



*Leadership in
Decision Support*

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Significant Rain and Mountain Snow Possible in March

After an unusually warm and dry February, it appears that a significant pattern change will open the door for a series of storms to move into California during the month of March. Long range computer models have been consistent in showing a significant storm moving into the state around the 7th, with several more following through the middle of the month. At this time it is still too early to tell how much precipitation will occur, but it is looking more likely that widespread wetting rains and significant mountain snow will impact much of the state beginning late next weekend.

While Central and Northern California have benefited from the current El Niño with above normal rainfall and a replenishing of snowpack in the Sierra, Southern California with the exception of San Diego County, has been very dry this winter. Dead fuels across the southern part of the state are very dry, and while green-up of the annual grasses has begun, it is much less than what it should be for this time of year. Live fuel moisture values have been slowly increasing, but are still below normal. However, If the anticipated wet weather materializes, significant improvement in fuel conditions is likely to occur later in March.

At this time it still looks like March, April, and May will be wetter than normal, but keep in mind that average precipitation amounts drop off dramatically towards the end of March and the beginning of April. We are now entering our 5th year of drought and according to the latest *Drought Monitor* (dated February 23rd), nearly 40% of the state remains in a D4 drought. While any rain that we receive during the month of March and beyond will be beneficial, it will by no means erase the drought. The amount of tree mortality in the Sierra is profound and will impact our fire seasons for years to come. Despite all of this, it continues to look like fire season will start later than normal this year. Our new Monthly/Seasonal Outlook will be out Tuesday, March 1st which will discuss in more detail some of the things mentioned here.

Prepared by:
Tom Rolinski
Predictive Services Program Manager
Southern Operations Coordination Center