Colorado Climate Update

Allie Mazurek, PhD

Engagement Climatologist
Colorado Climate Center
Dept. of Atmospheric Science, Colorado State University

Water Conditions Monitoring Committee

January 22, 2026

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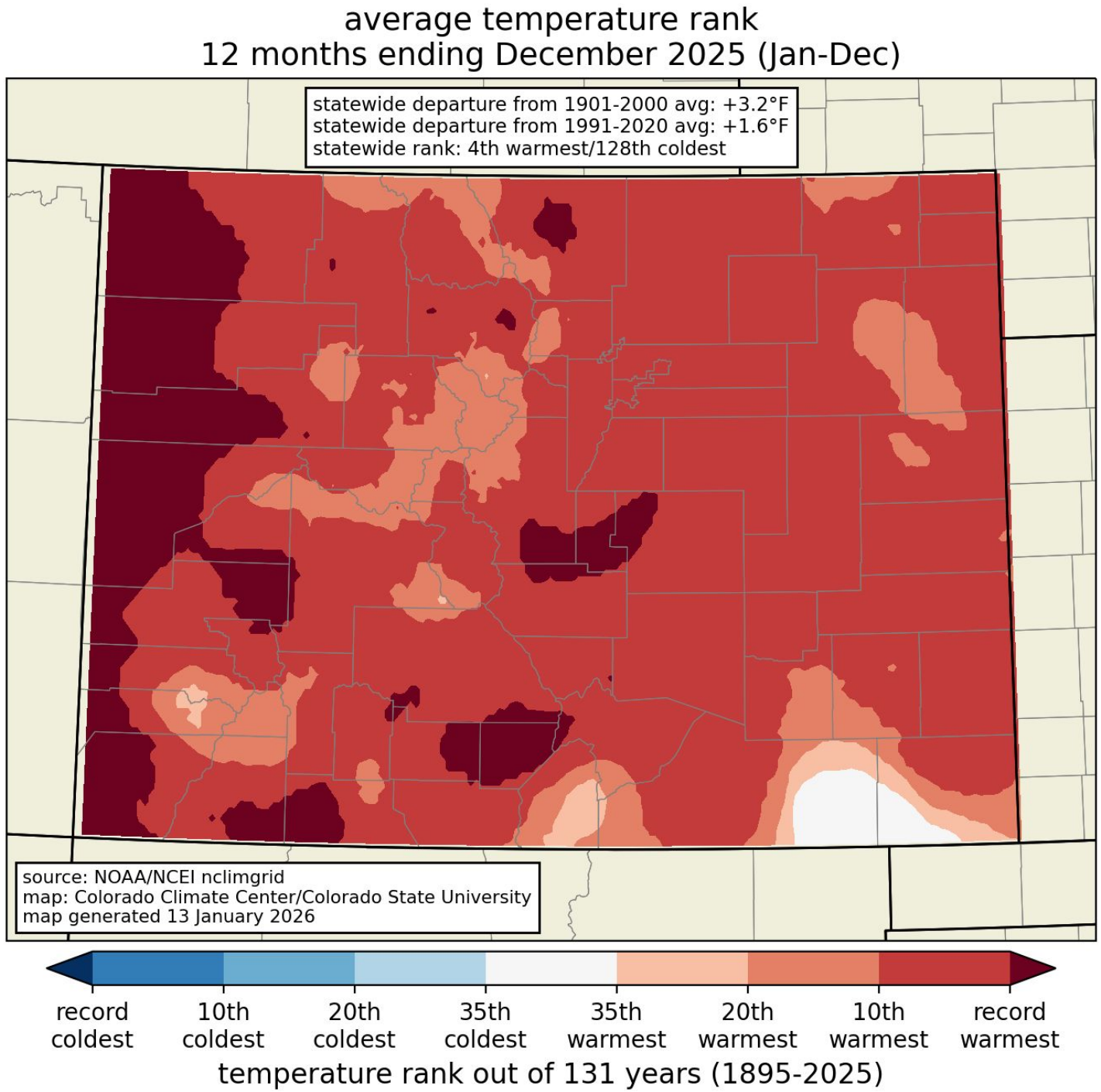
ATMOSPHERIC SCIENCE
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

The numbers are in…

2025 was the 4th warmest year on record for Colorado (behind only 1934, 2012, and 2017).

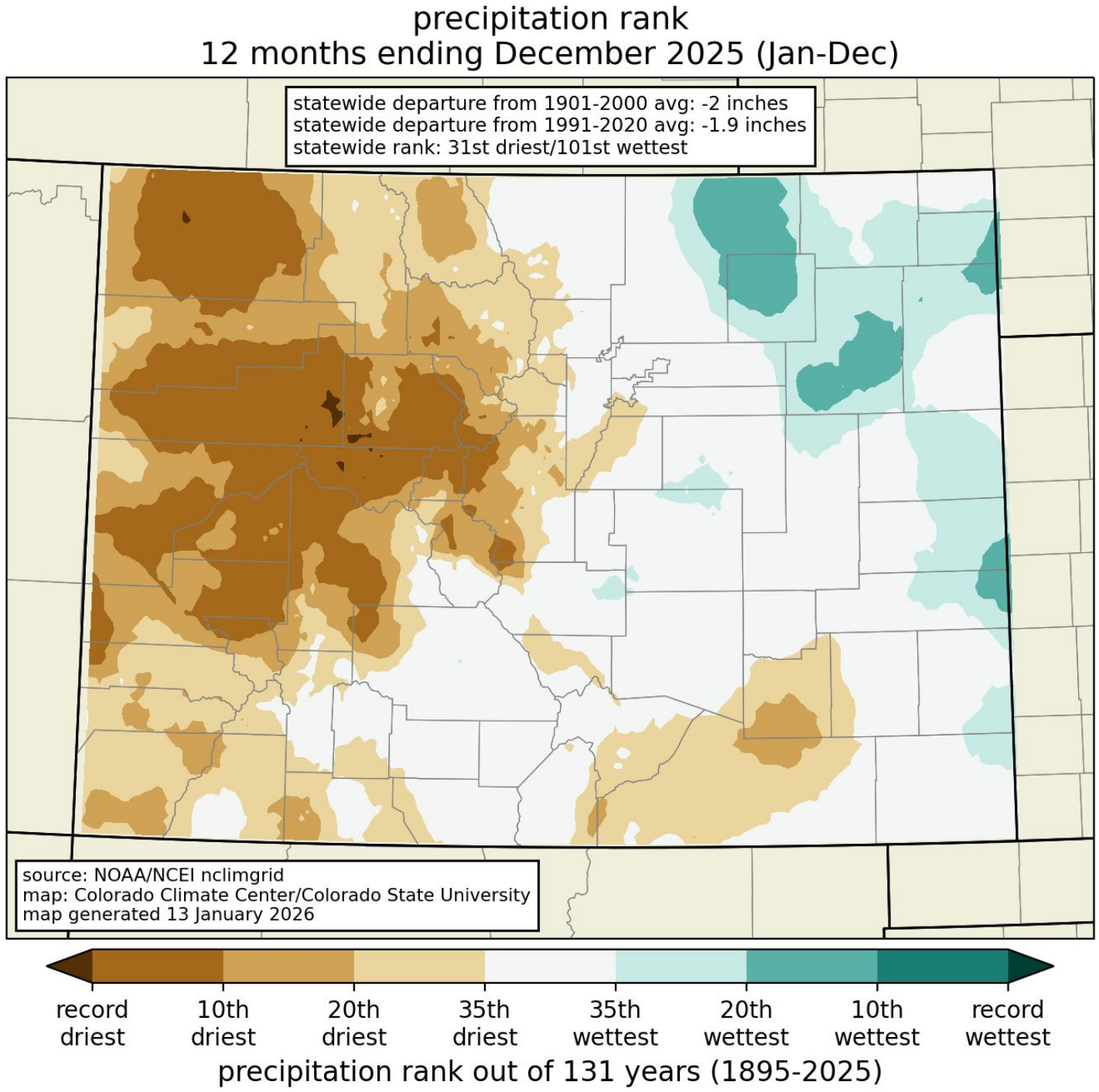
Record warmest for much of the West Slope



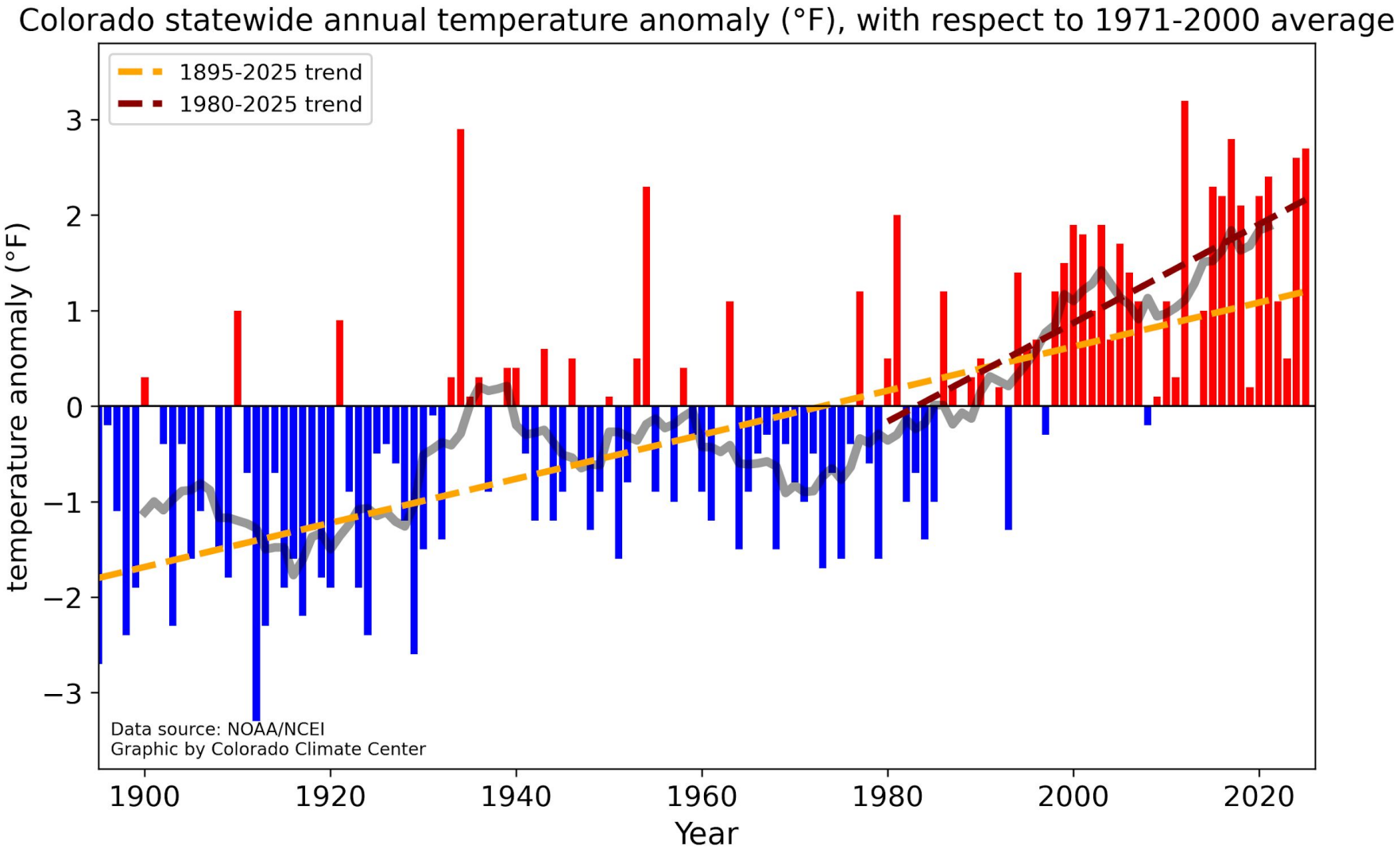
The numbers are in…

2025 was the 31st driest year on record statewide.

Top-10 driest for some locations west of the Divide, top-20 wettest for portions of the Northeast Plains



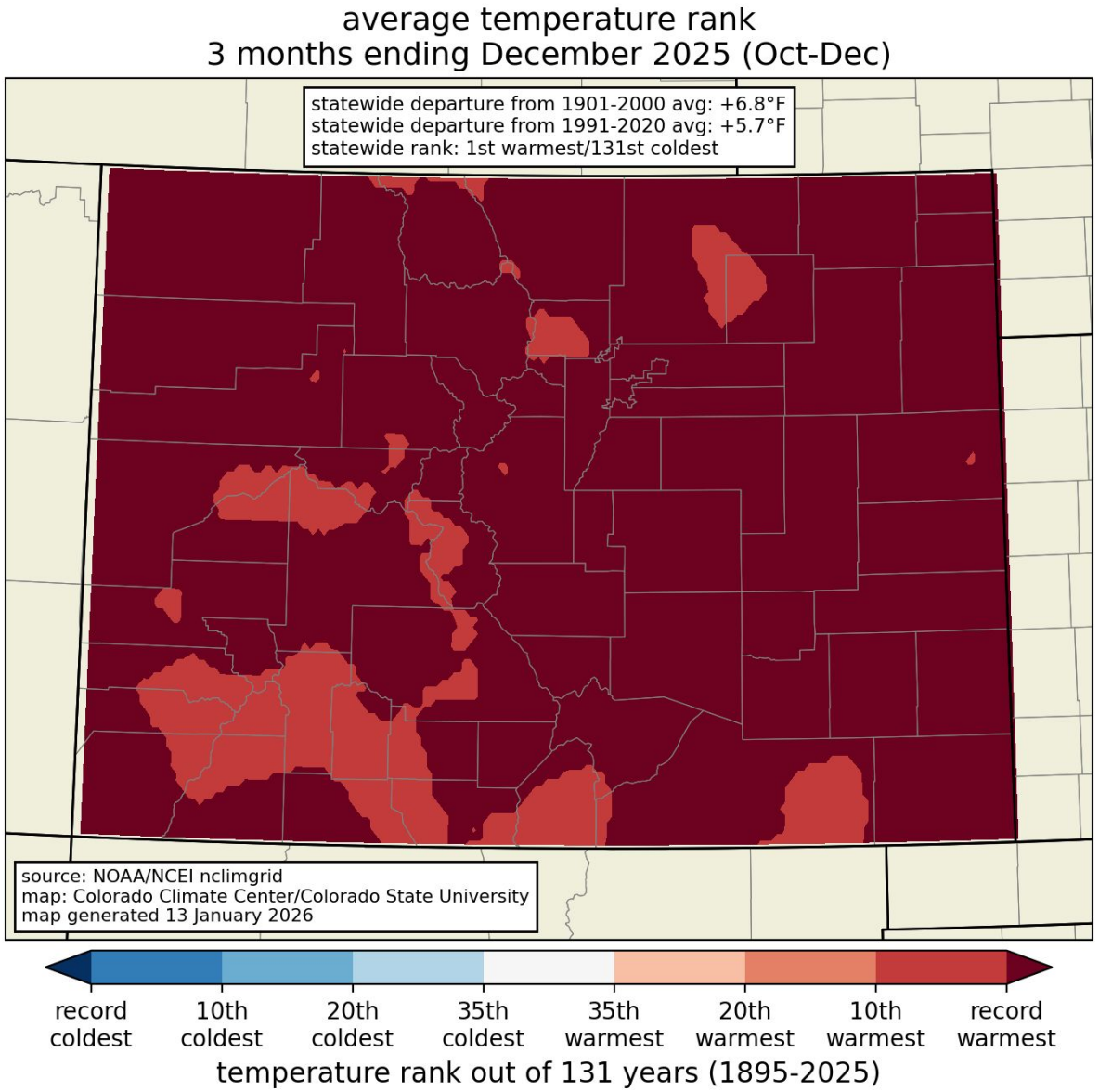
2025 continued a frightening pattern of the last decade or so… 8 of CO's 10 warmest years on record have occurred since 2012.



Water Year 2026 so far

Temperature, precipitation, and more

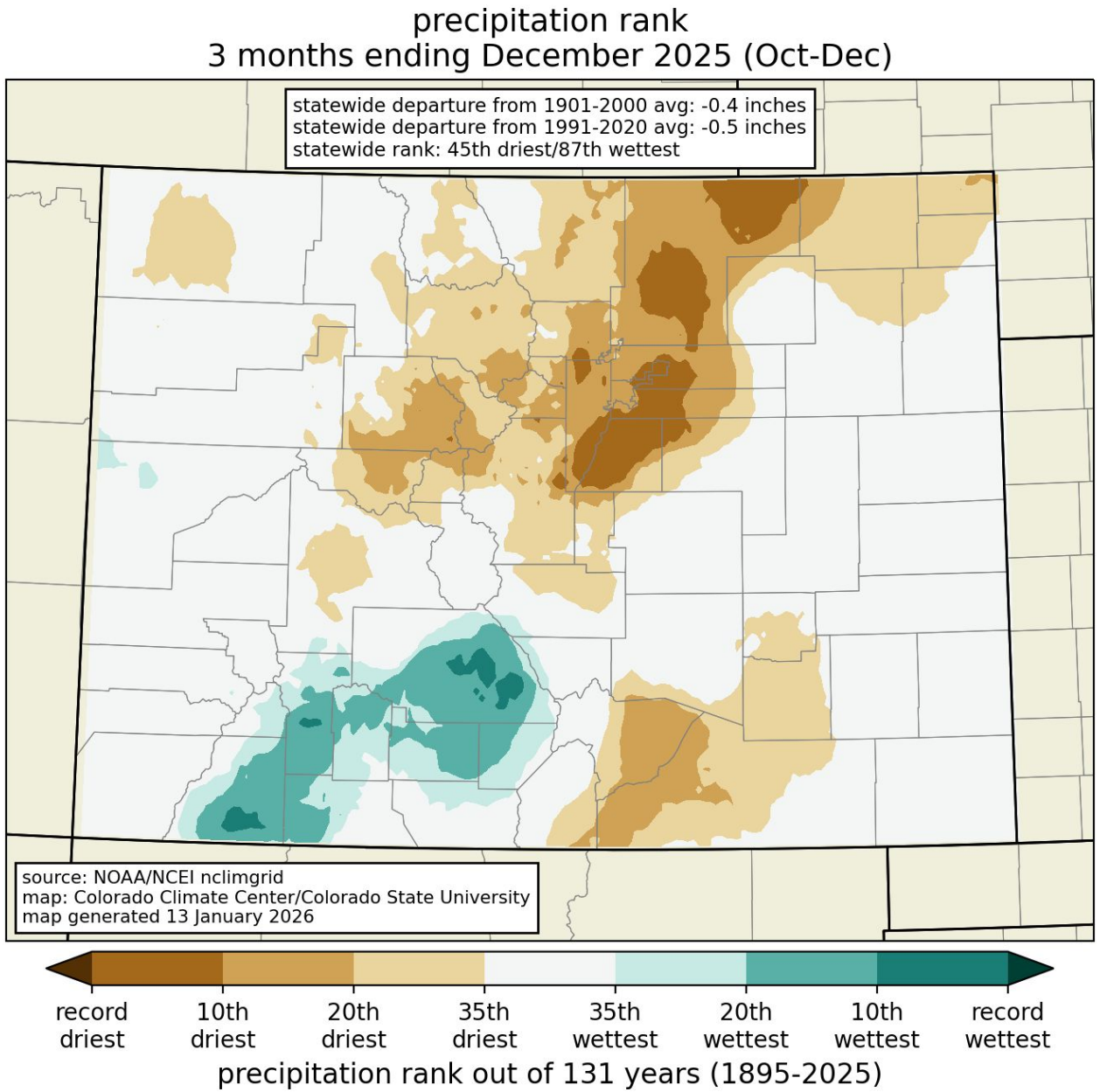
Big Thompson Headwaters on Dec 23
Courtesy of Henry Reges



Month	T Rank (of 130 years)	Above, below, or near 20th century avg?
Oct	11th warmest	much above
Nov	3rd warmest	much above
Dec	1st warmest	record warm

Record warmth in all corners of the state… San Juans were pretty much the only region that didn't see record warmth during this period

<u>Statewide:</u> 1st-warmest October-December on record.



