January-March 2026 Outlook: Perspective for the Lower Rio Grande Valley/Deep S. Texas Region

NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE

December 29, 2025

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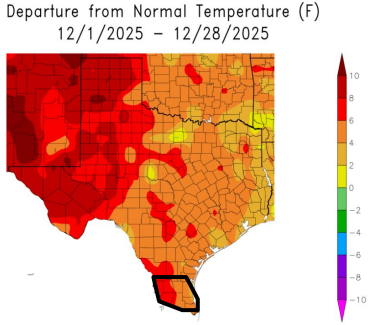
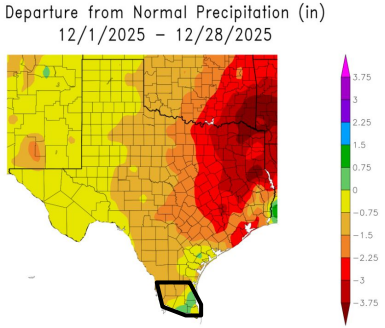
NWS Brownsville/Rio Grande Valley, Texas

Dry and warmer than normal conditions are favored to continue through the Winter 2025/2026 Season; drought, wildfire potential, water supply, marine/coastal hazards, and cold fronts remain in focus





December 2025: Very Warm Streak Continues as December Finishes Out Amongst The Top Ten Warmest On Record

Maximum 28-Day Mean Avg Temperature for BROWNSVILLE S PADRE ISLAND INTL AP, TX

Click column heading to sort ascending, click again to sort descending.

Rank	Value	Ending Date	Missing Days
1	72.6	2021-12-28	0
2	70.8	2024-12-28	0
3	69.9	2025-12-28	0
4	69.9	1970-12-28	0
5	69.5	1984-12-28	0
6	69.3	1948-12-28	0
7	68.3	2015-12-28	0
8	68.1	2012-12-28	0
9	67.5	2016-12-28	0
10	67.2	1921-12-28	0

Period of record: 1898-12-01 to 2025-12-28

Maximum 28-Day Mean Avg Temperature for HARLINGEN RIO GRANDE VALLEY INTL AP, TX

Click column heading to sort ascending, click again to sort descending.

Rank	Value	Ending Date	Missing Days
1	70.5	2021-12-28	0
2	67.6	2024-12-28	0
3	67.6	2015-12-28	0
4	67.1	2025-12-28	0
-	67.1	2012-12-28	0
6	66.4	2016-12-28	0
7	66.0	2007-12-28	0
8	65.8	1956-12-28	0
9	65.6	2014-12-28	0
10	65.1	1954-12-28	0

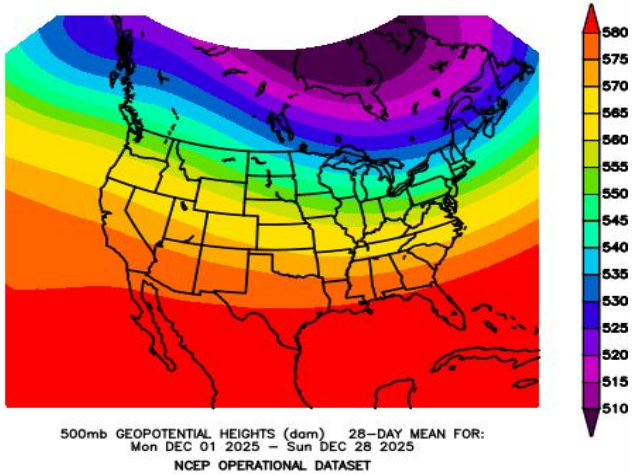
Period of record: 1952-07-15 to 2025-12-28

Maximum 28-Day Mean Avg Temperature for MCALLEN MILLER INTL AP, TX

Click column heading to sort ascending, click again to sort descending.

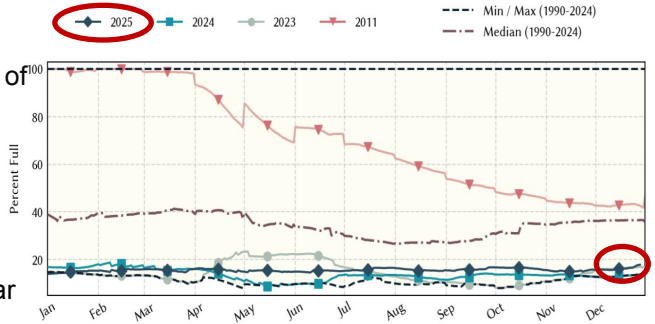
Rank	Value	Ending Date	Missing Days
1	70.9	2021-12-28	0
2	69.7	2025-12-28	0
3	69.2	2024-12-28	0
4	68.7	1970-12-28	0
5	68.6	1984-12-28	0
6	68.3	2012-12-28	0
7	68.3	2015-12-28	0
8	67.8	2016-12-28	0
9	67.8	2007-12-28	0
10	66.2	1994-12-28	0

Period of record: 1961-01-14 to 2025-12-28



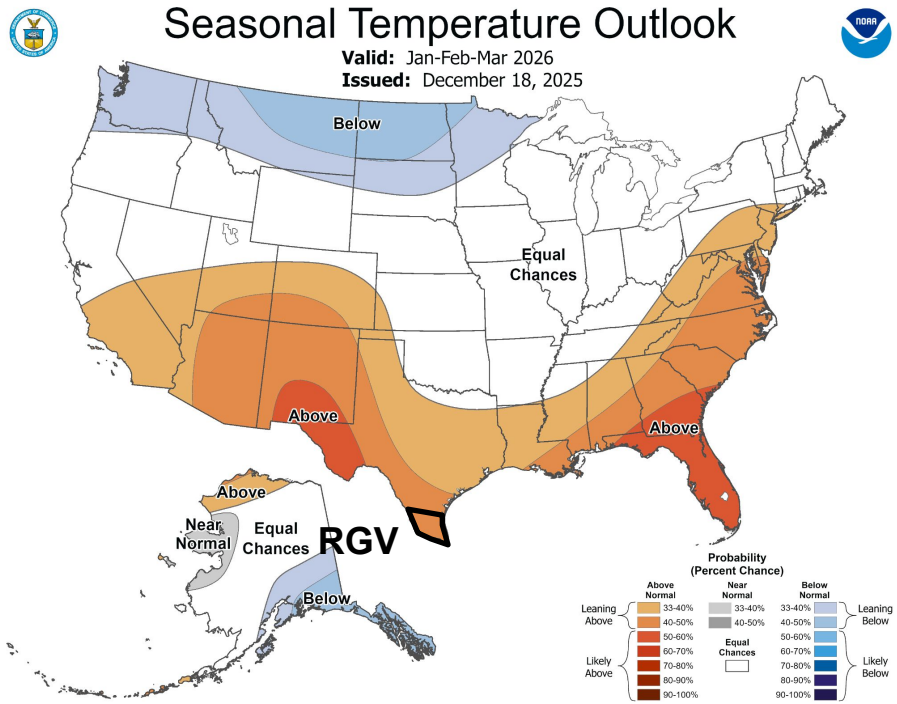
Top Image: 500 mb pattern averaged out from December 1-28, 2025.

