



Wildfire Quarterly Outlook - Q3 2026

Executive Summary

Persistent drought conditions, record-low mountain snowpack, and continued above-normal temperatures have heightened wildfire concerns across Colorado and within the Colorado Springs Utilities' (Springs Utilities) service territory, as the region enters the peak of the 2026 fire season. Although portions of Colorado may receive periodic moisture associated with the North American Monsoon during the third quarter, fire managers anticipate that critically dry fuels, stressed vegetation, and ongoing water supply impacts will continue to support an elevated wildfire risk, particularly during periods of hot, windy, and dry weather. Recent national and regional weather outlooks indicate that Colorado remains susceptible to significant wildfire activity through the remainder of the summer and into early fall.

Q2 2026 Summary

Colorado experienced persistent drought through the second quarter, with much of the state classified in Severe Drought (D2) or worse. Exceptionally poor snowpack and precipitation deficits resulted in reduced runoff and hydrologic stress across critical watersheds to Springs Utilities operations. The national wildfire activity remained well above average, with preparedness levels increasing as fire activity expanded across the western United States.

Wildfire and Watershed Conditions

- Watersheds throughout southern Colorado continued to experience hydrologic stress due to exceptionally low snowpack and reduced runoff. Streamflow in portions of the Arkansas River Basin tracked near record-low levels for the year, increasing concerns regarding water supply reliability. In areas that burned, post-fire watershed vulnerability due to the exceptionally dry conditions.
- Drought-related vegetation stress and declining soil moisture increased the susceptibility and probability of wildfire many priority watersheds that are critical Springs Utilities source water. These stresses expose watersheds to wildfire-related impacts, including erosion, sediment transport, and water quality degradation should significant fires occur during the peak summer season.

- Springs Utilities, alongside local, state, and federal partners, continued to monitor wildfire outlook conditions, fuel dryness, and wildfire threats to support proactive planning and protection of critical water supply infrastructure and source watersheds.

Q3 2026 Outlook

Above-normal temperatures are expected to persist through the third quarter. While monsoon activity may bring short-term moisture, extended periods of heat, low humidity, and gusty winds will elevate the wildfire potential across southern Colorado and the Arkansas River Basin.

Current Significant Fires

Willow Fire (South of Turquoise Lake): The Willow Fire has the potential to affect watersheds surrounding Turquoise Lake, which is critical to raw water operations and source water protection. Wildfire suppression efforts continue to make progress on containment. Springs Utilities personnel have been engaged with incident personnel and remain in close coordination with the Incident Management Team to support protection of watershed resources and damage assessments. Currently, there are no threats or risks to utility assets.

Aspen Acres Fire (South of Pueblo): The Aspen Acres Fire also has the potential to impact watersheds of interest to Springs Utilities. Progress continues for containment of the incident, and Springs Utilities personnel remain engaged with fire managers to ensure awareness of current conditions and protection of critical infrastructure and source-water resources. Currently, there are no threats or risks to utility assets.

Preparedness Status

- The Catamount Wildland Fire Team remains fully staffed with 40 year-round members and maintains a 24-hour response capability.
- Wildfire mitigation activities continue across the electric service territory and municipal watershed lands using risk-based prioritization project implementation with intern staff and collaborative partners.
- Utilities remains actively engaged in regional wildfire working groups, partner coordination efforts, and community wildfire preparedness initiatives.
- Regular coordination continues with local, state, and federal agencies to maintain situational awareness and support protection of Springs Utilities assets and priority watersheds.

Leadership Considerations

Elevated wildfire risk is expected to persist through the remainder of summer and into the fall months. Continued monitoring of watershed threats, infrastructure exposure, and regional fire activity remains a priority during these heightened levels of risk.

Reference Graphics

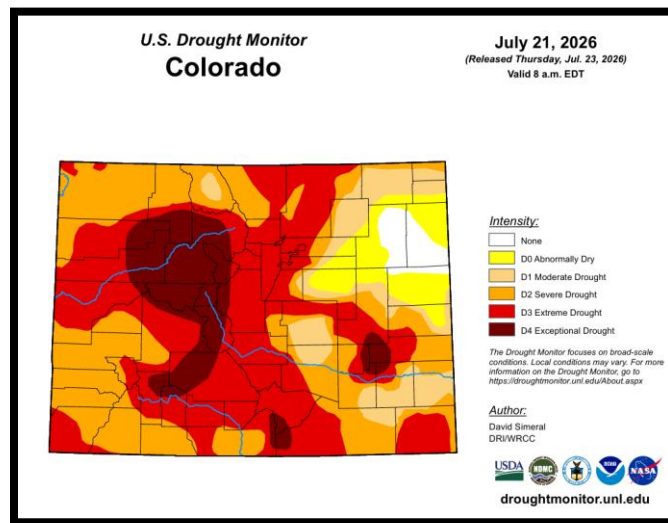


Figure 1 (above): Monthly U.S. Drought Monitor forecasting drought conditions to date for the month of July.

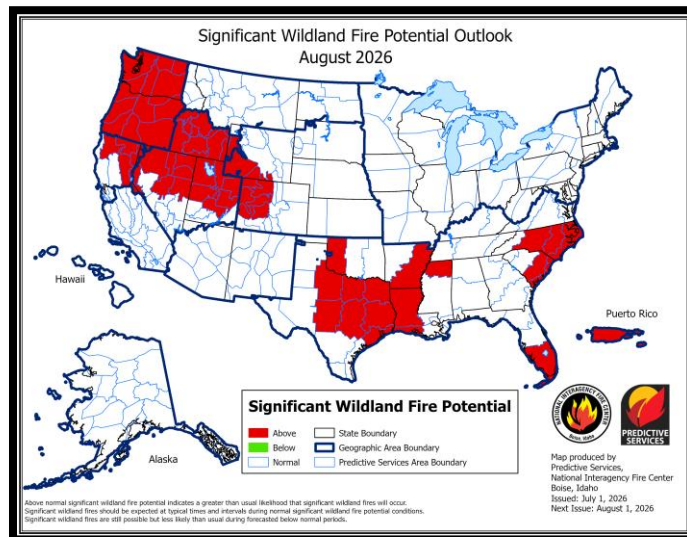


Figure 2 (above): Significant Wildland Fire Potential Outlook for the month of August. Expectation is the above-normal likelihood for large wildfire potential, given fuel conditions, forecasted weather, and forecasted temperatures.

Sources

- [National Interagency Fire Center Seasonal Outlook](#)
- [U.S. Drought Monitor;](#)
- [NRCS Snowpack Data; Colorado Water Conservation Board Hydrologic Reports](#)
- [Rocky Mountain Area Coordination Center Situation Reports](#)