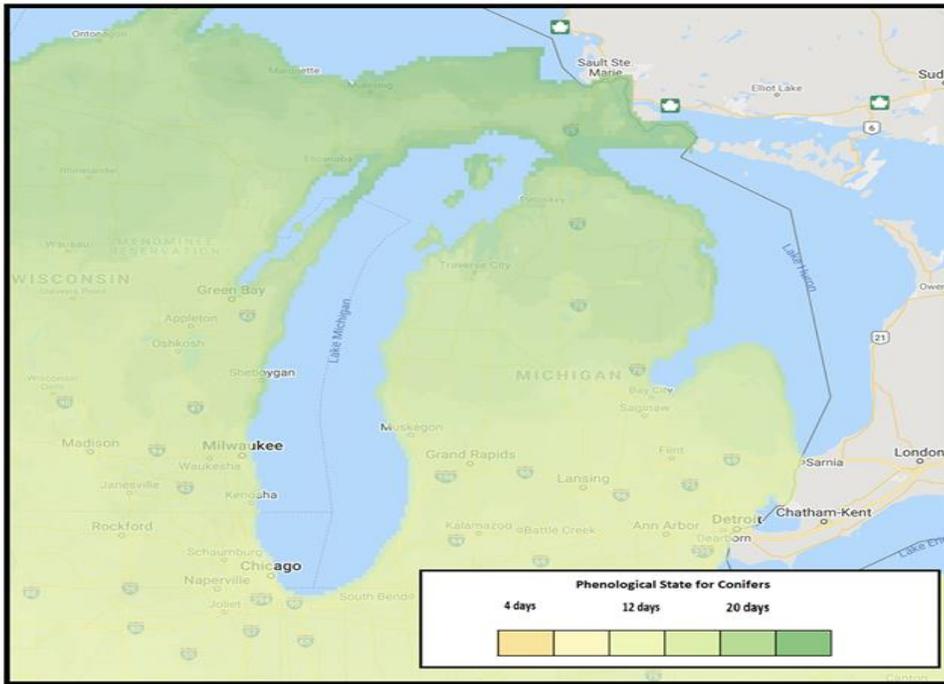


Figure 3. Predicted Days Until Phenological State of Conifer Species Increases Needle Density

The map in Figure 4 indicates areas where there is an increased chance of greater fire behavior during the spring fire season.

