Very Strong El Niño Expected

September 15, 2026
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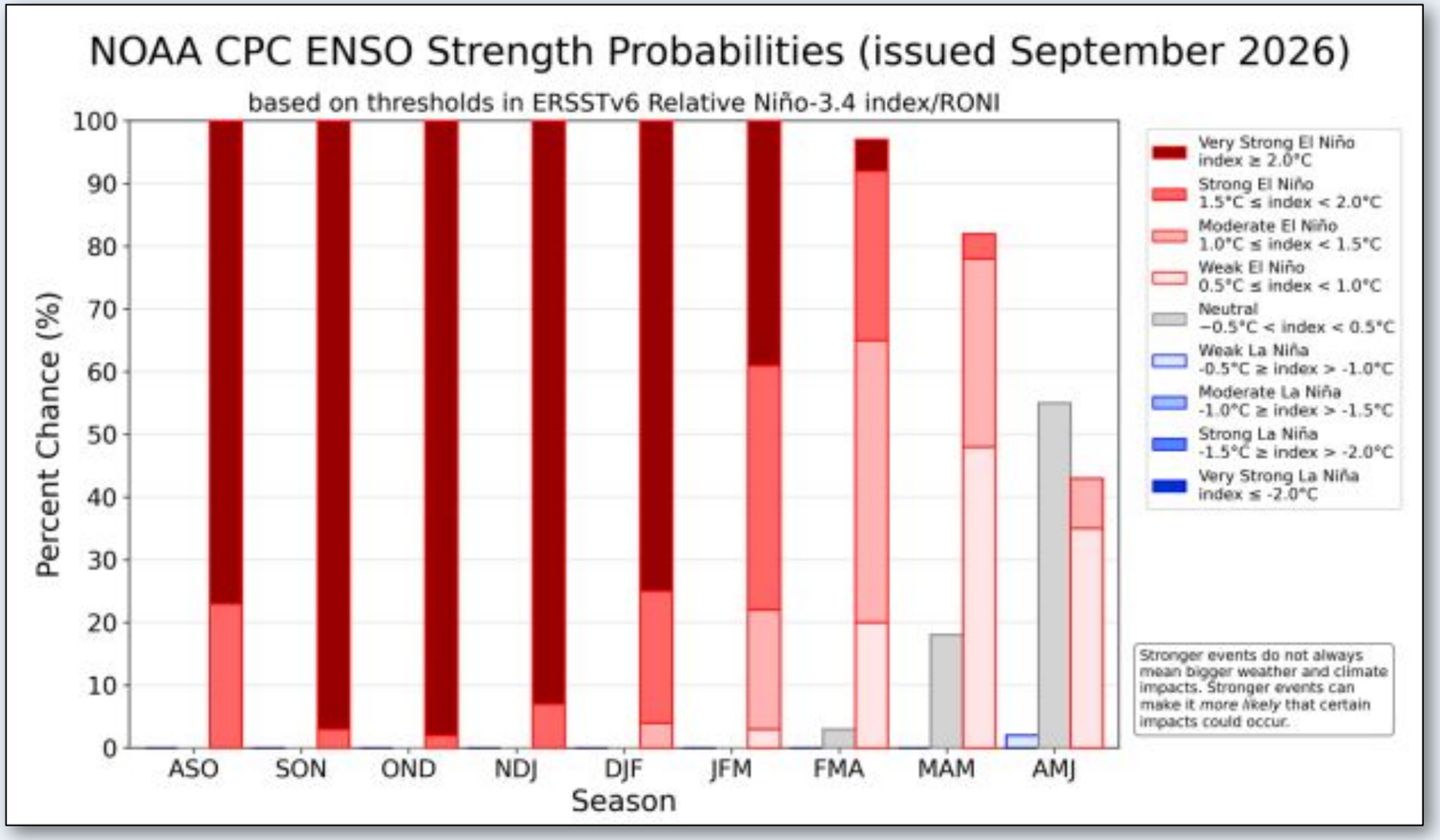
Potential for a historic El Niño to occur

Key Messages

- El Niño is currently occurring and is strengthening, with a 93-98% chance of a “very strong” event for October through at least January.
- There is a 75% chance for a historic event that would exceed the strength of previous El Niño events dating back to 1950.
- El Niño drives a pattern shift that can make certain weather events more likely over the course of a season for certain parts of the contiguous United States.
- **Southwest Missouri and Southeast Kansas generally fall in the “transition zone” of favored weather patterns.**
- **Past strong El Niño events favor above normal precipitation and slightly favor above normal temperatures for our region.**



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What Is El Niño?

