

Fuels and Fire Behavior Advisory

Southeastern Coastal Plain

Date Advisory Effective – May 14, 2026



Subject: Long-term drought persists across the Southeast, even as recent rainfall brought areas of temporary relief. Wildfire activity will likely increase in mid- to late May as drier and hotter weather returns.

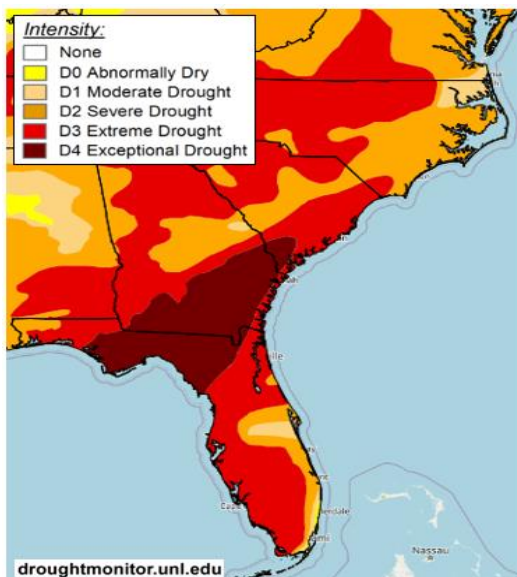
Summary:

- Drought has reduced soil moisture levels, causing stress to vegetation and lowering live fuel moisture values.
- Unusually dry organic soils may burn for extended periods, increasing control challenges and reburn potential.
- Low water levels are exposing additional fuels and reducing natural barriers that normally slow or stop fire spread.
- Drier and warmer conditions will bring an increase in fire activity and fire intensity, along with high rates of spread.
- Where drying continues, fires may have higher resistance to control, requiring more resources and longer mop-up than normal.



The Fuels and Fire Behavior Advisory area includes peninsular Florida into south Georgia, in addition to the South Carolina and North Carolina coastal plain

Discussion: Although recent rainfall and cooler conditions dampened fire activity in early to mid-May from north Florida into the Carolinas, large parts of the advisory area remain in D3 (extreme) to D4 (exceptional) drought. Periodic hot and dry weather, extremely low soil moisture, dry surface fuels and low water levels have all contributed to above normal fire activity this spring. Most of the Florida peninsula has observed only scattered beneficial rainfall, and fire activity has persisted. While weather conditions will continue to fluctuate throughout the rest of May, overall drier and hotter trends with intermittent lightning will likely bring another increase in activity. Extended attack fires may also re-emerge where needle cast is occurring in scorched pine forests and timberlands.



droughtmonitor.unl.edu

The U.S. Drought Monitor updated May 12th continues to show widespread severe, extreme and exceptional drought in the coastal Southeast

Differences from Normal Conditions: Long-term rainfall deficits across the advisory area will require either persistent moisture or more than a foot of rain to ease long-term drought conditions in the coastal Southeast. This underlying dryness has resulted in historically low water levels, with many monitoring locations showing discharge rates that are near the historical minimum for this time of year. KBDIs largely remain at least 100-200 points above normal for this time of year, and a sharp increase is likely as near-record heat returns during the third week of May. The combination of low water levels and dry fuels has resulted in extreme fire behavior, burn periods extending through the overnight hours, ground fuels burning for weeks at a time, and increased resistance to control. There have been widespread reports of holdover fires re-emerging or smoldering for several weeks to more than a month after being contained. In central and south Florida, some of the coldest winter temperatures in decades resulted in freeze kill of sensitive vegetation that is now burning readily. Fire activity will remain dominated by drought-stressed fuels until substantial relief occurs.

Fuels and Fire Behavior Advisory

Southeastern Coastal Plain

Date Advisory Effective – May 14th, 2026



Concerns to Firefighters and the Public:

- Critical fire weather may occur with hot, dry & breezy days, dry frontal passages, sea breezes, thunderstorms, and high dispersion indices.
- A critical fire environment may occur with RH 5-10% above and winds 5-10 mph below typical thresholds.
- Vegetative stress has reduced live fuel moisture in many areas and will lead to active fire behavior.
- Expect most snags and heavy dead and down fuel to readily ignite, potentially consuming entirely.
- Ground and/or duff fire will likely be a long-term issue that can hinder fire control efforts and lead to poor visibility in smoke or super fog.



Aerial view of the Lochloosa West Fire in north Florida



Needle cast in the footprint of the Sargent Fire in south Georgia may lead to reburn (photo provided by Gary Jarvis)

- Recent fuel-driven fires in coastal plain areas have produced explosive fire behavior that may outpace control efforts, even with little or no wind - swamps or drainages may not provide reliable containment.
- Fires have significant reburn potential given longer residual burn time and needle cast from scorched canopies.
- Careful consideration should be given to any planned prescribed fires during this time, particularly when relying on natural wetlands firebreaks that typically hold fire.
- Duff and muck may appear moist and saturated at the surface, but there may be lower layers of organic fuels which are still dry and available to carry smoldering fire.
- Members of the public should stay informed of fire activity near their location and should heed evacuation notices immediately!

Issued by: Southern Area Decision Support with state and federal partners