

Fuels and Fire Behavior Advisory

Southwest Idaho

August 20 – September 3, 2026



Subject: Abundant grass crops combined with very dry shrubs and juniper following long winter drought conditions have led to above-normal fire activity, rapid fire runs and extreme fire behavior.

Discussion: Persistent drought, critically low live and dead fuel moistures, and an above-average fully cured fine fuel crop are creating above-normal significant wildland fire potential across southwest Idaho. Drought-stressed vegetation, localized shrub mortality, and continuous cured fine fuels are contributing to increased fire occurrence and extreme fire behavior.

Recent large fires throughout the region such as the Big Grass fire, which ignited in Oregon and has burned over 40 miles into Idaho, and the Tartar fire in Idaho have demonstrated rapid rates of spread during the day and night, active torching, long-range spotting, prolonged burning periods, and high resistance to control. Field observations from recent incidents have documented unusually receptive juniper fuel beds and more aggressive fire behavior within juniper and shrub fuel types.

Difference from Normal Conditions: Fuel conditions are significantly drier than seasonal averages. Live woody fuel moisture remains critically low; in many cases, record low values have been measured. Fine fuels are fully cured. Together with carryover fuel from previous years, they provide a continuous fuel source supporting rapid fire spread and facilitating fire transition into heavier fuels.

Concerns to Firefighters and the Public: Firefighters should anticipate rapid fire growth, active fire behavior, long-range spotting, and high resistance to control during initial attack and extended operations. Aggressive burning may occur at night. Human-caused ignitions remain a significant concern, and any new fire has the potential to escape initial containment under current fuel and weather conditions. Communities located adjacent to wildland fuels should remain prepared for rapidly changing fire conditions.

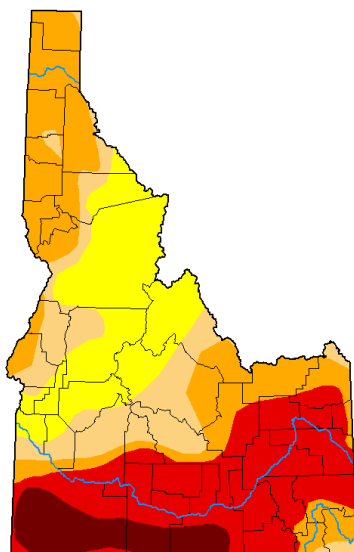
Mitigation Measures:

- Monitor fuel and fire weather conditions continuously and anticipate rapid changes in fire behavior.
- Utilize risk-based suppression strategies and evaluate indirect tactics when firefighter exposure outweighs the probability of success.
- Maintain LCES and identify contingency actions early.
- Position resources for rapid initial attack while preparing for extended attack and fire growth.
- Incorporate heat illness prevention through work/rest cycles, hydration, and crew rotation.
- Increase public prevention messaging to reduce human-caused ignitions.

Area of Concern: Southwest Idaho (portions of US WFS Great Basin Unit 1 and the West Zone of Payette National Forest) – see Figure 3.

Issued By: Great Basin Predictive Services and Idaho Fire Planners.

Figure 1
Idaho Drought Monitor Map



U.S. Drought Monitor
August 11, 2026

Figure 2
Idaho Last 14 Days % of Normal
Precipitation

Percent of Average Precipitation (%)
8/5/2026 – 8/18/2026

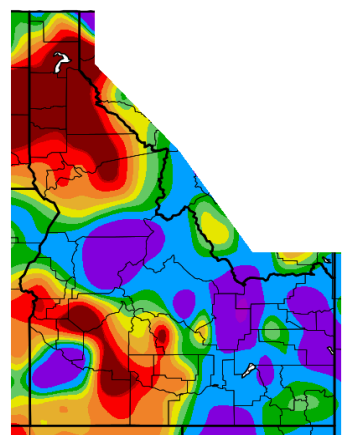


Figure 4: Big Grass Fire, Unit 1 WFS, Southwest ID
Burned 572,000 acres across OR & ID. Currently largest US
active fire of 2026 and in top 20 largest nationwide since
1990.



Figure 5 Tartar Fire, north of Payette, ID
Recently burned 158,000 acres. Exhibited occasional plume
dominated, extreme fire behavior.



Figure 3
Affected Areas