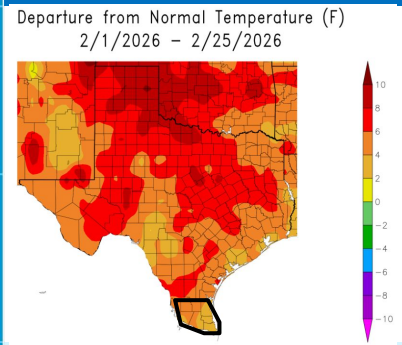
March-May Spring 2026 Outlook: Perspective for the Lower Rio Grande Valley/Deep S. Texas Region

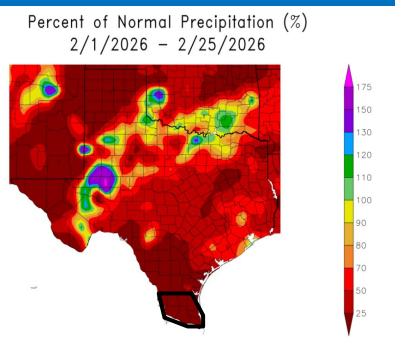
NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE

February 27, 2026

Andrei Evbuoma, Barry Goldsmith, & Rodney Chai
NWS Brownsville/Rio Grande Valley, Texas

Warmer than normal conditions are favored to continue through the spring; precipitation outlook is a toss-up; drought, wildfire potential, water supply issues remain in focus





February 2026: February will finish as one of the warmest on record; the stretch since December 1st has also been one of our driest on record

Maximum 26-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	72.8	2017-02-26	0
2	71.1	1962-02-26	0
3	70.5	2000-02-26	0
4	70.4	2026-02-26	1
5	70.1	2018-02-26	0
6	69.6	1957-02-26	0
7	69.6	1932-02-26	0
8	69.3	2008-02-26	0
9	69.2	2013-02-26	0
10	69.0	2009-02-26	0

Period of record: 1898-12-01 to 2026-02-26

Maximum 26-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	74.7	2017-02-26	0
2	72.5	1962-02-26	0
3	72.1	2026-02-26	1
4	71.3	2000-02-26	0
5	71.3	2008-02-26	0
6	71.0	1999-02-26	0
7	70.1	2013-02-26	0
8	69.9	2009-02-26	0
9	69.7	2018-02-26	0
10	68.6	2016-02-26	0

Period of record: 1961-01-14 to 2026-02-26

Minimum 88-Day Total Precipitation 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	0.18	1899-02-26	57
2	0.45	1952-02-26	0
3	0.64	1971-02-26	0
4	0.80	2023-02-26	0
5	0.91	2026-02-26	1
-	0.91	1954-02-26	0
7	1.04	1953-02-26	0
8	1.05	2009-02-26	0
9	1.17	1917-02-26	0
10	1.19	1974-02-26	0

Period of record: 1898-12-01 to 2026-02-26

Minimum 88-Day Total Precipitation for MCALLEN MILLER INTL AP, TX

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

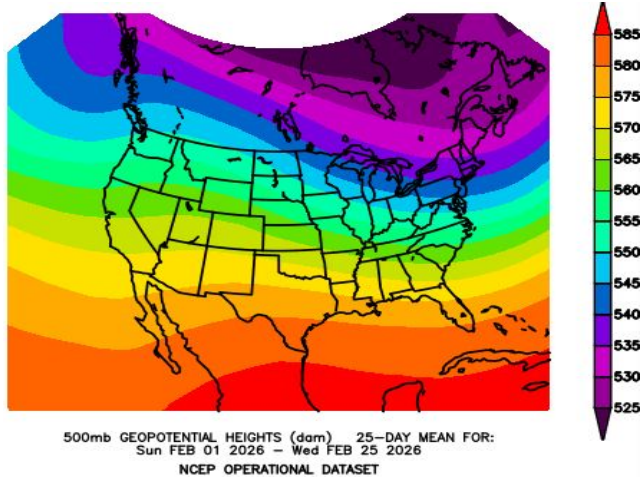
Rank	Value	Ending Date	Missing Days
1	0.32	1999-02-26	0
2	0.33	1962-02-26	0
3	0.44	2016-02-26	0
4	0.63	2006-02-26	0
5	0.69	1961-02-26	44
6	0.72	2009-02-26	0
7	0.83	1971-02-26	0
8	0.90	2026-02-26	3
9	0.95	2023-02-26	0
10	0.99	2013-02-26	0

Last value also occurred in one or more previous years.

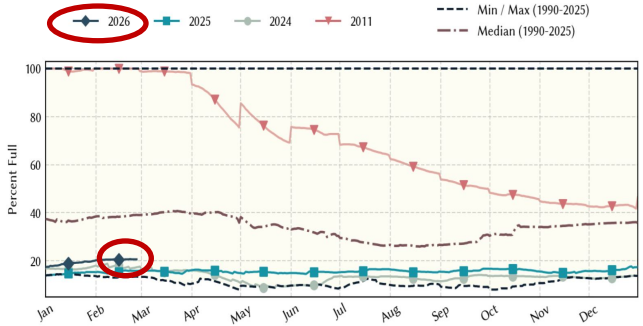
Period of record: 1961-01-14 to 2026-02-26

- **2026 is picking up where 2025 left off as the year is off to a hot start.** Consistent days of unseasonably warm temperatures (some days well above normal levels) plus the lack of a February Arctic Express Outbreak Event allowed for February 2026 to surge near the top of the record books along the Rio Grande Valley. Brownsville and McAllen will both finish in the top 5 warmest all-time for February 2026. **If this is hot start is any indication for what's to come, we are in for a very hot summer and year ahead!**

- Given that all of Deep South Texas is under a drought, including D3 (Extreme Drought) to D4 (Exceptional Drought) across the Northern Ranchlands and the Upper Valley and that there is a positive feedback loop (relationship) between the heat and dryness, it's worth pointing out just how dry it's been. Since December 1st, Brownsville is in the top 5 driest of all time. Meanwhile, McAllen is top 8th driest. **Both will likely continue to move up the ranks if dryness continues.**