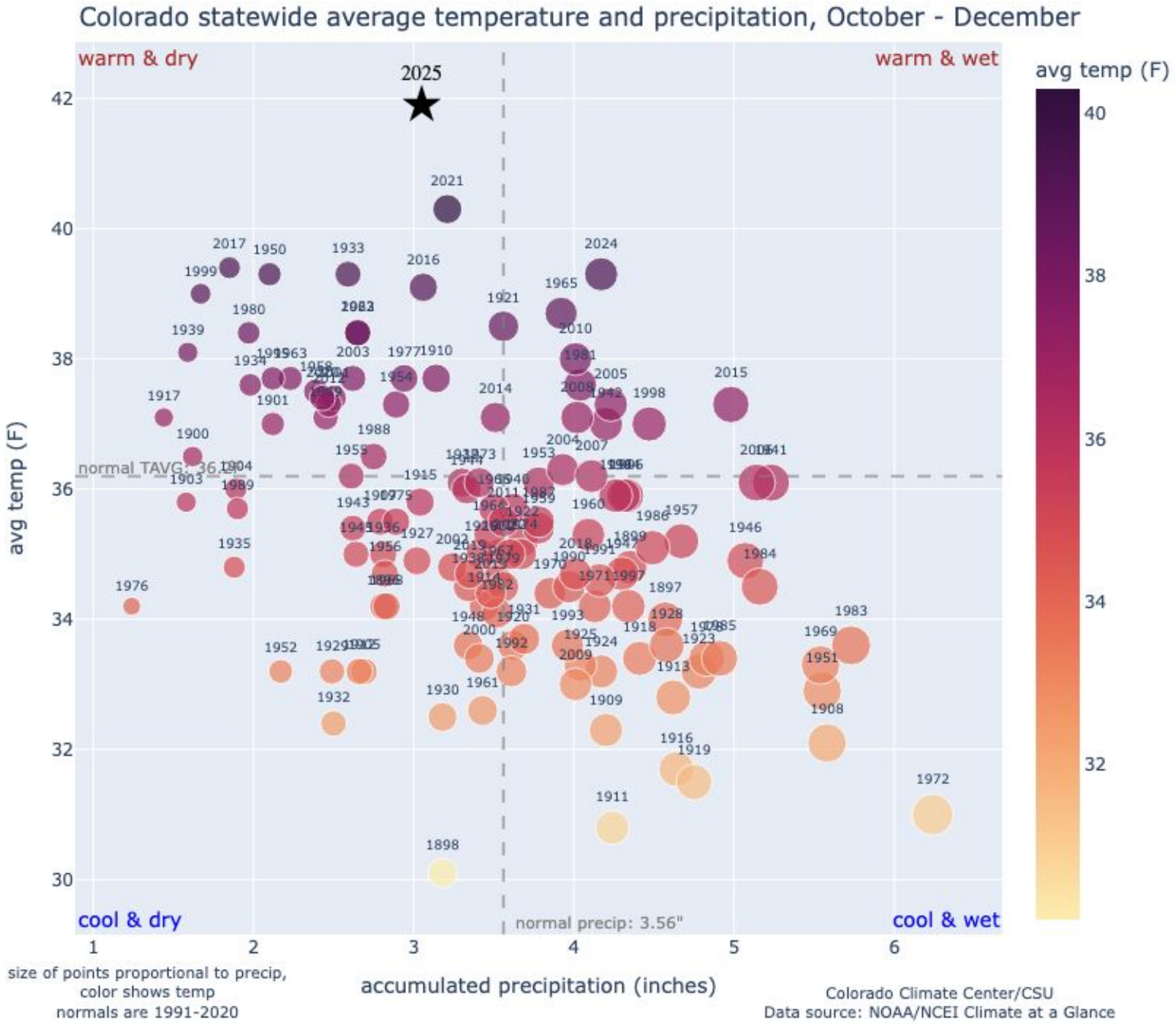
Month	P Rank (of 130 years)	Above, below, or near 20th century avg?
Oct	46th wettest	near normal
Nov	42nd driest	below
Dec	34th driest	below

Drier than averages in most of north-central CO (record-driest for some); top 20-ish wet for parts of the San Juans (recall the October floods)

<u>Statewide:</u> 45th driest October-December on record

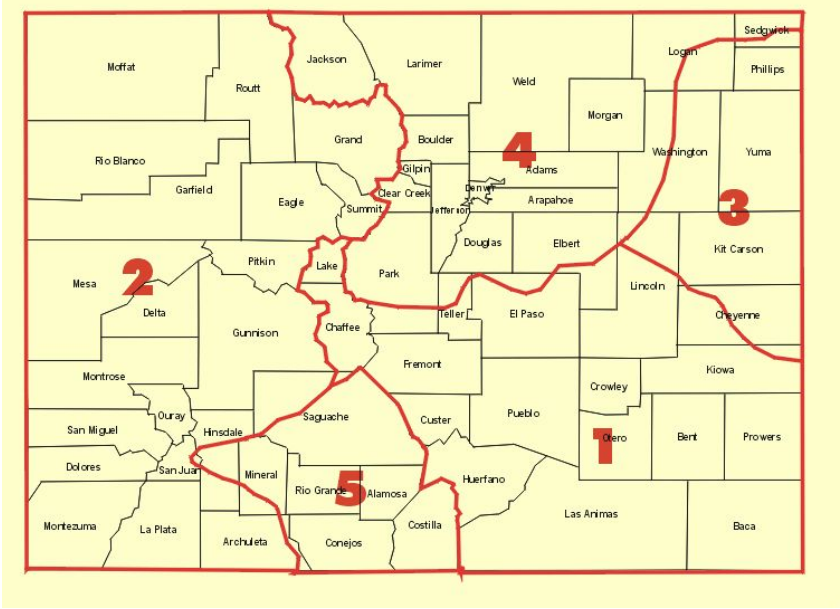
Quadrant chart: WY 2026

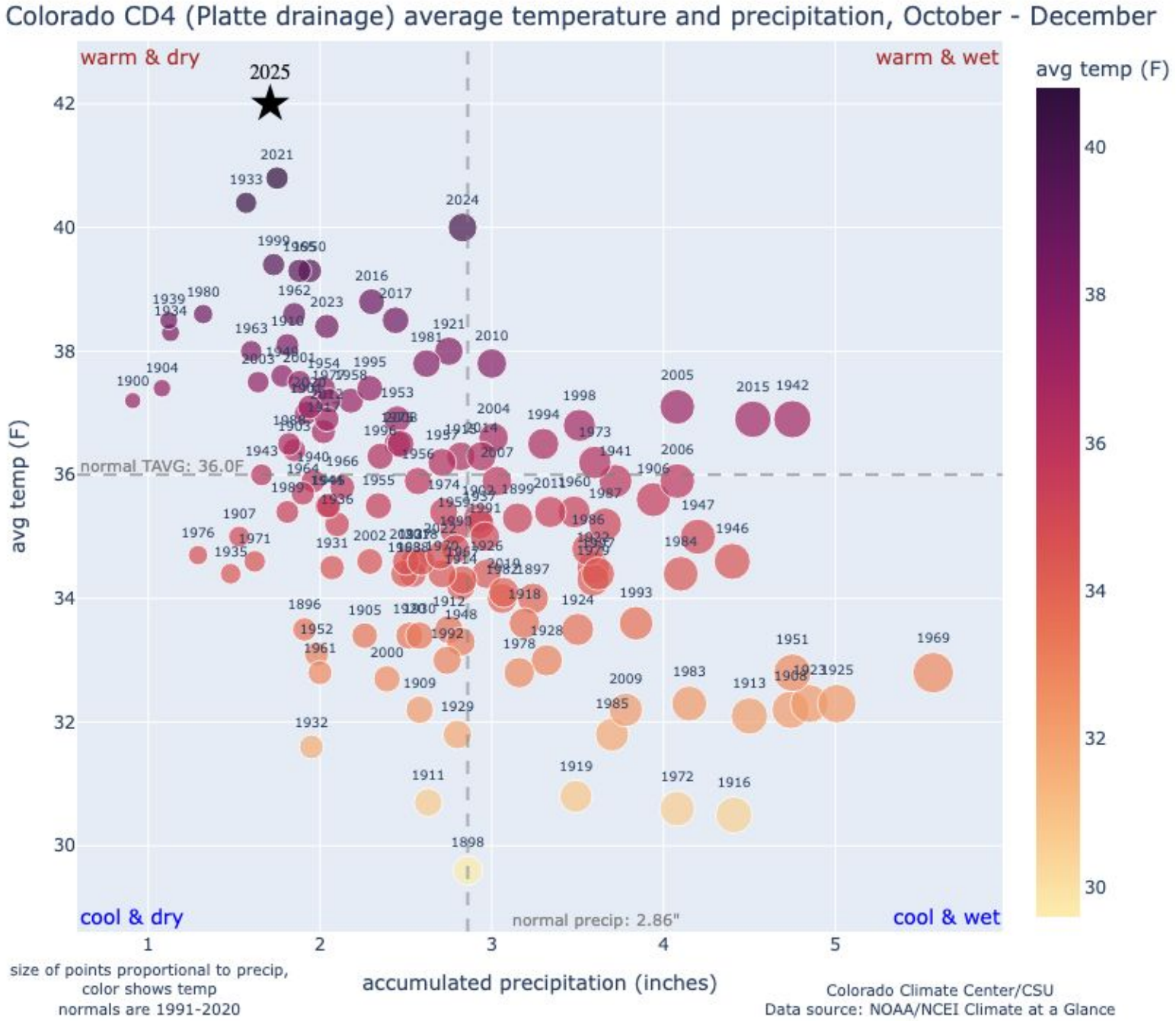
Record warmth; drier than average too



Quadrant chart: WY 2026, Platte Drainage division

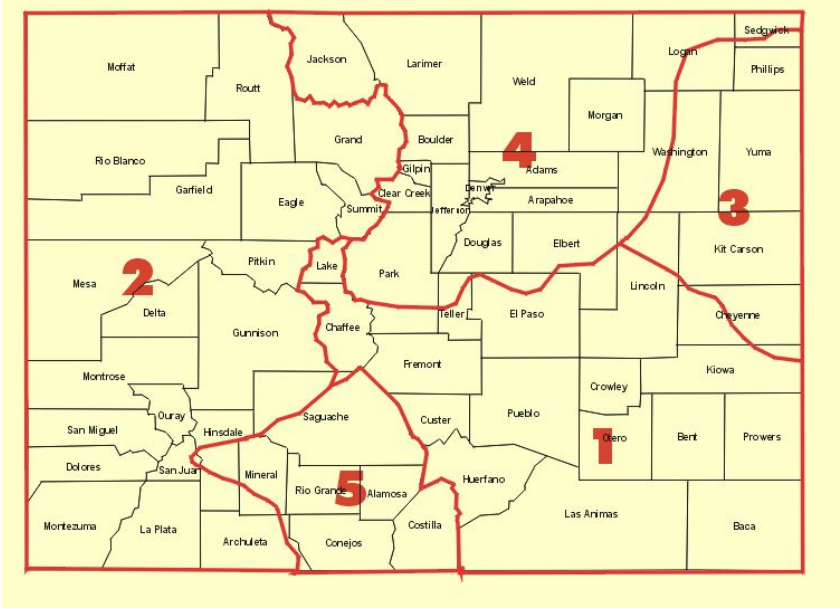
Similarly dry to 1999, 2021

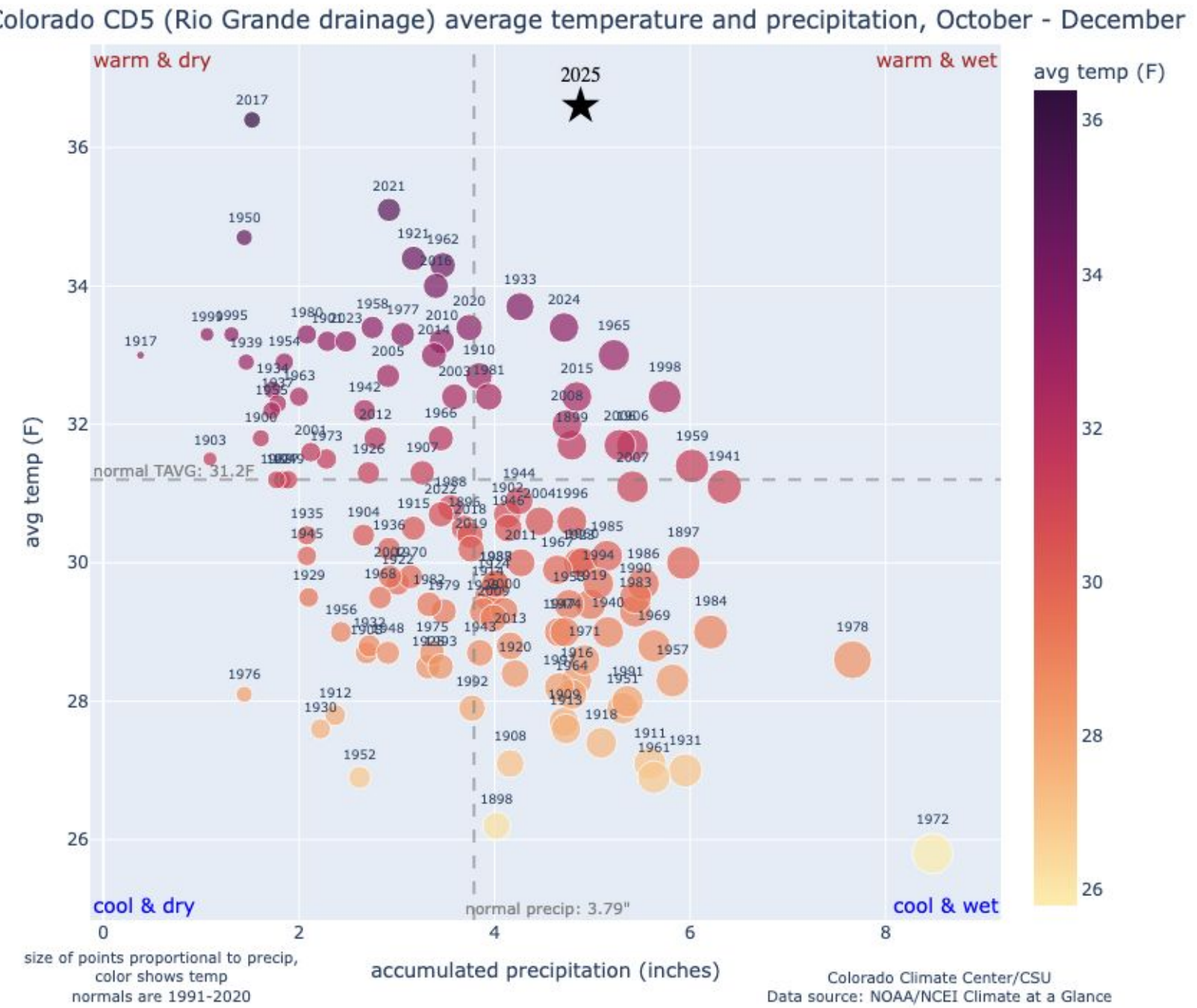




Quadrant chart: WY 2026, Rio Grande Drainage division

SW CO still running above average thanks to Oct rainstorms





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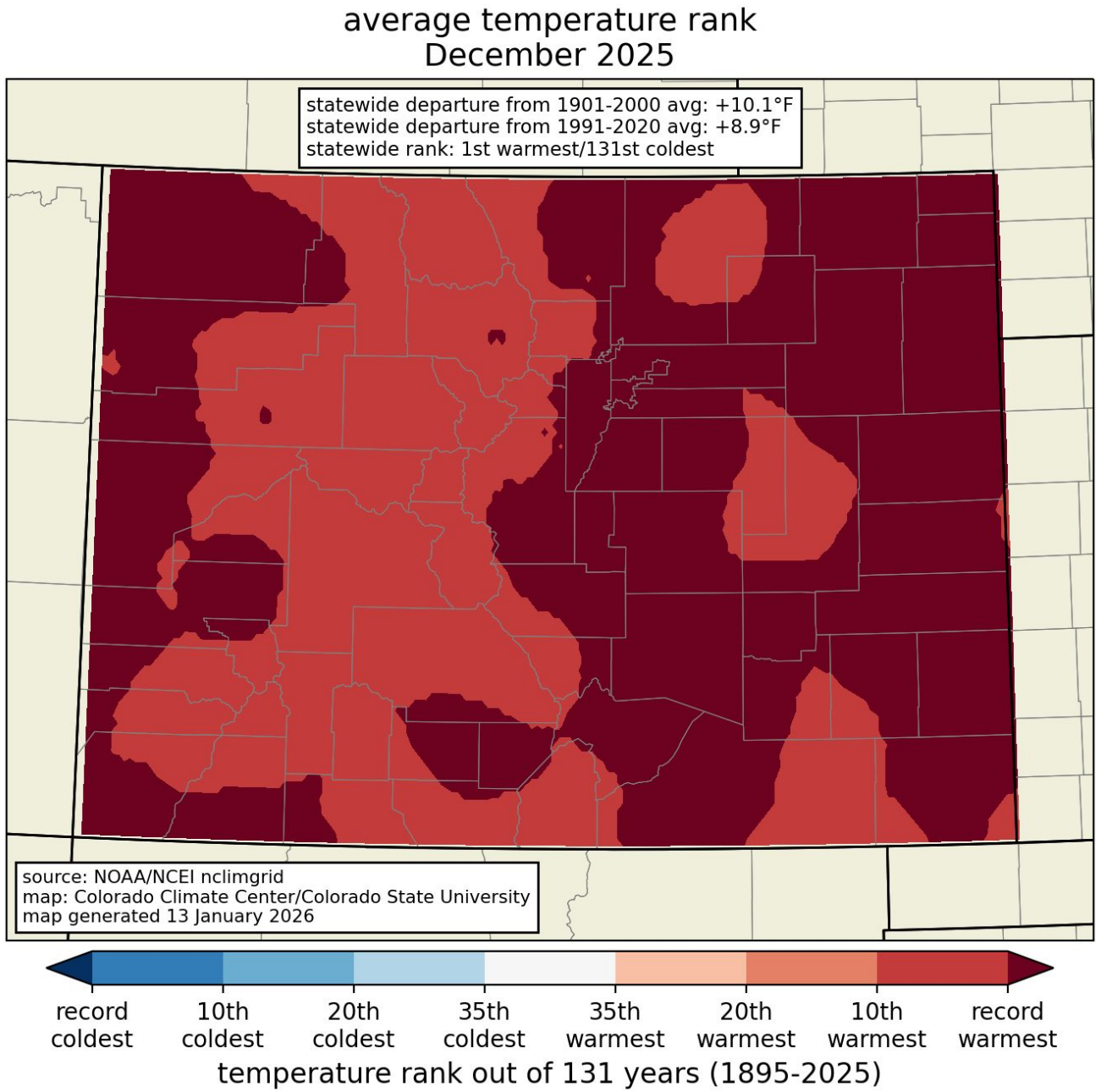
December 2025 and January so far

Small grass fire near the CSU Foothills campus
December 18

December temperature rankings

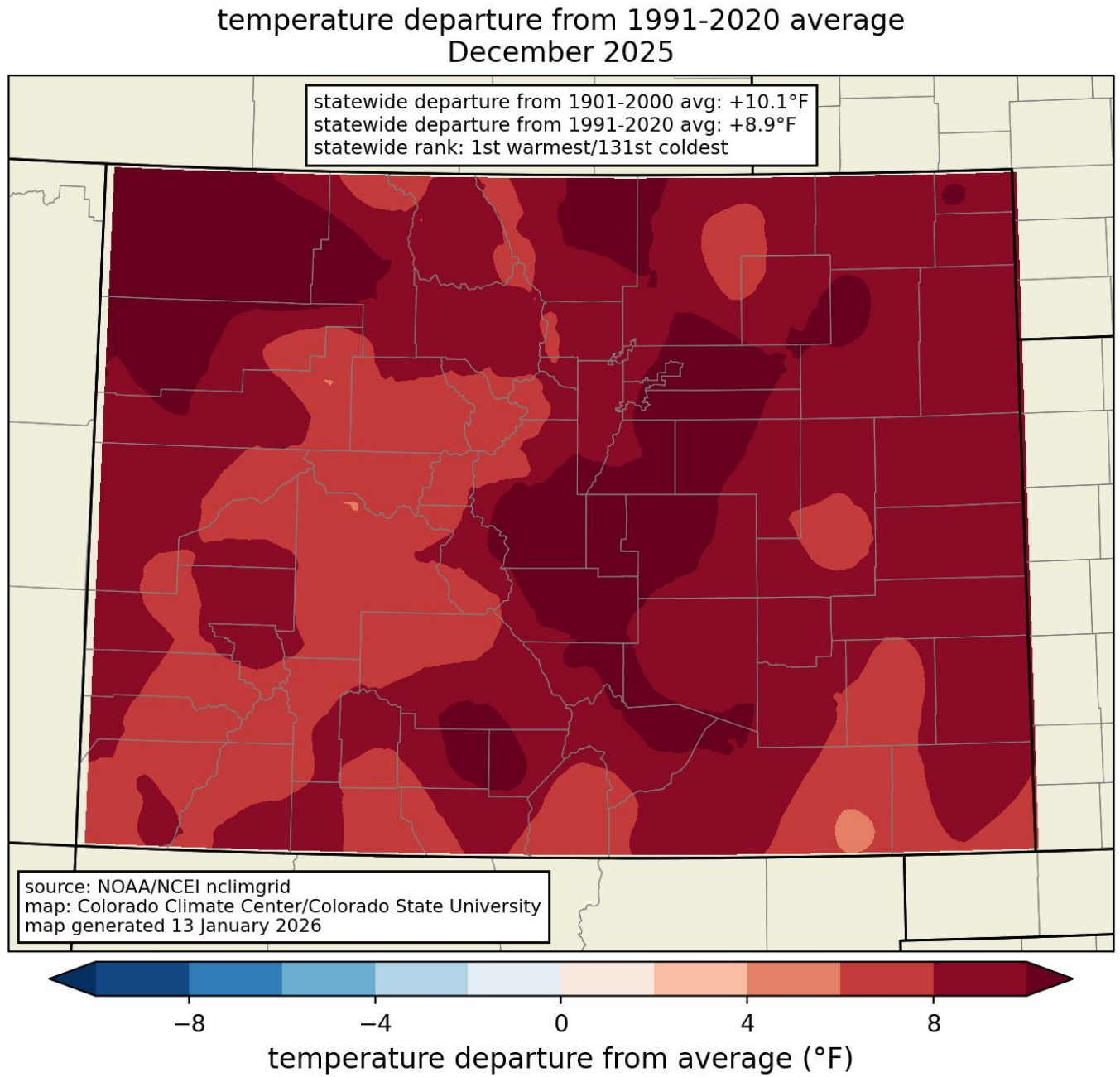
December 2025 <u>was the warmest December on record for Colorado.</u>

Record warmest for most of the West Slope and Eastern Plains, top 5-10 warmest elsewhere



“Disturbingly warm”

Temperatures were >10F° above average across portions of central and northwest Colorado.