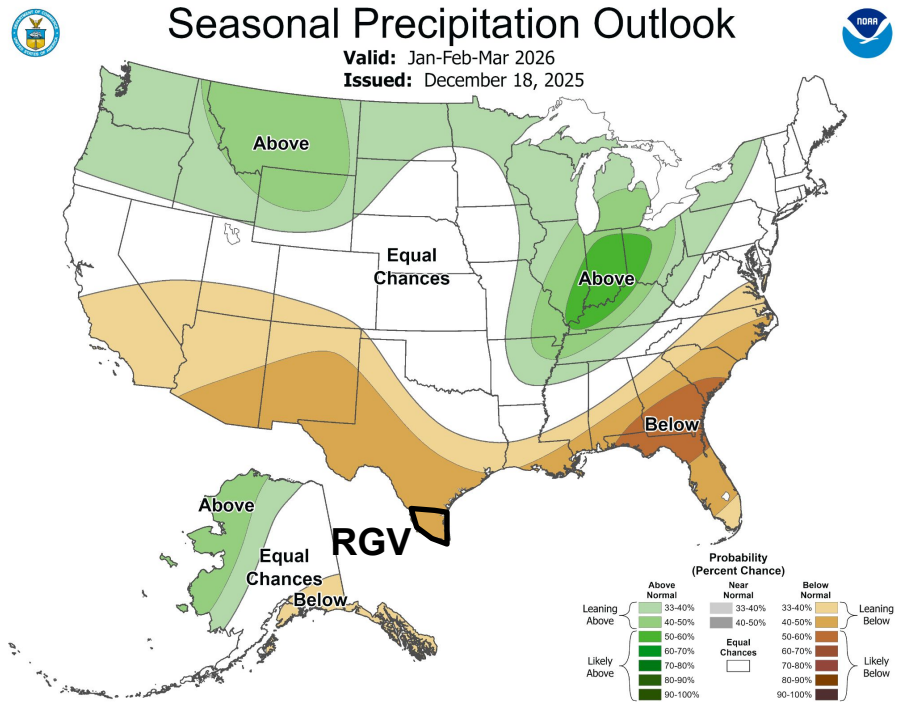
- **December 2025 will finish among the top 10 warmest on record.** As of the 28th, Brownsville **ranked #3 all-time, Harlingen ranked #4 all-time, and McAllen ranked #2 for the month**. Based on 1991-2020 averages, Brownsville is +5.2F above normal with an average temperature of 69.9F. McAllen is +5.6F above normal with an average temperature of 69.7F. Harlingen (Valley Airport) is +4.5F above normal with an average temperature of 67.1F.
- Despite a **slight cooldown** in the final days of December, both Brownsville, Harlingen, and McAllen will likely maintain their top ten position all-time.
- Meanwhile, it has been mostly dry across the region for yet another month as rainfall has been far and few in between and hit or miss across the region. Based on 1991-2020 averages, month-to-date, Brownsville is **-0.38 below normal** with a value of 0.71". McAllen/Miller saw 0.41" of rainfall, which is **-0.55 below normal.** Harlingen (Valley) was near normal levels with a value of 1.15", **0.04" above normal**.



Bottom Image: Latest data from the **Rio Grande Reservoirs (Texas Share)** continue to indicate 2025 levels are at or below 30 year lows and near records. Month-over-month shares have increased from 15.8% to 18.0%. **Credit:** Texas Water Development Board

Seasonal Forecast, January-March 2026 USA





<u>Confidence:</u> Medium-High (60-80%) for warmer and High (70-90%) for drier than normal conditions during the JFM period.

Key Takeaways: January-March 2026 Outlook

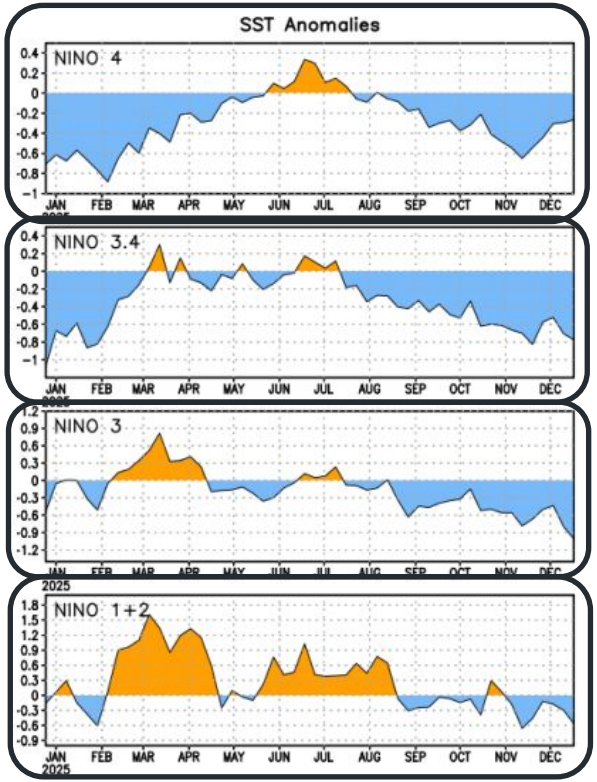
- A **warmer than normal** outlook is anticipated through the **January-March** period for the Rio Grande Valley/Deep South Texas region. **Confidence is medium-high (60-80%). Meanwhile, a drier than normal pattern is expected to persist through the January-March period. Confidence is high (70-90%).**
- Expect for **cool/cold fronts** **and** **dry air intrusions** to become more pronounced and frequent through February. These cool/cold fronts will help to drive blustery northerly winds, which coupled with lower relative humidity values, will increase the **potential for wildfires**.
- **D2 (Severe Drought)** and **D3 (Extreme Drought)** conditions continue across the Upper Valley and Northern Ranchlands (see the Jan-Mar 2026 Droughtlook for more information). Meanwhile, **D0 (Abnormally Dry)** to **D1 (Moderate Drought)** conditions continue over the Mid-Lower Valley (i.e. Cameron, Willacy, and Hidalgo Counties). These conditions very well could increase/worsen for most areas through the winter season if dryness continues.
- Falcon Int'l Reservoir remained **near historic lows at the end of December**. **As we continue to progress through the dry season, confidence remains near-certain (~100%) on total storage remaining just above record lows through March.**
- Additionally, the **continuation of cool/cold frontal passages** will result in a continuation of hazardous **coastal (tidal/surf) and marine (dangerous boating) situations** as we progress through early 2026!
- **Final Note:** Despite the favored warmer than average temperatures through winter 2025/2026, chances **(30 to 50 percent) for a significant cold snap or two through mid February remain!** One of the uncertainties include the placement of the cold air intrusions (i.e. an east of the Mississippi/Red River focus vs. over the Rockies). The past three winters (2022/23, 2023/24, and 2024/25) had these. **Stay Tuned!**

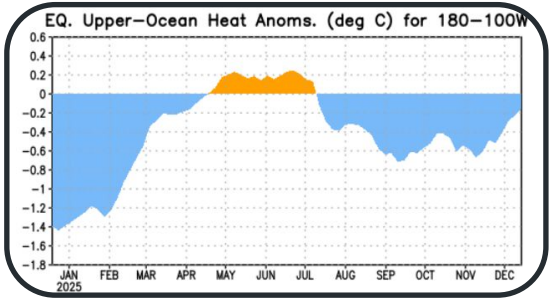
The "Why" of the Forecast: La Nina, soil moisture, long-term trends, and other key climate teleconnections to play a role

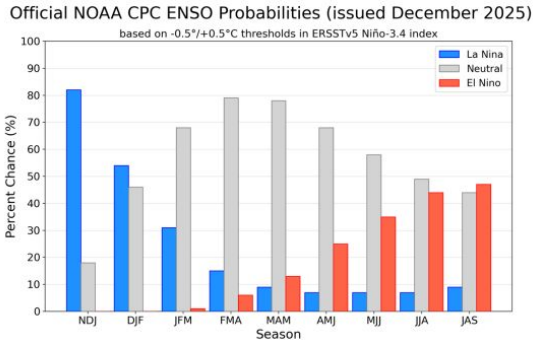
- With a La Nina in place and expected to persist through the Winter Season, a **warmer** **and** **drier** **than normal pattern** is favored to continue through at least March across Deep South Texas/RGV.
- Other seasonal/sub-seasonal **teleconnections/variables** such as the Arctic Oscillation, Pacific North American Oscillation, circumpolar vortex (PV) strength, northern hemispheric snow cover trends, and ***intraseasonal variability*** could play a **vital role** leading to anomalous an weather event(s) such as a major cold snap or ice storm this winter season!
- As **drought conditions** expand and **cool snaps** become more frequent and stronger, **wildfire season** could emerge in January and potentially become more **robust late winter into spring 2026.**

*Above right: Oceanic Niño Index. Values between -0.5 and 0.5 (gray) indicated ENSO Neutral conditions persisting since April-June 2024.