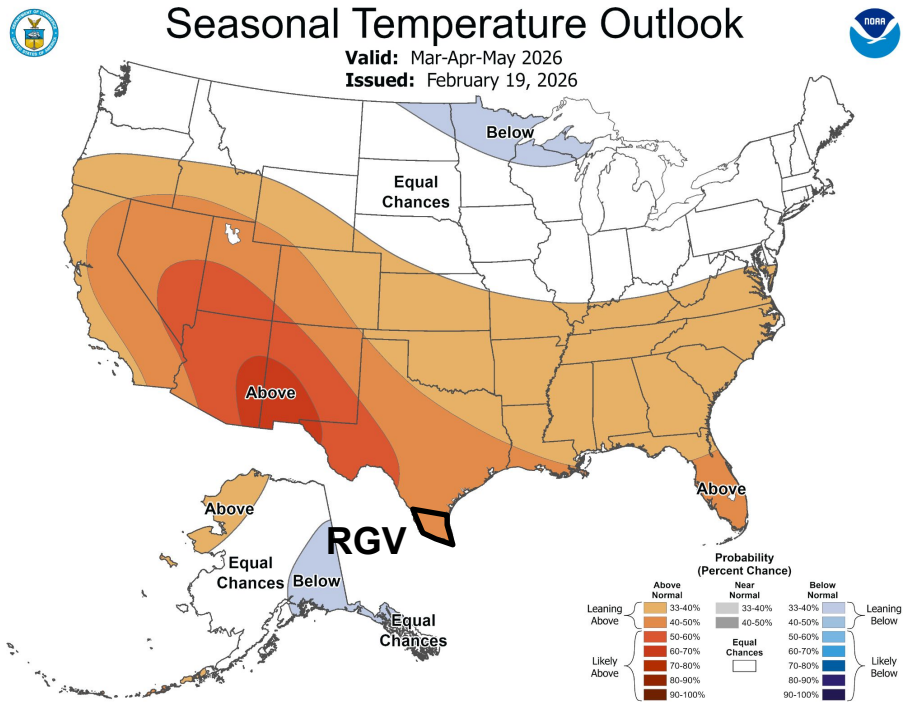


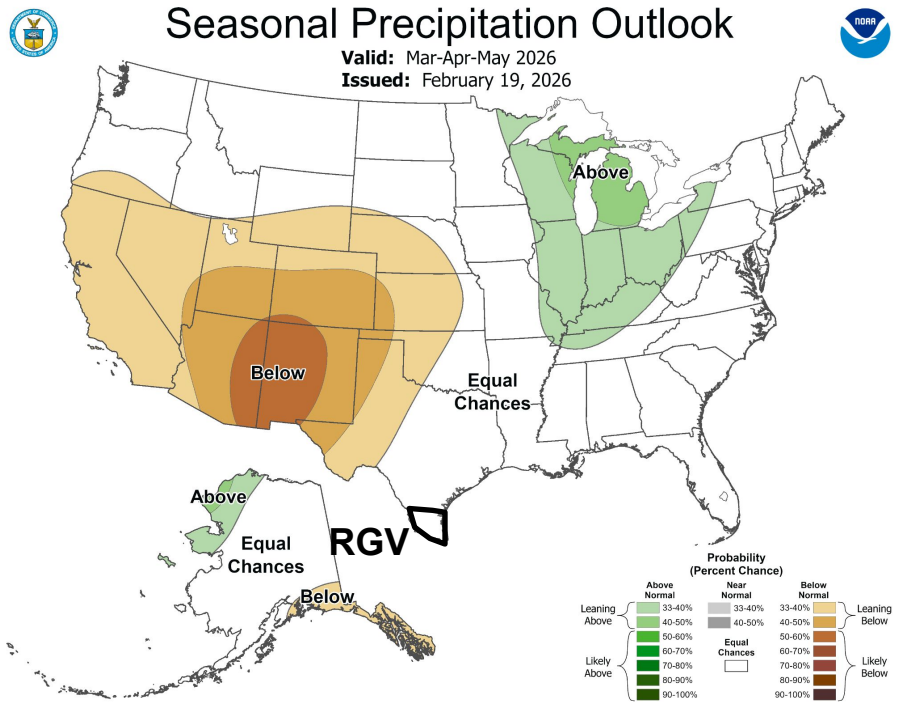
Top Image: 500 mb mean geopotential heights position from Feb 1-25, 2026.



Bottom Image: Latest data from the **Rio Grande Reservoirs (Texas Share)** continue to indicate Feb 2026 levels are near 30 year lows and records, but above 2025 levels. Month-over-month shares have increased from 19.7% to 20.6%. **Credit:** Texas Water Development Board

Seasonal Forecast, March-May 2026 USA





<u>Confidence:</u> Medium-High (60-80%) for warmer than normal temperatures during the March-May period. Equal chances for above, normal, or below normal precipitation. <u>Precipitation Confidence:</u> Low-Medium (33%).

Key Takeaways: March-May 2026 Outlook

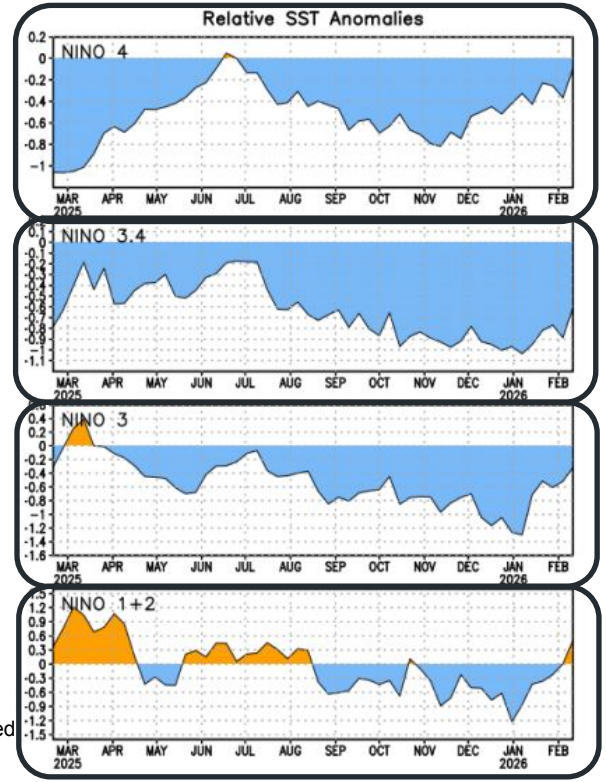
- **A warmer than normal outlook** is anticipated through the **March-May** period for the RGV/Deep South Texas region**. Heat Risk** concerns could begin developing as early as the 2nd half of March or in April. **Note:** March, April, and May are amongst the fastest warming months in the RGV.
- Meanwhile, **precipitation outlook is a true toss-up**! Can seasonality and the trend towards an El Niño later this summer/fall bring us **breakthrough rains** and support a **wetter pattern**? **Or** Will a weak La Niña, negative Pacific Decadal Oscillation (-PDO), and a perpetual drought keep the **drought theme in place**?
- **Peak fire weather season** will continue **through March**! The combination of breezy winds, low relative humidity values, combustible/freeze cured fuels, and extensively long-term drought with very low soil moisture will increase the threat for robust wildfire growth and spread through March.
- **D3 (Extreme Drought)** and **D4 (Exceptional Drought)** conditions continue into March across the Mid-Upper Valley and Northern Ranchlands (see slide 8 for more information). **D1 (Moderate Drought)** to **D2 (Severe Drought)** conditions continue into March over the mid-lower Valley (i.e. Cameron, Willacy, and eastern Hidalgo County) into east-southeastern Kenedy County.
- Falcon Int'l Reservoir remained **near historic seasonal lows at the end of February**. **Confidence remains near-certain (~100%) on total storage remaining just above record lows through May.**
- Occasional hazardous **coastal (tidal/surf) and marine (dangerous boating) situations** will continue as we progress through March into April.
- As we transition into March/April, **severe thunderstorms (winds, hail, tornadoes), heavy rainfall, and localized flooding** has to be taken into consideration as the prospects for showers and storms could increase. This is why we have equal chances for a wetter or drier than normal pattern March through May.