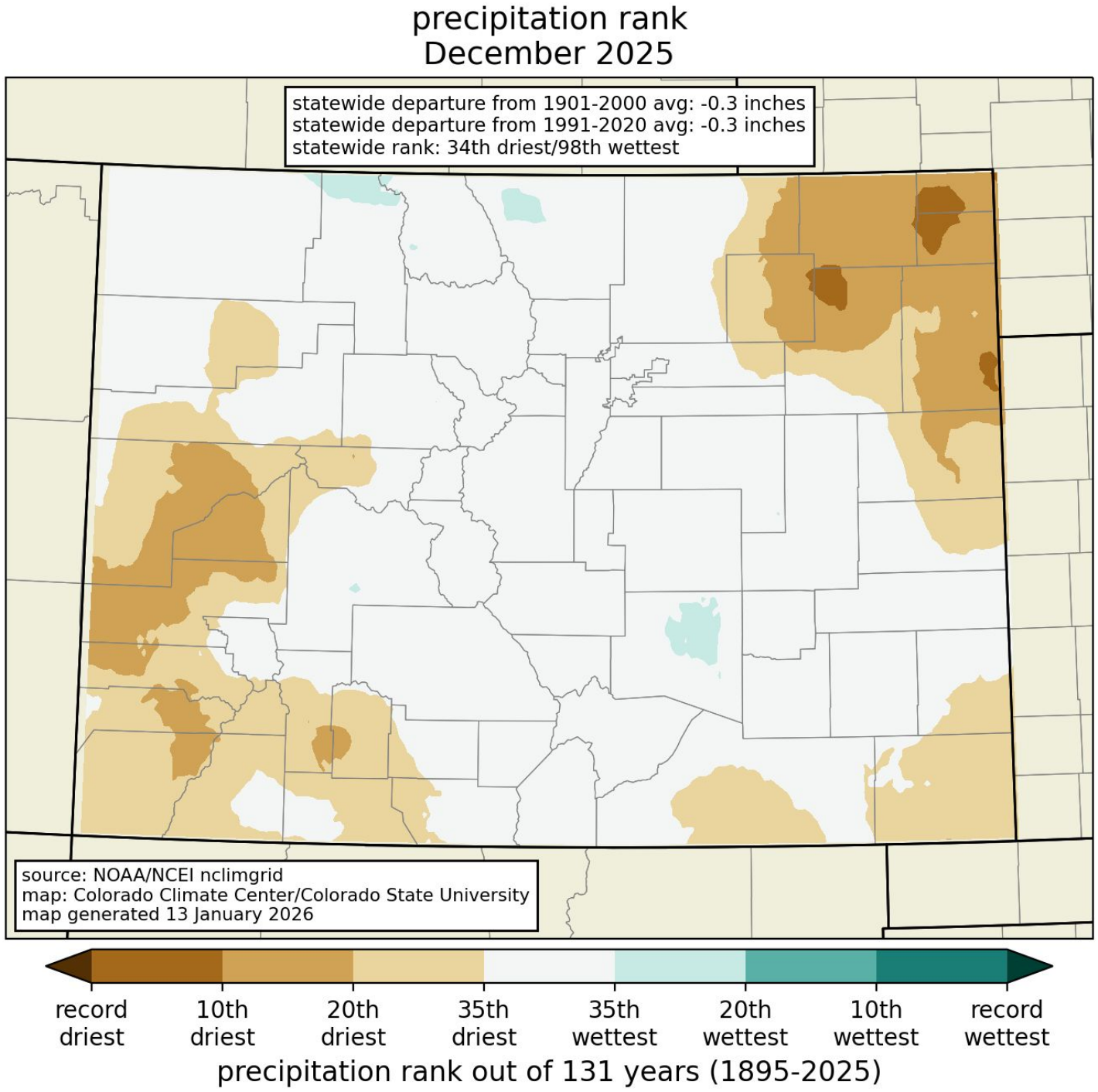


December precipitation rankings

34th driest December on record statewide

Notable dryness across West Slope, Southwest CO and Northwest CO

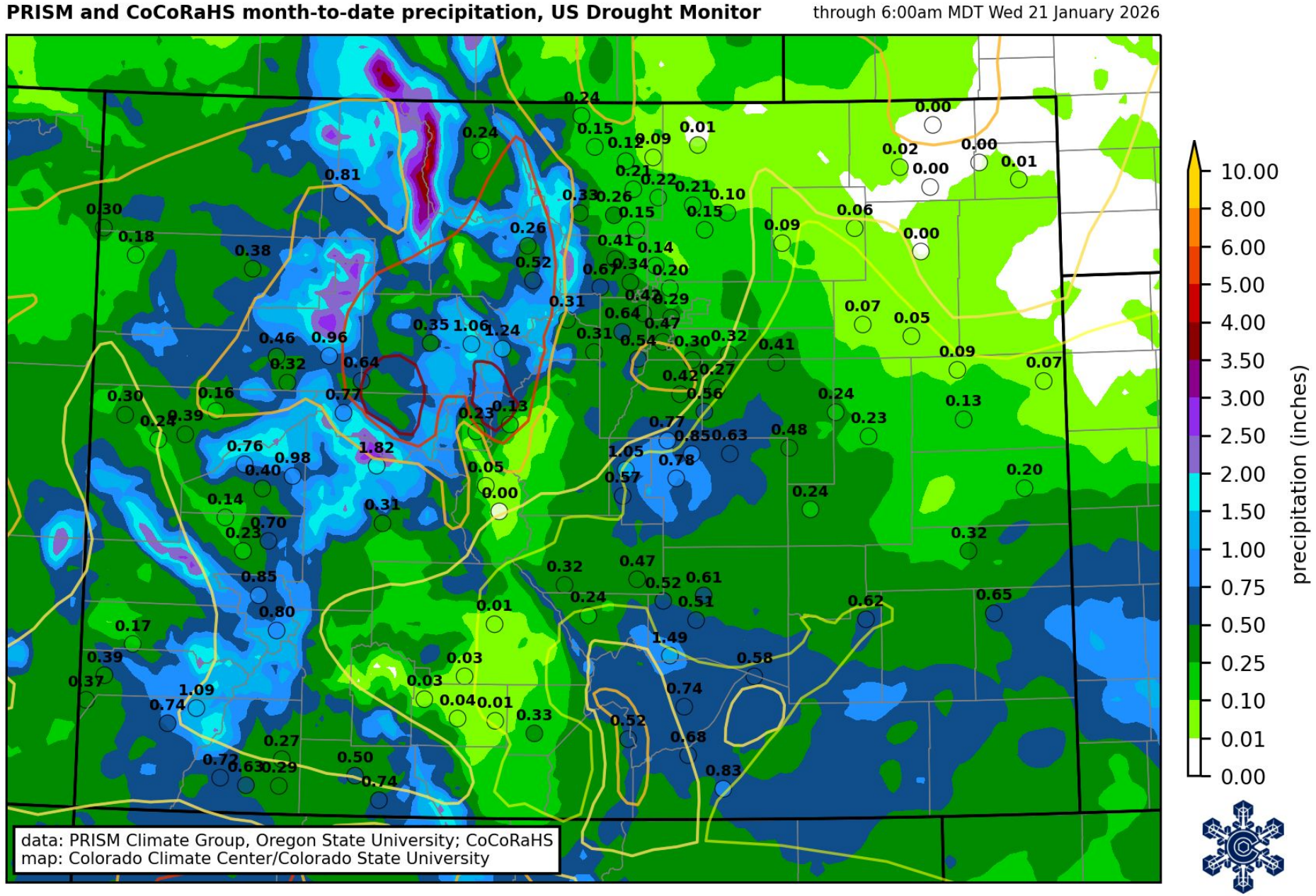
Practically no precipitation fell in Dec in the northwest corner



January precipitation through Wednesday

There has been *some* mountain snow…

NE Colorado has continued to stay dry



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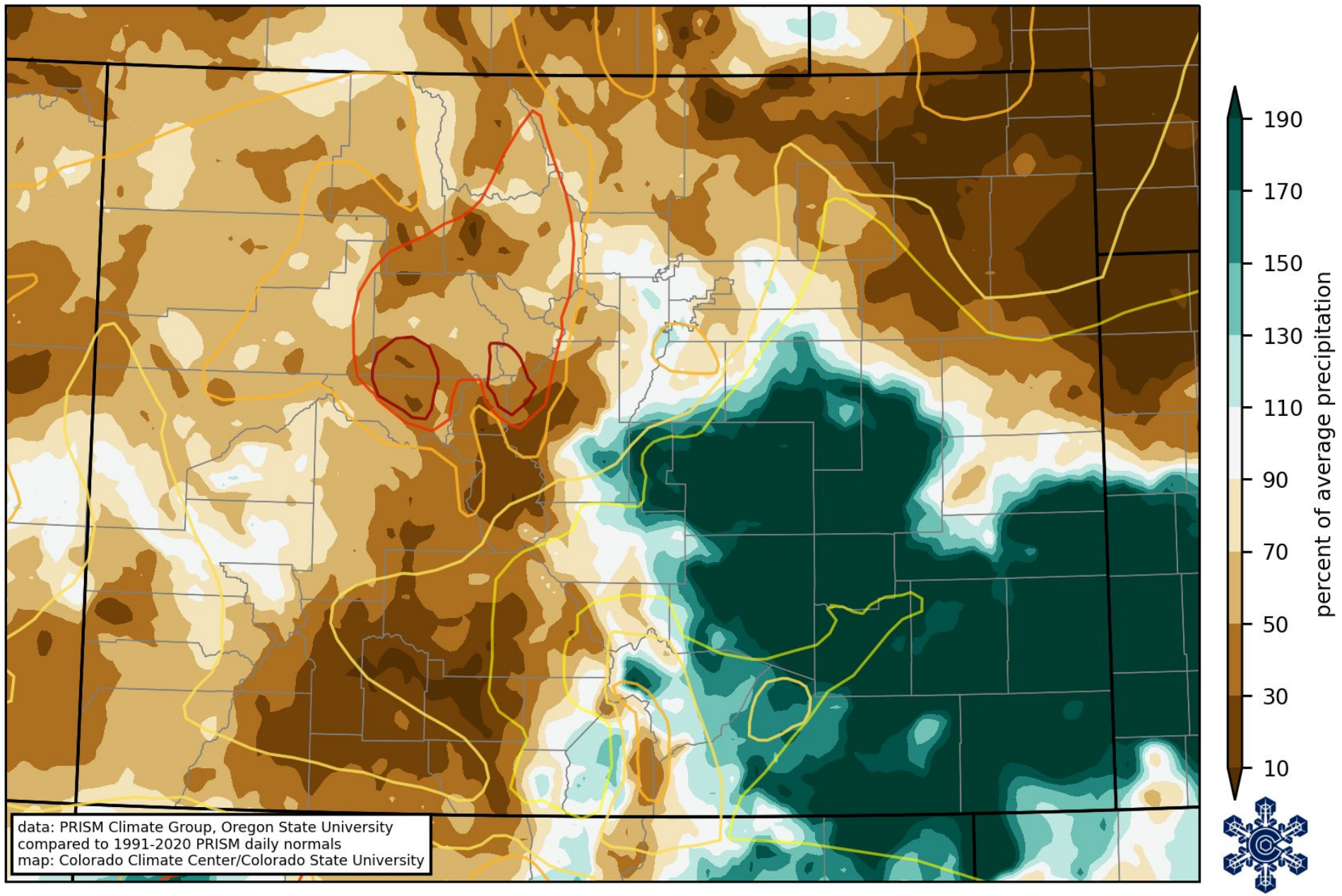
Percent of normal precipitation for January so far

Below-average everywhere except for southeast Colorado, which sav a nice shot of snow earlier this month (upwards of ~10”)



January precipitation is important for many of the mountain areas, especially the Park Range.

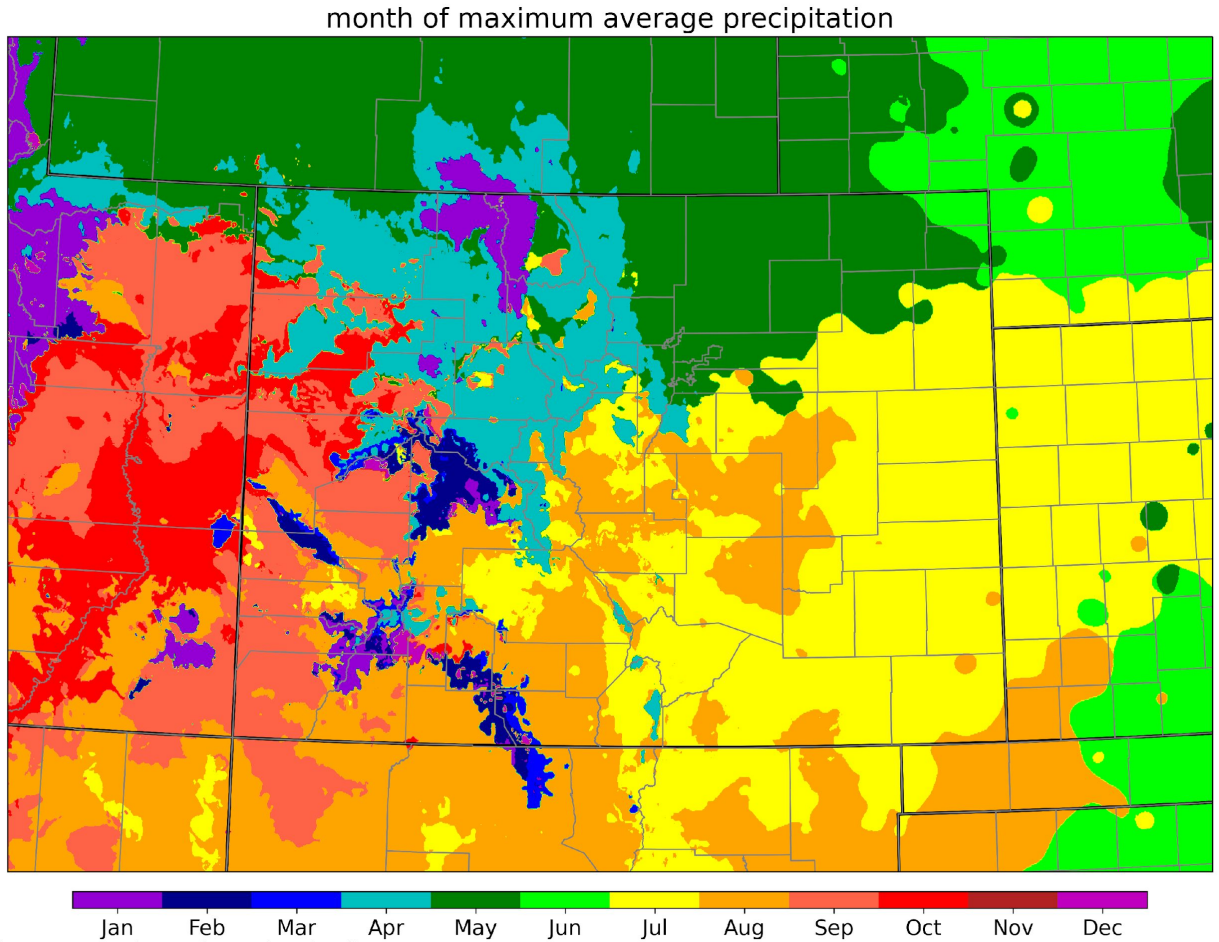
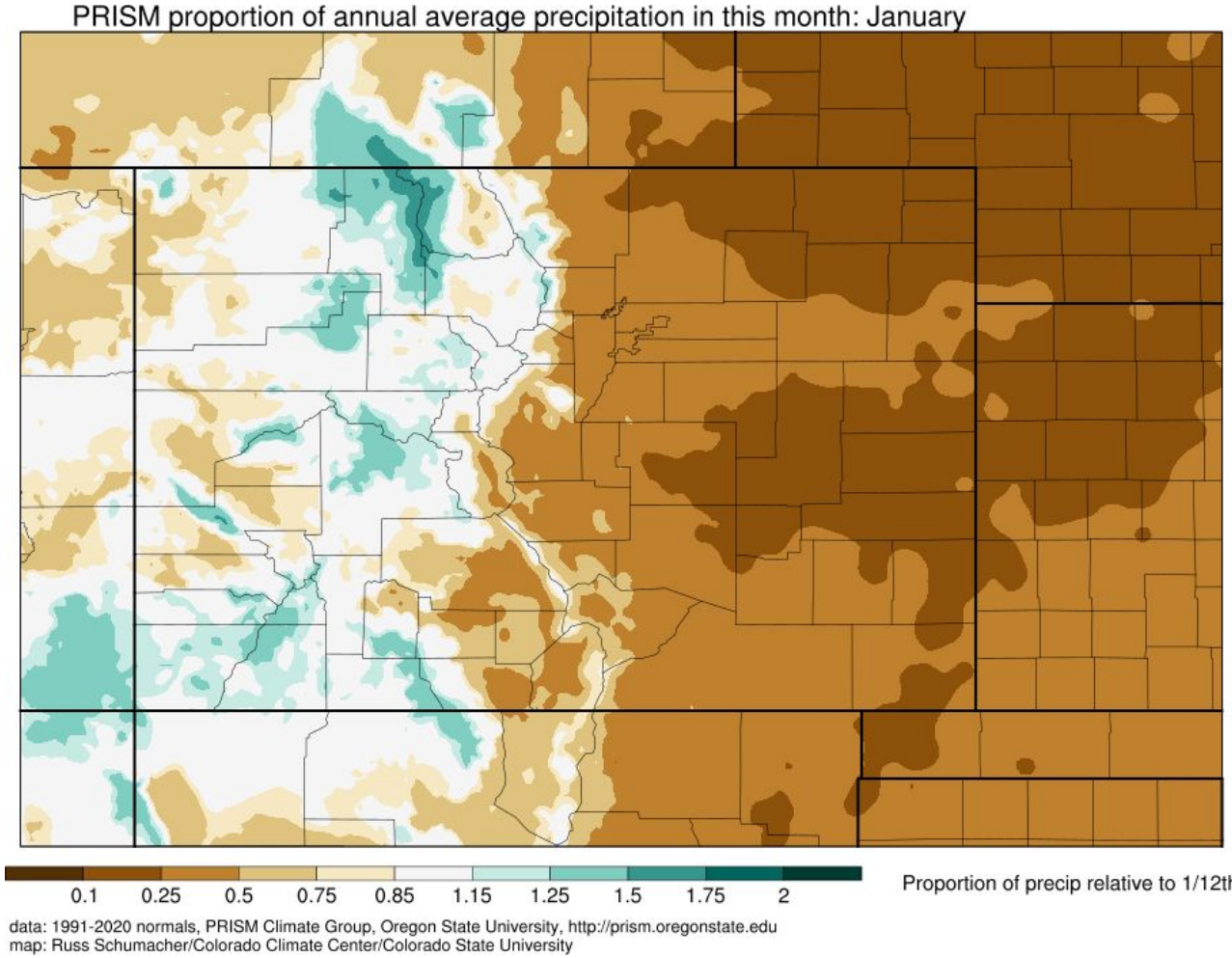


Figure: Russ Schumacher/Colorado Climate Center
Data: PRISM climate group (prism.oregonstate.edu), 1991-2020 normals



data: 1991-2020 normals, PRISM Climate Group, Oregon State University, http://prism.oregonstate.edu
map: Russ Schumacher/Colorado Climate Center/Colorado State University