Year	DJF	JFM	FMA	MAM	AMJ	MJJ	JJA	JAS	ASO	SON	OND	NDJ
2022	-1.0	-0.9	-1.0	-1.1	-1.0	-0.9	-0.8	-0.9	-1.0	-1.0	-0.9	-0.8
2023	-0.7	-0.4	-0.1	0.2	0.5	0.8	1.1	1.3	1.6	1.8	1.9	2.0
2024	1.8	1.5	1.1	0.7	0.4	0.2	0.0	-0.1	-0.2	-0.3	-0.4	-0.5
2025	-0.6	-0.4	-0.2	-0.1	-0.1	-0.1	-0.2	-0.3	-0.4	-0.6		

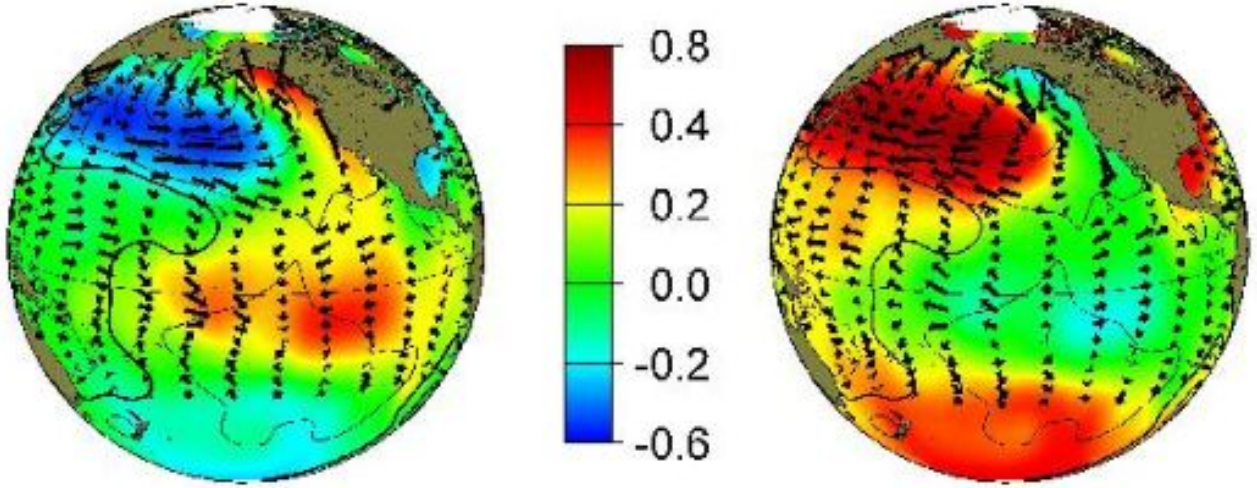






Pacific Decadal Oscillation (PDO)

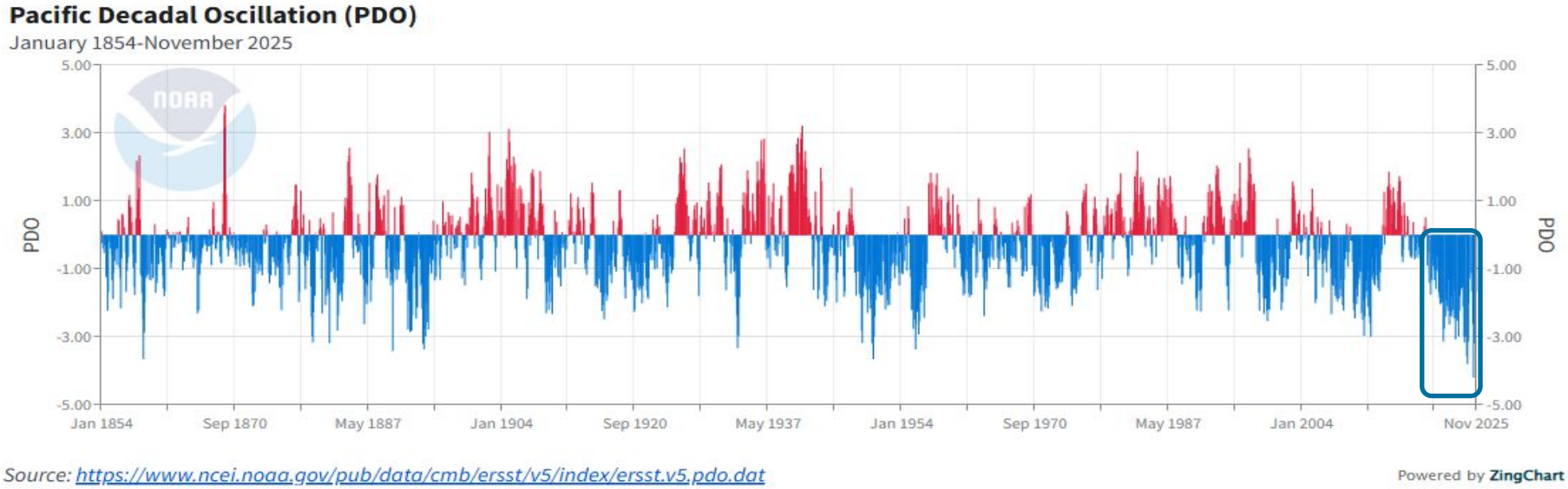
Positive Phase



Negative Phase

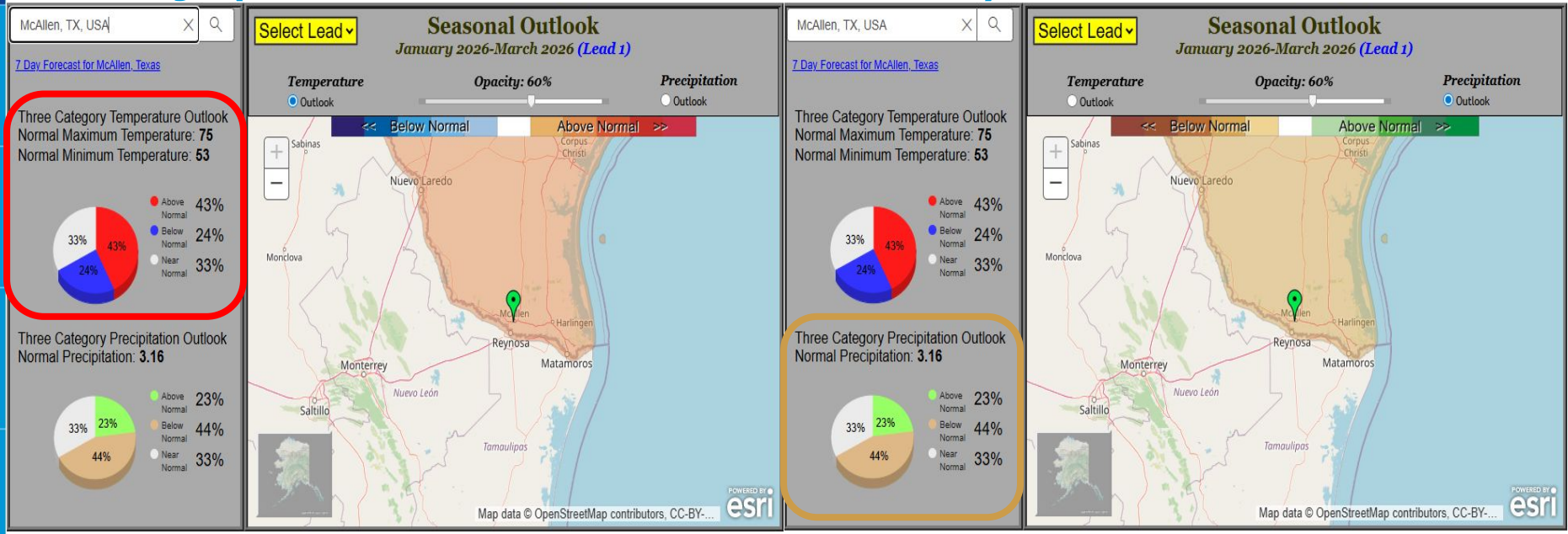
- The Pacific Decadal Oscillation (PDO) is often described as a long-lived El Nino-like pattern of Pacific climate variability.
- Above average sea level pressures over the North pacific (warm SST anomalies in the interior and cool SST anomalies along the North American coast) ⟶ Negative PDO (right).