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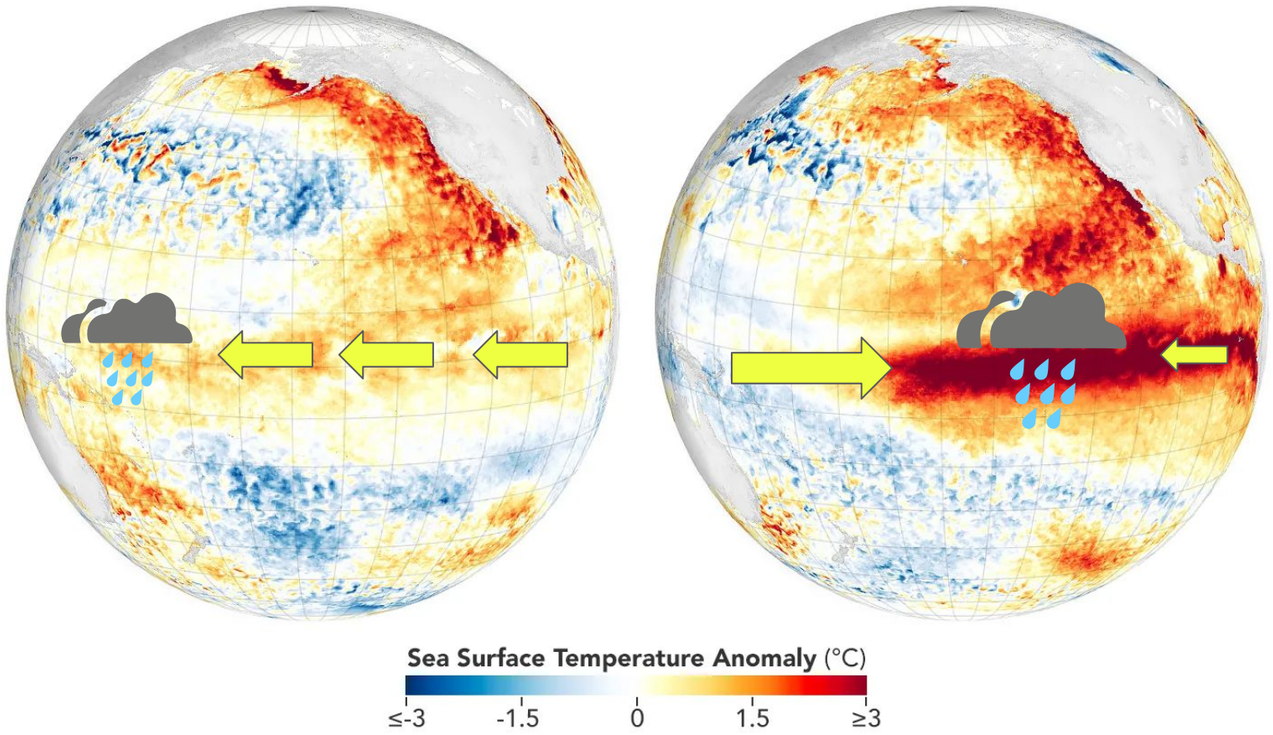
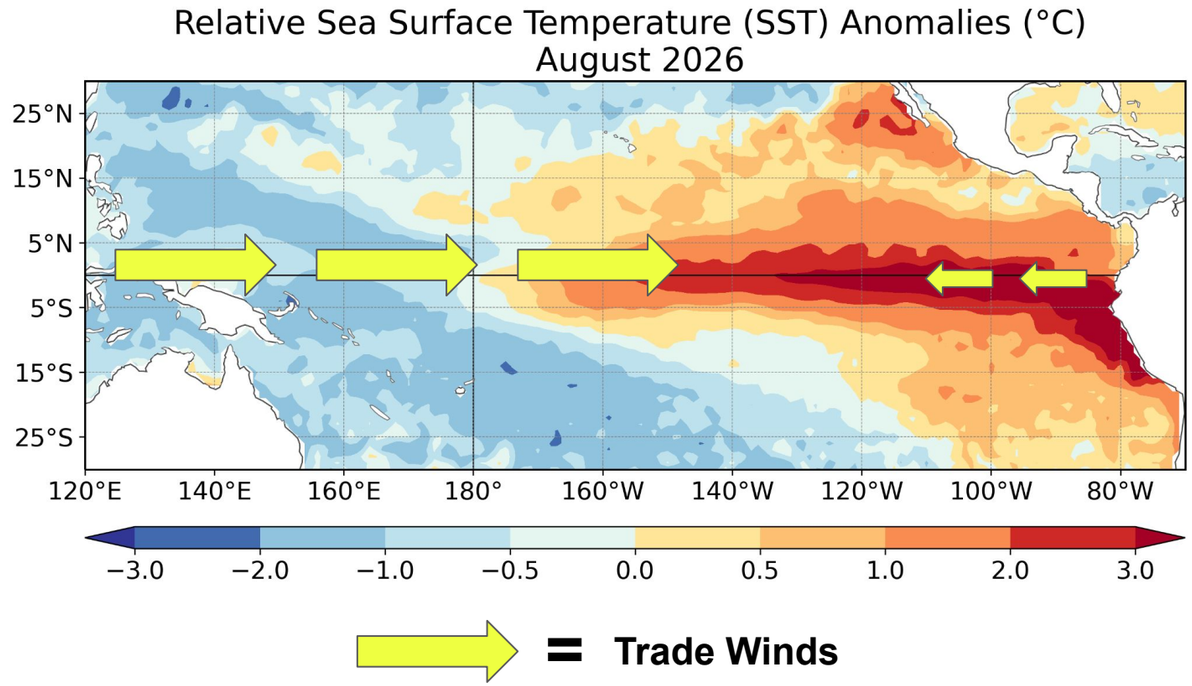
El Niño is not a storm!