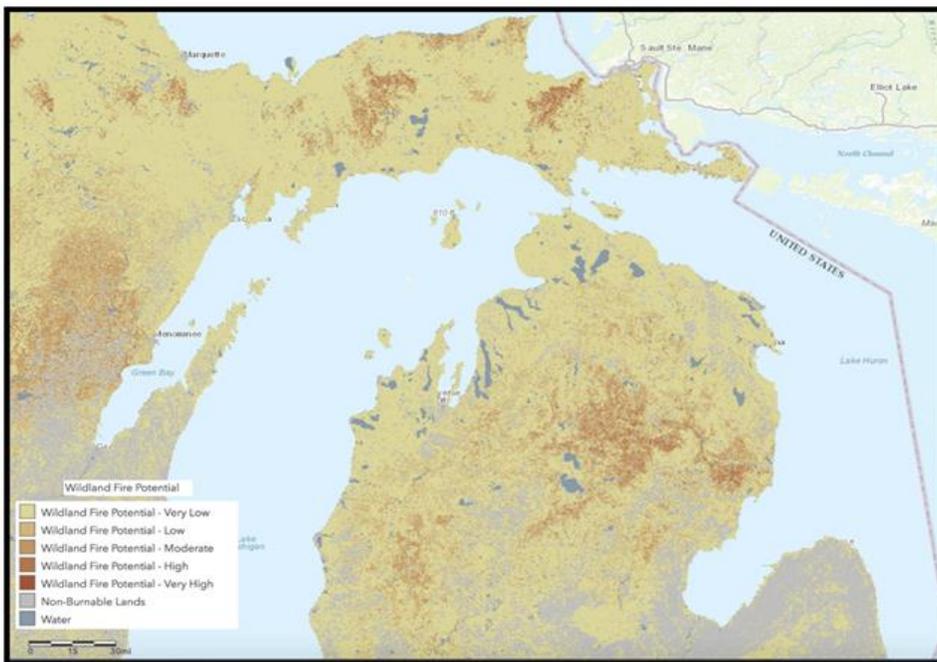


Figure 4. Wildfire Potential Map

### Mitigation Measures for Northern Michigan

- Lower than average snowpack created conditions for fire to move into areas that are usually wet. Use caution in these areas when using equipment and engine to avoid getting stuck.
- Expect fire to burn further into riparian areas than average spring conditions.
- Don't rely on areas that typically hold water to provide a safety zone or refugium.

## Northeastern Illinois

### Overview

Reports of a dry fall and lower than average winter precipitation have created conditions on the prairie that are allowing fire to enter areas that are typically wet during the spring. The phenological state for the first week of April 2021 is, cool season grasses are starting to sprout green tips (less than 1") and the terminal buds on most of the shrubs are swelling or starting to bud.



Fuel types that were modeled for this area are grass and forbs with a moderately coarse continuous fuel bed average height 1' (GR2) and moderately coarse continuous grass average height 2' (GR3). Stringers of timber exist throughout the prairie and along riparian areas. These were classified as broadleaf litter with a moderate load (TL6) and timber understory with a light to moderate fuel load (TU1). The modeled fire behavior between the trending conditions and the average conditions are nominal (tables 3 & 4).

