December 2025 Southern California Sector-Specific Drought Outlook Pilot

Current Drought

Southern California[1] has been experiencing persistent dryness since last year. Despite a period of heavy precipitation in mid-November 2025, precipitation from October 1, 2024 to December 6, 2025 ranks in the lower 30th percentile in counties along the California coast. In addition, precipitation during this 15-month period is near or at record lows across much of the Southwest United States, including the Upper Colorado River Basin.

Drought Prediction and Predictability

Southern California is expected to experience below-average precipitation between December 2025 and February 2026, consistent with La Niña (Figure 2). La Niña emerged in autumn 2025 and is likely to continue into early spring 2026.

Sector-Specific Outlooks

Water Utilities

Reservoir storage and groundwater levels are expected to be lower in June 2026 compared to October 2025 (high confidence).

Public Health

Poor air quality due to blowing dust in Southern California is expected from March to June 2026 (high confidence). Though a risk of poor air quality from wildland fire smoke remains in spring 2026, risk fell somewhat compared to last month due to recent precipitation (high confidence).

Agriculture

La Niña is expected to lead to high evaporative demand and below-average precipitation through spring, which may drive crop stress and reduce agricultural productivity in spring 2026 (high confidence). However, November's heavy precipitation added moisture to soils that may offset some of this crop stress.

About the Outlook

This outlook disseminates sector-specific drought scenarios that are based on tailored monitoring and forecasting information, which will enable users to make proactive decisions ahead of drought. The focus sectors include water utilities, agriculture, and public health in Southern California. This outlook uses data available as of September 25, 2025 at 10 a.m. PT unless indicated otherwise.

Several perspectives inform sector-specific drought scenarios, including observations of current conditions and expert interpretation of many types of forecasts to anticipate the future. View graphics and supporting evidence.

[1] Here, Southern California includes San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Ventura, Los Angeles, San Bernardino, Orange, Riverside, San Diego, and Imperial counties.

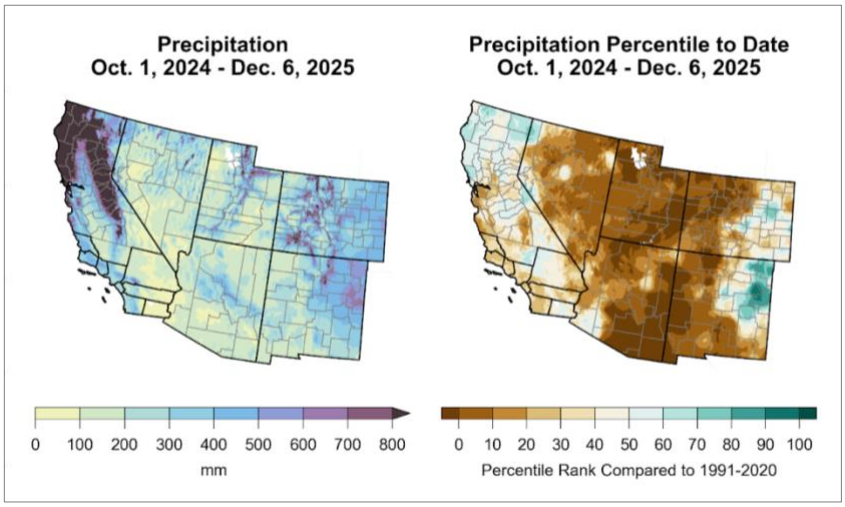

Figure 1. For October 1, 2024 to December 6, 2025, (left) total precipitation in millimeters and (right) precipitation percentile rank.

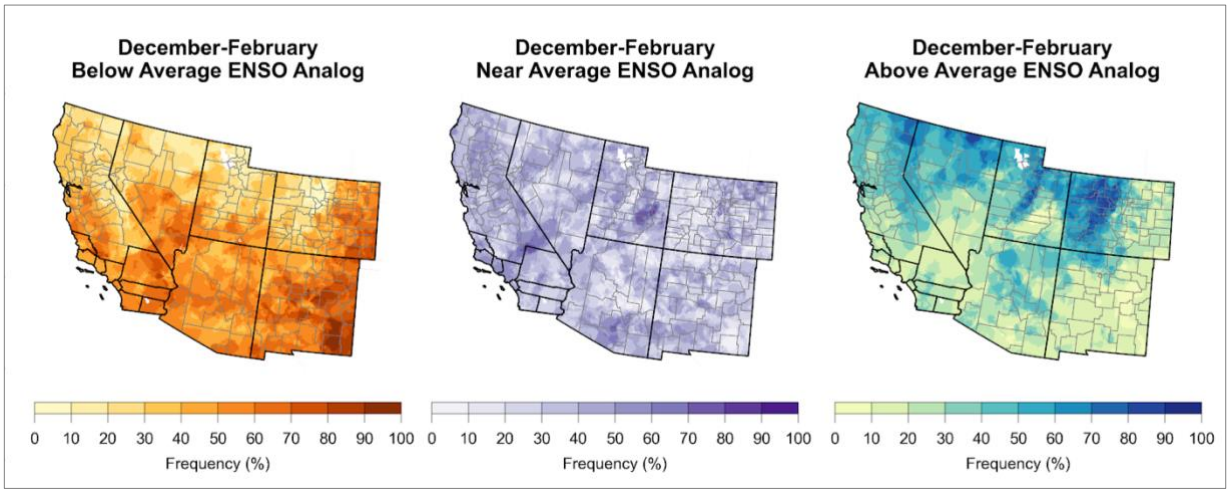

Figure 2. Frequency of below-, near-, and above-average precipitation between December and the following February during weak La Niña events that ended in early spring. These years include 1983-84, 1995-96, 2005-06, 2008-09, 2016-17, 2017-18, and 2024-25. Below-, near- and above-average refer to conditions in the lower, middle, and upper thirds of historical occurrences, respectively.