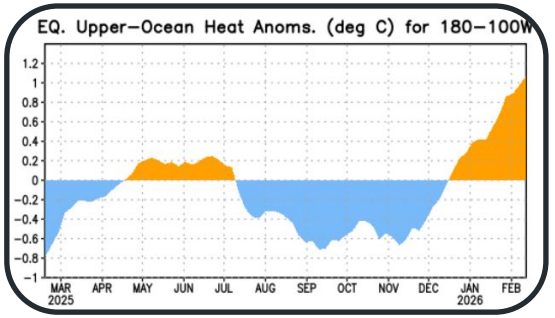
The "Why" of the Forecast: ENSO Neutral to El Niño transition, soil moisture, long-term trends, and other key climate teleconnections to play a role

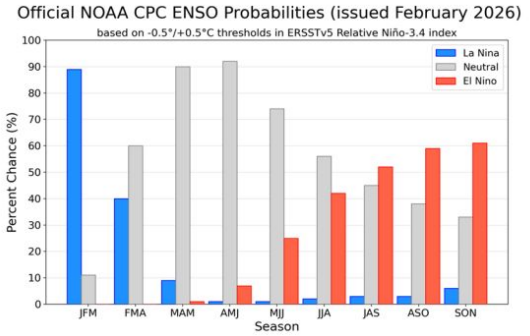
Year	DJF	JFM	FMA	MAM	AMJ	MJJ	JJA	JAS	ASO	SON	OND	NDJ
2022	-1.2	-1.2	-1.3	-1.3	-1.2	-1.0	-0.9	-1.0	-1.1	-1.1	-1.0	-1.0
2023	-0.8	-0.6	-0.4	-0.2	0.1	0.4	0.6	0.9	1.1	1.4	1.5	1.5
2024	1.2	0.9	0.5	0.1	-0.3	-0.5	-0.5	-0.6	-0.8	-0.8	-0.9	-1.1
2025	-1.1	-0.9	-0.7	-0.5	-0.5	0.0	-0.5	-0.6	-0.8	-0.9	-0.9	-1.0

- With a weak La Niña still sited over the equatorial Pacific, and a negative Pacific Decadal Oscillation (-PDO) in place as of this update, a **warmer** than normal pattern is favored across Deep South Texas/RGV through the Mar-May (MAM) period.
- A transition towards an **El Niño** this spring/early summer 2026 is expected. This **La Niña** to **El Niño** transition, in addition to climatology, could briefly shift the weather pattern into a **wetter pattern** during the Spring, particularly during the 2nd half of March and April. **This combined with the extensively long-term drought is why our precipitation outlook is a toss-up (50/50 chance for dry or wet pattern).**
- **Peak wildfire season** is in place and will remain in focus through March due to the combination of **long-term dryness, freeze cured grasses, breezy winds, and low relative humidity values.**

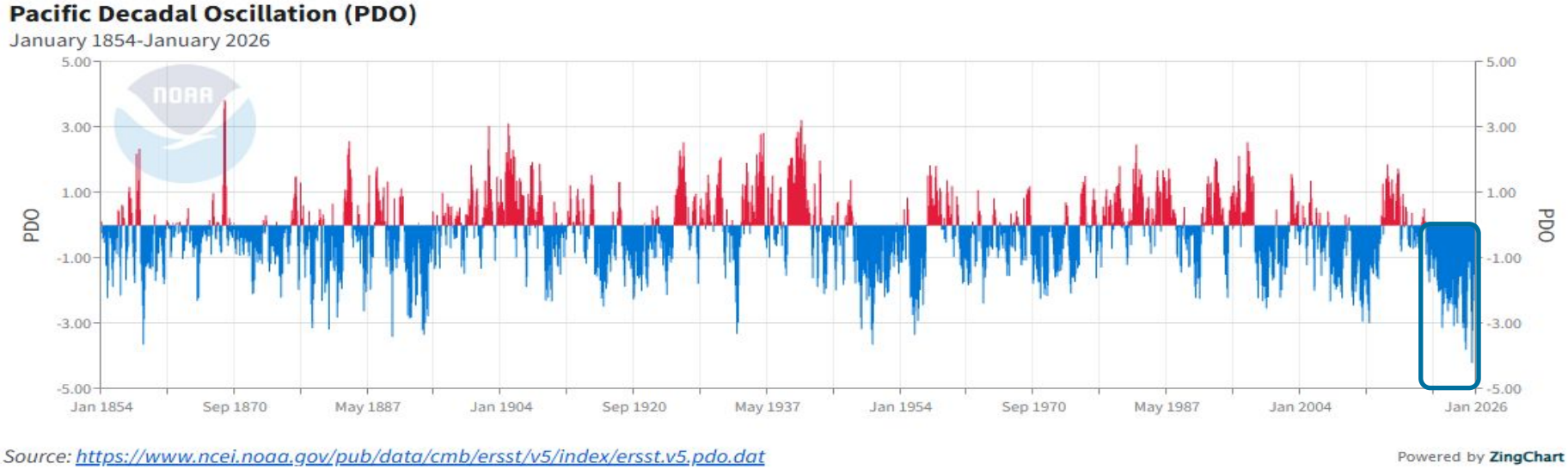
*Above right: Oceanic Niño Index. Values between -0.5 and 0.5 (gray) indicates ENSO Neutral conditions April-June 2024. ENSO Neutral conditions transitioned to a mainly weak La Nina July 2024 has persisted to present. Values between -0.5 and -1.0 (blue) indicates a weak La Nina.





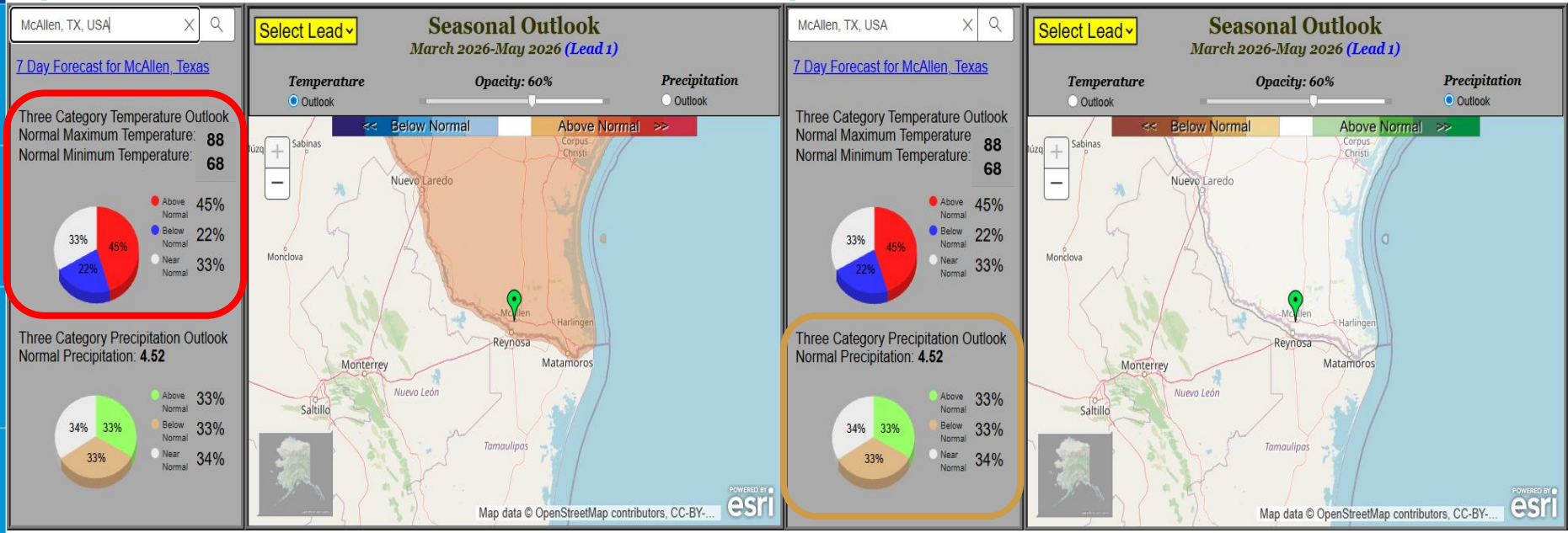


The “Why” of the Forecast: Pacific Decadal Oscillation (PDO) remains in Sharp Negative Phase