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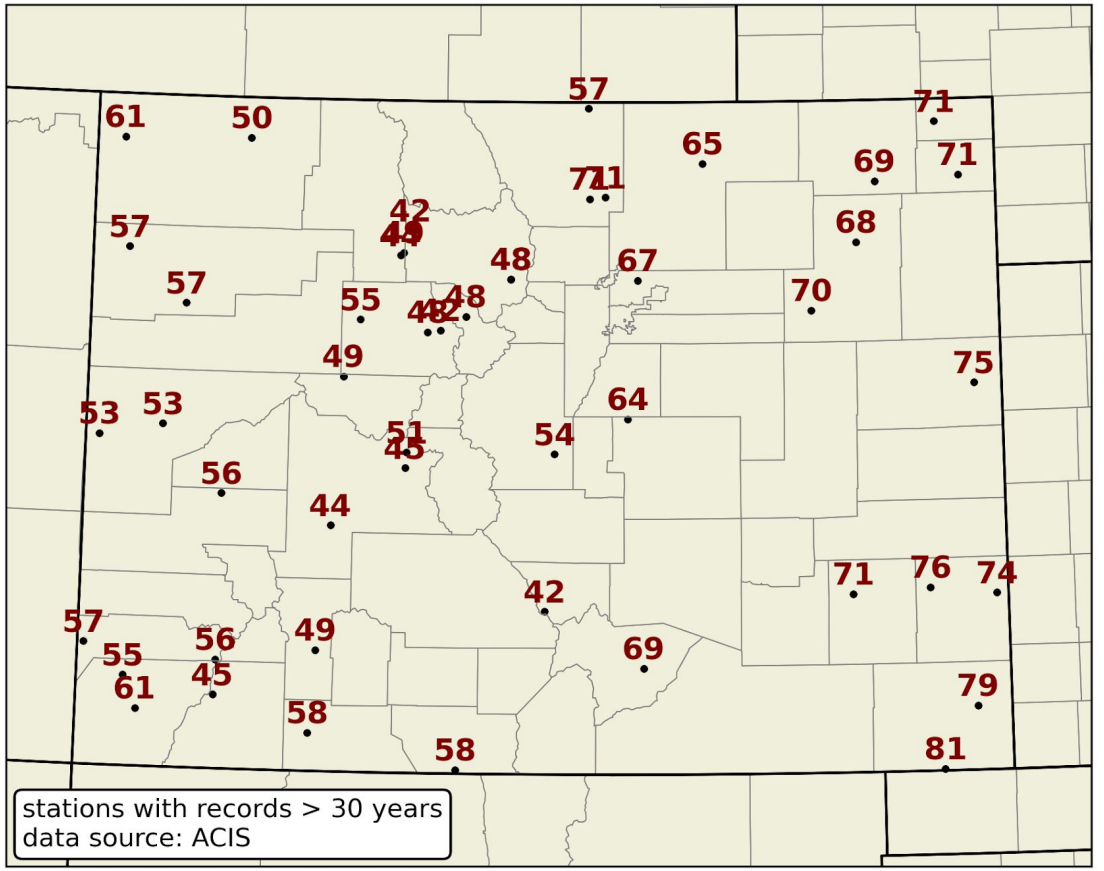
Remarkable warmth

Over 1000 daily max and daily min temperature records broken in December

record daily high maximum temperatures for 2025-12-12 (°F)



STATION RECORDS (PREVIOUS)
AKRON 4 E: 68 (67; 2014)
BIG HORN COLORADO: 58 (53; 2004)
BLUE MESA LAKE: 44 (44; 2017)
BRIGGSDALE: 65 (62; 1980)
BRIGHTON 3 SE: 67 (67; 2004)
BUFFALO PARK: 42 (42; 2014)
BURLINGTON: 75 (72; 2004)
CAMPO 7 S: 81 (74; 2004)
COLUMBUS BASIN: 45 (45; 2017)
CORTEZ: 61 (60; 1950)
DEVIL MTN COLORADO: 58 (58; 2004)
DOWD JUNCTION COLORADO: 48 (47; 2004)
DOVE CREEK: 57 (56; 2017)
FRASER: 48 (43; 2014)
FRASER: 48 (55; 1937)
GRAND JUNCTION 6ESE: 53 (53; 1996)
GREAT DIVIDE COLORADO: 50 (49; 2014)
GYPSUM COLORADO: 55 (53; 2004)
HOLLY: 74 (73; 1948)
HOLYOKE: 71 (70; 1990)
HUNTER CREEK COLORADO: 57 (57; 2004)
LADORE COLORADO: 61 (57; 2004)
LAKE GEORGE 8 SW: 54 (54; 2004)
LAMAR: 76 (72; 1906)
LAS ANIMAS: 71 (71; 1906)
LEROY 5 WSW: 69 (67; 1990)
LINDON 5 WNW: 70 (69; 2004)
LITTLE DELORES COLORADO: 53 (52; 1995)
LOVELAND 2N: 71 (64; 2004)
LYNX PASS: 44 (44; 2014)
OLATHE: 56 (55; 1996)
PALMER LAKE: 64 (58; 2022)
PORCUPINE CREEK COLORADO: 49 (47; 2017)
RANGELY 1E: 57 (54; 1950)
SCOTCH CREEK: 56 (53; 2004)
SEDGWICK 5 S: 71 (62; 2014)
SOUTH COLONY: 42 (42; 2004)
SUMMIT RANCH: 48 (47; 2014)
TAYLOR PARK: 45 (45; 2004)
TAYLOR PARK COLORADO: 51 (51; 2004)
THE CROWN COLORADO: 49 (49; 2004)
UPPER RIO GRANDE: 49 (49; 2017)
VAIL: 42 (41; 2004)
VIRGINIA DALE 7 ENE: 57 (57; 2014)
WALSENBURG 1 NW: 69 (68; 2014)
WALSH 1 W: 79 (75; 2004)
WATERDALE: 71 (71; 1921)
YELLOW JACKET: 55 (54; 2014)

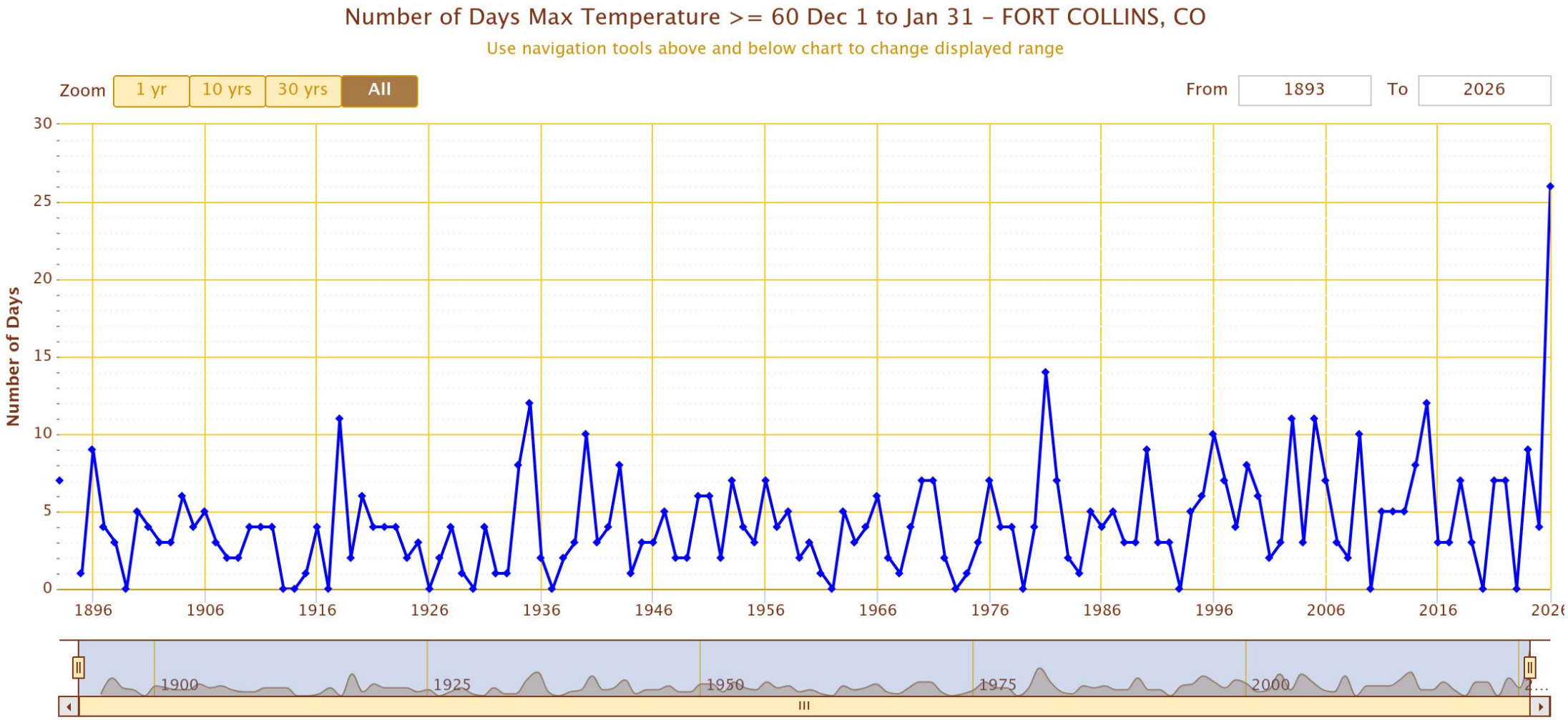
Remarkable warmth

≥ 60°F December days: record-setting for many

City	# days ≥ 60°F in Dec 2025	Previous record (year)
Akron	14	12 (1980, 1939)
Alamosa	3	2 (2021)
Boulder	18	17 (1980)
Colorado Springs	15	13 (1939)
Cortez	11	8 (1939)
Denver	18	15 (1980)
Fort Collins	17	13 (1980)
Grand Junction	3	2 (several)
Greeley	18	17 (1980)
Trinidad	19	18 (1980)

Remarkable warmth

26 ≥ 60°F days in Fort Collins in Dec-Jan so far (previous record: 14 in 1981)!



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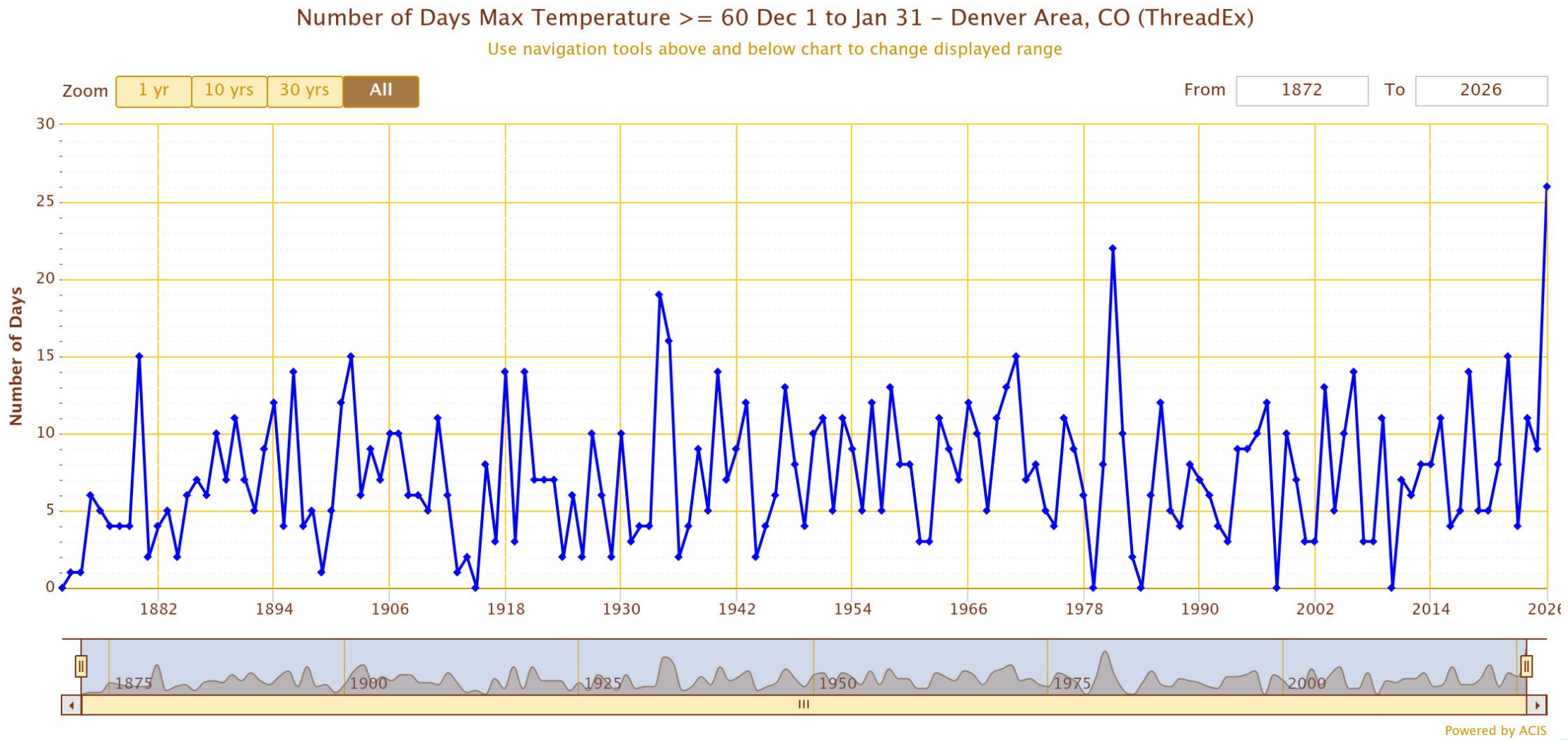
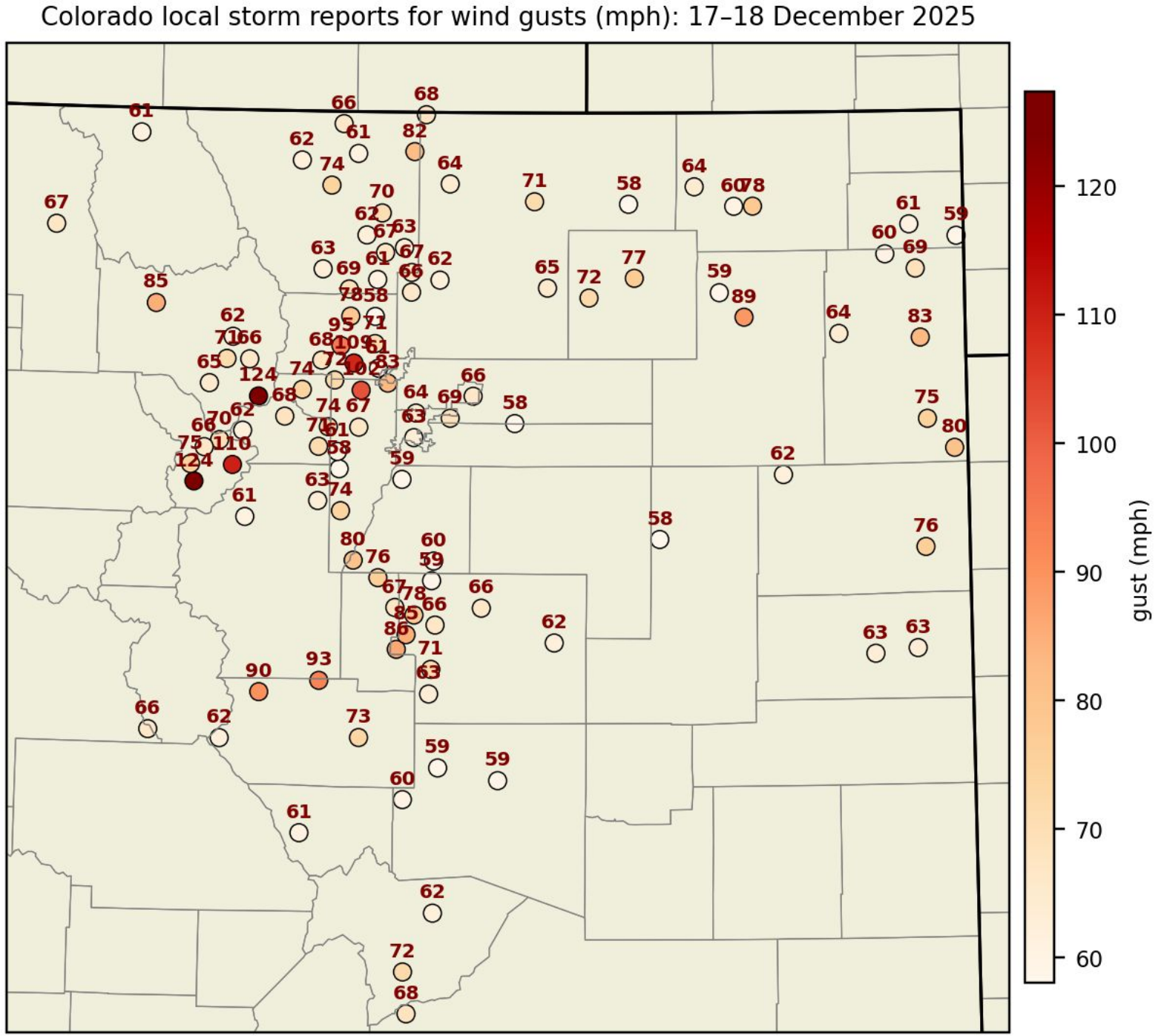
Remarkable warmth

Same for Denver and the Springs (these will likely be the final totals through the end of Jan).



High winds & fire danger

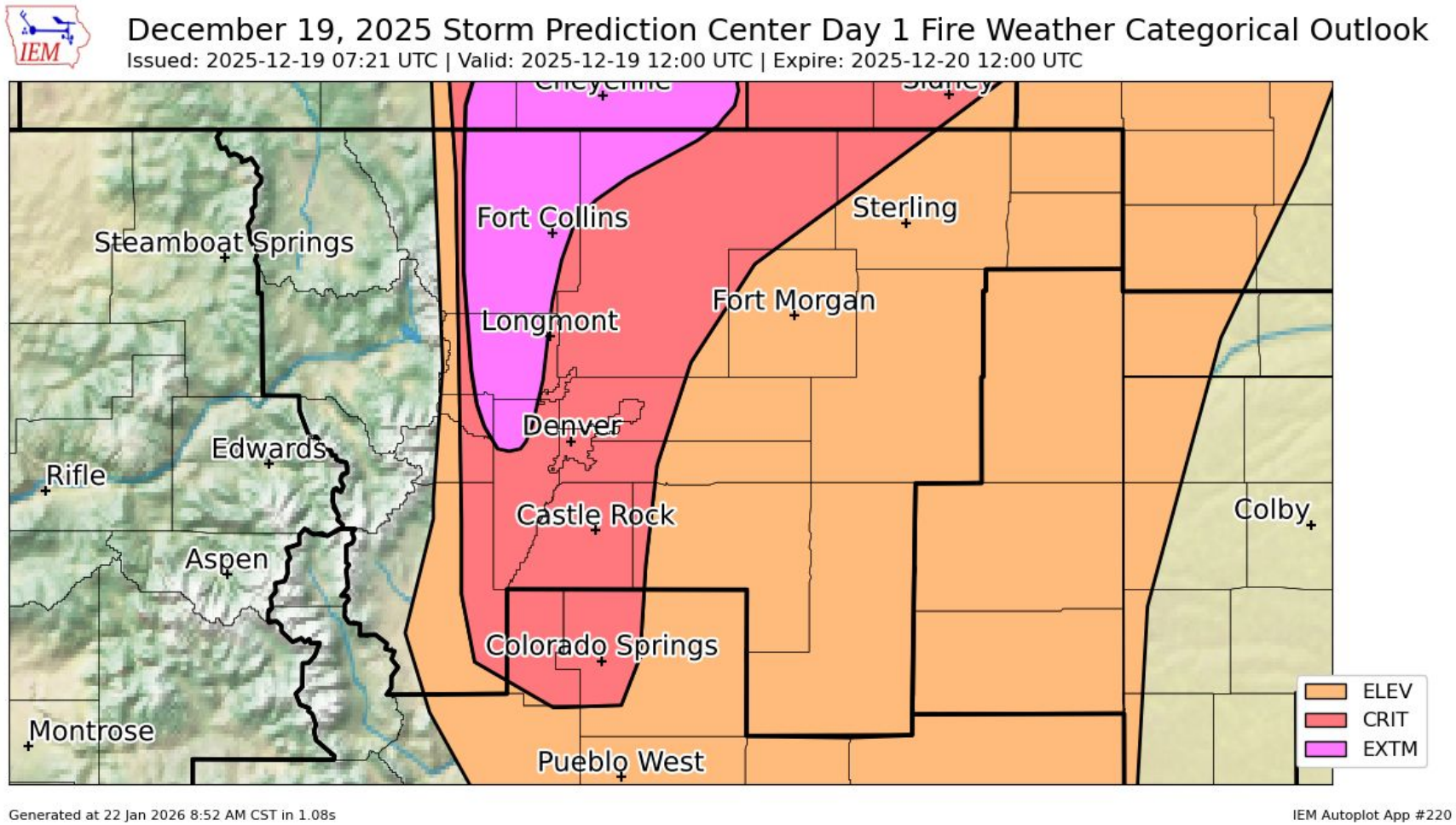
Several downslope wind days that brough gusts > 100mph to parts of the Front Range and prompted public safety power shutoffs



High winds & fire danger

NOAA Storm Prediction Center issued an “extremely critical” risk for fire weather on Dec. 19.

