



DEPARTMENT OF
ECOLOGY
State of Washington

Drought and Water Supply Update

Methow Watershed Council Meeting

Caroline Mellor, Statewide Drought Lead

February 24, 2026

Quick agenda

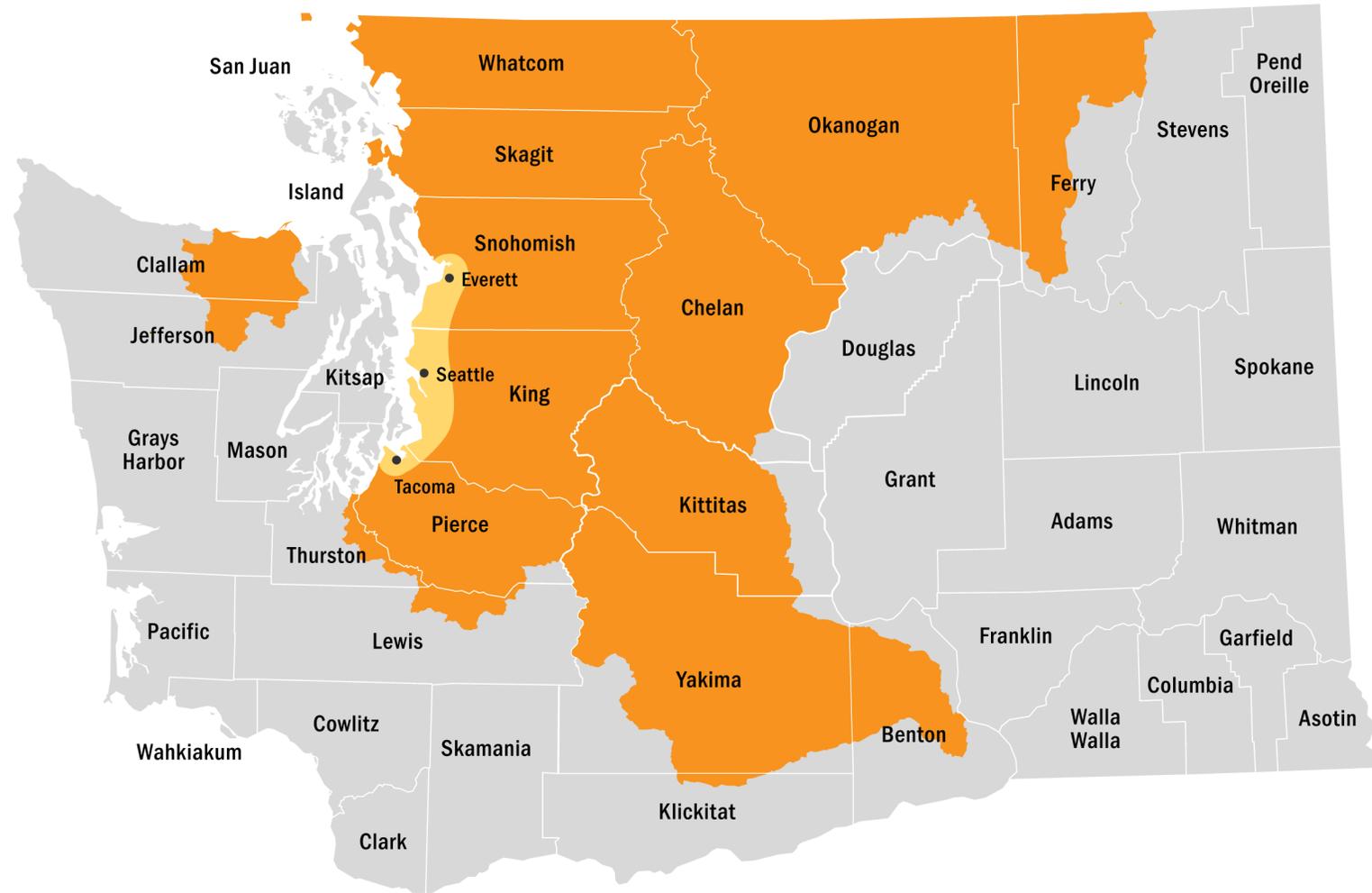
- 1** Drought declaration and process
- 2** Water supply and drought conditions update
- 3** Next steps for drought

Drought Emergency Declaration

On June 5, 2025, Ecology issued a drought emergency declaration in the **North and Central Cascade Mountains and parts of the Puget Sound area**, due to low snowpack, early and rapid snowmelt and a dry April and May.

This served as an expansion of the April 8, 2025, drought declaration for the **Yakima Basin watersheds**.

*The utilities of Everett, Seattle and Tacoma do not expect issues for their customers.



 Drought Emergency Declaration  Drought Advisory

Drought Conditions

Drought conditions - two requirements:

- 1. Hydrologic threshold** – An area is receiving, or is projected to receive, less than seventy-five percent of normal water supply.
- 2. Hardship threshold** – Water users and the environment are or are expected to experience undue hardship.

See: [RCW 43.83B.405](#) and [WAC 173-166-050](#).

Water Supply Factors

Water
year to
date

- Snowpack
- Precipitation
- Temperature
- Soil moisture

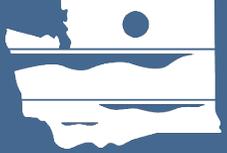
Hydrologic
threshold
for
drought
was met
in 2025

Forecasts

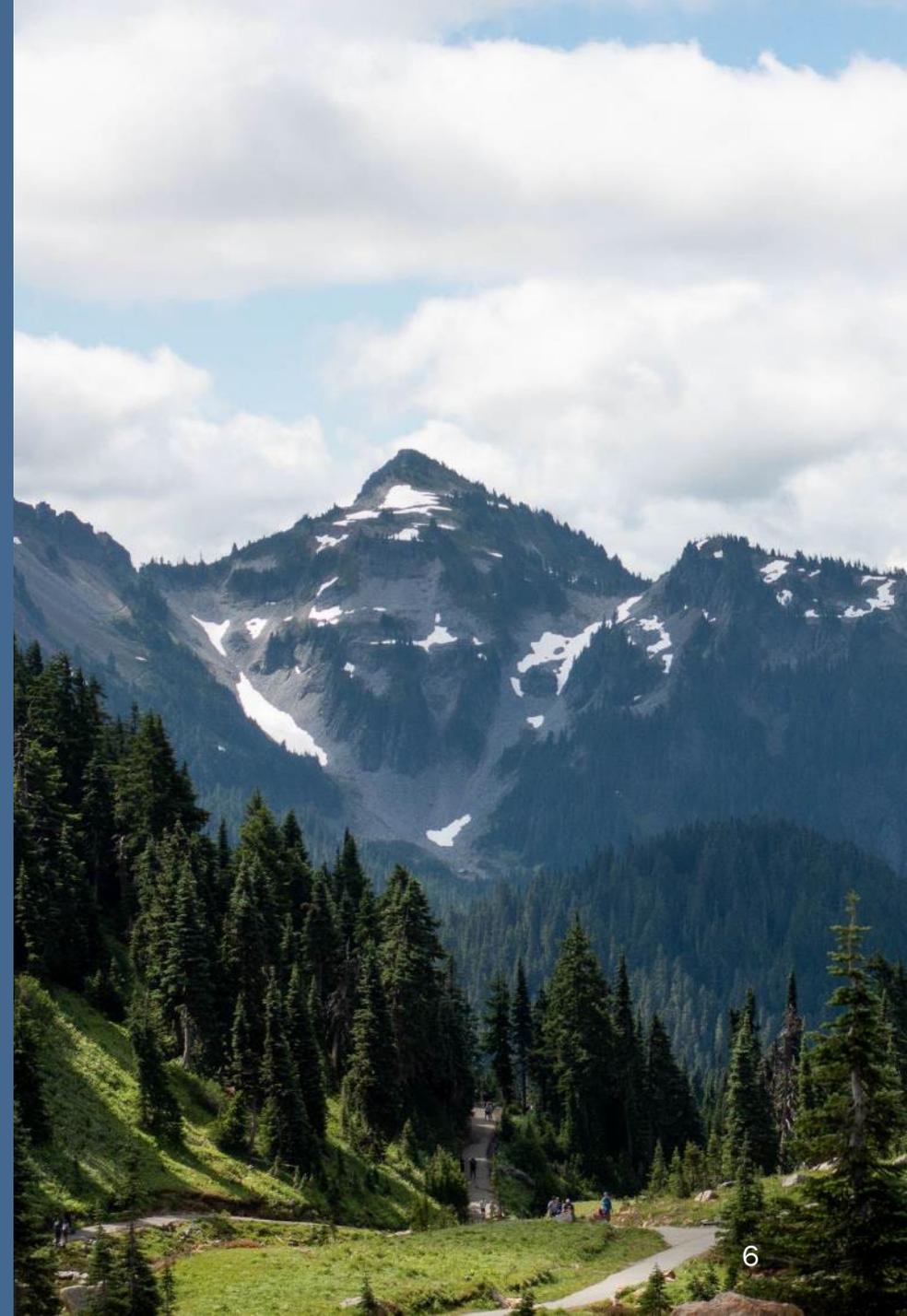
- Streamflow
- Precipitation
- Temperature
- Soil moisture



Rimrock Reservoir, November 2024



Implications of a Drought Declaration



Provides us with the authority to:

1. Expedite emergency water transfer applications.
2. Establish a grant program to mitigate hardships to water users and the environment.