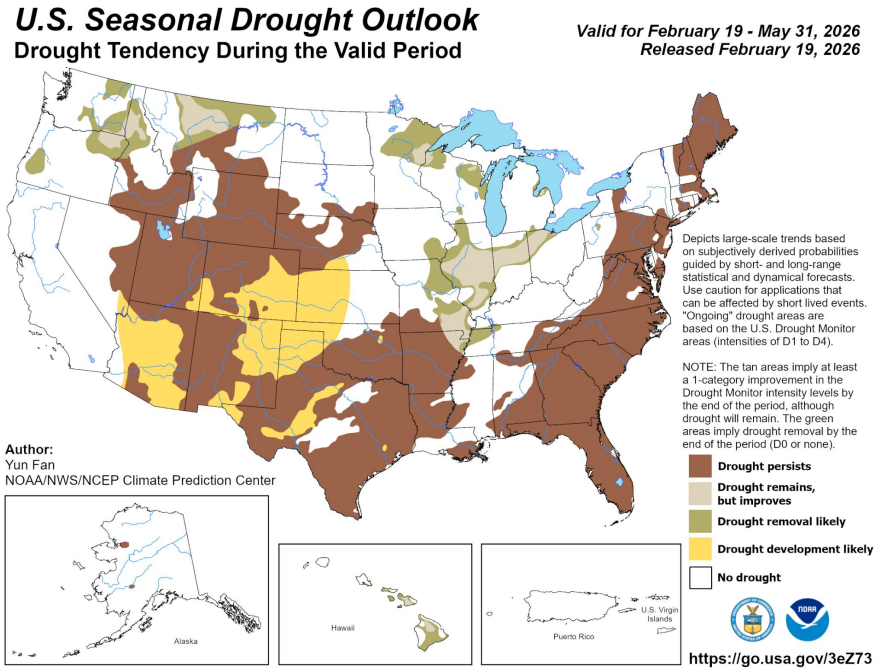
- The 2021-2026 **prolonged and strong negative PDO has persisted**, and will remain the case through mid 2026. This **continues to support confidence** for a **warmer than normal pattern to persist through mid 2026.**
- In addition to the sharply negative PDO, a **La Nina (weak)** and ongoing drought in place will support a **drier than normal precipitation outcome** through the Mar-May (MAM) period. However, seasonality plus a transition to an El Niño this spring/early summer 2026 supports a potential shift towards a **wetter pattern** across Deep South Texas and the Rio Grande Valley this Spring. Overall, **precipitation odds Mar-May are a toss-up** as a result. **Confidence remains high** for a sharply negative PDO to continue.

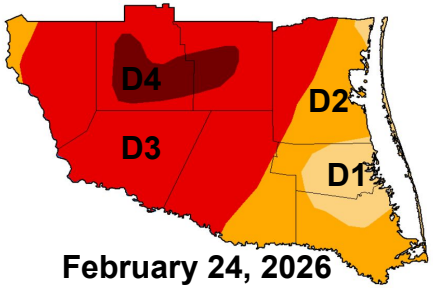
The March-May 2026 Outlook: Rio Grande Valley (McAllen as Anchor Point)

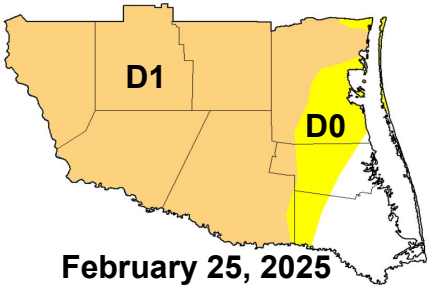


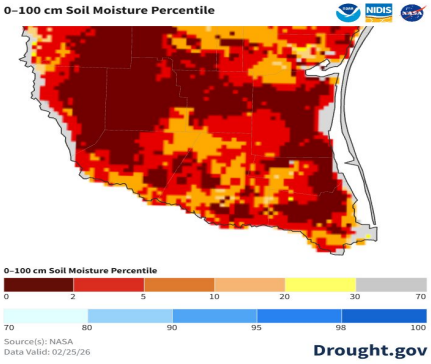
- **Temperature:** **Warmer than normal temperatures** are expected to continue. **Confidence: Medium-High (60-80%).** RGV averages: Afternoon – Upper 70s-Mid 80s through March; Mid 80s-Lower 90s through April; Upper 80s to mid 90s through May. Wake-up: Lower-Mid 60s through early April; Upper 60s-Mid 70s mid April to early May.
- **Precipitation:** **Odds are a toss-up though rain prospects could increase in time. Confidence: Low-medium (33% for above, normal, or below normal).** RGV averages: 5 to 6 inches (**most in May**).

The March-May 2026 “Droughtlook”



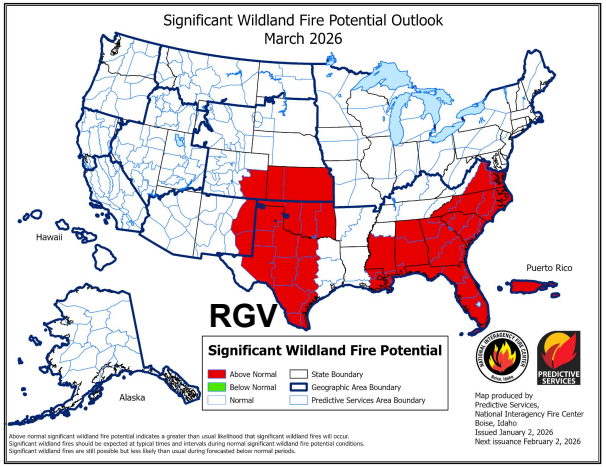


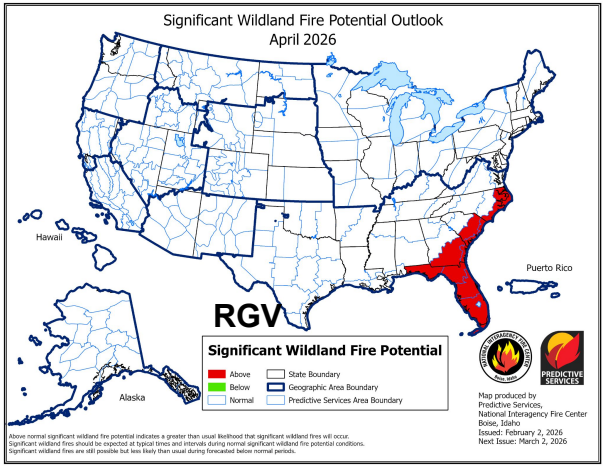


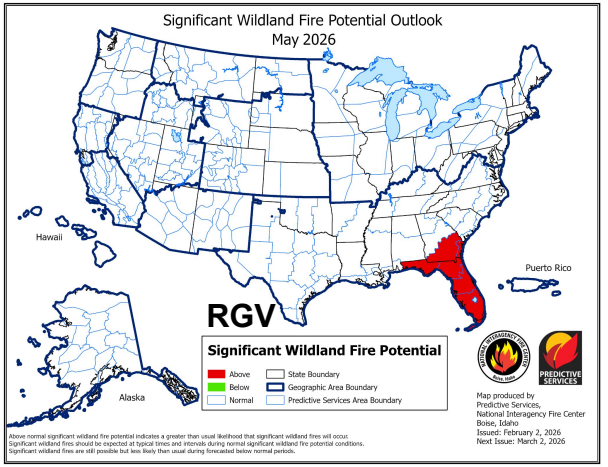


- **Year-over-Year (YoY) drought/dryness** shows much deeper drought/dryness issues across Deep South Texas this year compared to 2025.
- **Exceptional Drought (D4)** conditions are being observed across nearly 8% of Deep South Texas, including the central portions of Jim Hogg and Brooks counties. **Soil moisture percentages are very low** in this area.
- **Extreme Drought (D3)** conditions are being observed over 58% of Deep South Texas, including all of Starr, most of Jim Hogg, Zapata, Brooks, Hidalgo, and western Kenedy counties. **Soil moisture percentages are very low** in this area.
- **Severe Drought (D2)** conditions are being observed over 25% of Deep South Texas, including northwestern Zapata, southeastern Hidalgo, western Willacy, and most of Kenedy and Cameron counties.
- The seasonal drought outlook suggests **drought conditions/dryness persisting** overall over the RGV/Deep South Texas region through May.