*Turtle Pond Midewin Tallgrass Prairie*

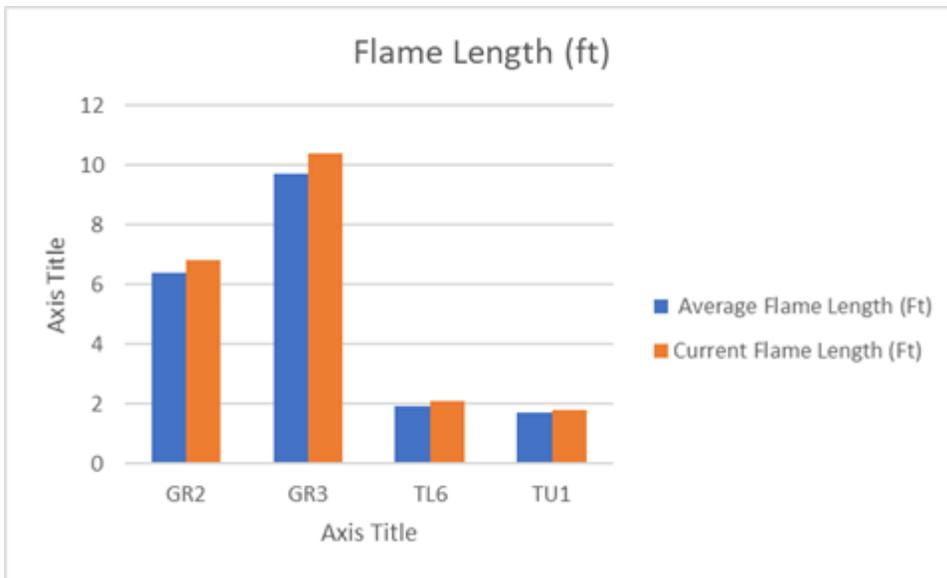


Table 3. Flame length Departure from Average Year for Midewin Tallgrass Prairie

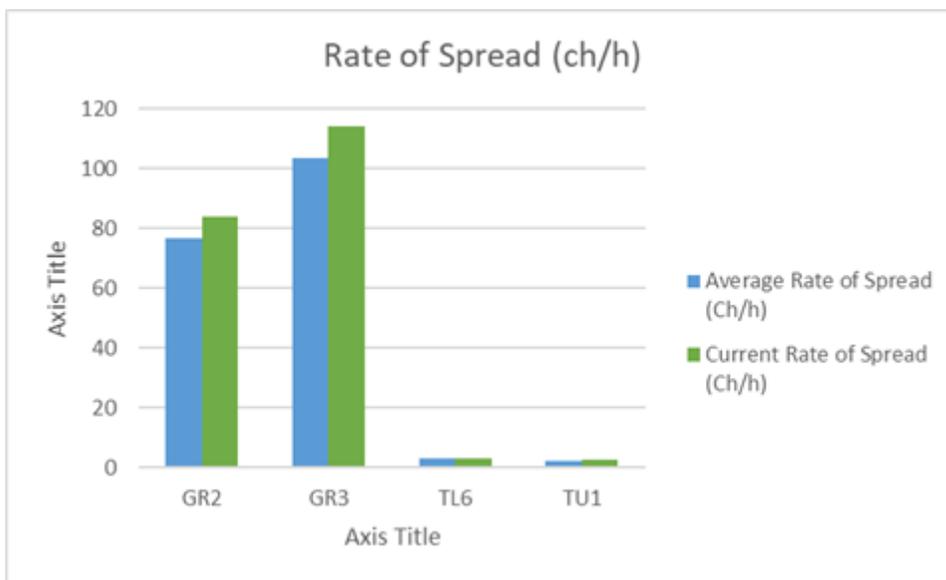


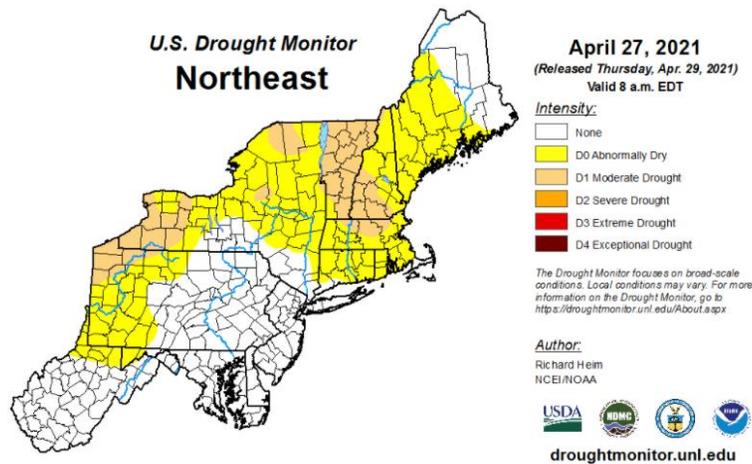
Table 4. Rate of Spread Departure from Average Year for Midewin Tallgrass Prairie

### Mitigation Measures for Southern Lake Michigan Basin

- Be aware of increased fire behavior in timber fuel-types. Typically fire behavior diminishes when transitioning from prairie to timber, but a drier than normal winter has created unusual conditions in the timber areas.
- Expect fires to burn further into riparian areas greater than average during spring conditions.
- Don't rely on areas that typically hold water to provide a safety zone or refugium.

## Northeast and Mid-Atlantic

### Overview



Widespread precipitation occurred across much of the region, limiting the expansion of drought and abnormal dryness. In western New York, moderate drought expanded again this week where precipitation deficits are close to 3 inches over the last 90 days and are reflected in low streamflow values and declining groundwater. Farther east, abnormal dryness increased in eastern New York and Massachusetts. Moderate drought remains in New Hampshire and Vermont.

## Maine

### Overview

Current activity and observed fire behavior is normal for this time of year. The southern half of the state is experiencing all of the wildfire activity. Of that, over 50% of incidents are close to the coast, which stresses the point, “where the people are.” Earlier in the week, the northwest third still had snow in the woods. And since it’s still Spring, access to the state’s northern woods is hampered by muddy roads, which in turn has limited industrial activity. Typically, 6 to 10 days of drying is needed to support substantial fire occurrence and precipitation events earlier in the week has maintained normal response levels.