What Does a Declaration Do?

Drought Response Funding

Grants to governmental entities:

- Federally recognized Tribes
- Counties, cities, and towns
- Water and sewer districts
- Public utility districts
- Port districts
- Conservation districts
- Irrigation districts
- Watershed management partnerships

State agencies – Ecology can enter into interagency agreements to fund drought response efforts

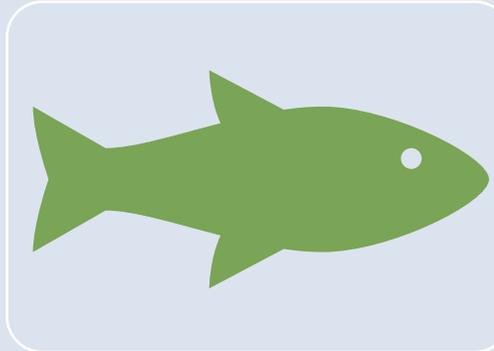
- Examples: DOH, DFW, SCC, AGR

Eligibility for federal drought funding

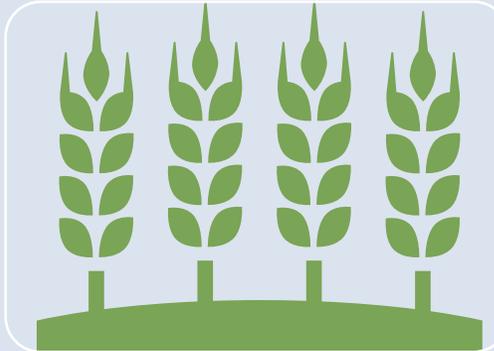
Important communications tool

Additional Implications

Drought impacts – Initial and continuing



Instream
flows, fish
and wildlife



Agricultural
and
livestock



Public
water
systems
and
domestic
uses

Example Drought Response Grant Projects

Agriculture or livestock

- Purchasing or leasing water or water rights
- Replacing intakes, pumps, and related accessories

Public water supply

- Transporting emergency water supplies
- Implementing water conservation strategies

Fisheries and wildlife

- Eliminating migration barriers
- Modifying stream channels adjacent to a hatchery

Drought Advisory

Advisory tool:

- Indicates that drought conditions may develop.
- Public awareness & preparation tool to support readiness.
- Drought relief tools not available in these areas.

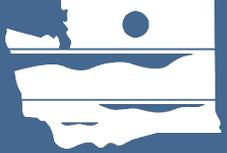


State Declaration vs Federal Designation

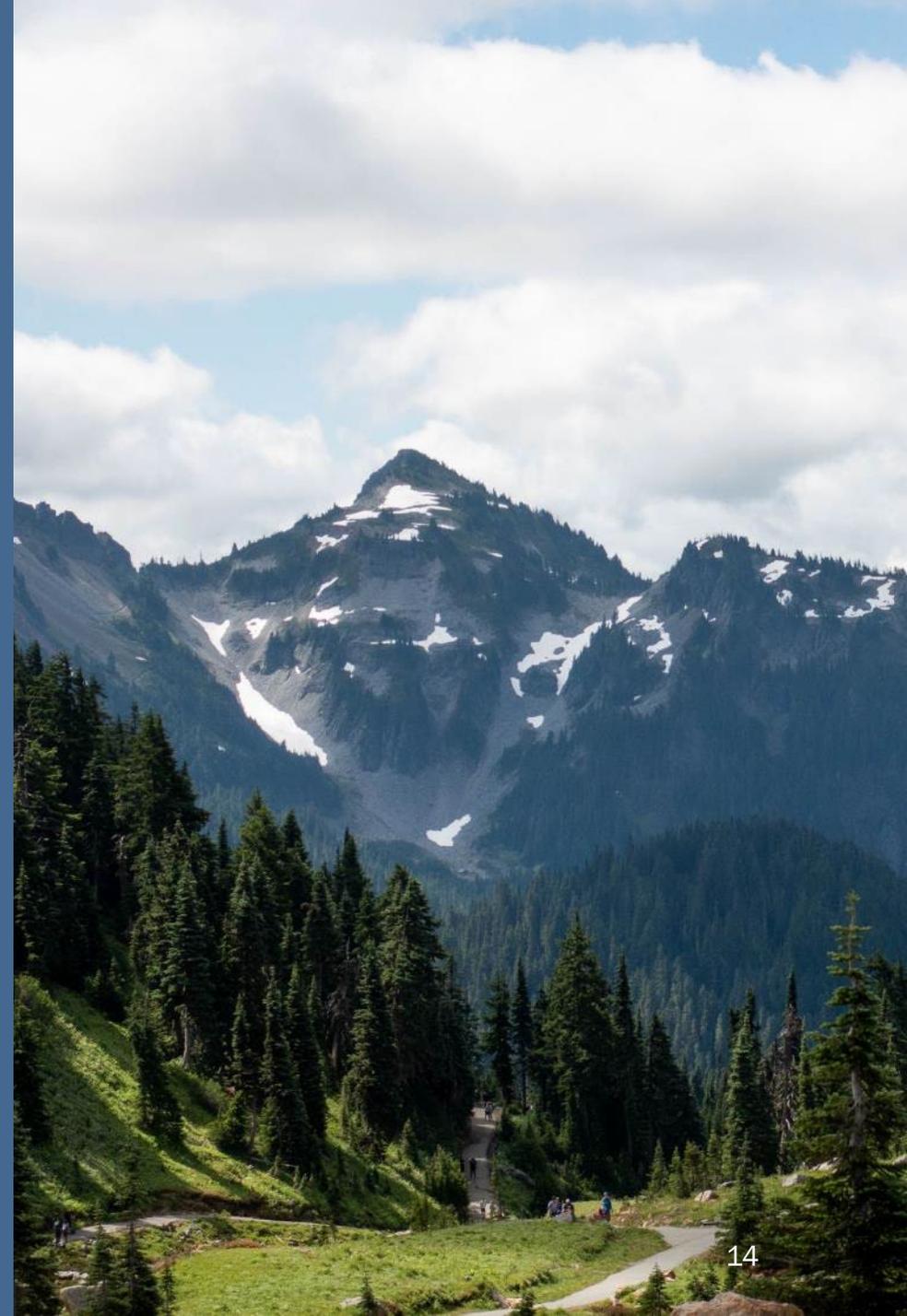


Different thresholds and different relief triggered

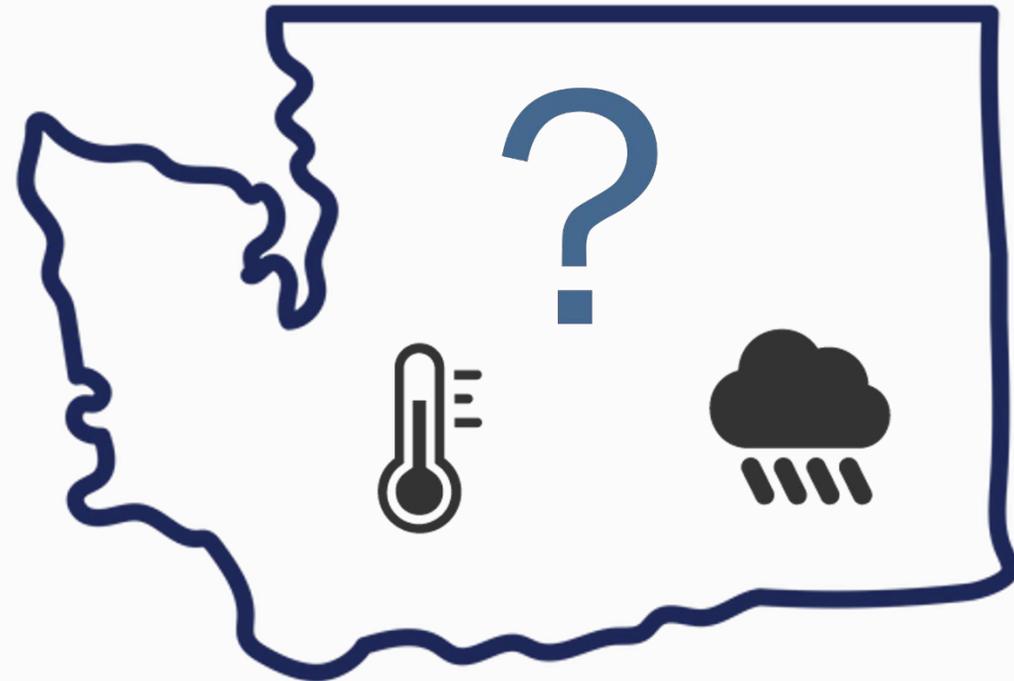
- Federal thresholds:
 - D2 level for 8 consecutive weeks or reach a D3 or D4 level for at least one day according to the U.S. Drought Monitor.
- Federal relief – main types:
 - Low-interest emergency loans for individual farmers.
 - Additional disaster relief for primary counties (example: livestock forage disaster aid) .