The “Why” of the Forecast: Pacific Decadal Oscillation (PDO) remains in Sharp Negative Phase



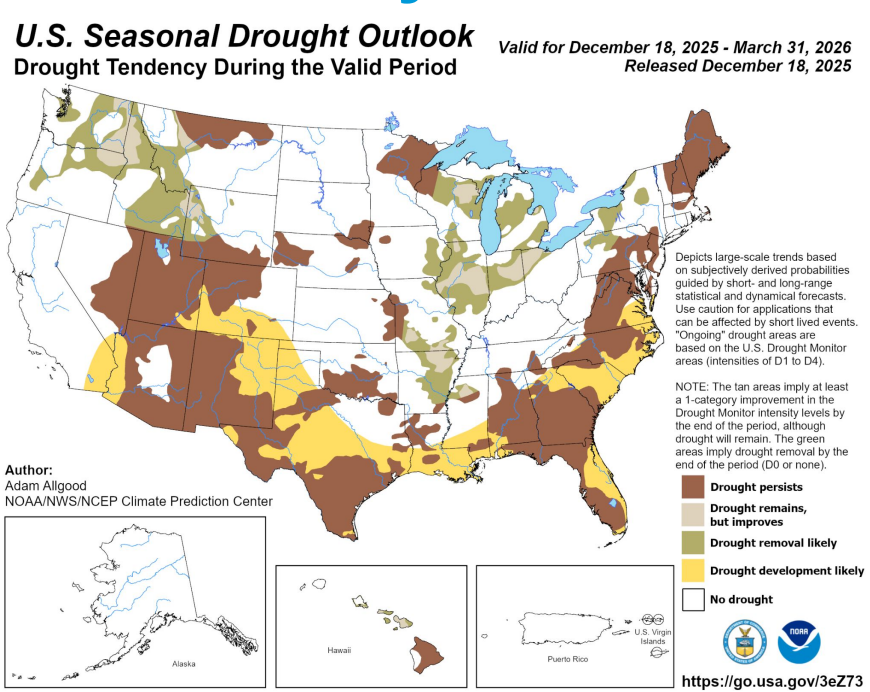
- The 2021-2025 **prolonged and strong negative PDO has persisted**, and will remain the case through early 2026. This **continues to support confidence** for a **warmer than normal pattern to persist through early 2026.**
- In addition to the sharply negative PDO in place, a La Nina will support a **drier than normal precipitation outcome.** **Confidence remains high** for a sharply negative PDO to continue.
- Correlations between at least one hard freeze each winter since 2020/2021 and the prolonged negative PDO, with more research needed.

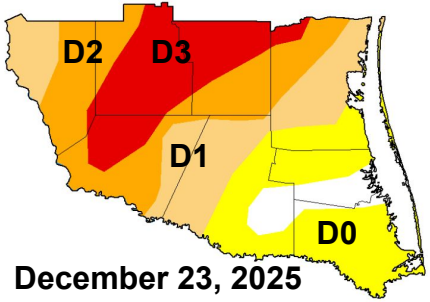
The January-March 2026 Outlook: Rio Grande Valley (McAllen as Anchor Point)

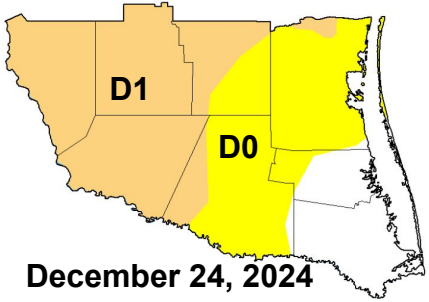


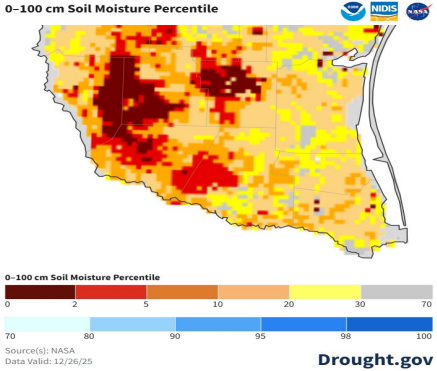
- **Temperature:** **Warmer than normal temperatures** are expected. **Confidence: Medium-High (60-80%).** RGV averages: Afternoon – Lower 70s through January; mid-upper 70s in February; upper 70s to lower 80s early-mid March; lower-mid 80s late March. Wake-up: Lower-mid 50s through January, mid-upper 50s in February; lower-mid 60s in March.
- **Precipitation:** **Drier than normal outcome** is expected**. Confidence: High (70-90%).** RGV averages: 1 to 1.5 inches (**most in March**).

The January-March 2026 "Droughtlook"



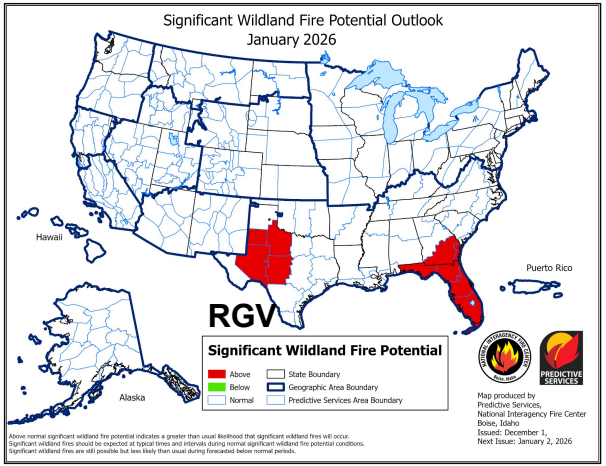


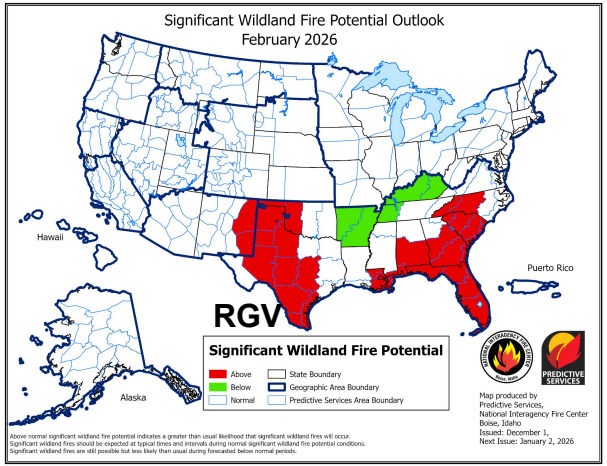


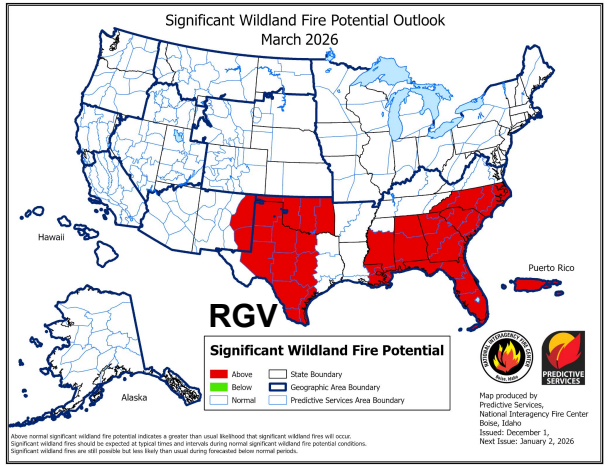


- **Year-over-Year (YoY) drought/dryness** shows a stark contrast between 2024 which was relatively dry to 2025 which has been very dry, specifically across Brush Country, the Northern Ranchlands, or areas along/west of IH-69C.
- **Extreme Drought (D3)** conditions are being observed over 20% of Deep South Texas, including parts of the Upper Valley and the Northern Ranchlands (i.e. northwestern Kenedy, most of Brooks, most of Jim Hogg, extreme southeastern Zapata, and northern Starr counties.
- **Severe Drought (D2)** conditions are being observed across 26% of Deep South Texas, including most of Zapata and Starr, the remainder of Jim Hogg and Brooks, northwestern Kenedy, and northern Hidalgo Counties.
- The seasonal drought outlook suggests **drought conditions persisting** over the RGV/Deep South Texas through March.