Peak Wildfire Season is here and will remain in focus through March!







- In response to the recent Jan 25-27 2026 Arctic Blast Event, grasses/brush across all of Deep South Texas and the Rio Grande Valley have become freeze-cured. This has aided in above normal fuels across the region.
- The combination of **the extensively long-term drought** and **elevated fuels** will keep **wildfire spread potential concerns** in the picture through March (see images above).
- Additional cool fronts, though lessening in frequency and intensity in time, could yield lower relative humidity levels and blustery winds from time to time further supporting the risk for wildfires through March.
- **Drylines** will become critical, particularly on breezy days with winds out of the south or north, through March.
- Any **breakthrough rains** and/or **moisture levels** will become more important in the weeks ahead, particularly late March through at least April as days with a return flow out of the south boosting relative humidity (RH) values will be greater than days with winds out of the north.

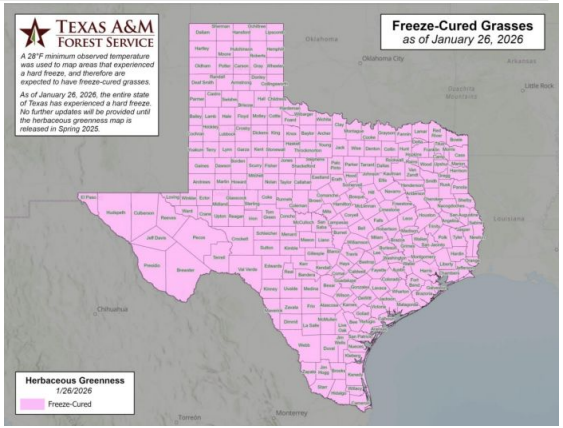
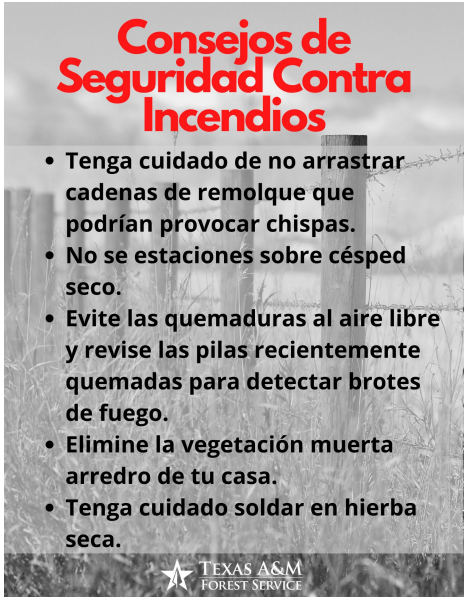


Image: Following the recent arctic outbreak January 25-27th, all of Texas has been freeze cured.

Wildfire Prevention Review

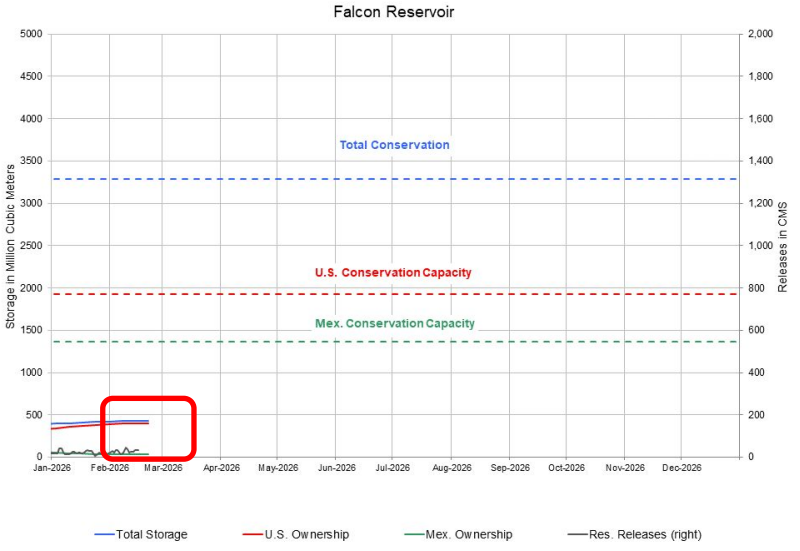
- Conditions remain dry to very dry at the end of February, with drought worsening already freeze-cured grasses and brush. Given the exceptional long-term dryness, wildfire spread potential concerns will remain elevated through **March.**
- Continue to practice fire weather safety and focus on **farm, ranch workers**, and **other persons who might drive hot vehicles** on parched brush on critical/near-critical days – especially on **warm-hot, breezy days during a dry spell.**

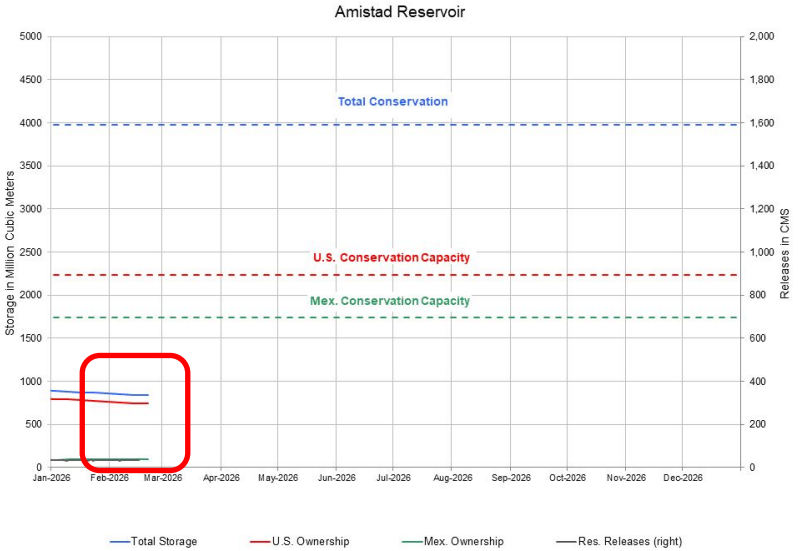
Infographics for Wildfire Prevention



- ~50 in all (20 in Spanish)! Ask us for more information.
- Thanks to **Texas A&M Forest Service** for many of these!