Drought Conditions and Water Supply Outlook



La Niña – Still Here but weak

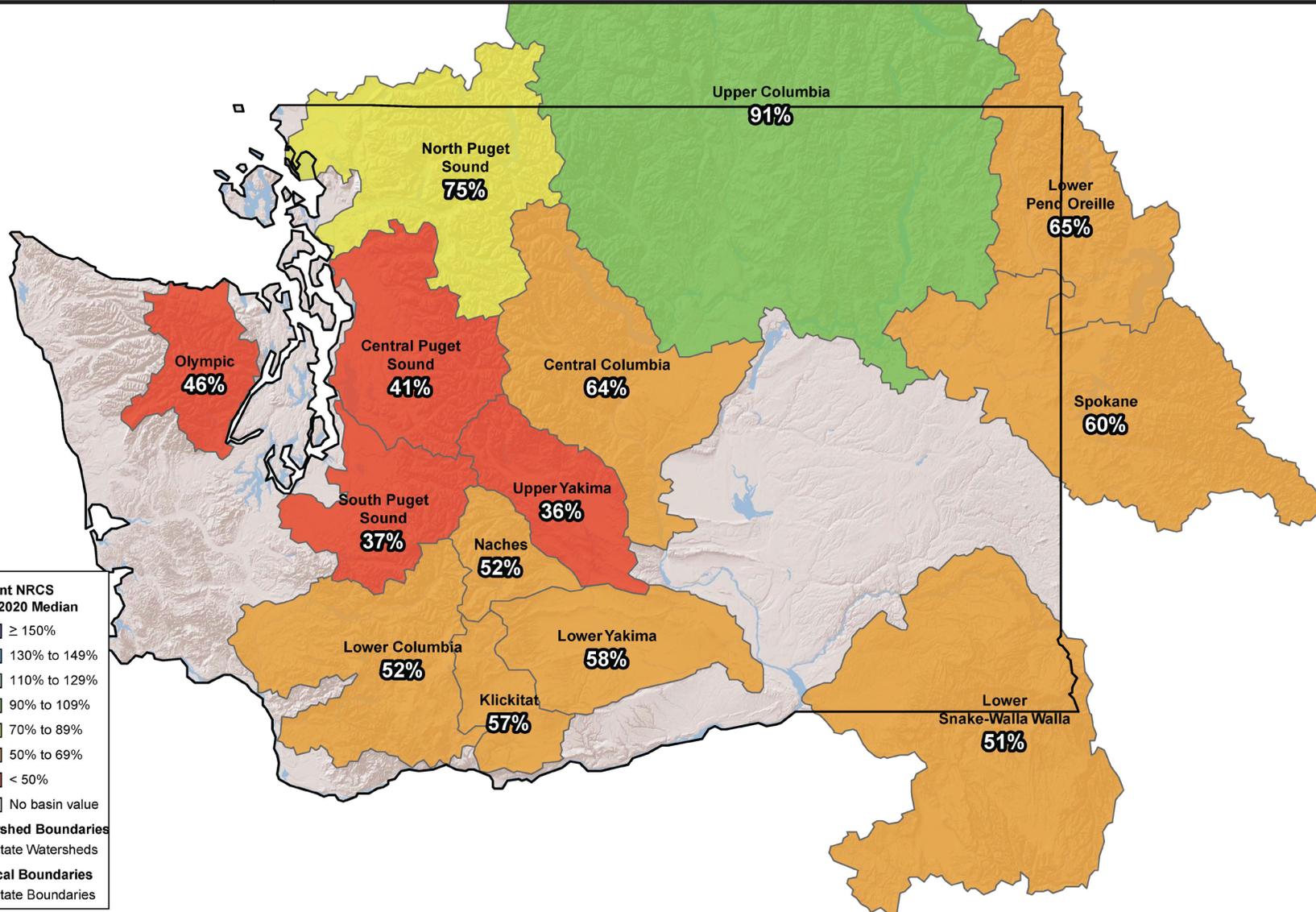


Snowpack Conditions

Statewide Snow Water Equivalent (SWE) = 54% of normal.

Statewide water year to date precipitation = 109% of normal.

(Source: NRCS).



Snow Water Equivalent

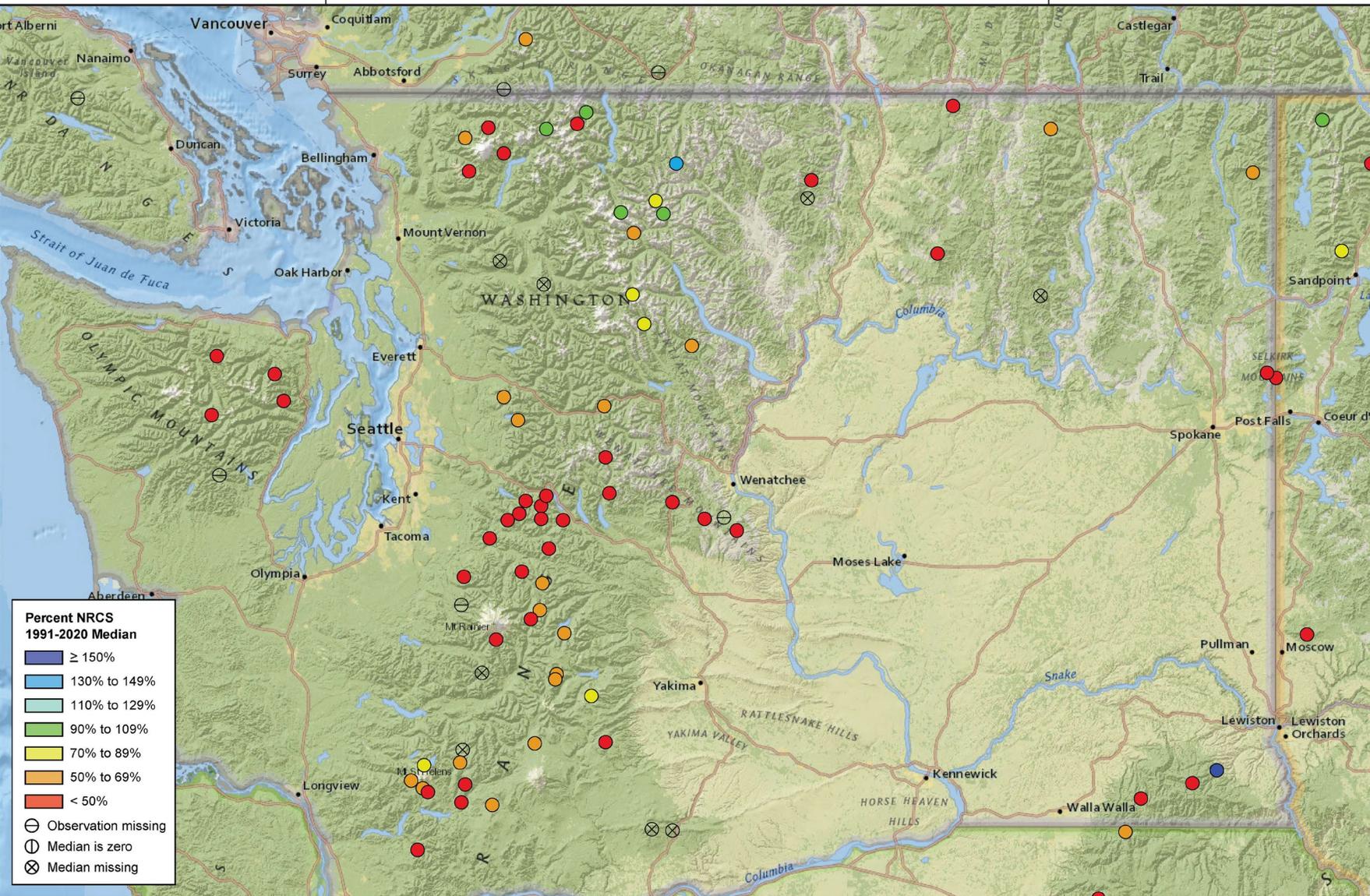
Percent NRCS 1991-2020 Median

February 24, 2026, end of day



Snowpack Conditions by SNOTEL sites

Tells a different story



Percent NRCS 1991-2020 Median

- ≥ 150%
- 130% to 149%
- 110% to 129%
- 90% to 109%
- 70% to 89%
- 50% to 69%
- < 50%

