California 2014 Fire Conditions Forecast

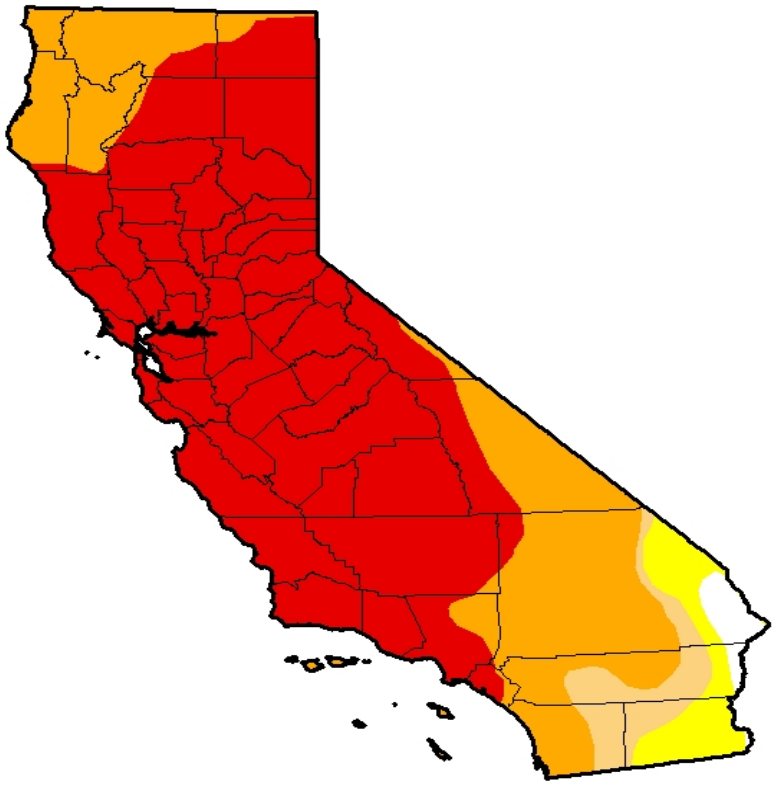
California's persistent drought is impacting the characteristics of native plants and timber that comprise the existing fuel load for potential wildfires. Fuel drying exacerbates the condition of high fuel load accumulations that have concerned forest scientists and managers for years. The severity of the Rim Fire in Mariposa County in 2013 focused attention on the effects of over accumulation of forest fuels created by decades of fire suppression practice in forestry management. The likelihood of continuing drought conditions through most of 2014 contributes to concern for an unusually severe fire season. Looking at the longer term, climate change models suggest that higher average temperature and lower average humidity in temperate zones worldwide will have a compounding effect on California's wildfires.

Recent data highlight the immediate value of attention to and preparation for an extended and potentially severe fire season:

- A year ago, 34 percent of the state's geographic area was not yet experiencing any degree of recognized drought conditions. Only 22 percent of California by area was suffering from drought rated as severe. Today, less than 2 percent of the State is considered unaffected by the drought, and that is in eastern desert areas that experience almost no rainfall in normal years. Over 90 percent of the State is now experiencing severe to extreme drought levels (see figure 1).
- The geographic area of low moisture (i.e., fire-susceptible) timber in California has almost doubled from last year and is spreading throughout the state (see figures 2 and 3).
- The National Interagency Fire Center produces predictive maps that delineate areas of fire concern for all regions of California. Current maps classify nearly all native fuels in the State as "dry" or "very dry". Figure 4 provides the most recent seven-day forecast for Southern California.

National Interagency Fire Center forecasters are predicting intermittent periods of normal rainfall patterns in February and March. However, forecast precipitation levels will be insufficient to counteract the present fuel drying conditions, and they will not lessen the intensity, nor delay the early onset, of the 2014 fire season (1).

Figure 1.