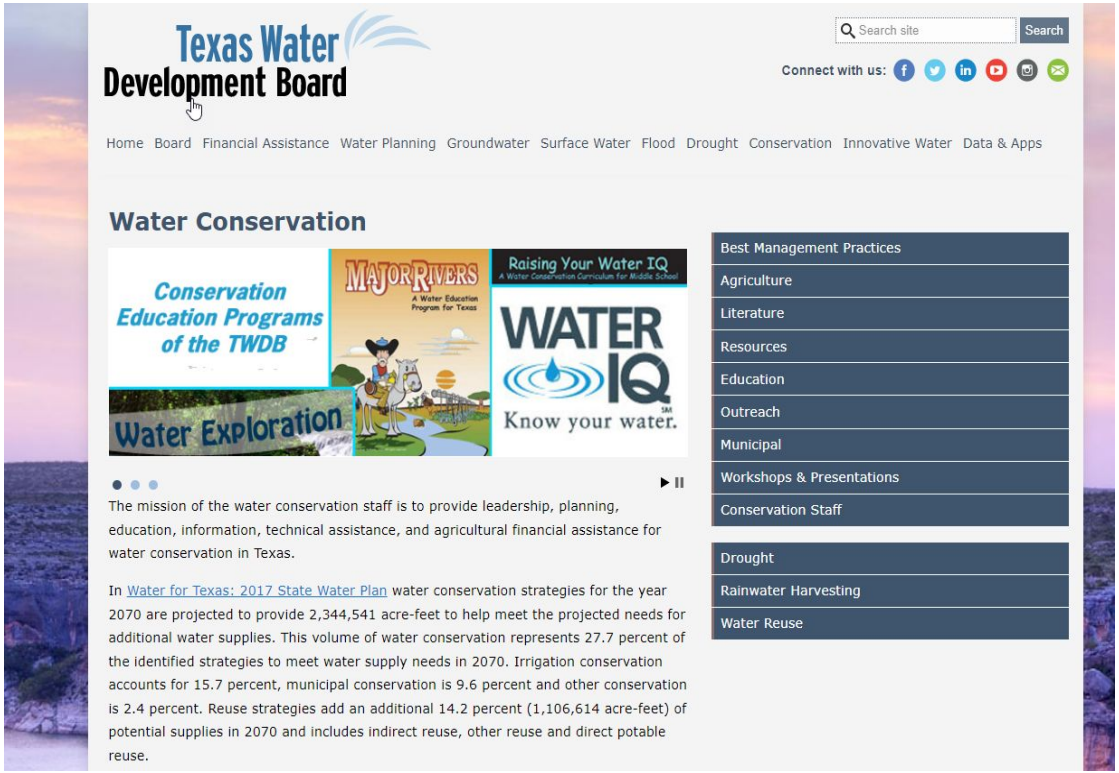
Amistad and Falcon Reservoirs have and will continue to remain just above record lows through early 2026





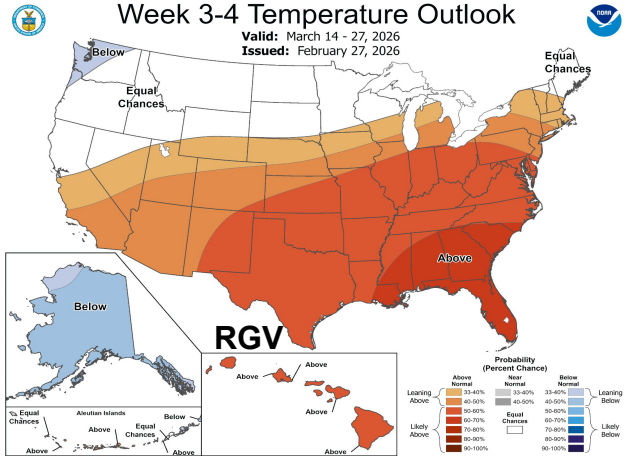
- **Falcon rose slightly, at 13.1% as of February 27th** (slightly higher than the **12.9% from late January**) due to releases from Amistad in late January/early February. Levels are likely to fall slowly through May, unless additional releases are provided from Amistad - or periodic thunderstorm systems develop.
- **Amistad fell slightly and remains just above all-time record lows as of late February.** Levels were at **20.9% on February 27th** (slightly lower than the **21.7% from late January**). Levels should change little or fall slowly through May, unless periodic thunderstorm systems develop.

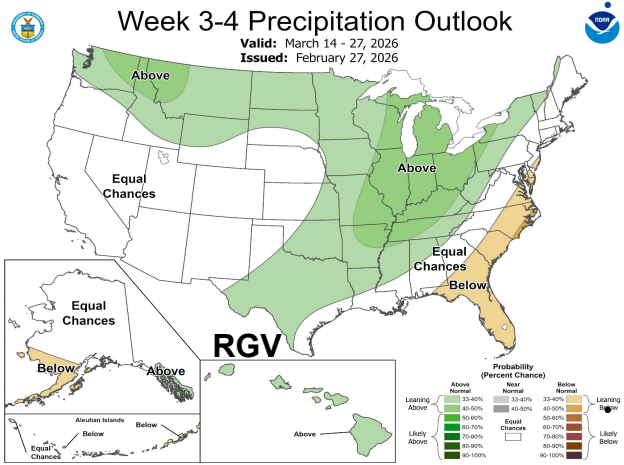
Water Conservation is Key Until Further Notice!

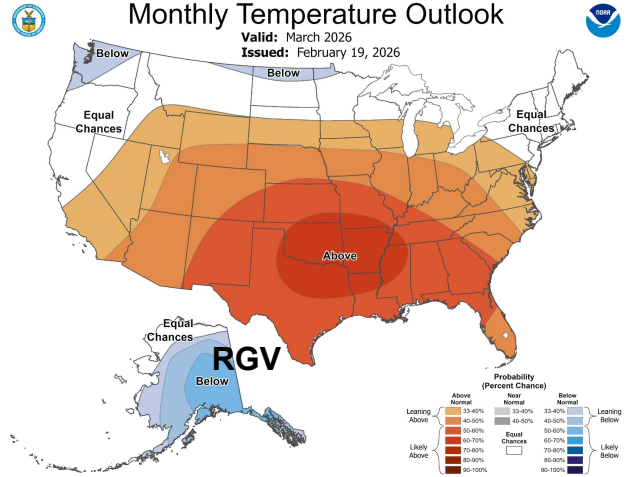


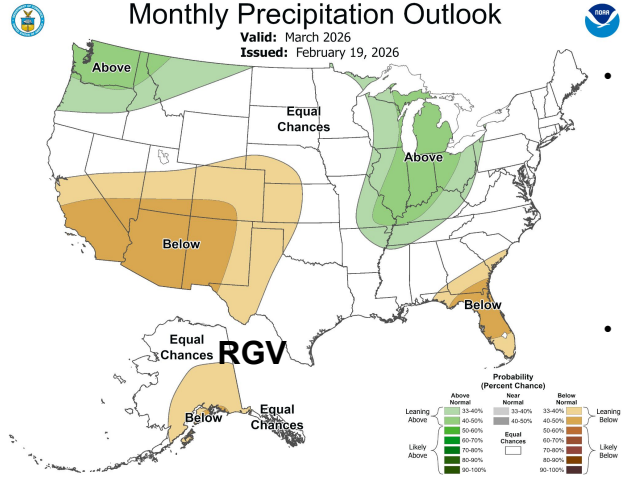
- "Stage 2/3" Restrictions will continue through early 2026 (at least) in some areas, and are likely to continue **until further notice** based on inflows from Amistad and Falcon.
- Learn more at the Texas Water Development Board's Conservation Page.