⊖ Observation missing
⊕ Median is zero
⊗ Median missing



Created 2-25-2026

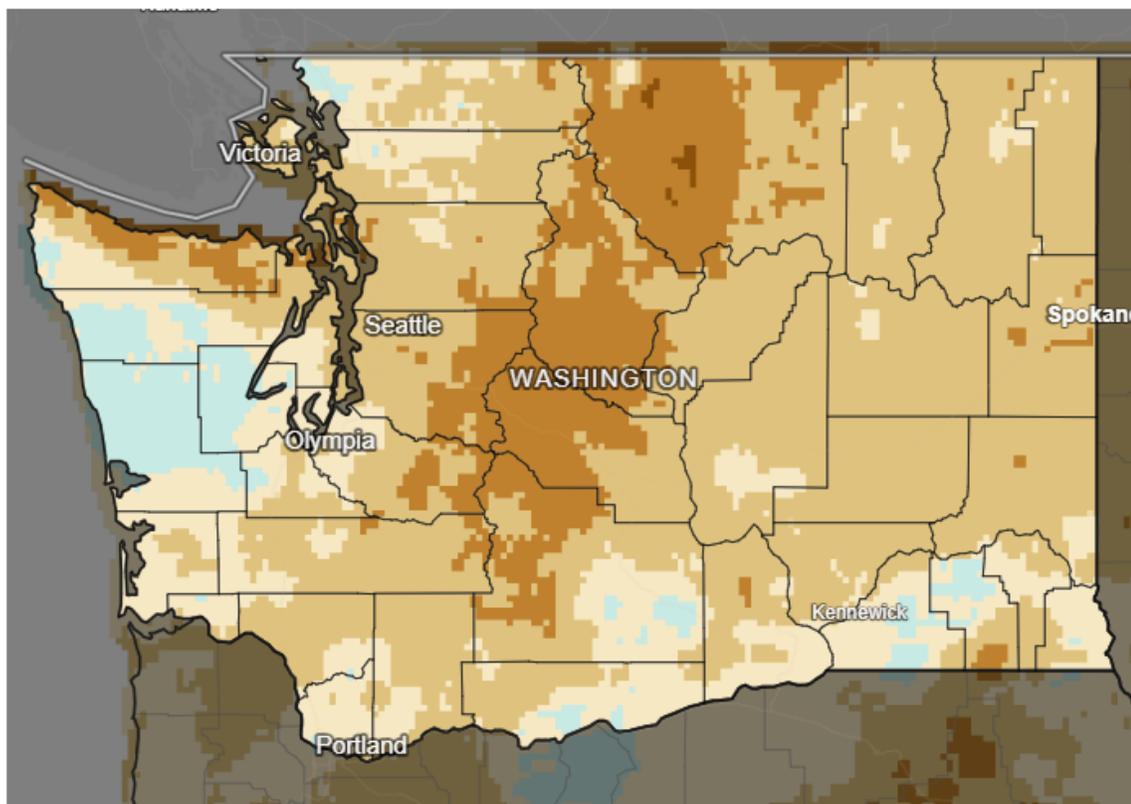
(Source: NRCS).

Snowpack as Snow Water Equivalent (SWE)

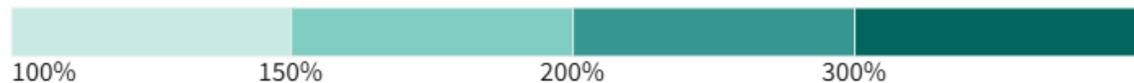
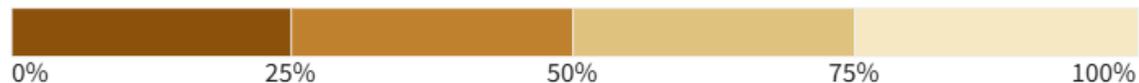


Washington SNOTEL Snow/Precipitation Update Report							
Based on Mountain Data from NRCS SNOTEL Sites							
Provisional data, subject to revision							
Data based on the first reading of the day (typically 00:00) for Wednesday, February 25, 2026							
Basin Site Name	Elev (ft)	Snow Water Equivalent			Water Year-to-Date Precipitation		
		Current (in)	Median (in)	Pct of Median	Current (in)	Median (in)	Pct of Median
UPPER COLUMBIA							
Swamp Creek	3930	11.7	15.4 ₍₂₁₎	76	43.0	29.4 ₍₂₁₎	146
Gold Mountain	4500	3.4	N/A	*	11.1	N/A	*
Salmon Meadows	4460	4.0	8.8	45	13.2	10.7	123
Muckamuck	4470	2.8	N/A	*	11.4	N/A	*
Sentinel Butte	4680	4.8	7.6 ₍₁₇₎	63	11.3	10.3 ₍₁₇₎	110
Rainy Pass	4880	28.1	29.6	95	49.4	39.9	124
Moses Mtn	5470	4.5	12.4 ₍₂₉₎	36	9.4	13.6 ₍₂₉₎	69
Gold Axe Camp	5380	3.2	7.4 ₍₁₀₎	43	7.2	7.6 ₍₁₀₎	95
Harts Pass	6490	49.9	35.8	139	39.5	31.0	127
Basin Index (%)				91			121
CENTRAL COLUMBIA							
Trinity	2890	20.0	27.6 ₍₁₀₎	72	56.4	48.0 ₍₁₀₎	118
Fish Lake	3440	10.0	25.0	40	48.2	45.0	107
Pope Ridge	3590	7.9	14.4	55	31.8	23.7	134
Stevens Pass	3940	17.5	31.3	56	68.1	60.5	113
Blewett Pass	4240	3.4	11.8	29	27.3	23.0	119
Upper Wheeler	4330	-M	9.6	*	-M	16.4	*
Park Creek Ridge	4610	24.1	39.2	61	55.4	49.2	113
Rainy Pass	4880	28.1	29.6	95	49.4	39.9	124
Grouse Camp	5390	5.6	16.2	35	22.7	21.6	105
Trough	5480	4.4	9.2	48	19.4	17.2	113
Lyman Lake	5990	39.2	47.4	83	60.0	51.6	116
Basin Index (%)				64			116

30-Day Percent of Normal Precipitation



Precipitation Shown as a Percentage of Normal Conditions

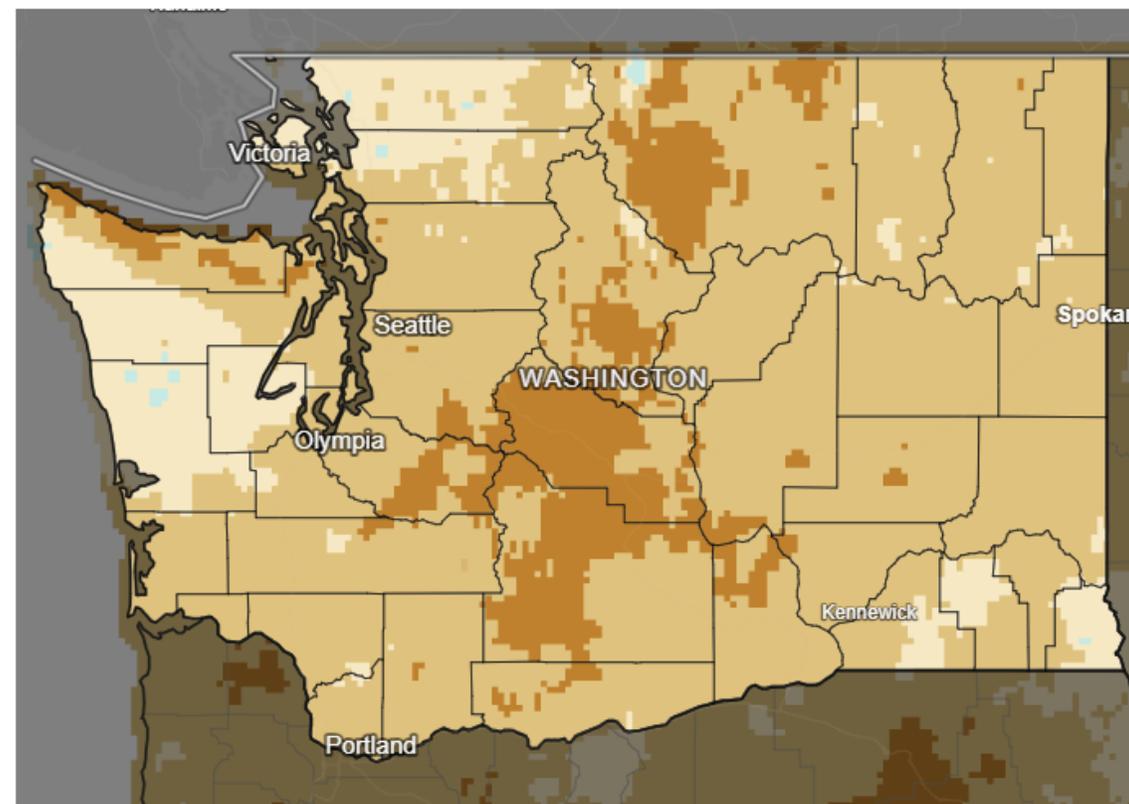


This map shows precipitation for the past 30 days as a percentage of the historical average (1991–2020) for the same time period. Green/blue shades indicate above-normal precipitation, while brown shades indicate below-normal precipitation.