U.S. Drought Monitor

California

January 14, 2014

(Released Thursday, Jan. 16, 2014)

Valid 7 a.m. EST

Drought Conditions (Percent Area)

	None	D0	D1	D2	D3	D4
Current	1.43	4.39	4.27	27.21	62.71	0.00
Last Week 1/7/2014	1.43	4.32	6.71	59.94	27.59	0.00
3 Months Ago 10/15/2013	2.65	1.40	11.82	72.77	11.36	0.00
Start of Calendar Year 12/31/2013	2.61	3.14	6.71	59.94	27.59	0.00
Start of Water Year 10/1/2013	2.63	1.42	11.83	72.77	11.36	0.00
One Year Ago 1/15/2013	34.20	12.23	32.01	21.57	0.00	0.00

Intensity:

- D0 Abnormally Dry
- D1 Moderate Drought
- D2 Severe Drought
- D3 Extreme Drought
- D4 Exceptional Drought

The Drought Monitor focuses on broad-scale conditions. Local conditions may vary. See accompanying text summary for forecast statements.

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http://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/

Figure 2.

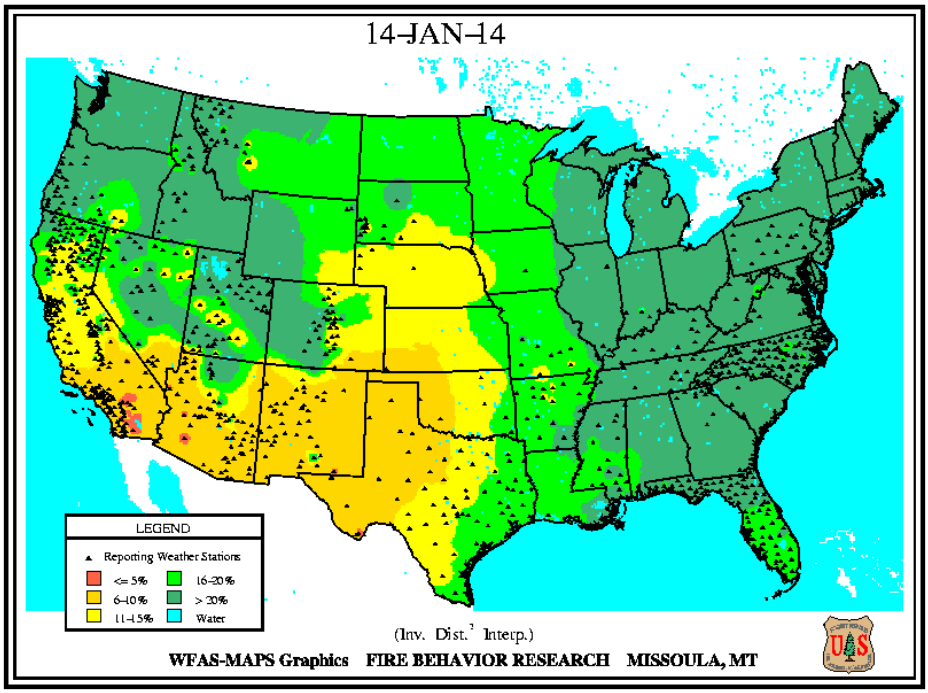
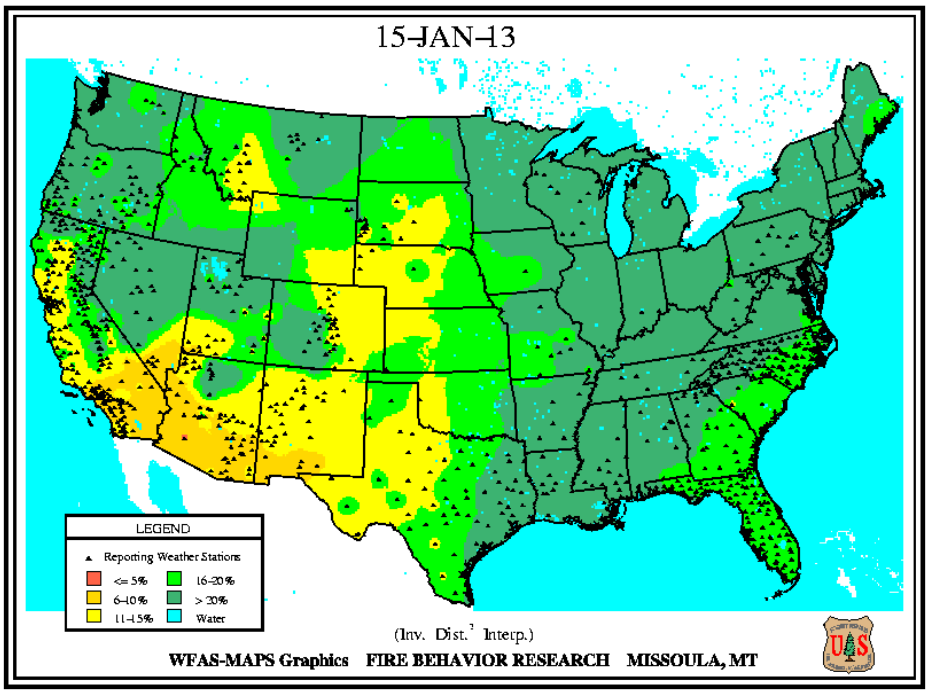
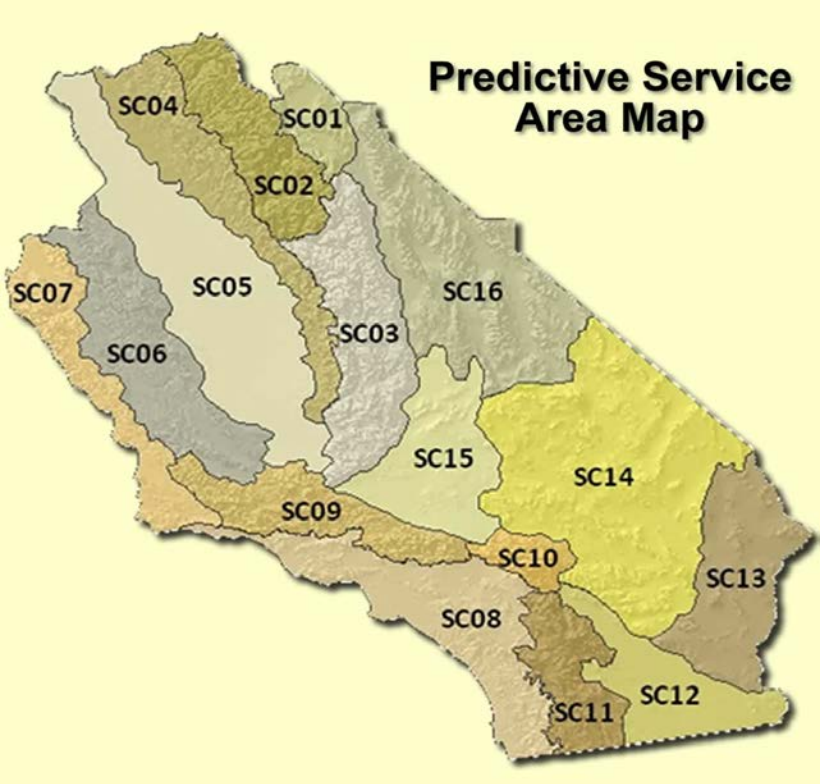