## New Hampshire

### Overview

New Hampshire is experiencing earlier than normal fire activity. Response load has been light to medium and currently resources are not stretched thin. If drought conditions worsen, state supervisors are anticipating a busier than normal spring fire season. Current small grass and leaf litter fires needing short mop-up time will be replaced by difficult and very deep burning fires requiring extensive/multi-day mop-up. This will quickly stretch their resources as they rely heavily on local fire departments for fire suppression. Already, they’ve noticed some south facing slopes to be drier than normal with more active burning of snags and 1,000 hour fuels ([EACC Fire Family Plus Graphs](#))

## Vermont

### Overview

Like it’s eastern neighbor, Vermont is experiencing an earlier start to spring fire season than historically the norm. Since March and the beginning of April has been very dry, current significant fire potential is greater than normal. Snow in southern Vermont is all but gone, except in the woods at the highest elevations and north/northeast aspects.. Dead grass (FM1) is ready to burn and forest fuels (FM9) are

drying out down to the duff layer/soil. As spring progresses, fuel will continue to dry out and lawns are starting to green up. In most well shaded areas fuels are still fairly moist. KBDI for VT RAWS are 20 or less. Northern and higher elevations have more moisture and fire concerns are primarily 1-hr and some 10-hr fuels. If RH's continue at low levels, 100-hr fuels will begin to dry out and may be a concern in some exposed areas in the coming weeks. Most spring fires in VT burn through FM1 rapidly, with little mop-up required. Usually these fires are contained with natural or man-made barriers or suppression by volunteer fire departments. These fires will also burn into FM9 and are easily suppressed. As this dry weather continues, the forest fuels will continue to dry out deeper, and in the absence of crown cover, FM9 can have fire behavior similar to grass fuel model, with a slower rate of spread. In Vermont, almost all wildfire response is handled by local fire departments, most of which are volunteer. And as of this week, resources – volunteer, state and federal – do not appear to be spread thin; however, that may change if the drought continues to worsen. ([EACC Fire Family Plus Graphs](#))

## Rhode Island

### *Overview*

Fire activity has increased relative to the past 10 years but is more average on a longer timeline. Overall, Rhode Island's spring season has been challenging due to very low and persistent RH levels, often with poor RH recovery. Typically, RHs range from the mid-20's to mid-30s on the low end, but it's not uncommon to have fires occur while RH's climb up through the 50%+ mark. For this spring, the state has measured many days with RH's dropping into the teens. Cool season grasses have transitioned from cured phase and general transition stage is rapidly approaching. Currently, light surface fires have been observed and they are mostly consuming 1-hr to 10-hr with little to no impact to 100-hr, 1000-hr duff layers. When RH and wind are in alignment, fires have been fast moving, but extreme rates of spread are typical for spring conditions. If current warm and dry conditions continue, duff moisture code is expected to be around the 20 threshold and duff consumption and mop-up can be expected. In addition to continuing drought conditions, the state will monitor its period of Foliar moisture drop in late April and early May.

## Connecticut

### *Overview*

As with its New England cousins, Connecticut is experiencing fire season earlier than usual, especially in eastern Connecticut. Last year's flash drought is contributing to surface fires burning in areas not accustomed to fire occurrence so early in the year. A windy spring has contributed to larger and faster moving fires and challenged control measures. Residual oak mortality in eastern Connecticut and statewide ash mortality is contributing to hazardous fuel conditions

## New York

### *Overview*

Except for an early beginning, New York's spring fire season is normal as compared to past years and hasn't faced any significant control challenges. Fire response has been light but the increase in recreation since COVID began has kept state resources very busy. The state received a fair amount of snow this winter; therefore, current seasonal fuel conditions are typical; however, if

moisture deficits continue to worsen in southwestern New York, fuel conditions may become more alarming. ([EACC Fire Family Plus Graphs](#)).