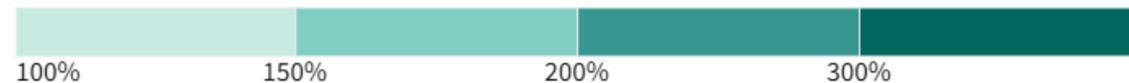
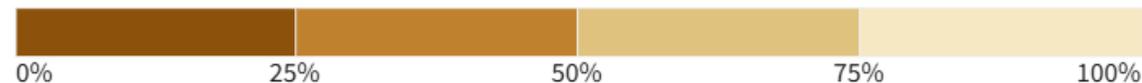
Source(s): UC Merced
Data Valid: 02/23/26

Drought.gov

60-Day Percent of Normal Precipitation



Precipitation Shown as a Percentage of Normal Conditions



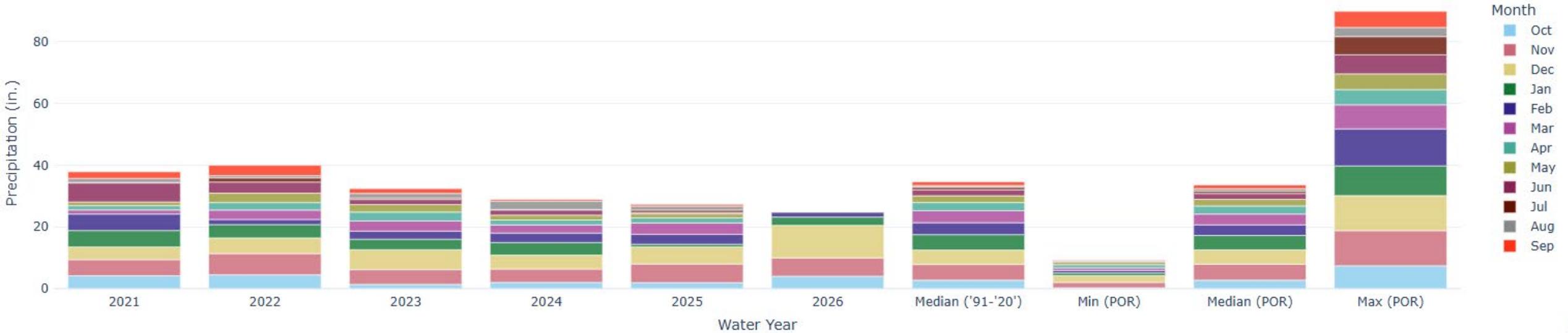
This map shows precipitation for the past 60 days as a percentage of the historical average (1991–2020) for the same time period. Green/blue shades indicate above-normal precipitation, while brown shades indicate below-normal precipitation.

Source(s): UC Merced
Data Valid: 02/23/26

Drought.gov

Water Year Precipitation – By Month

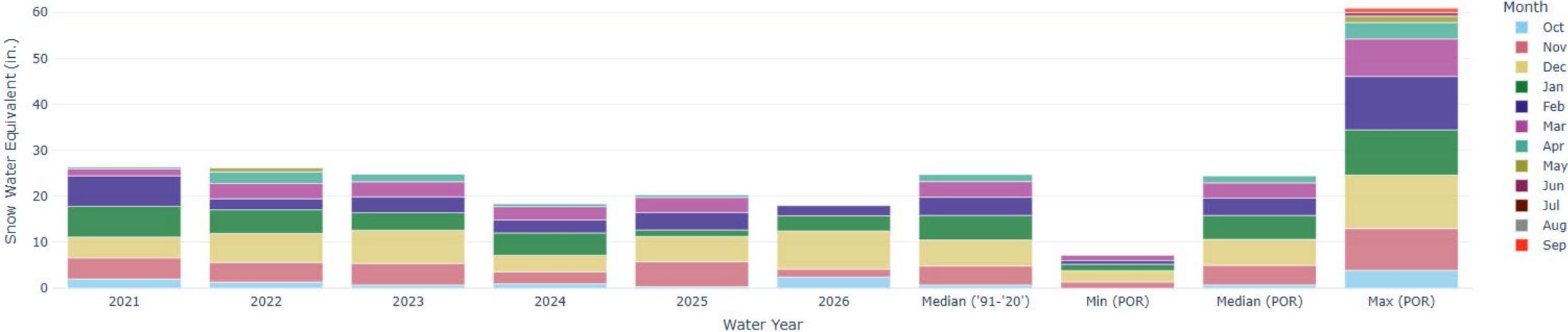
UPPER COLUMBIA MONTHLY PRECIPITATION SUMMARY