March 2026: Medium-High (60-80%) Confidence on Temperature; Equal Chances on Precipitation









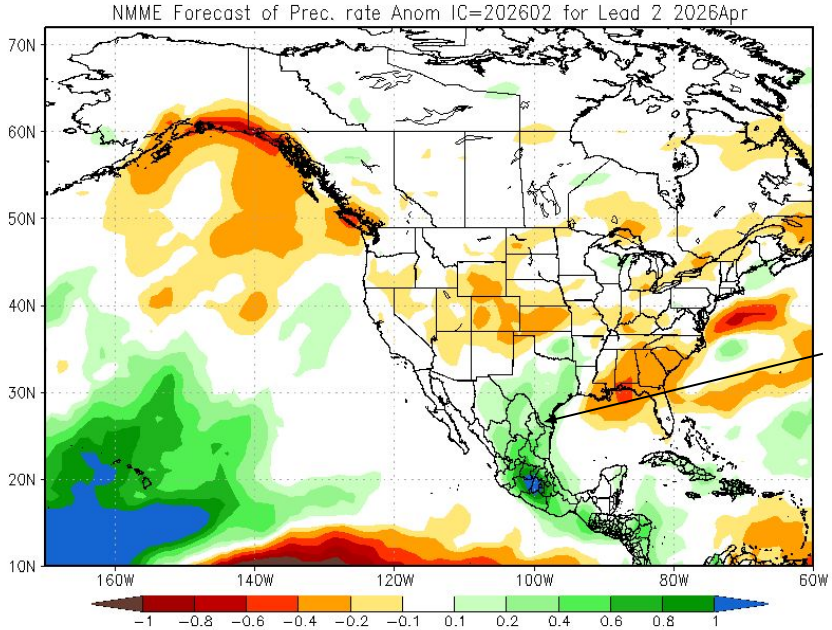
The combination of a **weak La Nina**, a **negative Pacific Decadal Oscillation (-PDO)**, and an **extensively long-term drought** will support **warmer than normal temperatures prevailing through March** across Deep South Texas and the Rio Grande Valley. A strengthening sun angle combined with the perpetual drought in place could often support **overachieving temperatures** to occur during the month as well as the potential for an instance or two of some **early season heat risk** developing (especially mid-upper valley) during during the second half of March.

Medium-long range weather/climate models/ensembles are bullish on the idea of **warmer than normal temps prevailing through March**.

- Precipitation odds are equal for above, normal, or drier than normal. Factors include a -PDO, a weak La Nina, climatology, ongoing drought conditions, and a trend from ENSO Neutral to an El Nino later this summer/fall. **The second half of March going into April** is the timeframe to watch to see if the pattern begins to turn wetter.
- Should the weather pattern flip wetter, **showers and storms** will be capable of producing **heavy rainfall and localized flooding**. Severe storms capable of damaging winds, large hail, and/or tornadoes will also be possible in any storms that develop later in March.

Early Look: April 2026

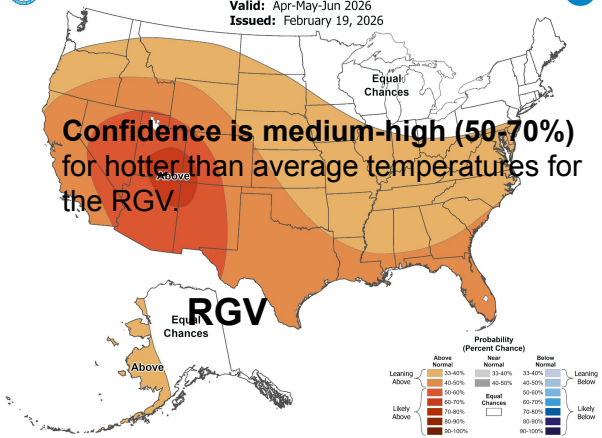
Potential rainfall rate anomaly, April 2026



- This model's forecast for <u>April</u> favors a **wetter pattern** (note the light green colors nearby) emerging.
- Confidence, however, remains low (33%) for this occurrence. However, it is something to consider.

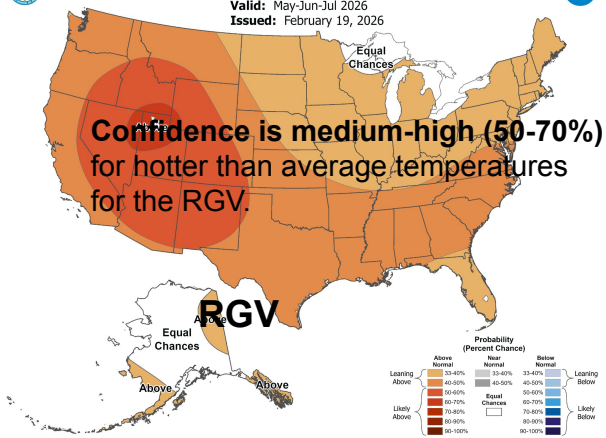
Late Spring 2026 into Summer 2026: Hotter than normal trends favored; Equal chances for precipitation remains (it's possible that the pattern could turn wetter in the Spring)

Seasonal Temperature Outlook



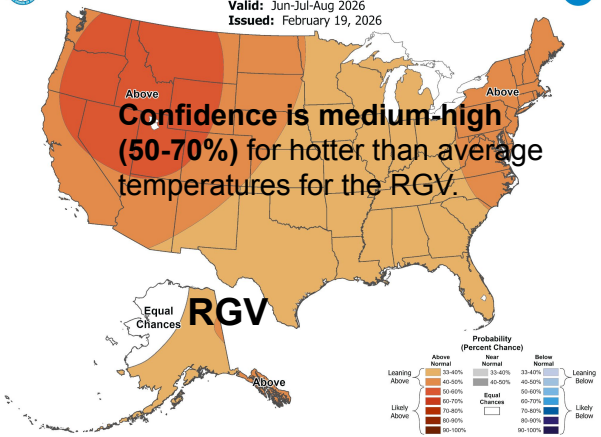
Confidence is medium-high (50-70%) for hotter than average temperatures for the RGV.

Seasonal Temperature Outlook



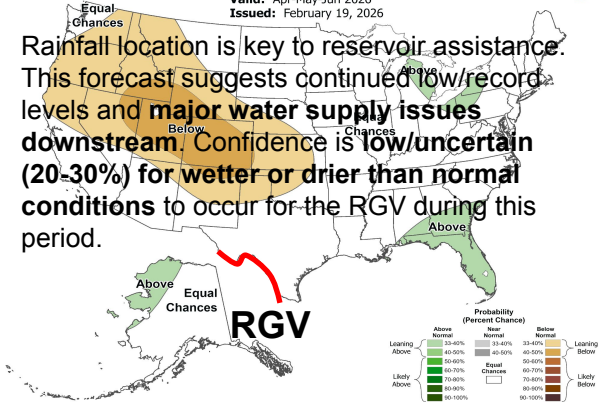
Confidence is medium-high (50-70%) for hotter than average temperatures for the RGV.

Seasonal Temperature Outlook



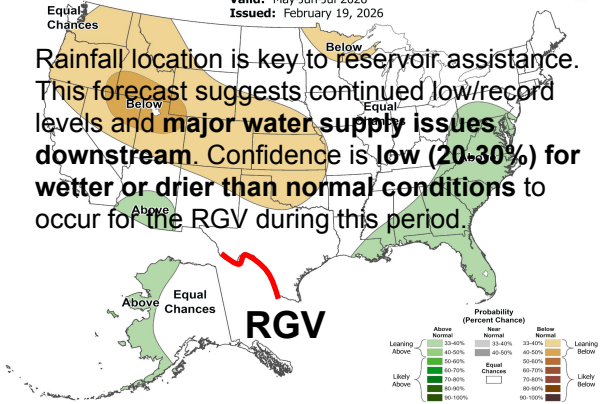
Confidence is medium-high (50-70%) for hotter than average temperatures for the RGV.