## Pennsylvania

### Overview



*Cobham Hill Fire, Allegheny National Forest*

Like everywhere in the Eastern Area, wildfire season is early by several weeks. Northwest Pennsylvania accumulated a good winter snow pack; however it melted rapidly in mid-March. Recent incidents verified 1-Hr fuels are dry and receptive and a combination of warmer temperatures (77), lower Relative Humidity (35%), sustained winds (10 mph) and steep terrain challenge control measures.

## Summary

Spring fire behavior remains largely impacted by moisture deficits (existing and developing drought) and current weather conditions. Fuels accept and lose moisture rapidly until they transition to full green up, which greatly reduces fuel moisture loss.

- Spread rates and flame lengths will be dependent on the weather conditions of the day; however, current drought conditions and lack of snowpack is possibly making more fuel available for combustion and therefore increasing the intensity and growth rate of a fire above what would occur in a normal year.
  - A lack of snowpack can lessen fuel compaction and present fuels that are arranged vertically and are losing moisture more rapidly.
  - Less total snowpack or snowpack melting sooner presents more geography and fuels available to ignition and combustion.
  - Decreased runoff from snow melt may reduce ponding in riparian or wetland areas, again increasing the geography and fuels available to burn.
- Managers should monitor the alignment of the spring dip phenomenon with favorable fire weather conditions that contribute to large fires spreading rapidly in upland fuel types and possibly threatening WUI.
- Ignition potential increases as public visitation and industrial activity increases.
- **Response Capacity** might be impacted by competition for resources due to increased activity regionally and nationally, local resources staying home and staff turnover and development.
- As the COVID-19 risk continues, large fire growth in Eastern Area this spring and possibly early summer has the potential to create significant smoke problems due to heavy fuel loads burning in crown fires and holdover fire in deep organic duff layers.
- **Support severity requests** for units with high hazard fuel areas, spring and early summer fire history, and fuel availability/flammability indices above the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile.
- Especially this year, when many standard operating plans have been adjusted and typical practices put in reserve, **confirm interagency response needs and expectations** with both local and regional partners this spring and early summer.
- In situations like these, when fire danger is elevated and conditions may be changing ahead of what recent wildfire occurrence might suggest, **each new fire response should be attacked with the heightened concern for firefighter and public safety.**
- This assessment is focused primarily on near term forecasts and outlooks through early summer. Within two weeks, the situation at the time as well as **this assessment and its recommendations should be reviewed** to determine if it is still valid, if it needs to be updated or if it is no longer needed.

## Future Decision Support Recommendations

### Formalize a process and populate the membership of the Eastern Area Decision Support Group (EA DSG)

This EA DSG was stood up by the Eastern Coordination Center (EACC) after much of the Eastern Area had transitioned well into fire season. This decision was made in part due to the early arrival of fire season, but mainly because the concept of an interagency decisions support group is relatively novel to the EACC. With the rapidly developing fire situation, the EA DSG starting behind the curve, and members of the DSG deeply entrenched in their day jobs; it became apparent that a planned and well thought out process would make future assessments function much smoother.

A model for forming the EA DSG was borrowed from the Southern Area and adapted for use in the EA. Recommended key objectives for the EA DSG would be:

- Annually develop preseason assessments of the entire EA and update as needed throughout the spring summer and fall.
- Develop a consistent process for gathering and disseminating decision support data.
- Identify a pool of capable individuals for the purposes of increasing decisions support bench strength in the EA or at the local level. This would include individuals qualified or trainee as FBAN or LTAN; However it should be recognized there are a large number of individuals possessing the Fire Behavior Specialist skillsets needed that may not be on this qualification track and they should not be excluded based on this.
- A focused element of the EA DSG is to support local units from any agency (Federal, State or Local) in the development of risk based strategic decisions using WFDSS or other decision support programs or methods

It should be recognized that currently some of these objectives are currently being met but largely spearheaded by individual action. Formalizing this group has brought stakeholders together from across the EA serving to provide local knowledge and SA and provide sounding boards for those currently involved in producing decision support products.

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