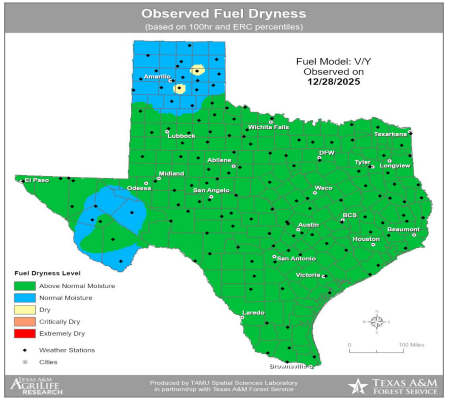
Wildfire Concerns Remains Limited Going Into January; however, things could become more robust in February/March 2026!







- As of late December, soil moisture conditions were seen in a transitional to dry state across much of the Rio Grande Valley/Deep South Texas ranchlands, **courtesy of a prolonged dry spell over the past 3-4 months.**
- Aided by a La Nina, a **drier and warmer than normal pattern** is expected to persist through March 2026, which would set the stage for **wildfire spread potential as early as January through March/April 2026.**
- As we continue to move through this winter season, **cooler and dry air intrusions** are expected to increase and intensify. **If dryness persists,** some of the **stronger cool/cold fronts will raise the risk for wildfire spread as early as January 2026.** This is especially true for the Rio Grande Plains and Brush Country.

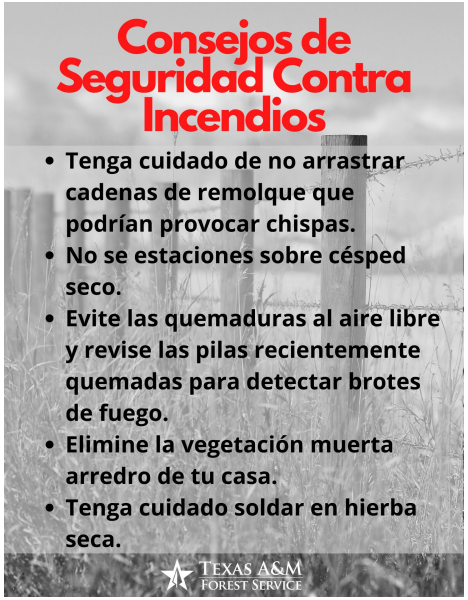


Fuel moisture remains above normal across Deep South Texas. The lack of widespread dry to critically dry fuels suggest the threat for large fires should remain limited.

Wildfire Prevention Review

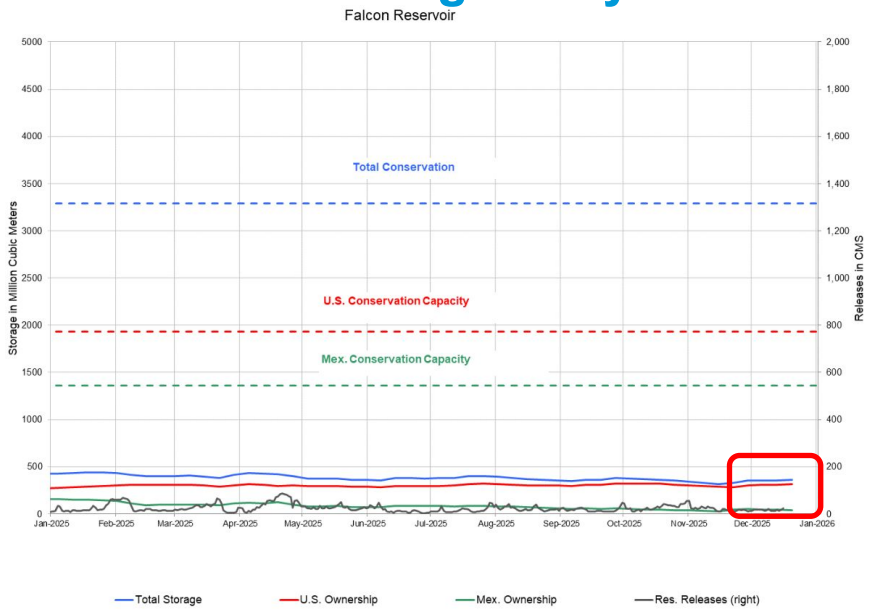
- Conditions remain stable for most locations at the end of December. However, if dryness persists, wildfire spread potential may increase through the early parts of 2026 in the Rio Grande Plains/Brush Country,and potential spread into the mid/upper RGV. Such a situation would worsen drought and cure recently-grown fine fuels such as rangeland and brush.
- Continue to practice fire weather safety and focus on **farm, ranch workers**, and **other persons who might drive hot vehicles** on parched brush on critical/near-critical days – especially on warm, breezy days during a dry spell.

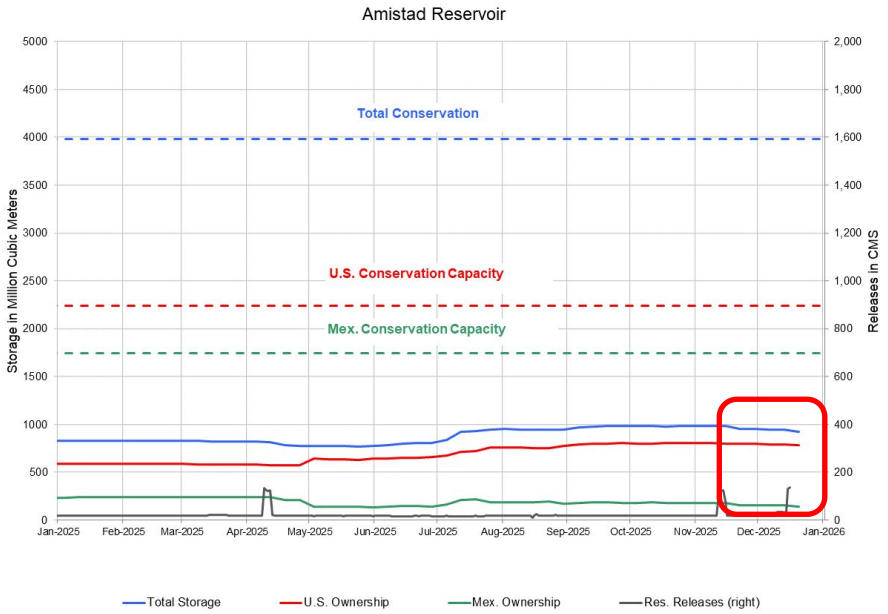
Infographics for Wildfire Prevention



- ~50 in all (20 in Spanish)!
- Thanks to **Texas A&M Forest Service** for Many of These!