These are rare in NE Colorado (1-2/year), and unprecedented in December.



High winds & fire danger

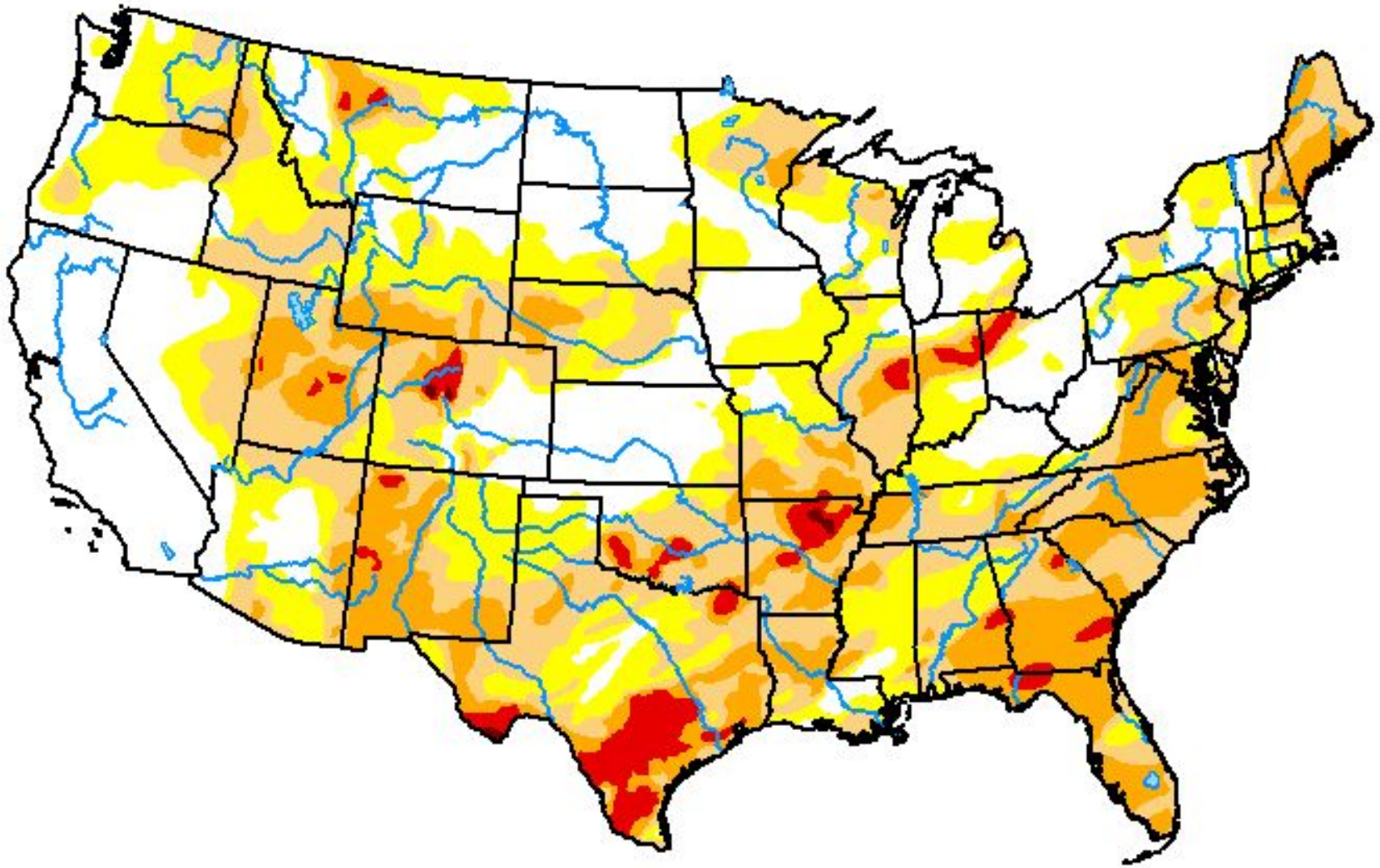
A strong cold front also brought strong winds to the Eastern Plains on Dec. 17. Nine wildfires broke out across Yuma County, burning over 14k acres before being extinguished the next day.

Fire in Yuma County, Dec. 17-18
Photo by Joshua Baumgardner, Denver7

Drought Conditions

Dixon Reservoir in late December
Photo from Henry Reges

US Drought Monitor – Valid Jan 20



Intensity:

- None
- 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. For more information on the Drought Monitor, go to https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/About.aspx

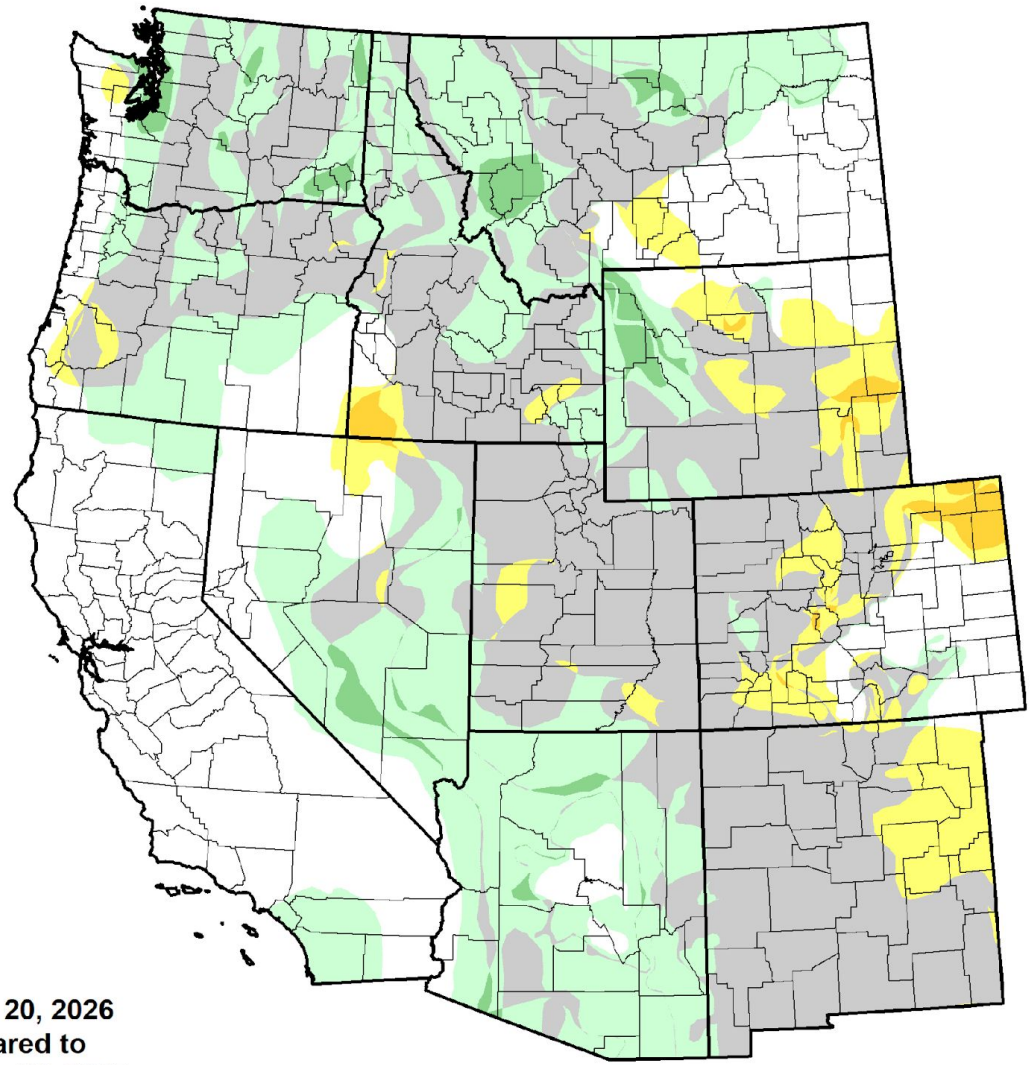
Author:

Brad Rippey
U.S. Department of Agriculture

droughtmonitor.unl.edu

U.S. Drought Monitor Class Change - West

4 Week



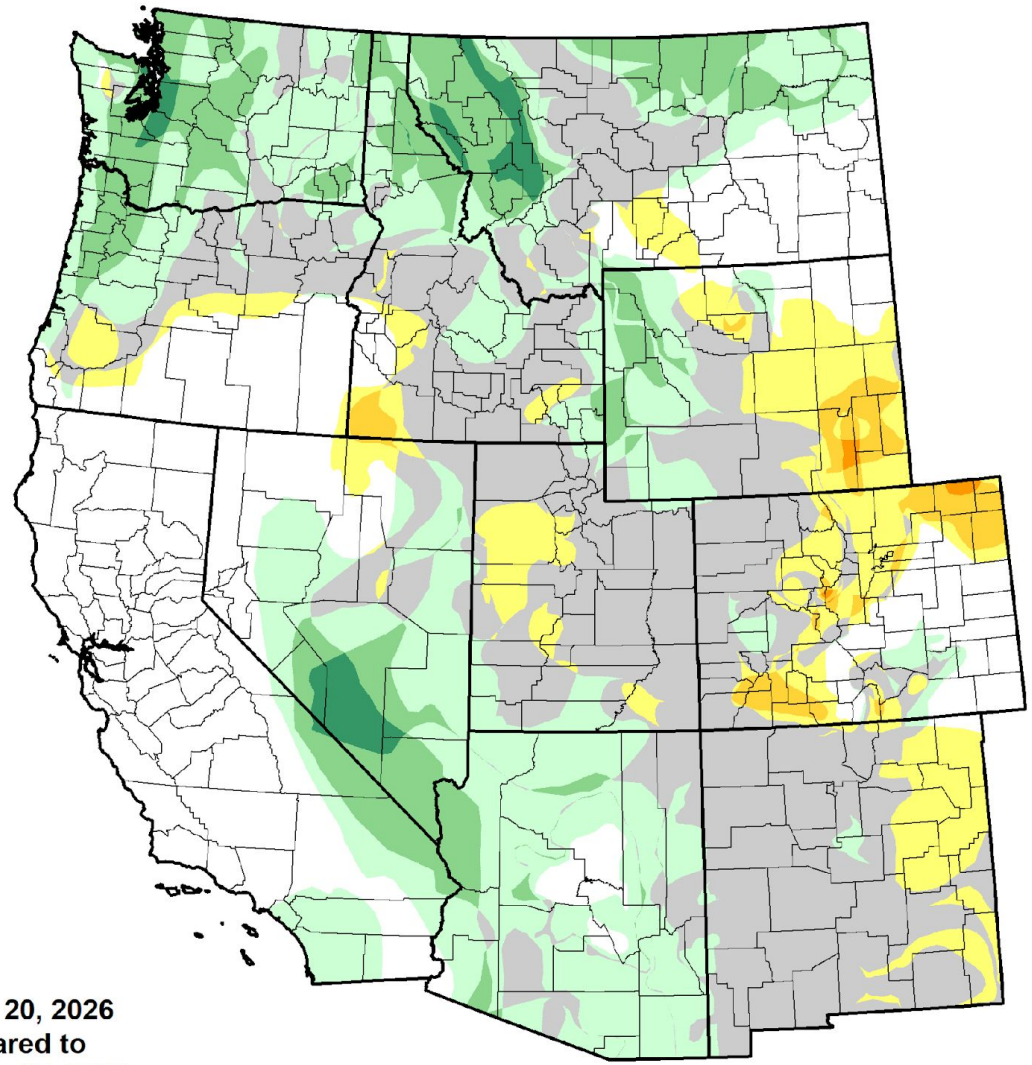
January 20, 2026
compared to
December 23, 2025

droughtmonitor.unl.edu

- 5 Class Degradation
- 4 Class Degradation
- 3 Class Degradation
- 2 Class Degradation
- 1 Class Degradation
- No Change
- 1 Class Improvement
- 2 Class Improvement
- 3 Class Improvement
- 4 Class Improvement
- 5 Class Improvement

U.S. Drought Monitor Class Change - West

8 Week



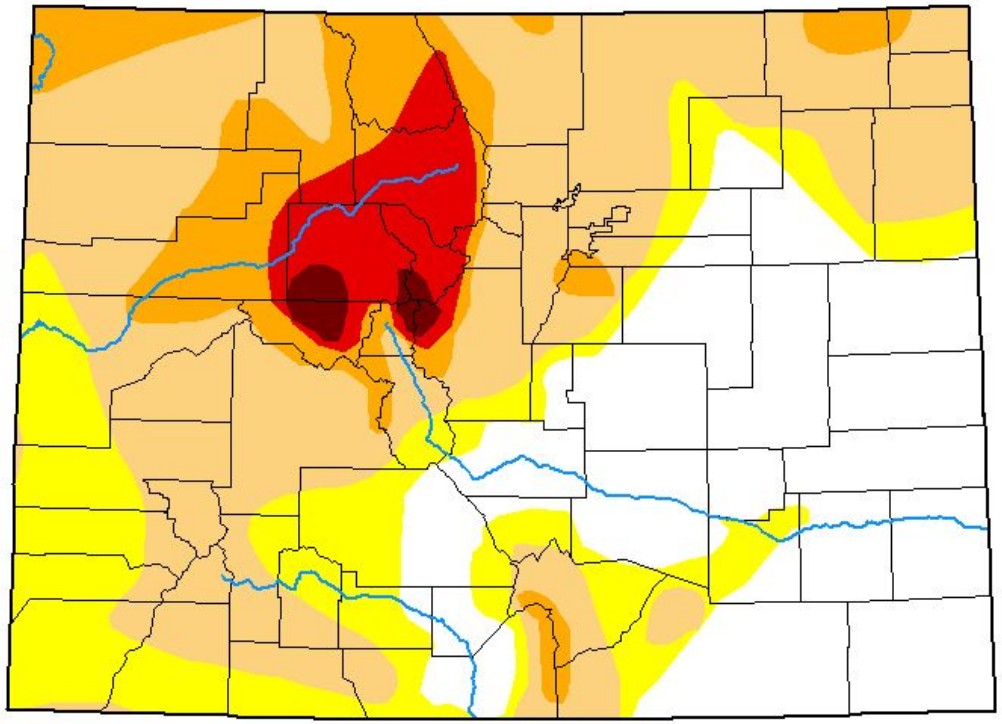
January 20, 2026
compared to
November 25, 2025

droughtmonitor.unl.edu

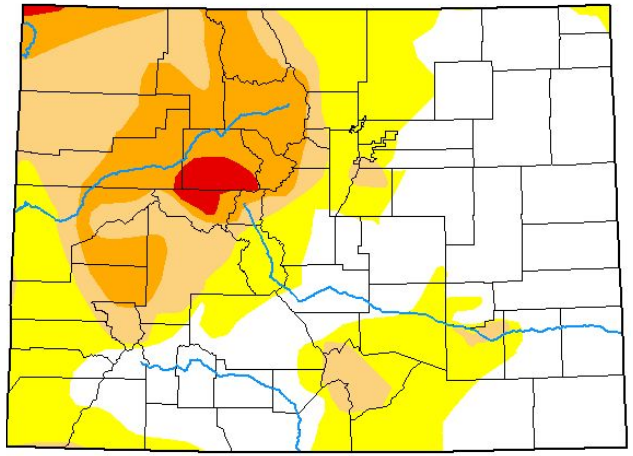
- 5 Class Degradation
- 4 Class Degradation
- 3 Class Degradation
- 2 Class Degradation
- 1 Class Degradation
- No Change
- 1 Class Improvement
- 2 Class Improvement
- 3 Class Improvement
- 4 Class Improvement
- 5 Class Improvement

Exceptional drought returned to CO in December. It includes portions of Eagle, Pitkin, Park, Lake, and Summit Counties.

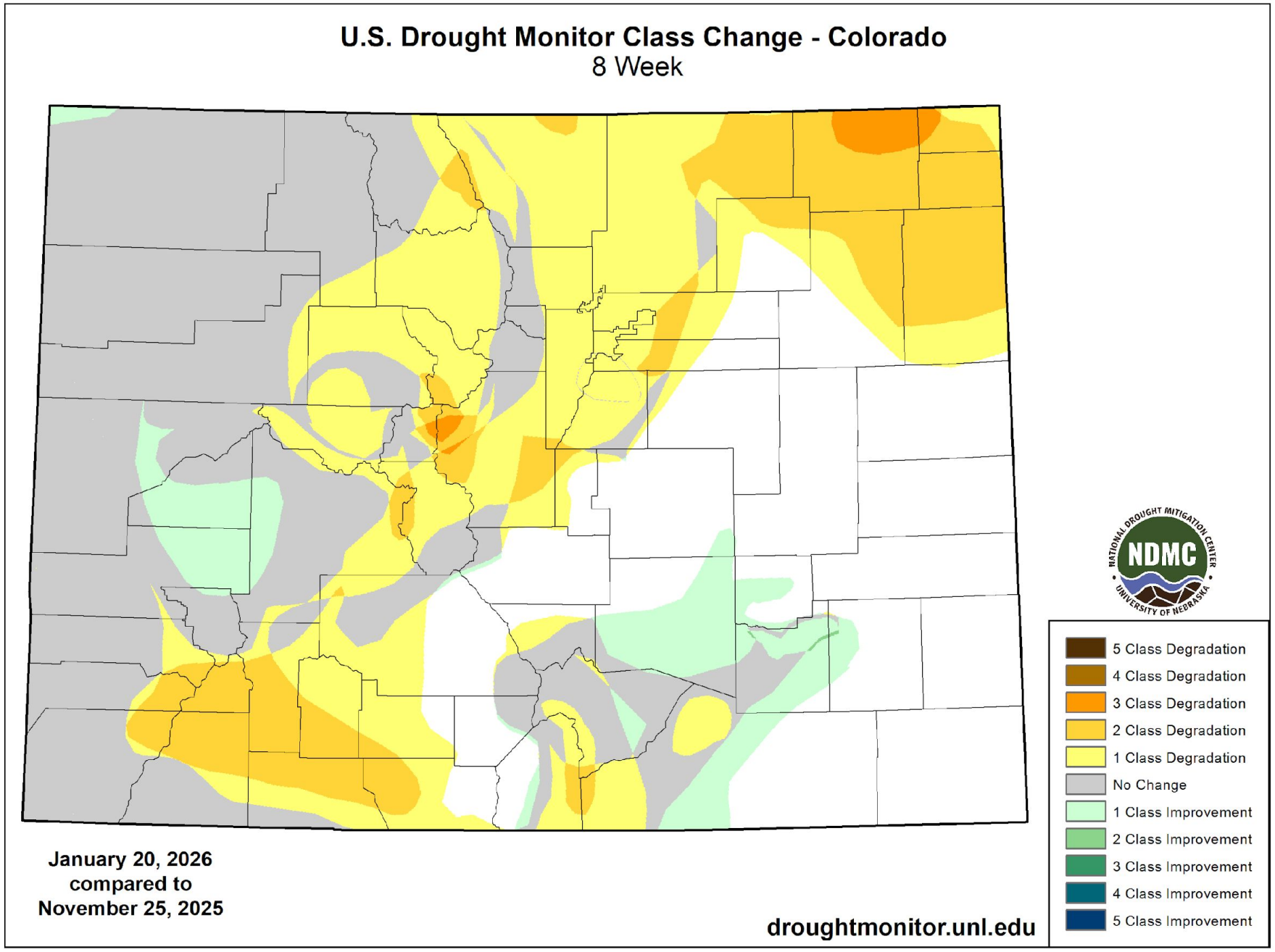
Approximately 16% of the state is currently in severe drought or worse.