Water Year Snowpack – By Month

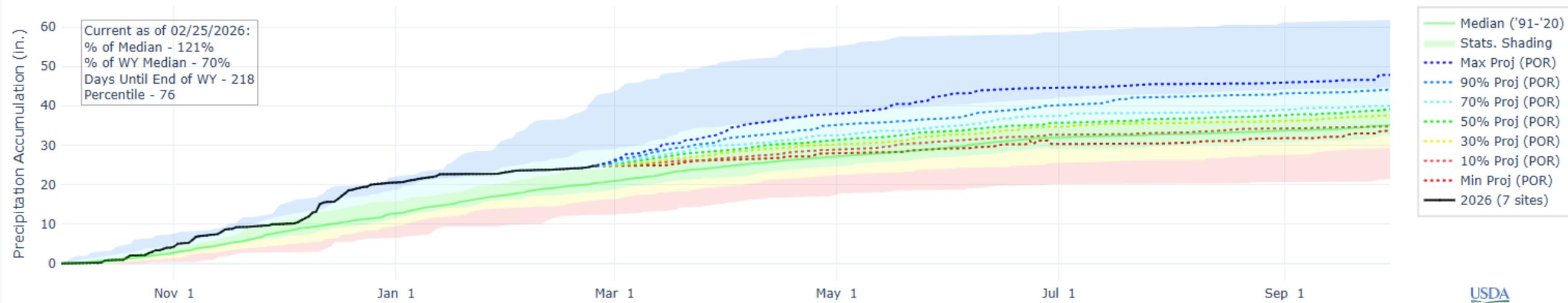


UPPER COLUMBIA MONTHLY SNOW WATER EQUIVALENT SUMMARY



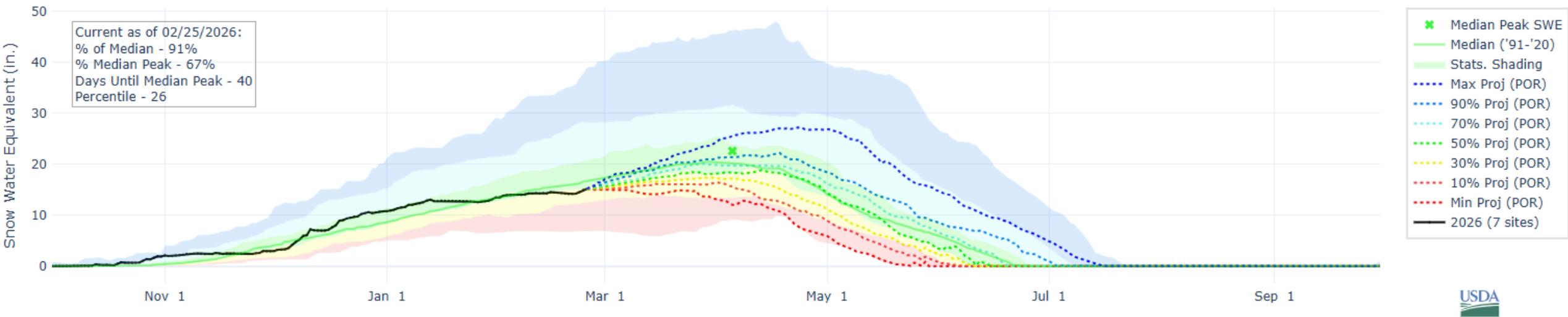
Water Year Projection Precipitation

PRECIPITATION ACCUMULATION PROJECTION IN UPPER COLUMBIA

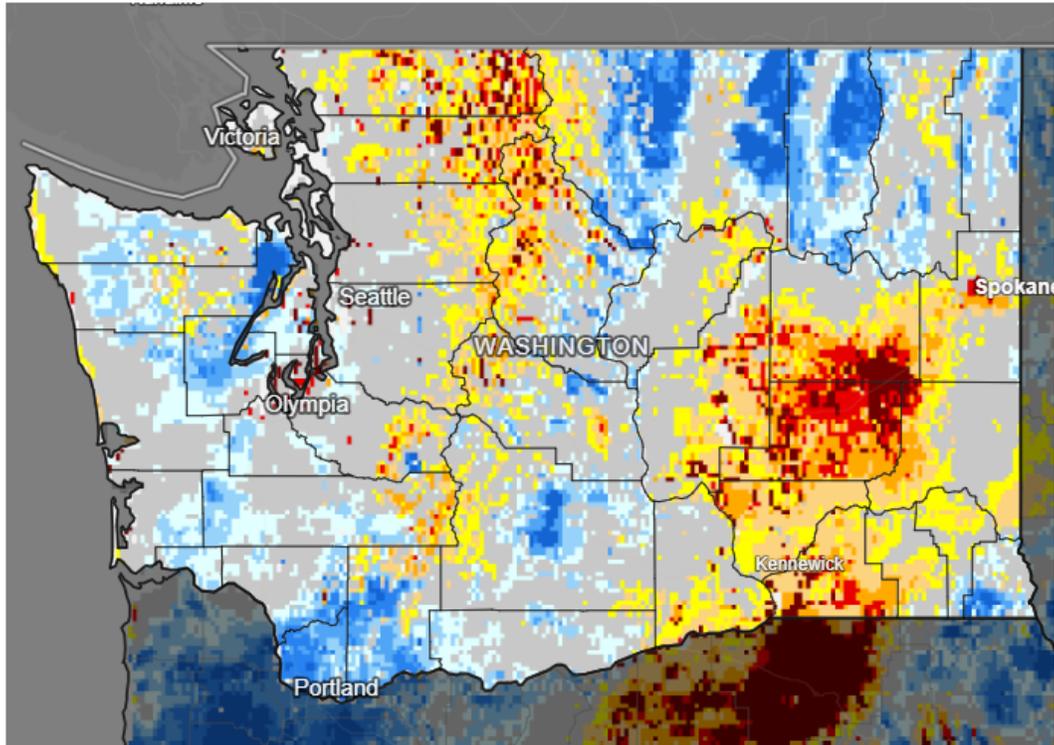


Water Year Projection SWE by Basin

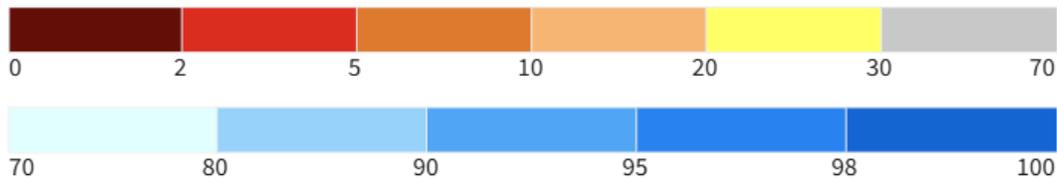
SNOW WATER EQUIVALENT PROJECTION IN UPPER COLUMBIA



NASA SPoRT-LIS 0-100 cm Soil Moisture Percentile



0-100 cm Soil Moisture Percentile

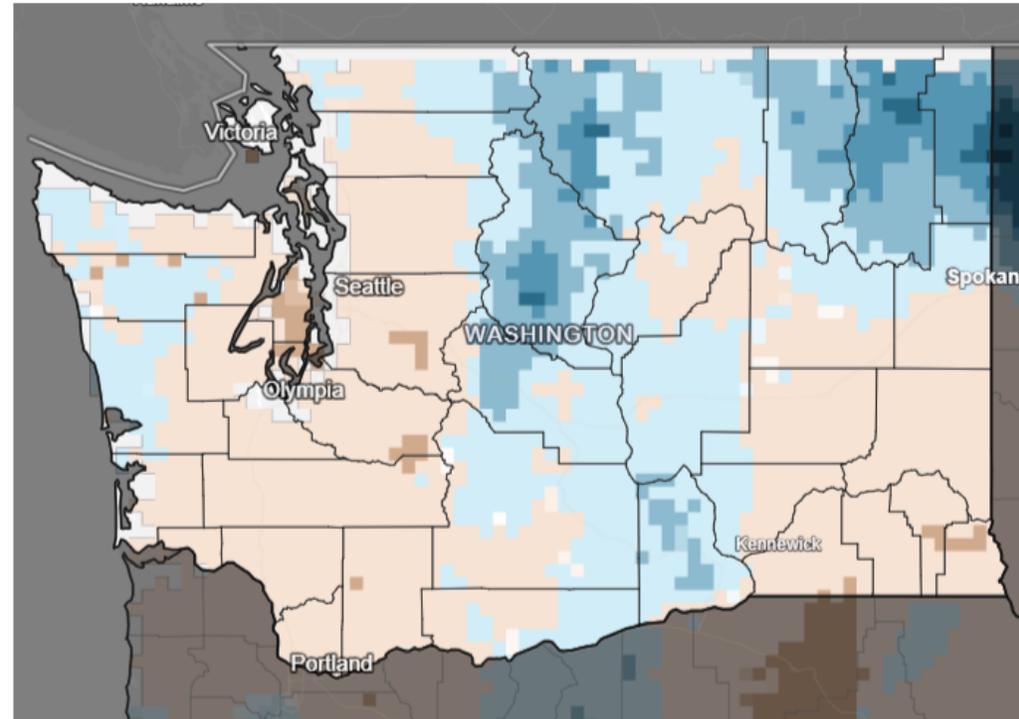


An accurate depiction of soil moisture conditions can provide valuable insights for agricultural monitoring, weather prediction, and drought and flood early warning. This map shows the moisture content of the top 1 meter of soil compared to historical conditions from 1981-2013, based on NASA's Short-term Prediction and Transition Center - Land Information System (SPoRT-LIS). Red and orange hues indicate drier soils, while greens and blues indicate greater soil moisture.

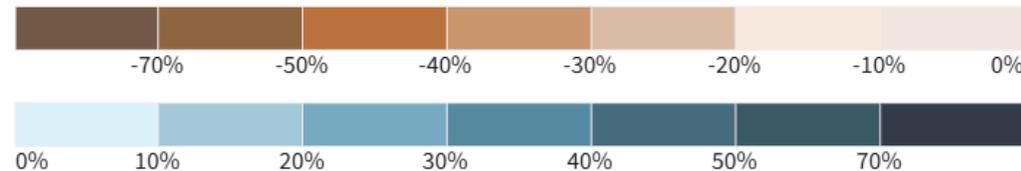
Source(s): NASA
Data Valid: 02/24/26

Drought.gov

Crop-CASMA Subsoil (1 Meter) Soil Moisture Anomaly



Soil Moisture Anomaly



An accurate depiction of soil moisture conditions can provide valuable insights for agricultural monitoring, weather prediction, and drought and flood early warning. This map shows the moisture content of the top 1 meter of soil, according to NASA's Crop Condition and Soil Moisture Analytics tool (Crop-CASMA). It relies on remotely sensed soil moisture data derived from NASA missions. Soil moisture is shown as a deviation from average soil moisture conditions from 2015-present. Brown hues indicate below-average soil moisture, and blue hues indicate above-average soil moisture.