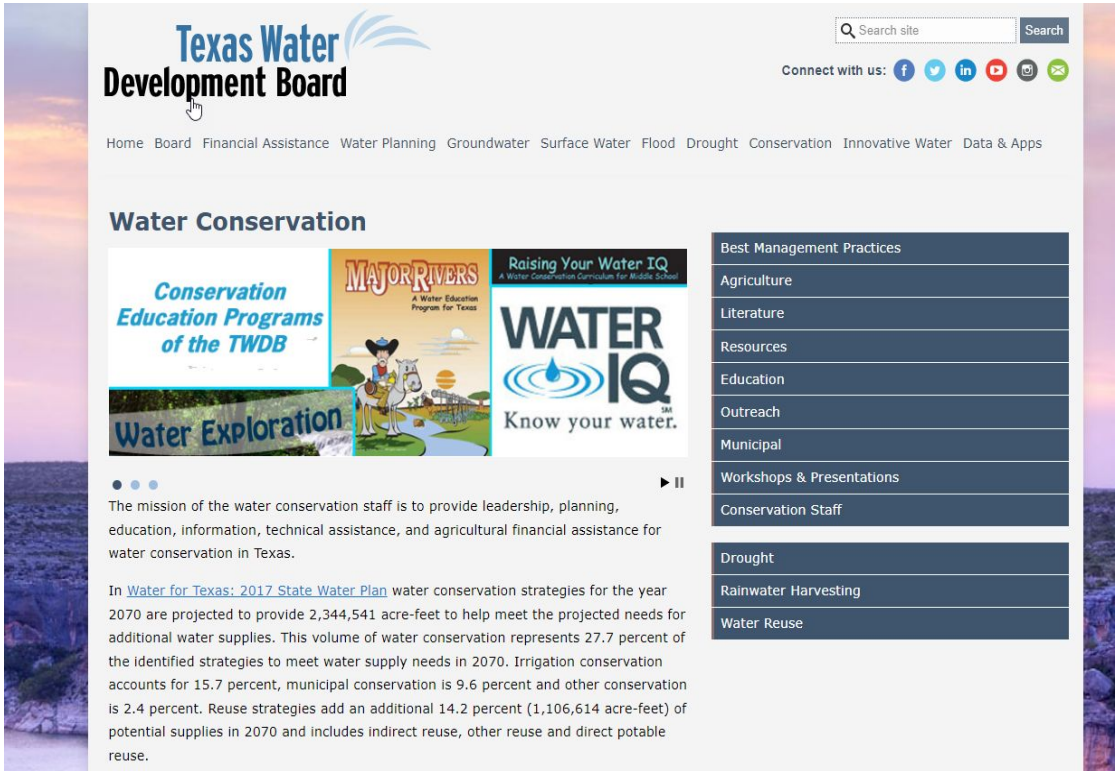
Amistad and Falcon Reservoirs have and will continue to remain just above record lows through early 2026





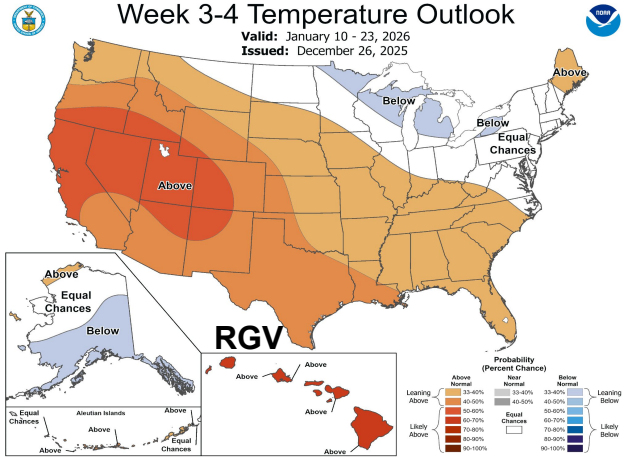
- **Falcon remained nearly steady at 10.9%** as of December 28 (slightly higher than the **10.1% in late November**). Levels should change little or fall slowly through March.
- **Amistad also remained nearly steady and slightly above all-time record lows as of late December.** Levels were at **22.7% on December 28th** (slightly lower than the **23.9% from late November**). Levels should change little or fall slowly through March.

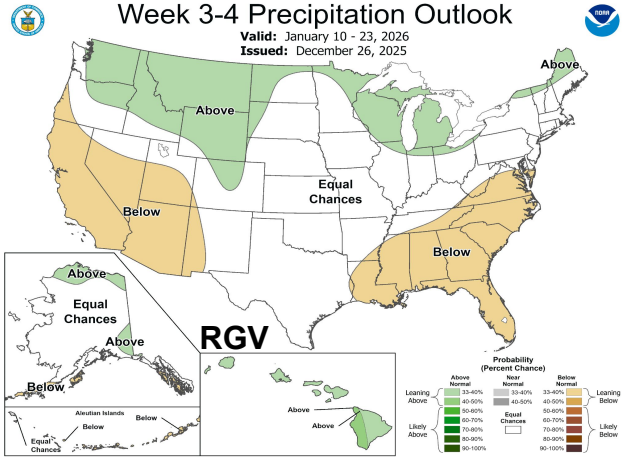
Water Conservation is Key Until Further Notice!

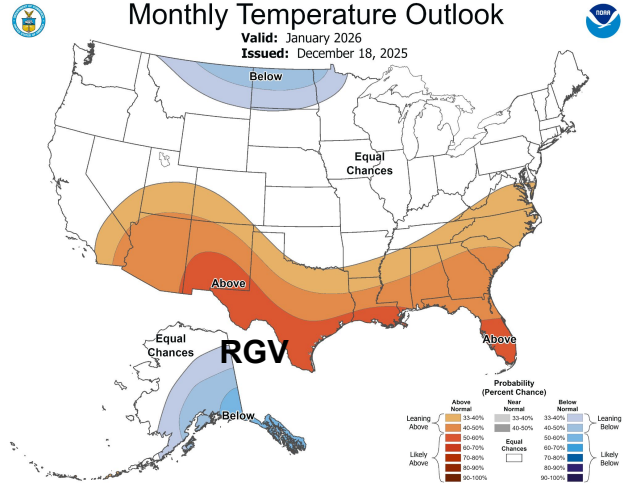


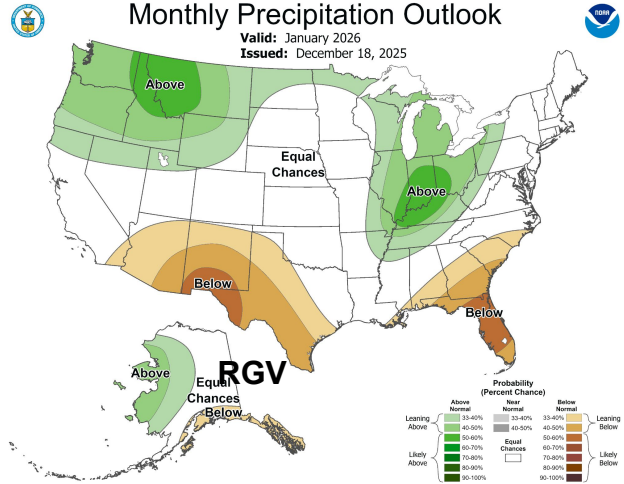
- "Stage 2/3" Restrictions continued into Winter 2025 in some areas, and are likely to continue **until further notice** based on inflows from Amistad and Falcon.
- Learn more at the Texas Water Development Board's Conservation Page.