Change from late Nov to now



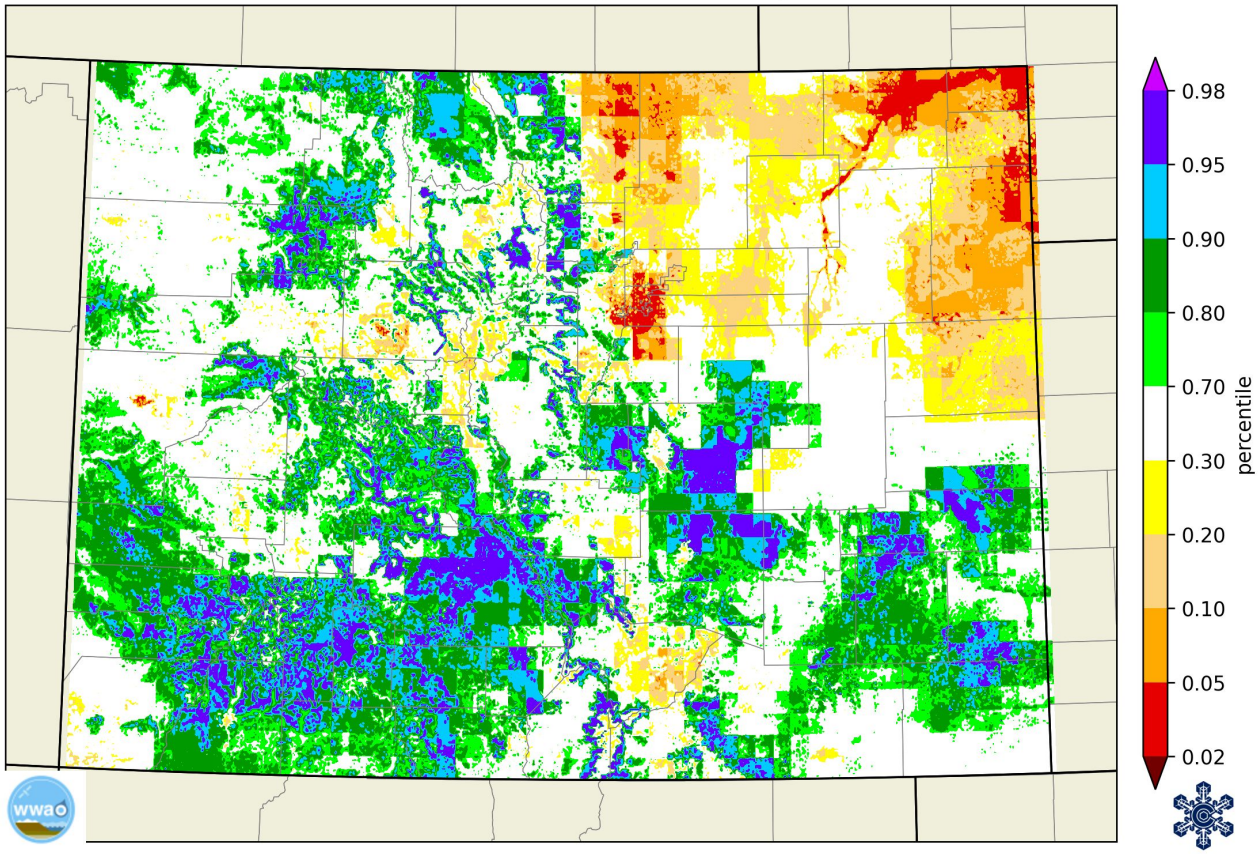
Nov. 25



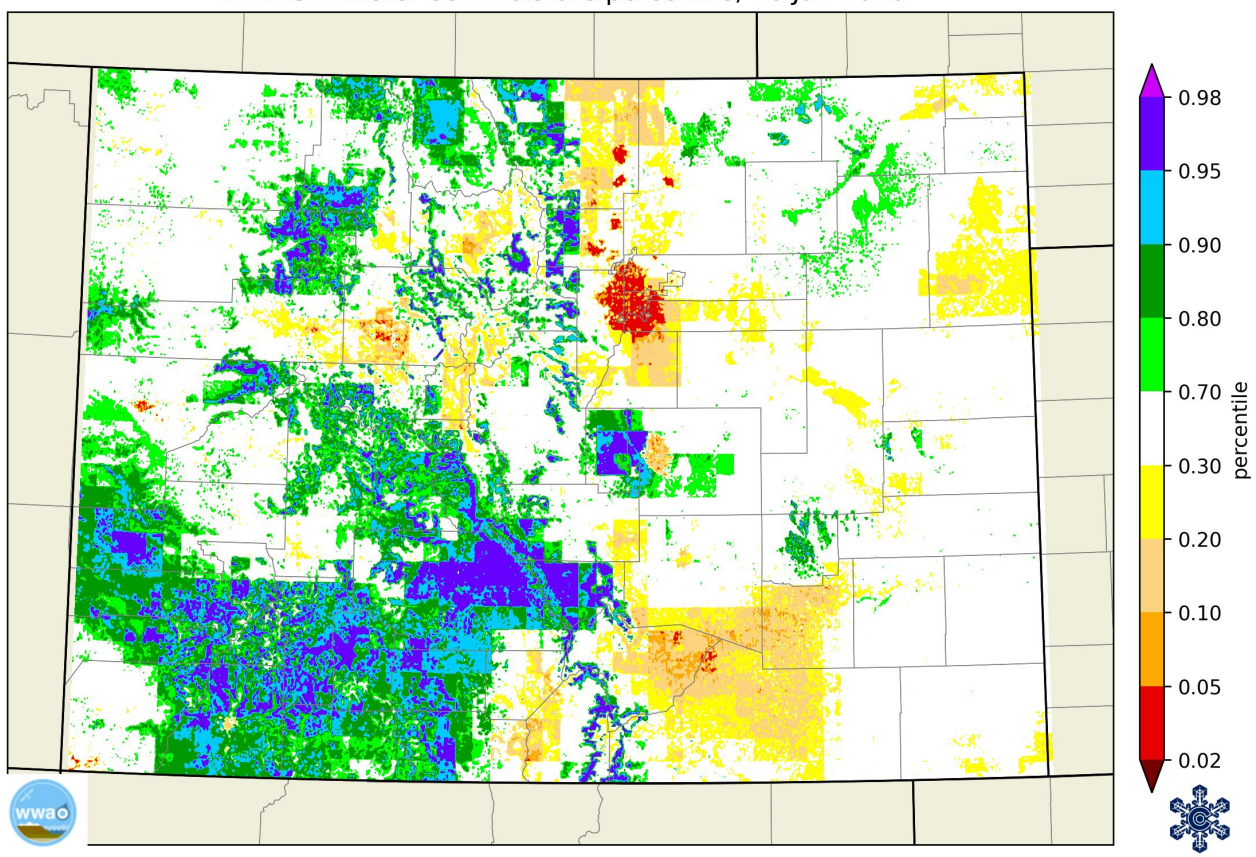
Soil Moisture

Southwest CO seems to be holding on to moisture from the wet fall. Same in northeast CO, but there's some evidence of some drying at shallow depths

WLDAS 10-cm Soil moisture percentile, 16 Jan 2026



WLDAS 1-meter Soil moisture percentile, 16 Jan 2026



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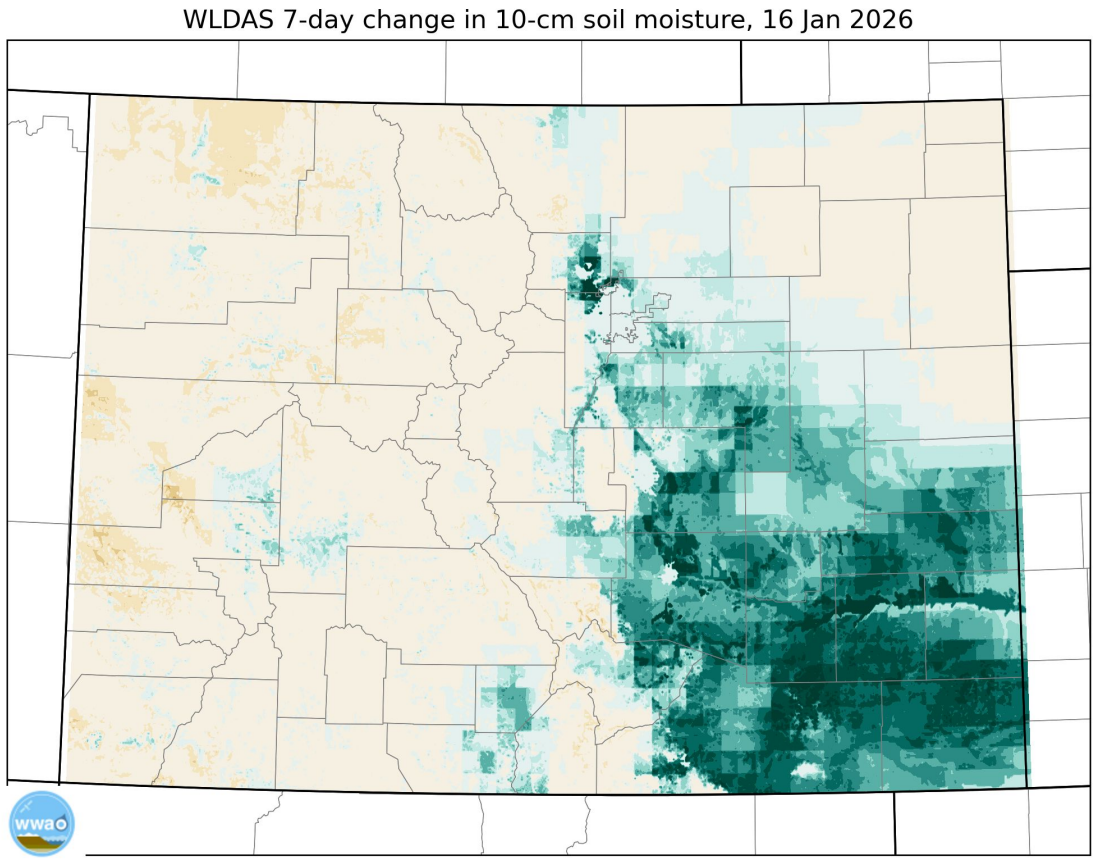
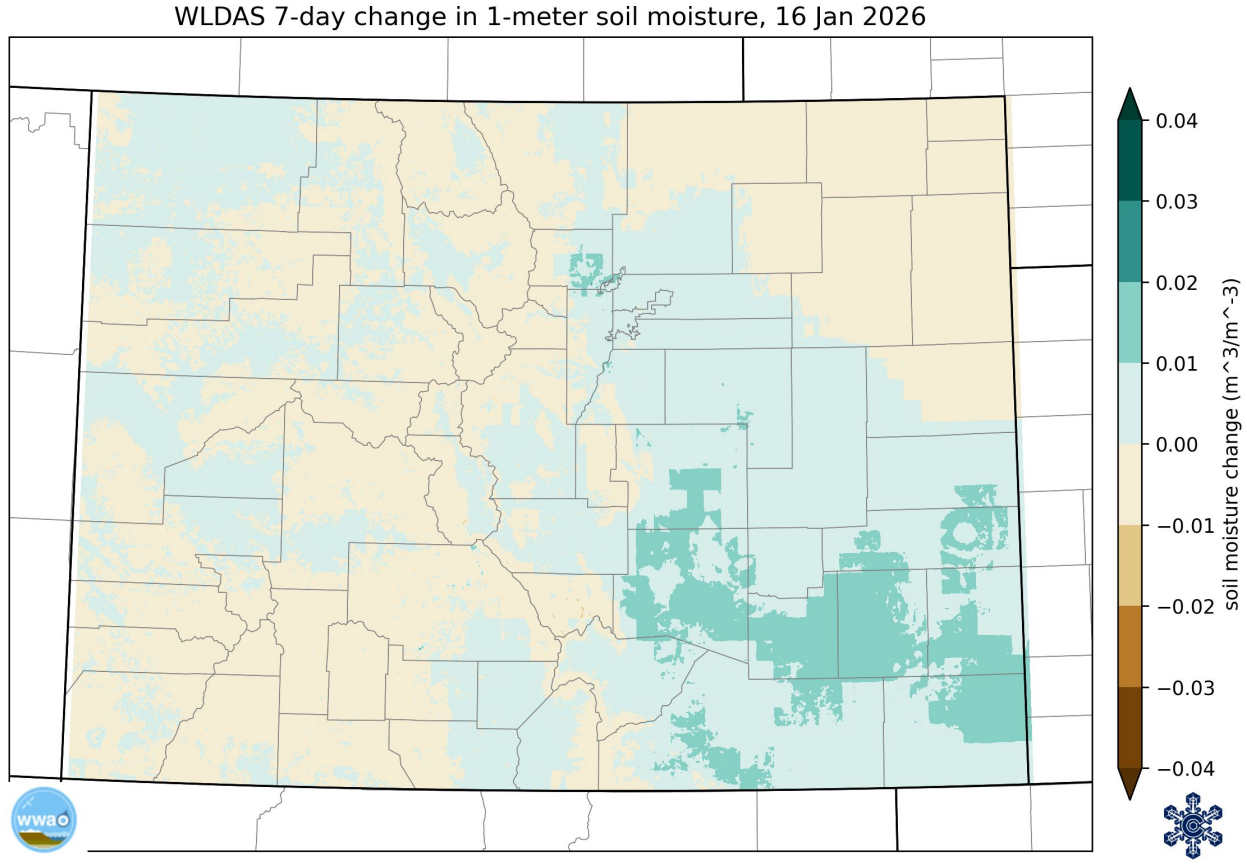
Soil Moisture

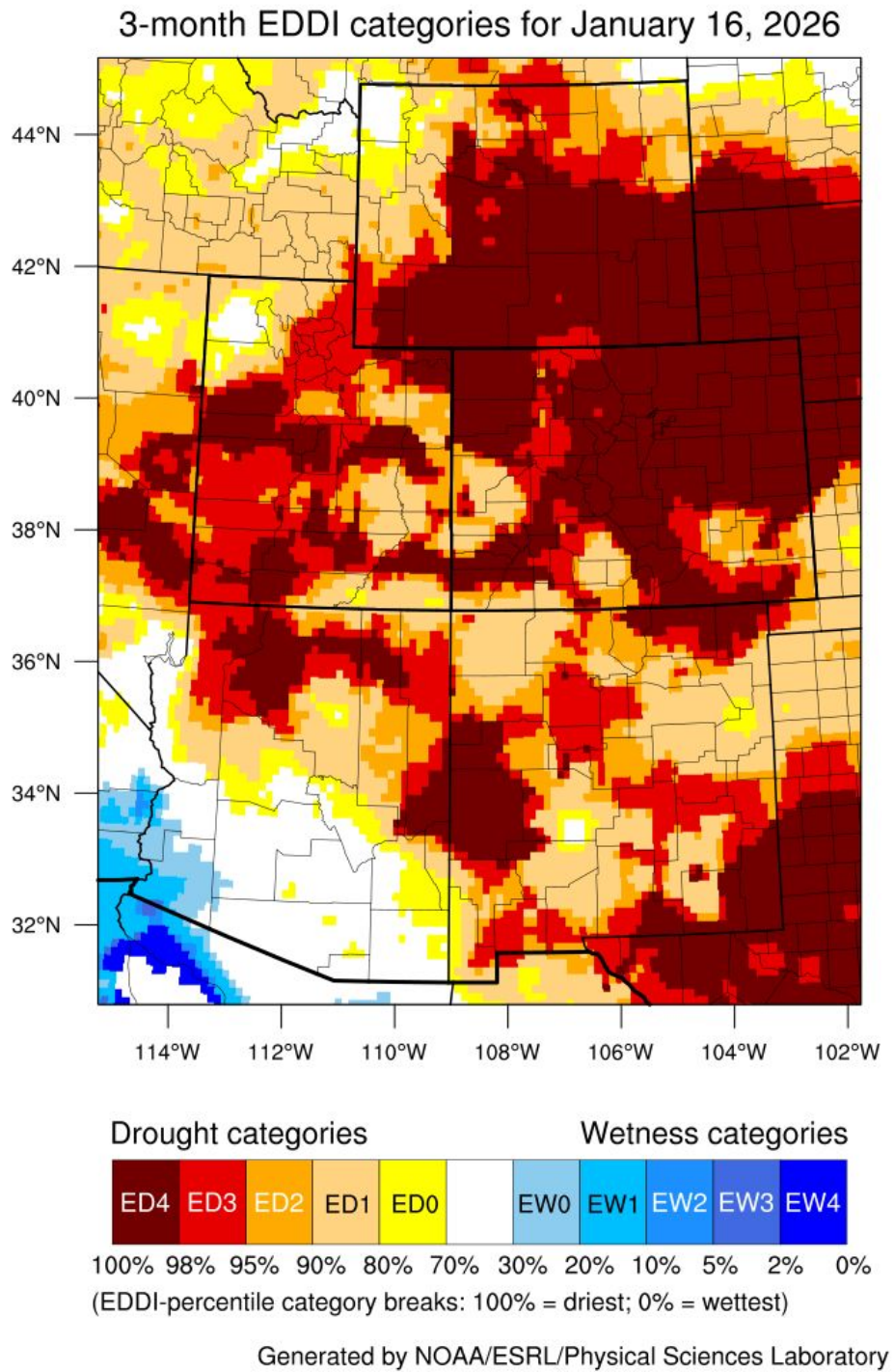
Soils in Southeast CO have benefitted from recent moisture.





Evaporative Demand Drought Index

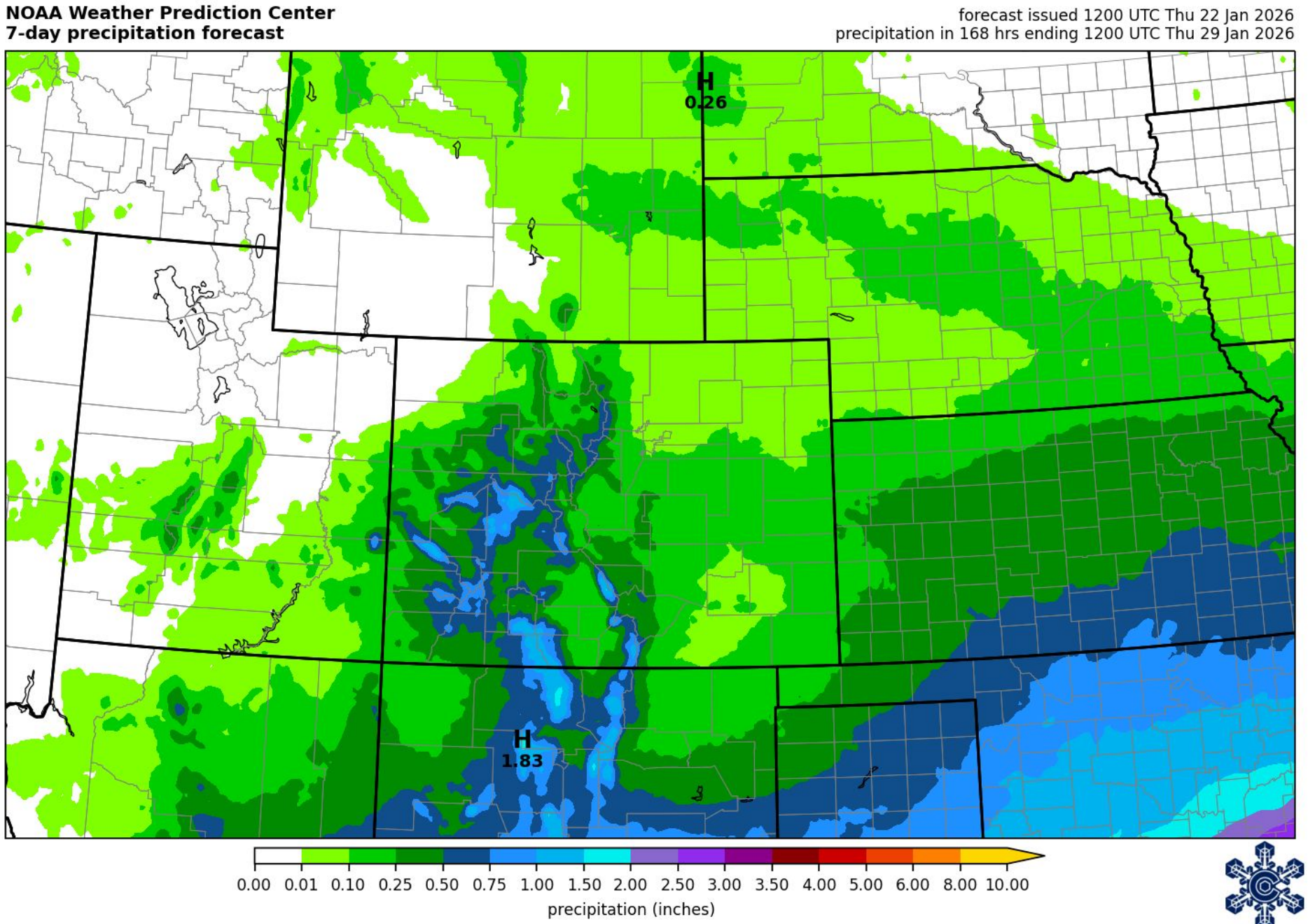
Very high evaporative demand over the past few months, driven by warm temperatures and relatively dry conditions