Source(s): NASA, USDA, George Mason University
Data Valid: 02/20/26

Drought.gov

Current US Drought Monitor

Map released: Thurs. February 19, 2026

Data valid: February 17, 2026 at 7 a.m. EST

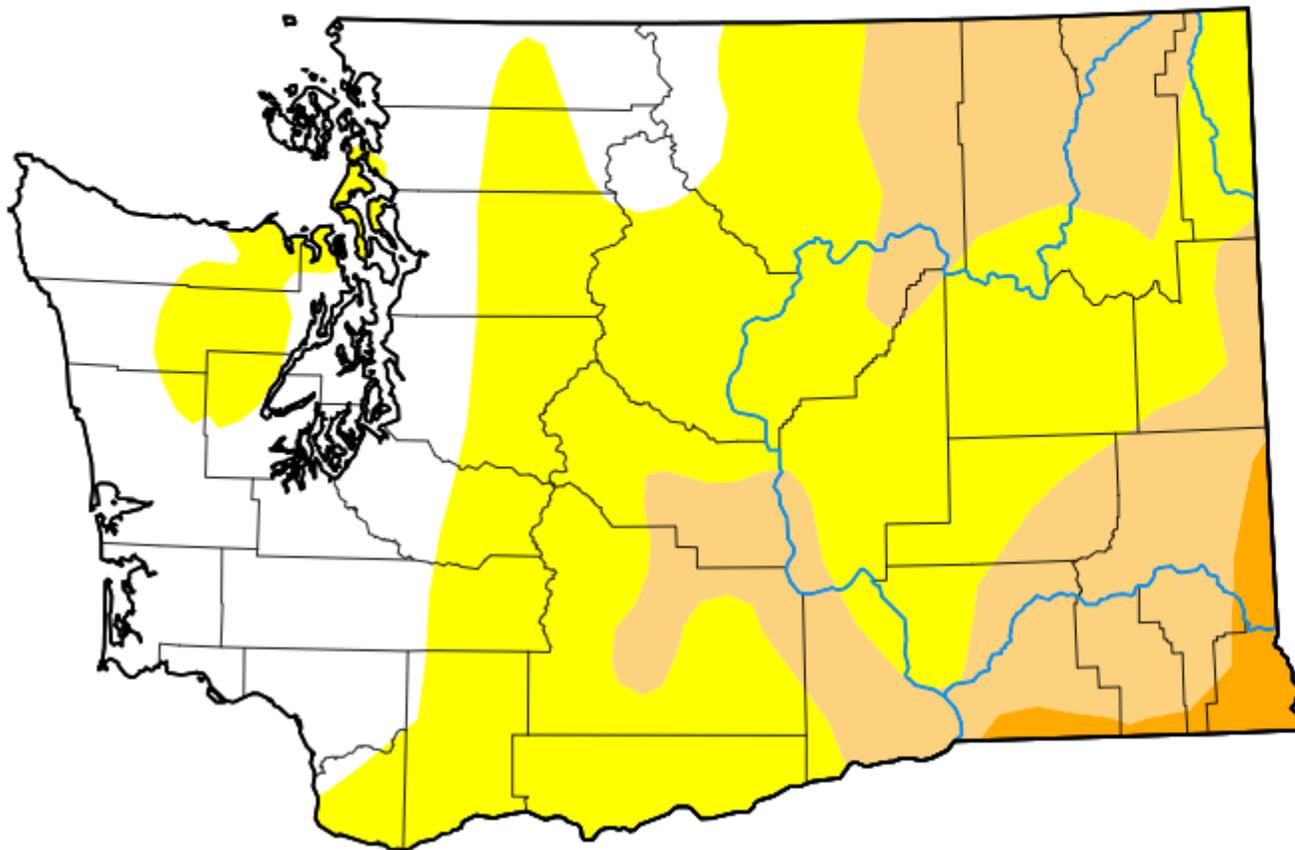
Intensity

-  None
-  D0 (Abnormally Dry)
-  D1 (Moderate Drought)
-  D2 (Severe Drought)
-  D3 (Extreme Drought)
-  D4 (Exceptional Drought)
-  No Data

Authors

United States and Puerto Rico Author(s):
[Richard Tinker](#), NOAA/NWS/NCEP/CPC

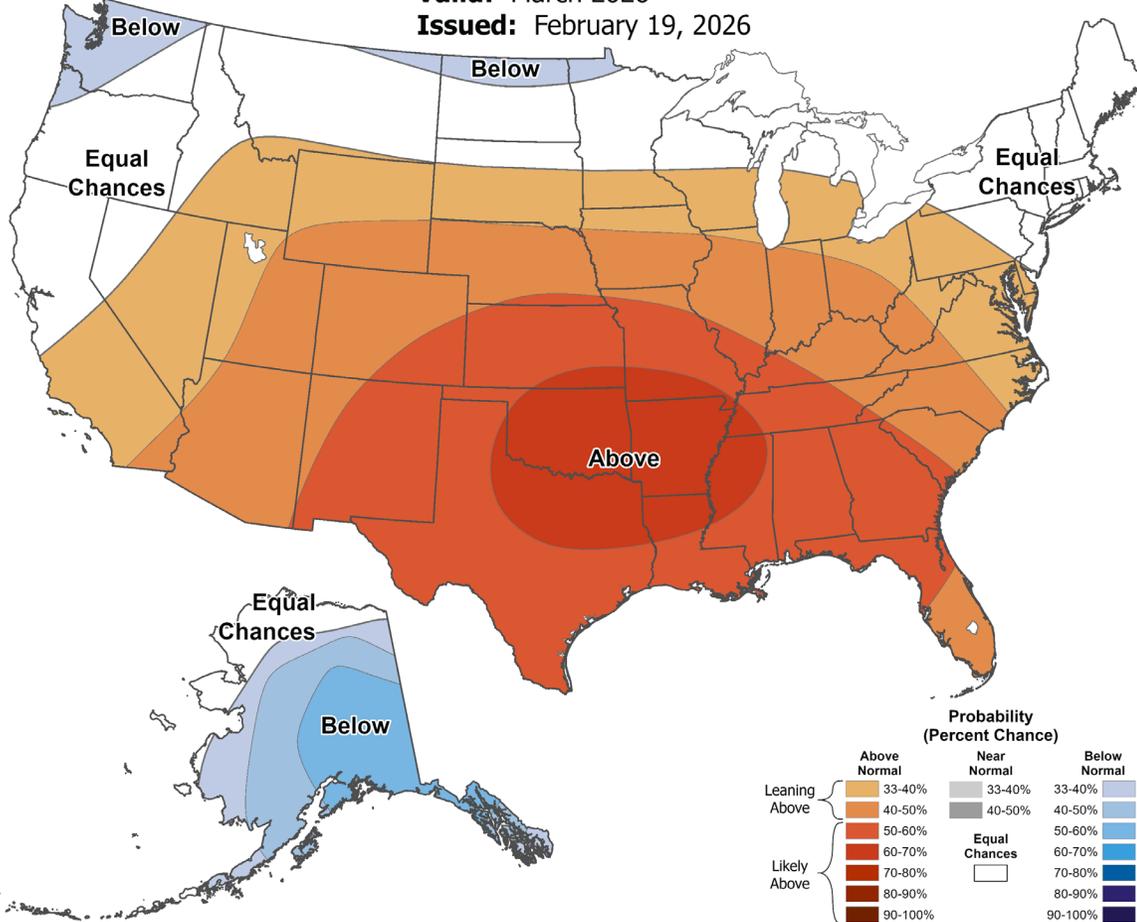
Pacific Islands and Virgin Islands Author(s):
[Rocky Bilotta](#), NOAA/NCEI