Figure 3.



Source: United States Forest Service – Wildland Fire Assessment System (Updated 1/14/14)

Figure 4.



Legend

Fuel Dryness

- Moist - Little or no risk for large fires.
- Dry - Low risk of large fires in the absence of a "High Risk" event.
- Very dry - Low/Moderate risk of large fires in the absence of a "High Risk" event.
- Data Unavailable.

Predictive Service Area	Mon Jan 20	Tue Jan 21	Wed Jan 22	Thu Jan 23	Fri Jan 24	Sat Jan 25	Sun Jan 26	Mon Jan 27
SC01 - Eastern Sierra								
SC02 - Central Sierra								
SC03 - Southern Sierra								
SC04 - Sierra Foothills								
SC05 - Central Valley								
SC06 - Central Coast Interior								
SC07 - Central Coast								
SC08 - South Coast								
SC09 - Western Mountains								
SC10 - Eastern Mountains								
SC11 - Southern Mountains								
SC12 - Lower Deserts								
SC13 - Eastern Deserts								
SC14 - Central Mojave								
SC15 - Upper Deserts								
SC16 - Northern Deserts								

Web link to National Interagency Fire Center: Predictive Services webpage:
http://gacc.nifc.gov/oscc/predictive/weather/index.htm

1. Basil Newmerzhycky, John Snook. *SEASONAL OUTLOOK For Northern California and Hawaii.* National Interagency Fire Center, December 31st, 2013.
<http://gacc.nifc.gov/oncc/predictive/outlooks/Seasonal_Outlook.pdf>
<http://gacc.nifc.gov/oscc/predictive/outlooks/myfiles/assessment.pdf>