Outlook

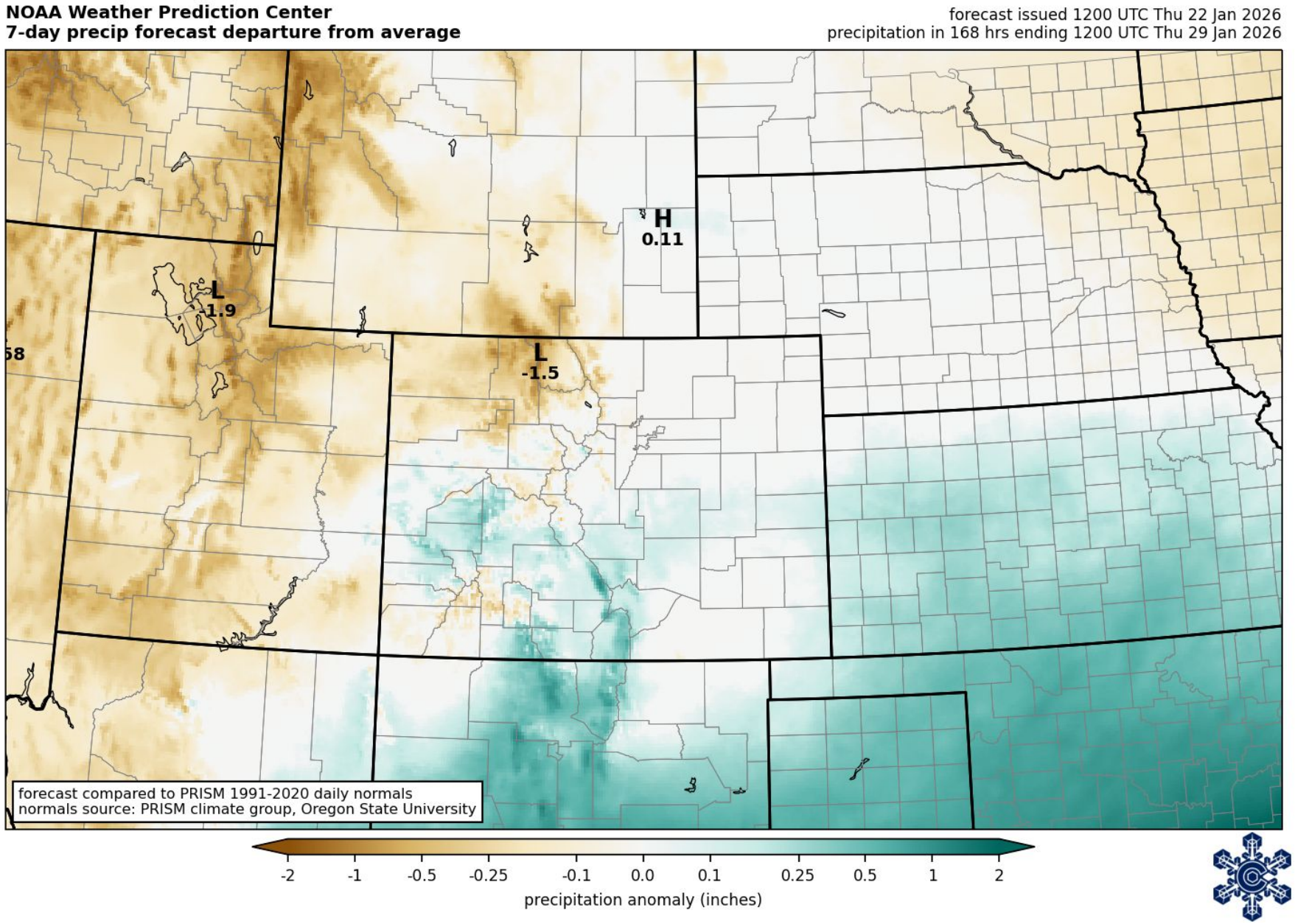
NOAA 7-day precipitation forecast

Snow expected this weekend, then mostly dry through the end of January



NOAA 7-day precipitation forecast (difference from average)

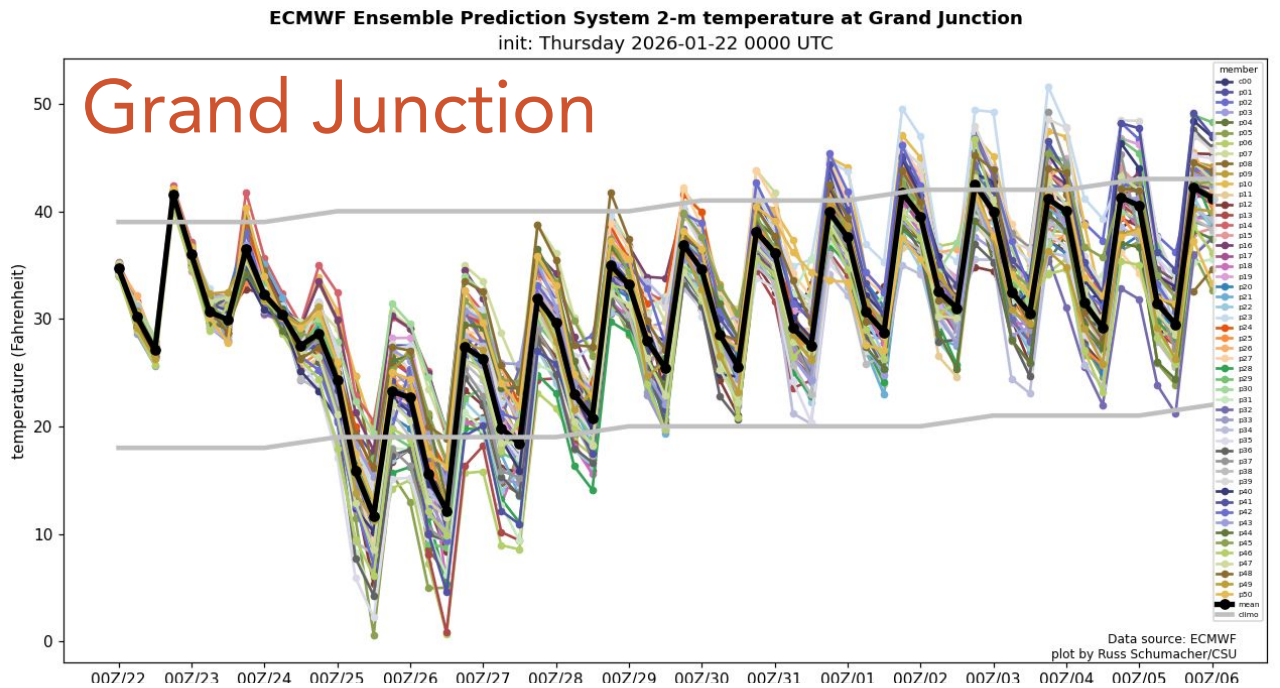
Snow could provide a needed boost to the Sangres and the San Juans but probably won't make a meaningful difference for areas north of I-70

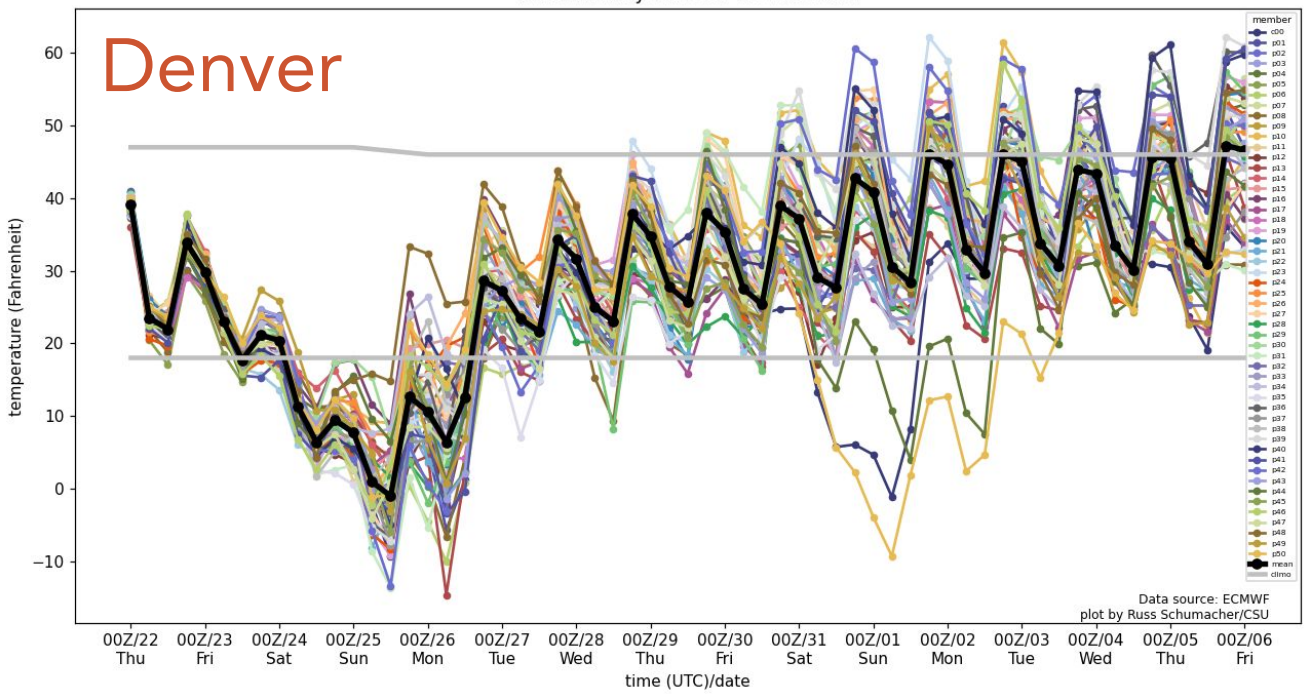


Ensemble temperature outlook

Big cold snap this weekend and the first big taste of winter temps for many! The most severe cold will be on the Eastern Plains, but most of CO will be below average through the weekend.

Temperatures will warm to near- or slightly above average as we look towards February.





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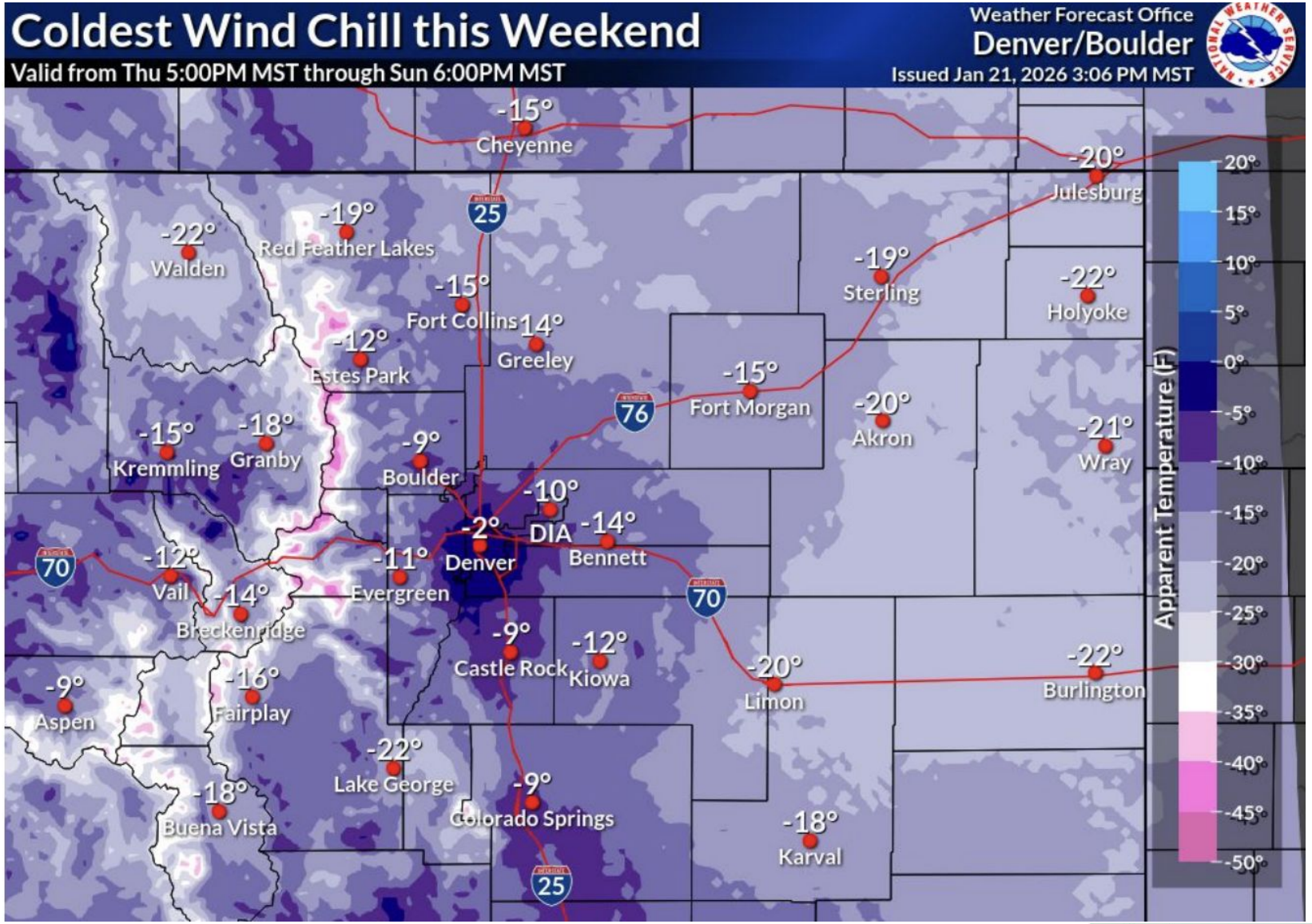
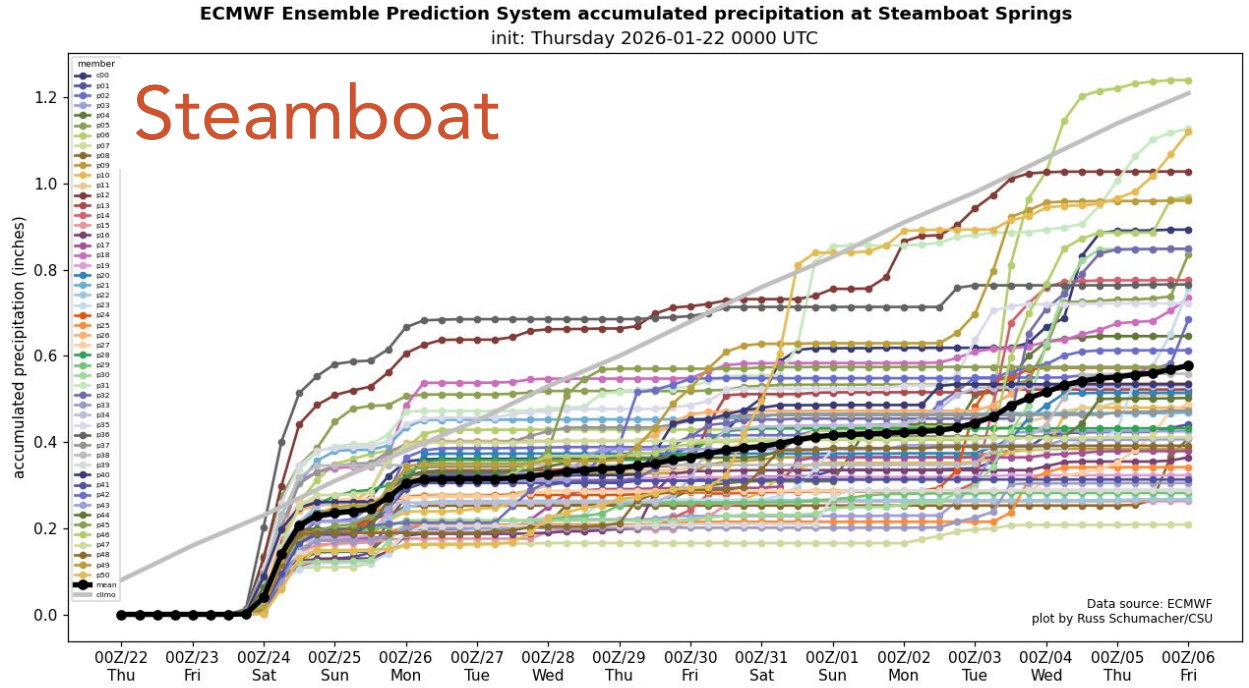
Dangerous wind chills possible

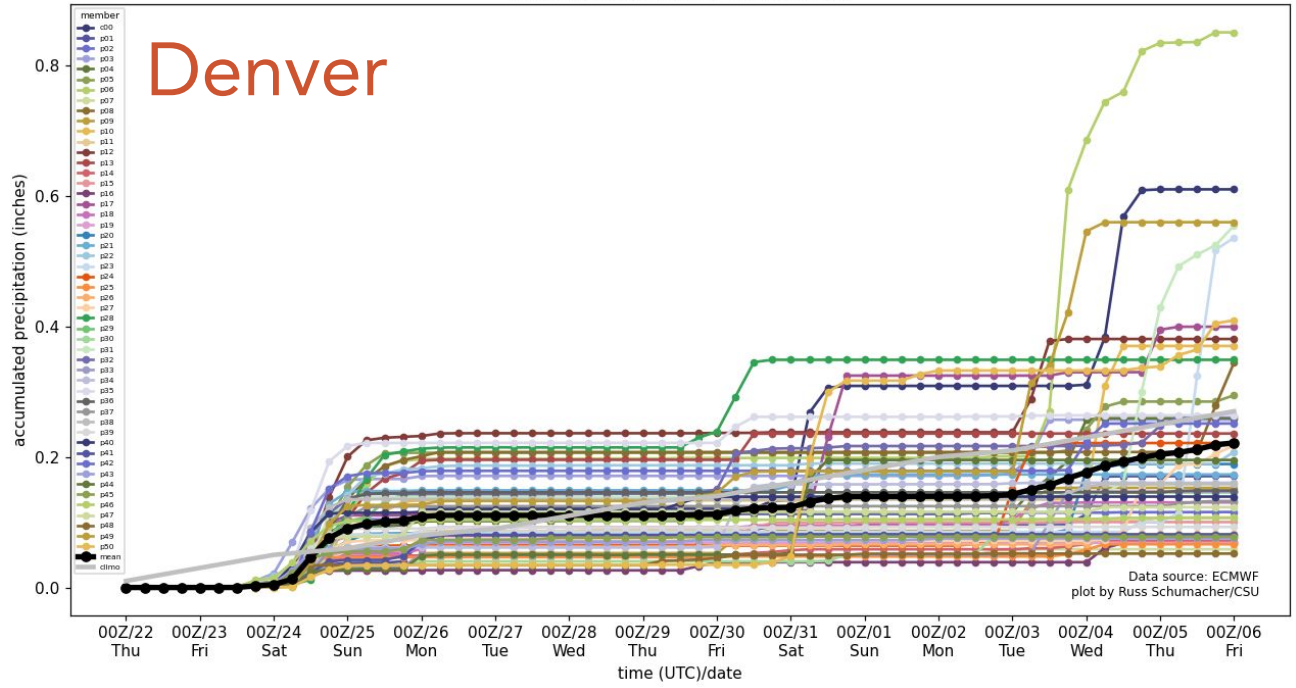
Sub-zero wind chills possible Friday night-Monday morning. Actual temperatures on the Eastern Plains will also be near or below zero



Ensemble precipitation forecasts

Next chances for precipitation after this weekend not expected until at least early Feb. Slightly greater chances in the mountains, but low chances for drought-busting snow





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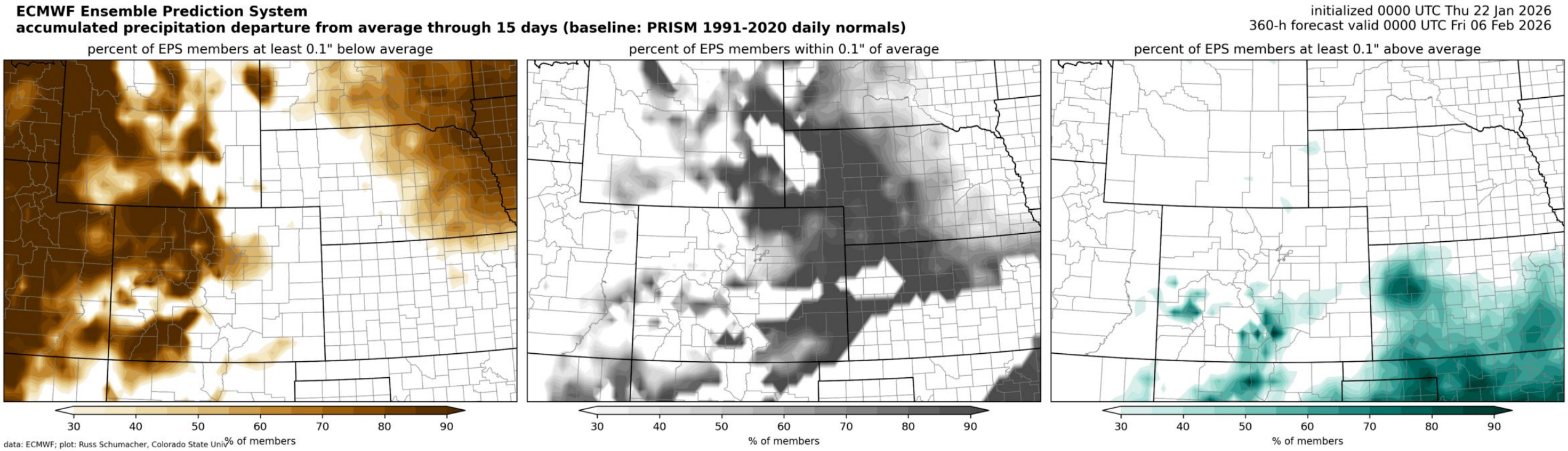
Will the next 15 days be above, below, or near-average precipitation? Almost certainly drier than normal in northwest CO, wetter than normal for southern CO (driven by this weekend's precipitation).