January 2026: Medium-High (60-80%) Confidence on Temperature and Precipitation Trends









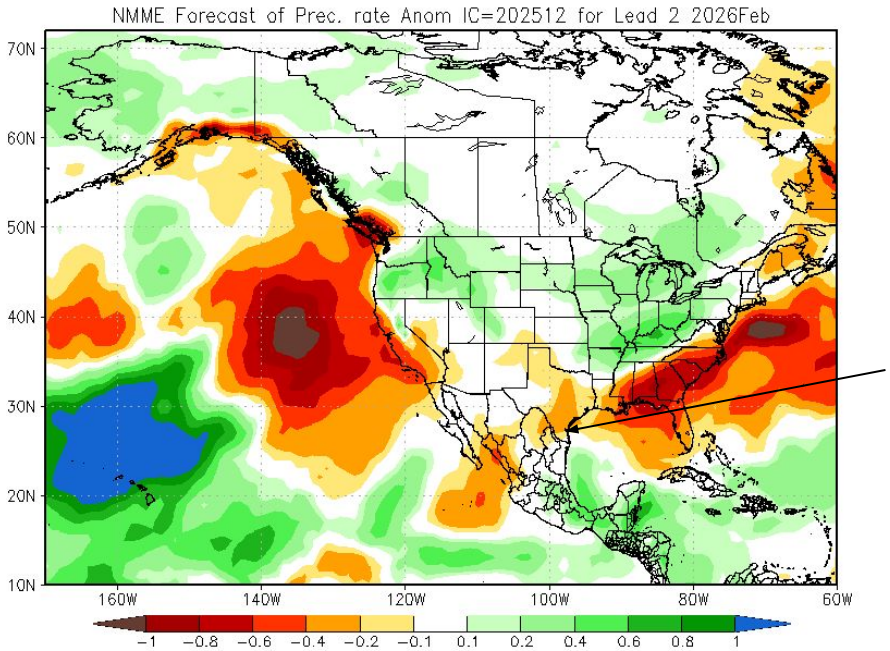
Short range models suggest the pattern becoming ***less amplified*** resulting in **moderating temperatures** across Deep South Texas to start the New Year! This pattern could by and large persist through the month of January as mid to longer range models signal.

That said, there could be an occasion or two where the pattern becomes highly amplified again, which would foster or support additional cold air intrusions mid to late January as the **cold and snowpack** continues to build across the northern U.S. and Canada.

Overall, the **pattern remains La Nina like** (**cold and wintry north U.S.** vs **mild and drier south U.S.**). Trends suggest for temperatures to run **normal to warmer than normal** through January. While there could be some **slight rain chances** here or there, the pattern overall will be **drier than normal** through January.

Early Look: February 2026

Potential rainfall rate anomaly, February 2026

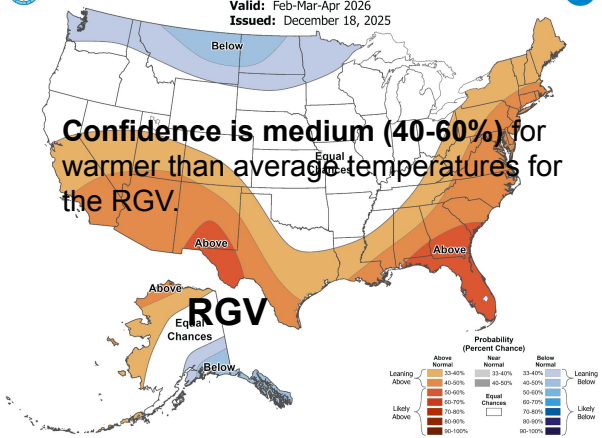


- This model's forecast for February continues to favor a **dry pattern** (note the brown/golden brown colors nearby) persisting. Confidence remains high given that we're in the heart of the dry season here!
- **Cool/cold fronts** moving into Texas will continue! Most will likely be dry, but there could be one or two that could reach the Valley/Deep South Texas Ranchlands and could set off an occasional **shower and thunderstorm**. Will be monitoring the potential for a **major cold snap or two (Arctic Express Events)** to take place anytime between now and mid-February. If followed by light precipitation, this **may be in the form of freezing rain (icing) or sleet**.

Late Winter through Spring 2026: Warmer than normal trends favored; Drier than normal trends are favored to continue through late Winter

Seasonal Temperature Outlook

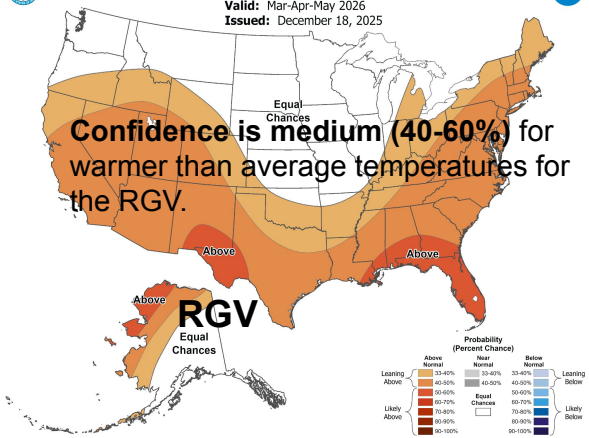
Valid: Feb-Mar-Apr 2026
Issued: December 18, 2025



Confidence is medium (40-60%) for warmer than average temperatures for the RGV.

Seasonal Temperature Outlook

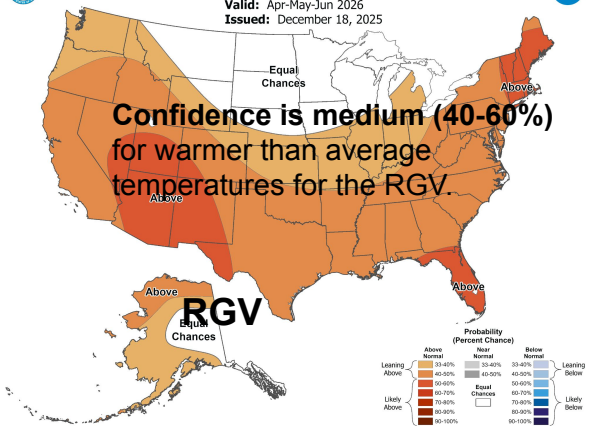
Valid: Mar-Apr-May 2026
Issued: December 18, 2025



Confidence is medium (40-60%) for warmer than average temperatures for the RGV.

Seasonal Temperature Outlook

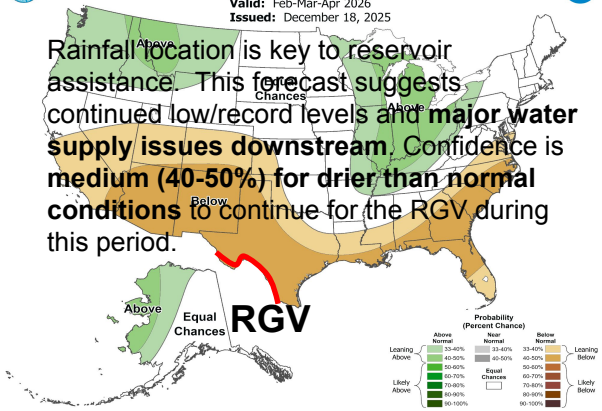
Valid: Apr-May-Jun 2026
Issued: December 18, 2025



Confidence is medium (40-60%) for warmer than average temperatures for the RGV.

Seasonal Precipitation Outlook

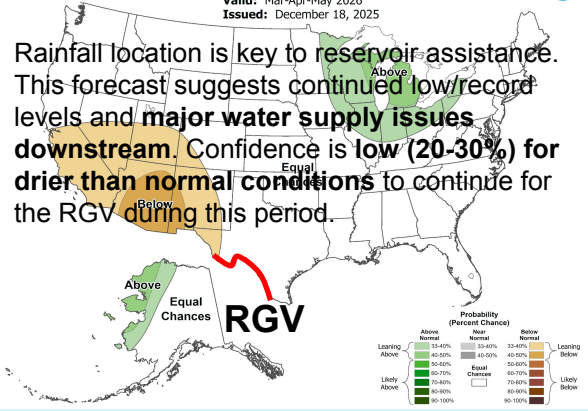
Valid: Feb-Mar-Apr 2026
Issued: December 18, 2025



Rainfall location is key to reservoir assistance. This forecast suggests continued low/record levels and **major water supply issues downstream**. Confidence is **medium (40-50%) for drier than normal conditions** to continue for the RGV during this period.