Conditions: Month Outlook

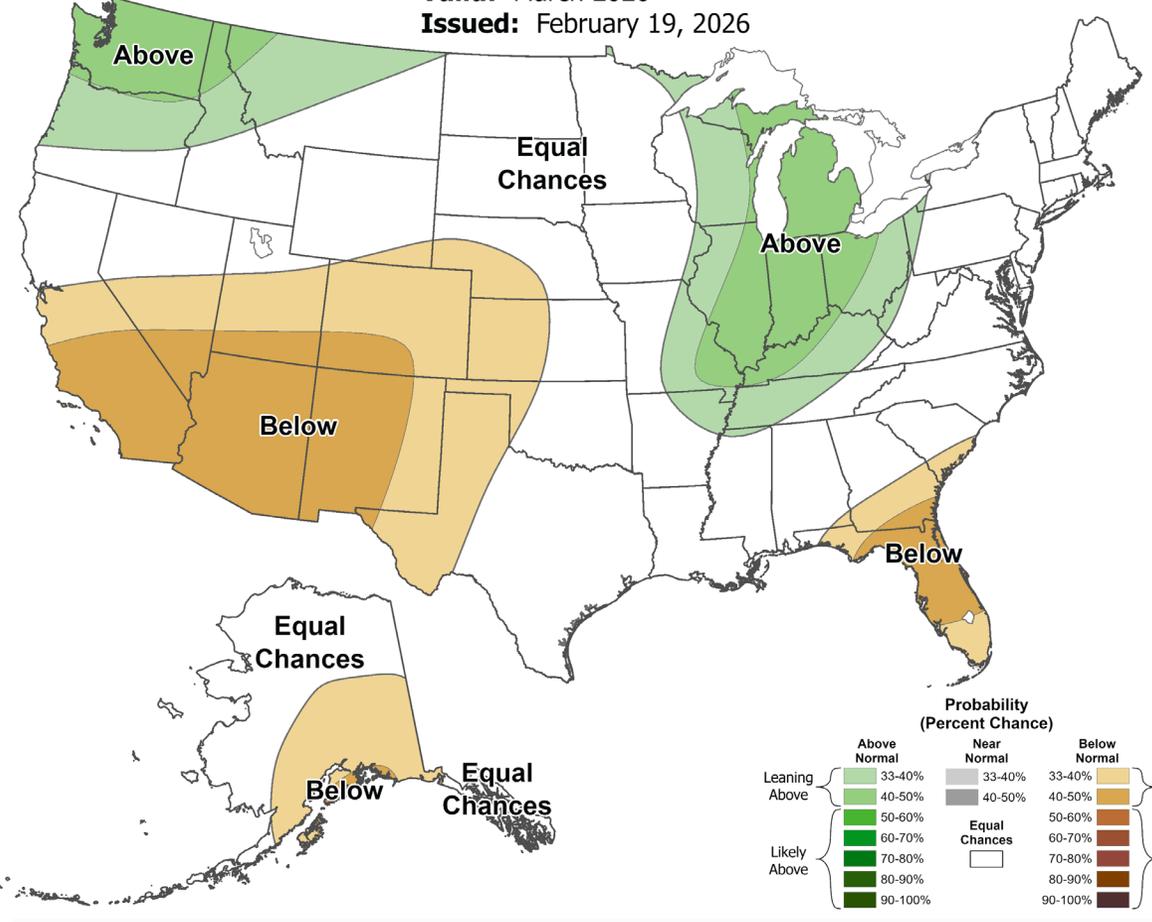
Monthly Temperature Outlook

Valid: March 2026
Issued: February 19, 2026



Monthly Precipitation Outlook

Valid: March 2026
Issued: February 19, 2026

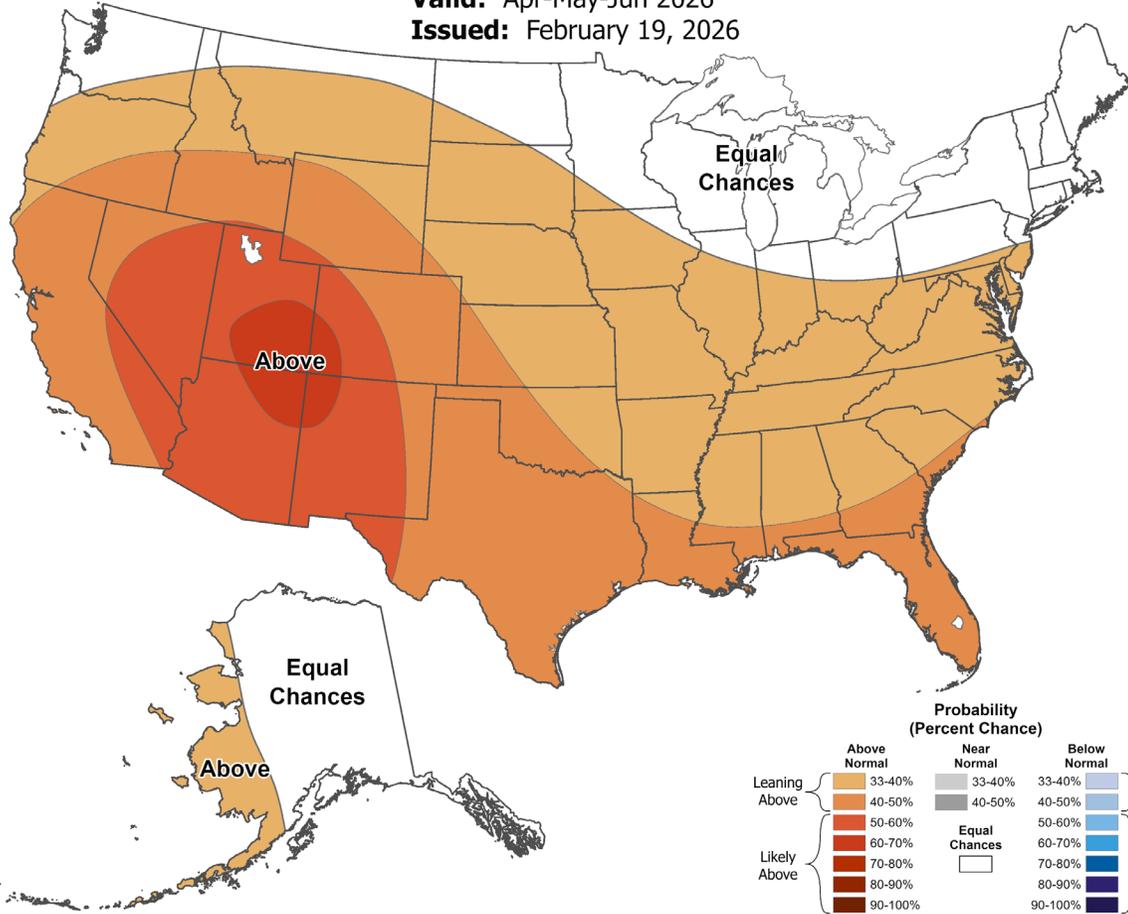


Conditions: Three-Month Outlook



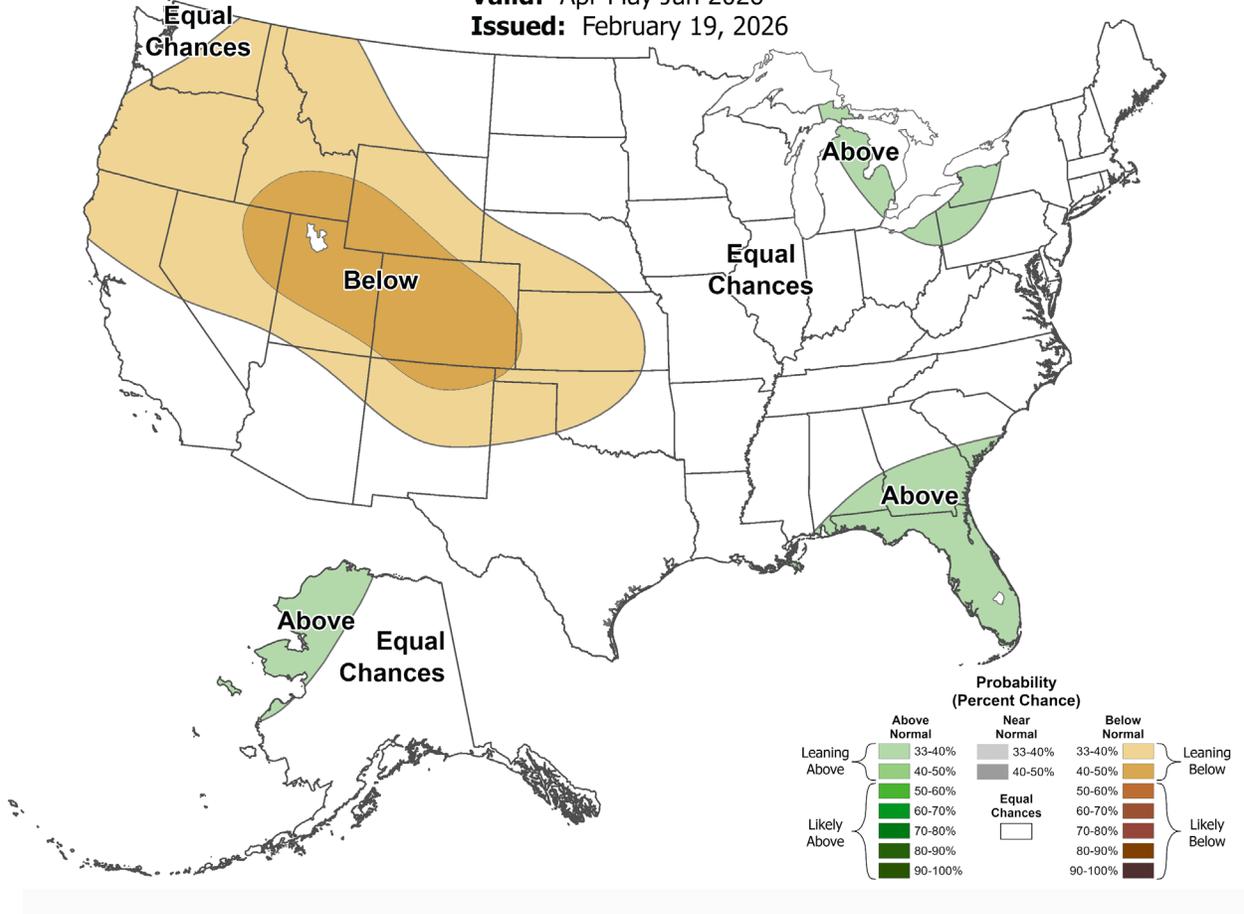
Seasonal Temperature Outlook

Valid: Apr-May-Jun 2026
Issued: February 19, 2026



Seasonal Precipitation Outlook

Valid: Apr-May-Jun 2026
Issued: February 19, 2026



Takeaways

- The current drought emergency declaration is still in place.
- Any project applications submitted this winter must be to address water supply impacts from 2025 drought conditions.
- Ecology is closely monitoring current conditions with partners for potential impacts on 2026 water supply.

Drought website: [Drought Response](#)

- Declaration: [Order of Determination by the Director](#)
- Press release: [June 5](#)

[Water Supply Availability Committee \(WSAC\) website](#)

Newest Ecology drought blog:

[Did record rainfall end Washington's drought? - Washington State Department of Ecology](#)

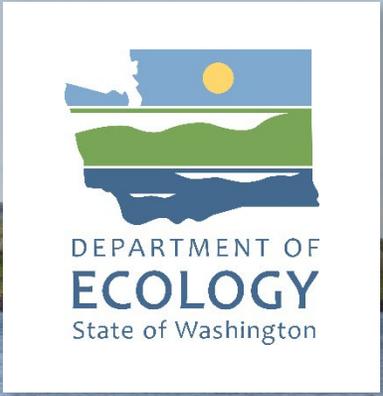
Drought Info



Questions?



DEPARTMENT OF
ECOLOGY
State of Washington



Thank you

Caroline Mellor

Statewide Drought Lead

Caroline.Mellor@ecy.wa.gov