Seasonal Precipitation Outlook



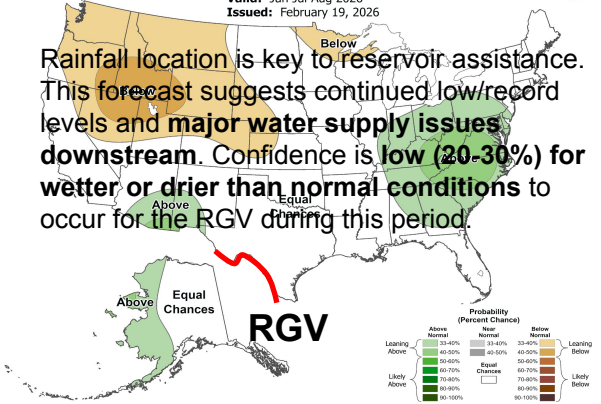
Rainfall location is key to reservoir assistance. This forecast suggests continued low/record levels and **major water supply issues downstream**. Confidence is **low/uncertain (20-30%) for wetter or drier than normal conditions** to occur for the RGV during this period.

Seasonal Precipitation Outlook



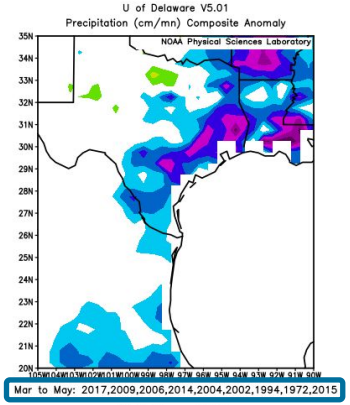
Rainfall location is key to reservoir assistance. This forecast suggests continued low/record levels and **major water supply issues downstream**. Confidence is **low (20-30%) for wetter or drier than normal conditions** to occur for the RGV during this period.

Seasonal Precipitation Outlook

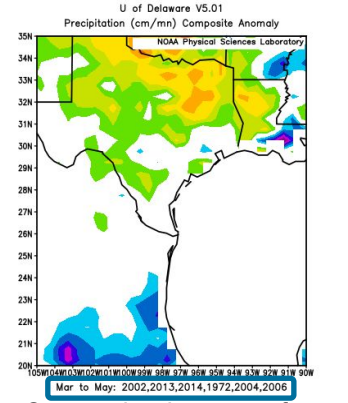


Rainfall location is key to reservoir assistance. This forecast suggests continued low/record levels and **major water supply issues downstream**. Confidence is **low (20-30%) for wetter or drier than normal conditions** to occur for the RGV during this period.

Comparing Similar ENSO Neutral to El Nino Episodes mostly within the last 30 years; March-May Periods

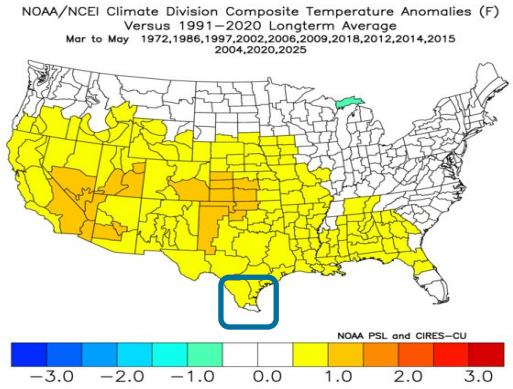


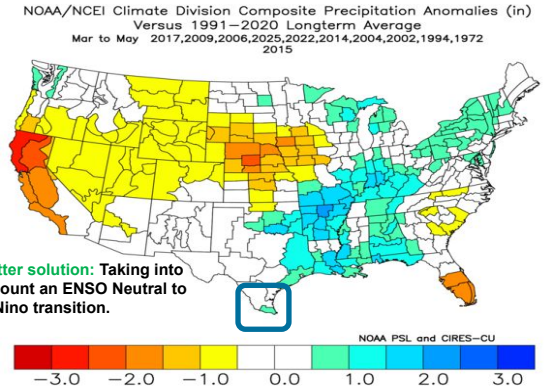
Wet Case



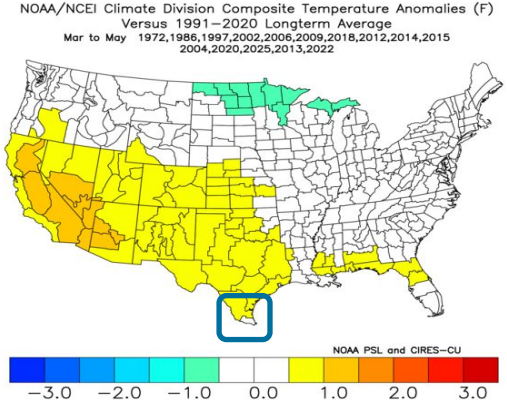
Dry Case

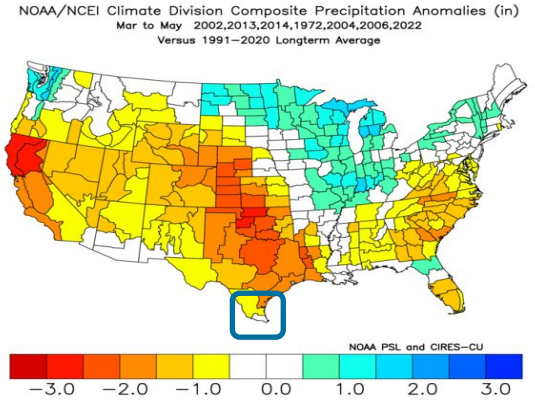
Composite departure from average rainfall for years of similar Neutral to El Nino transition episodes in the March to May window.





Wetter solution: Taking into account an ENSO Neutral to El Nino transition.





- **Top:** Composite temperature (left) and precipitation (right) anomalies for similar Neutral to El Nino transition episodes leading into March-May, since 1950.
- **Bottom Left:** Same, but added the 2013 and 2022 seasons.
- **Bottom Right:** Same, but added the 2013 season, and took out 2017, 2009, 2025, 1994, and 2015 seasons.

Bottom Lines

- A **warmer than normal pattern** is anticipated during the **March-May time period**. Precipitation odds are a toss-up, though **wetter trends could develop in March and/or April** (low-medium confidence). **Heat Risk** concerns could begin increasing as early as late March/April as forecast temperatures look to overachieve.
- 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 Spring months.**
- **Drought conditions** continue and could worsen across parts, if not all of the RGV/Deep South Texas as time progresses. **D3 (Extreme Drought) and D4 (Exceptional Drought)** is occurring over the Mid-Upper Valley and Northern Ranchlands (see slide 8 for more information). Meanwhile, **D1 (Moderate Drought)** to **D2 (Severe Drought)** conditions are taking place over Lower Valley (i.e. Cameron, Willacy, eastern Hidalgo, and east-southeastern Kenedy Counties).
- **Peak Fire Weather Season will continue through March!** Grasses across all of the RGV/Deep South Texas ranchlands remain freeze and drought-cured following the recent January 25-27, 2026 Arctic Blast and lack of any rain in February. This, **coupled with elevated fuels and prolonged antecedent dry conditions,** will result in increased fire weather concerns through at least March. Days with **low relative humidity (RH) values** and **increased winds** will be critical through March.
- Don't "sleep" on the potential for **flash flooding**, especially in **late March and April**. While a repeat of March 26-28, 2025, is not expected, **flood safety and readiness** needs to be in back of mind. Any storms that develop could become **severe producing damaging winds, large hail, and/or tornadoes**.
- Occasional hazardous **coastal (tidal/surf) and marine (dangerous boating) situations** will continue as we progress through March.