Seasonal Precipitation Outlook

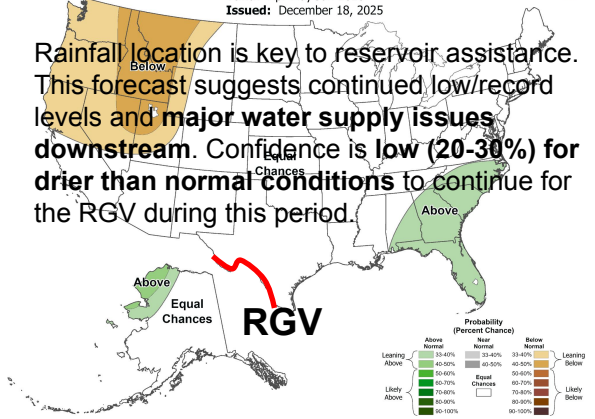
Valid: Mar-Apr-May 2026
Issued: December 18, 2025



Rainfall location is key to reservoir assistance. This forecast suggests continued low/record levels and **major water supply issues downstream**. Confidence is **low (20-30%) for drier than normal conditions** to continue for the RGV during this period.

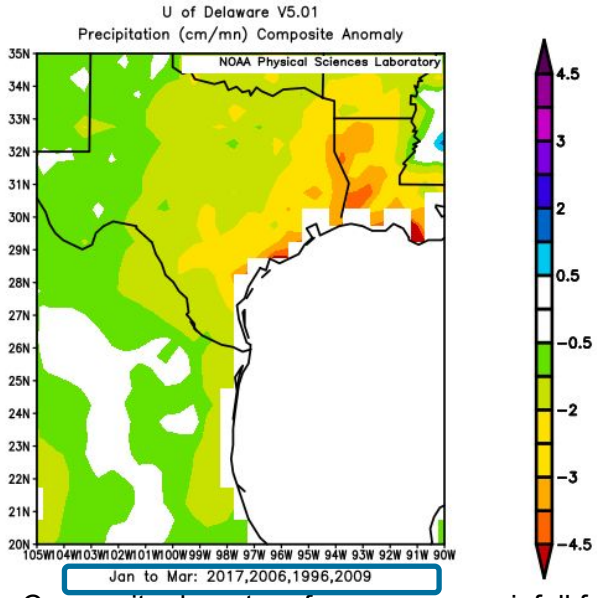
Seasonal Precipitation Outlook

Valid: Apr-May-Jun 2026
Issued: December 18, 2025

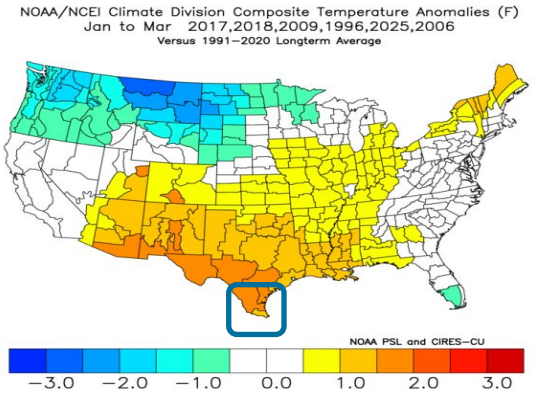


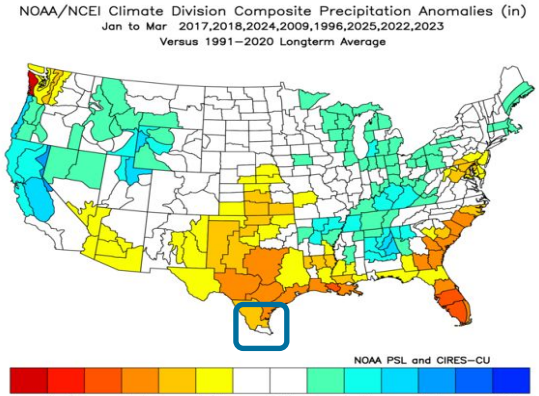
Rainfall location is key to reservoir assistance. This forecast suggests continued low/record levels and **major water supply issues downstream**. Confidence is **low (20-30%) for drier than normal conditions** to continue for the RGV during this period.

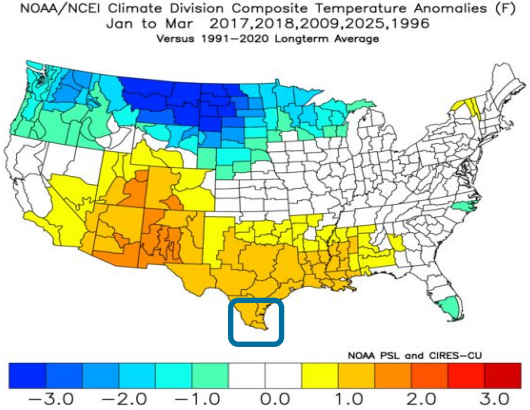
Comparing Similar ENSO Neutral to La Nina (Weak) Episodes mostly within the last 30 years; January-March Periods

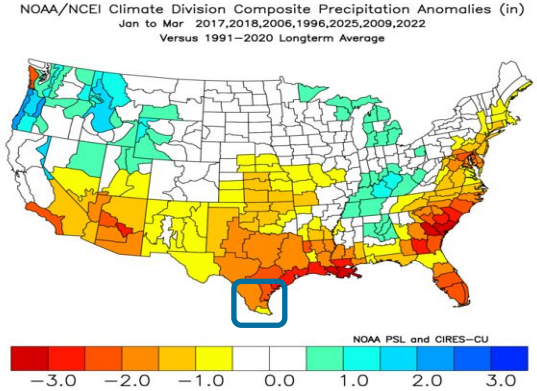


Composite departure from average rainfall for years of similar Neutral to La Nina transition episodes in the January to March window.









- **Top:** Composite temperature (left) and precipitation (right) anomalies for similar Neutral to L Nina transition episodes leading into January-March, since 1950.
- **Bottom Left:** Same, but without the 2006 season.
- **Bottom Right:** Same, except took out 2023 & 2024, and added the 2006 season.

Bottom Lines

Warmer than normal temperatures are expected to persist through Winter 2025/2026 (January-March 2026). Calendar Year 2025 is likely to finish among **the top ten warmest on record** for most locations.

Sufficient inflows from Mexican and International reservoirs serving the Lower Rio Grande watershed remain unlikely. The **combined share of water in Amistad and Falcon will likely to continue at or below Stage 2/3 triggers (25% or less) until further notice.** Water conservation, smart irrigation, and rainwater harvesting are **critical actions to continue as we move through the dry season (winter into mid spring 2026).**

Drought conditions are expected to continue and could worsen across parts, if not all of the RGV/Deep South Texas as time progresses. **D2 (Severe Drought) and D3 (Extreme Drought)** continues for the Upper valley and Northern Ranchlands (see the Jan-Mar 2026 Droughtlook for more information). Meanwhile, **D0 (Abnormally Dry) to D1 (Moderate Drought)** conditions continue over Mid-Lower Valley (i.e. Cameron, Willacy, and Hidalgo Counties).

Fire weather concerns should begin increasing in January thanks to the prolonged **dry pattern** in place and as **cool/cold fronts** become more frequent and stronger. Again, this is especially true for the Rio Grande Plains and Brush Country, already in D2/D3 Drought. **Fire weather concerns could become more robust late winter through Spring 2026!**

Additional strong cool/cold fronts are possible in the weeks and months ahead, **with the potential for day-to-day "feel-like" temperatures dropping more than 40 degrees.** January and February will be prime periods! Key uncertainty will be the placement of these cold air intrusions! Additionally, with **cool/cold fronts** becoming stronger and more frequent over the next couple months, **dangerous marine/coastal hazards will also be in play**. Additionally, there will be the **potential** for one or two **freezes/hard freezes through mid-February**, despite the warmer than average seasonal forecast. **Light freezing (ice) or frozen (sleet) precipitation could occur with one or more of the freezes**.