Out of 50 different model forecasts, how many are at least 0.1" above/below average, or within 0.1" of average?



Percent of members below average

Percent of members within 0.1"

Percent of members above avg

https://schumacher.atmos.colostate.edu/weather/ecmwf.php

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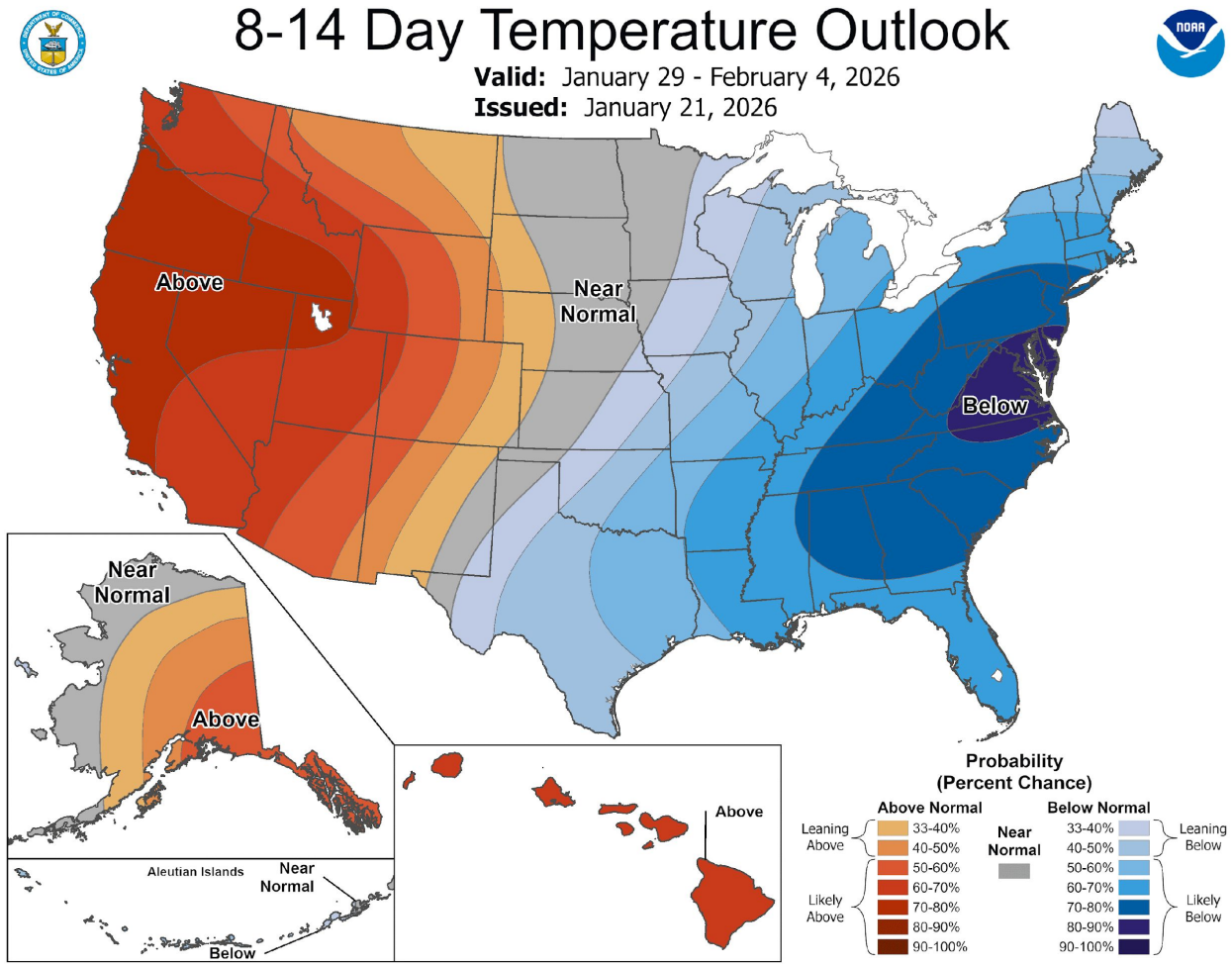
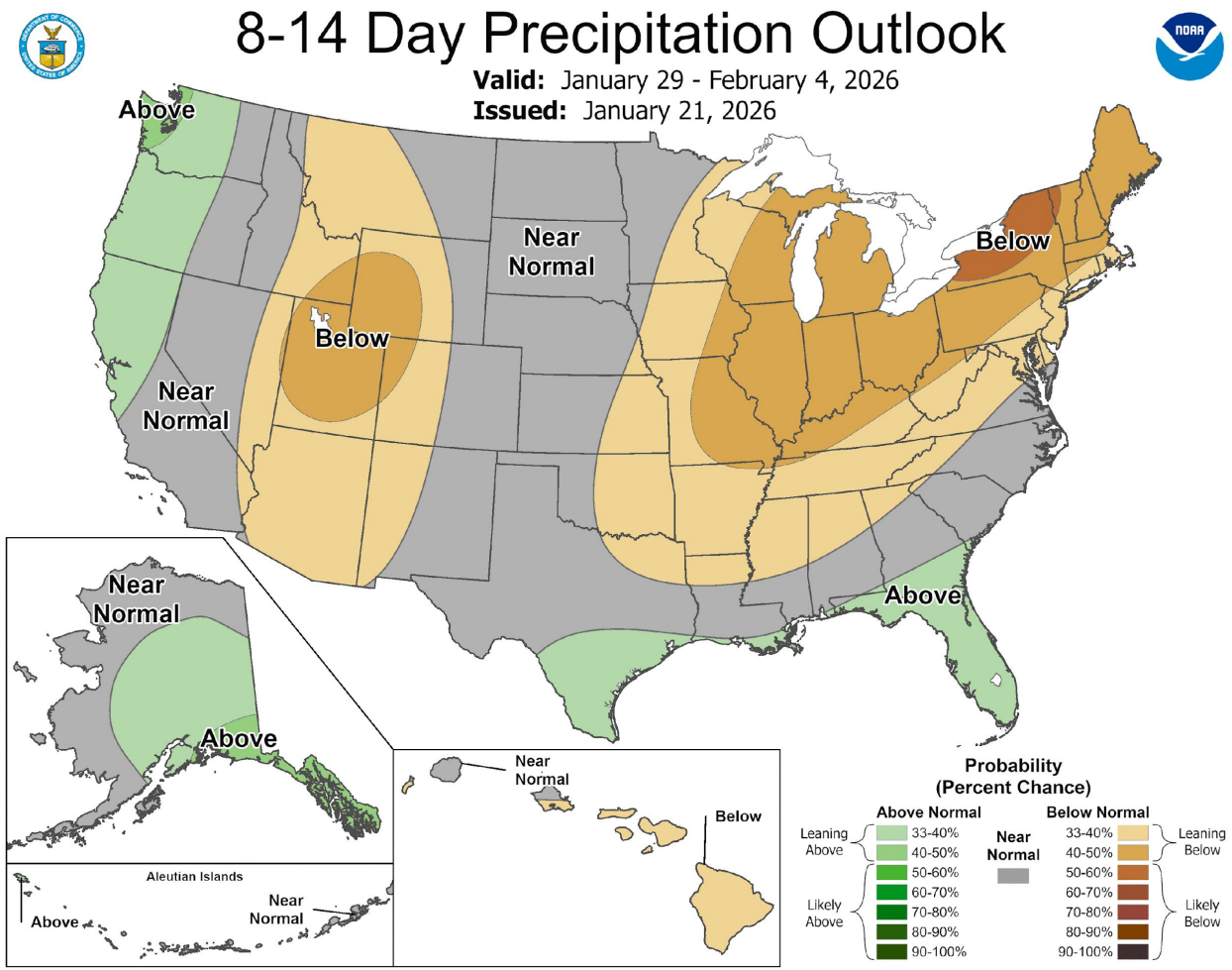
8-14 day outlook: Above normal temperatures likely; below-normal precipitation for western CO.





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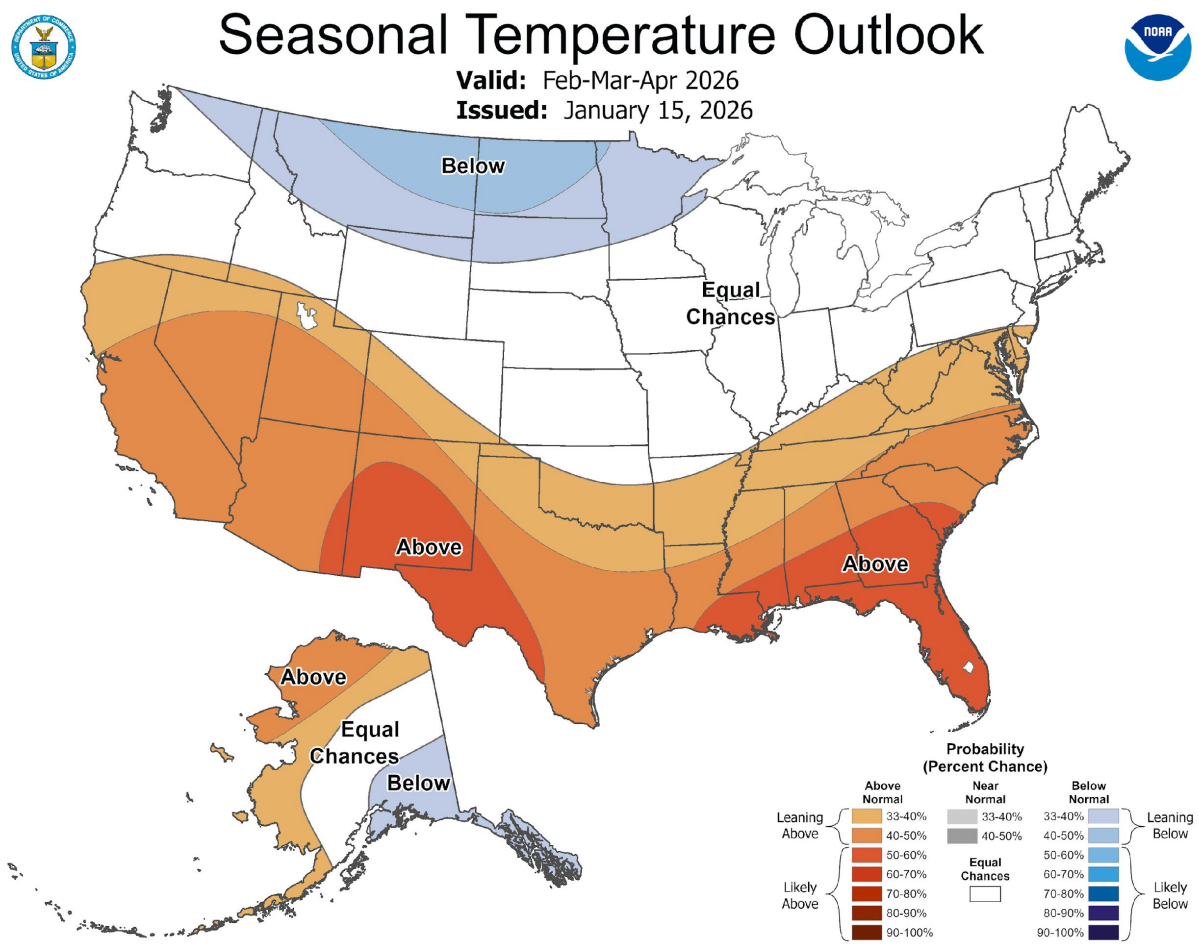
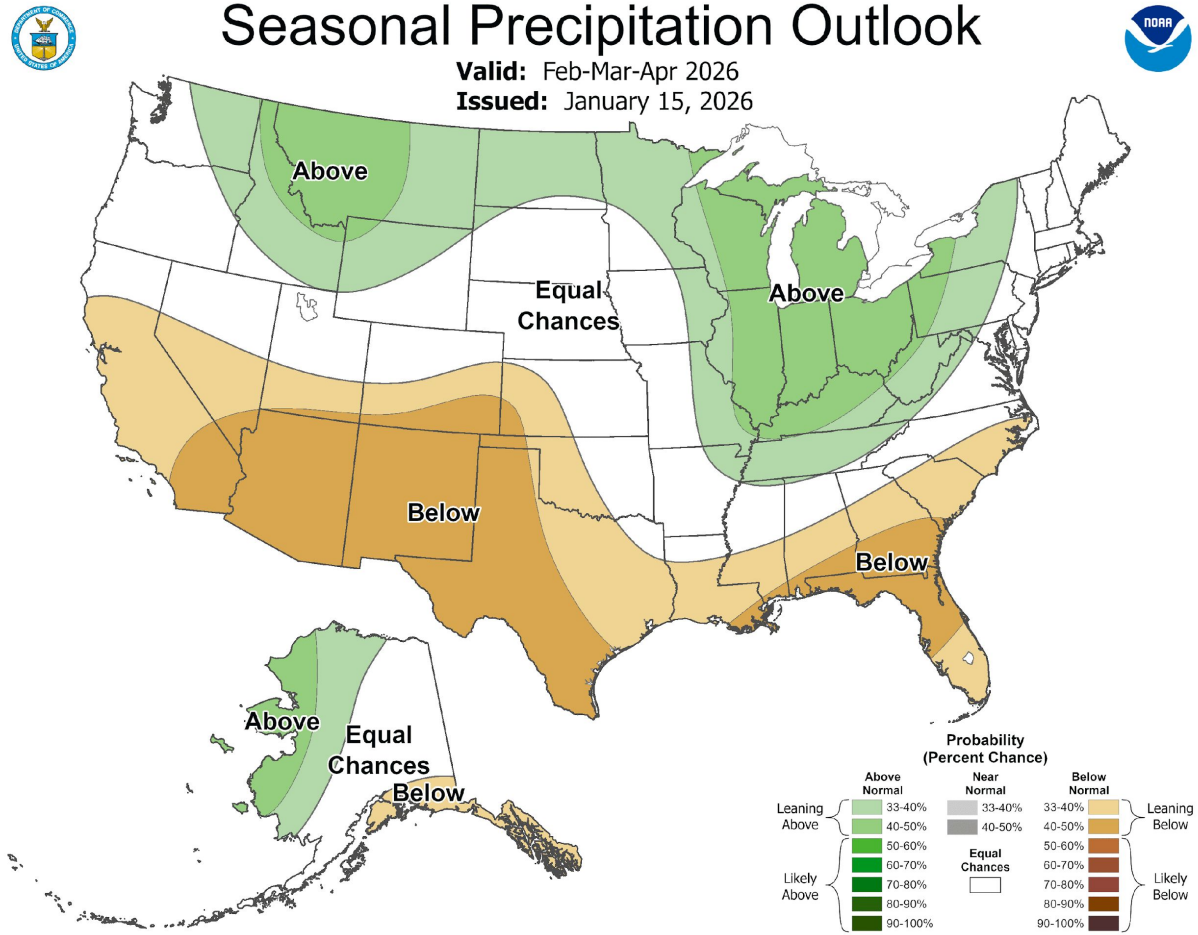
Seasonal outlook: Some for northern CO, but above normal temperatures and below normal precipitation are expected in southern CO.





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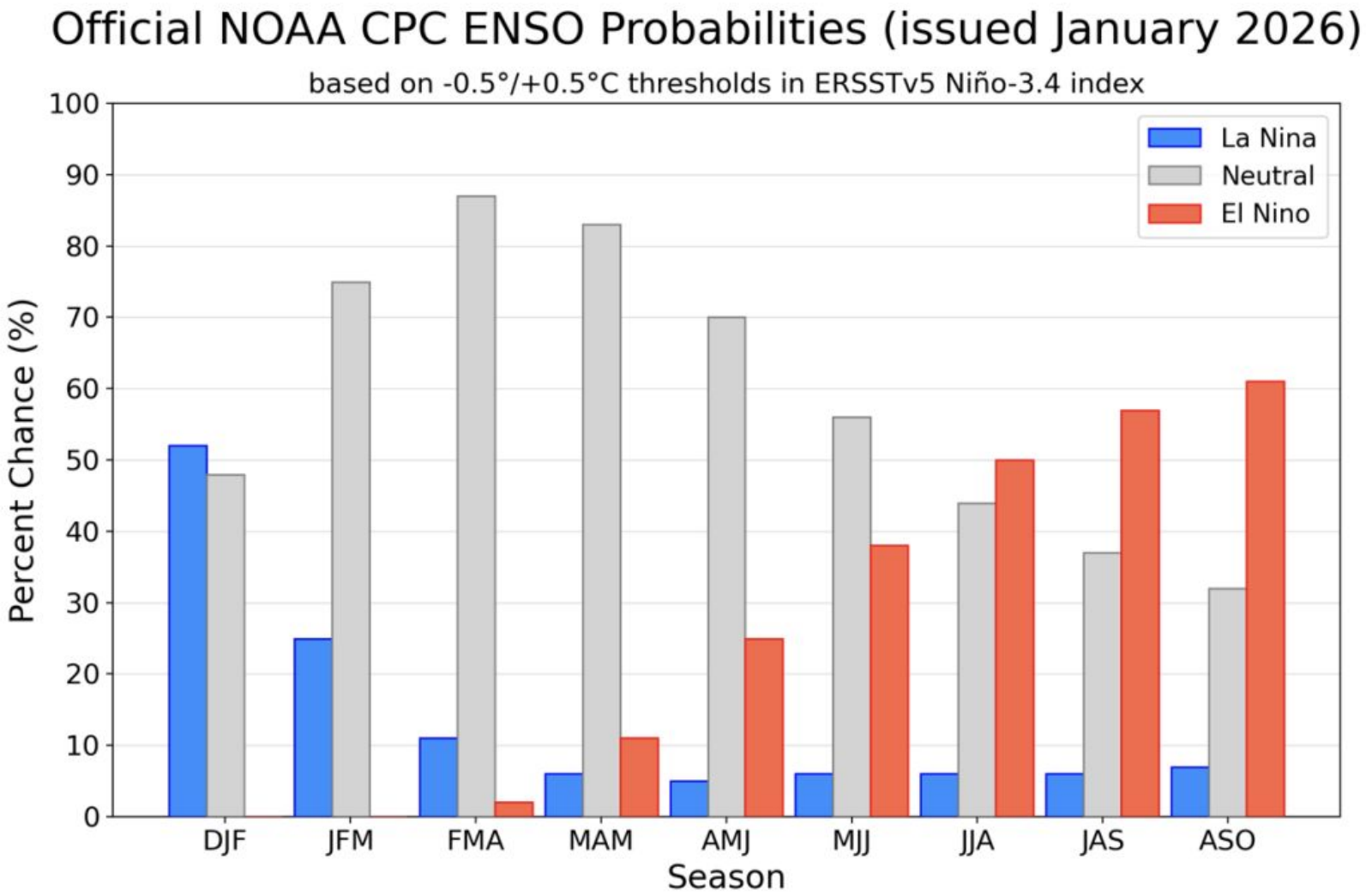
ENSO outlook: La Niña still in place, shift to ENSO neutral expected in the next few months

A shift to ENSO neutral is expected sometime in the late winter to early spring (>80% chance of neutral conditions between Feb-Apr).

There is little known connection between ENSO neutral and CO precipitation, making it difficult seasonal snowfall forecasts even more challenging.



Key Takeaways

- 2025 was the 4th warmest year on record, and December 2025 was the warmest December on record.
- Temperature anomalies were greater than 10°F for parts of CO in December, which smashed numerous records.
- Nov-Dec have been dry for most of Colorado, and January has been a continuation of the warm/dry trend.
- Windy weather was also a theme in December, bringing power shutoffs, gusts exceeding 100 mph, and wildfires east of the Divide.
- Precipitation and below-normal temperatures are likely this weekend. We will dry out for the rest of Jan-start of Feb.

Thank you!

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WLDAS uses meteorological observables including precipitation, incoming shortwave and longwave radiation, near surface air temperature, humidity, wind speed, and surface pressure along with parameters such as vegetation class, soil texture, and elevation as inputs to a model that simulates land surface energy and water budget processes. Outputs of the model include soil moisture, snow depth and snow water equivalent, evapotranspiration, soil temperature, as well as derived quantities such as groundwater recharge and anomalies of the state variables.