El Niño marks above normal equatorial sea surface temperatures in the central and east Pacific due to a weakening and/or reversal of trade winds.

Neutral

El Niño





Current East Pacific equatorial sea surface temperatures exceed 2-3°C above normal. These conditions act to shift the general weather/climate pattern for North America.

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How Does El Niño Modify Weather Patterns?

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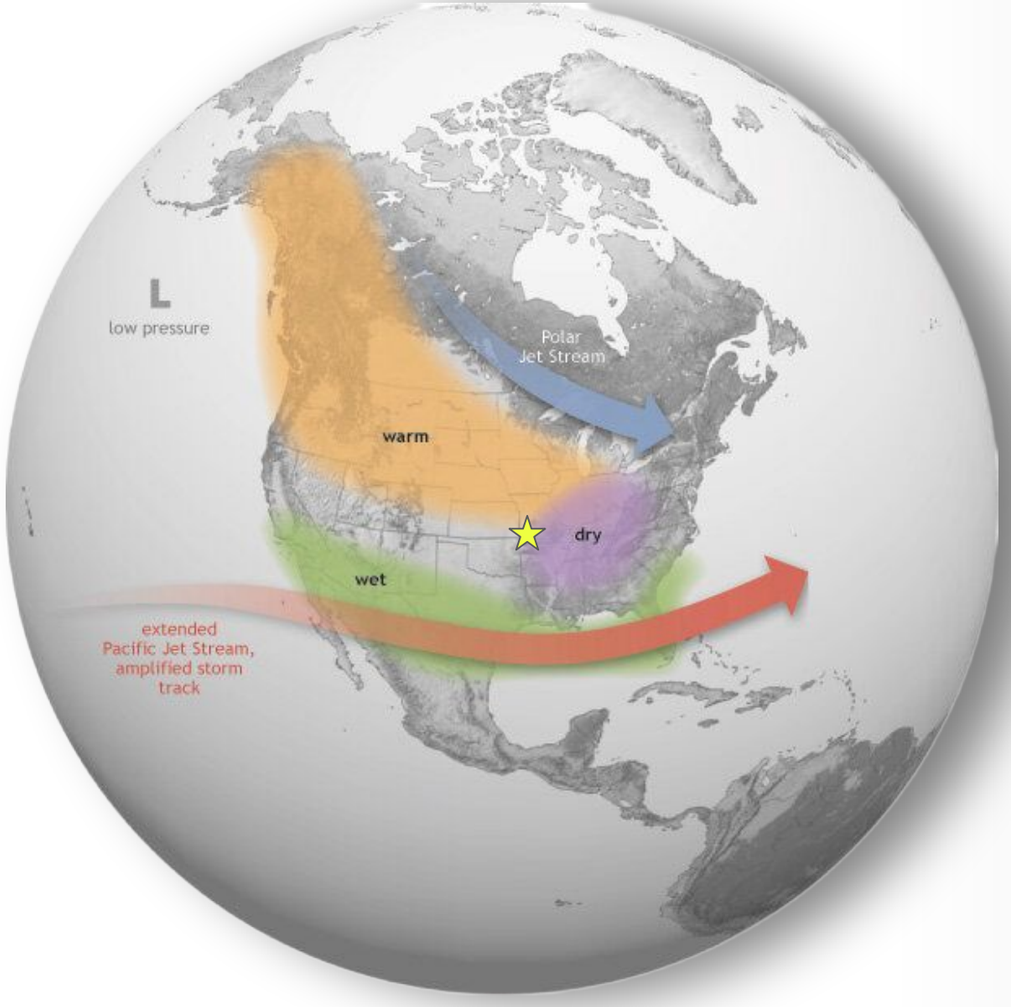
General patterns can be identified, but it does not guarantee a specific outcome

Average El Niño Conditions



- The westerly trade winds and warm sea surface temperatures act to **extend and amplify the subtropical jet stream**, while **suppressing the polar jet stream northward**.
- This creates an average pattern leading to **warmer and drier conditions to the north**, and **cooler and wetter conditions to the south**.
- Note that southwest Missouri and southeast Kansas ☆ fall in this transition zone, meaning our average conditions could swing either way.
- **Important Note:** These are average conditions that can make certain weather events *more likely*, but can never guarantee a specific outcome.

What Does A Strong El Niño Mean For Us?

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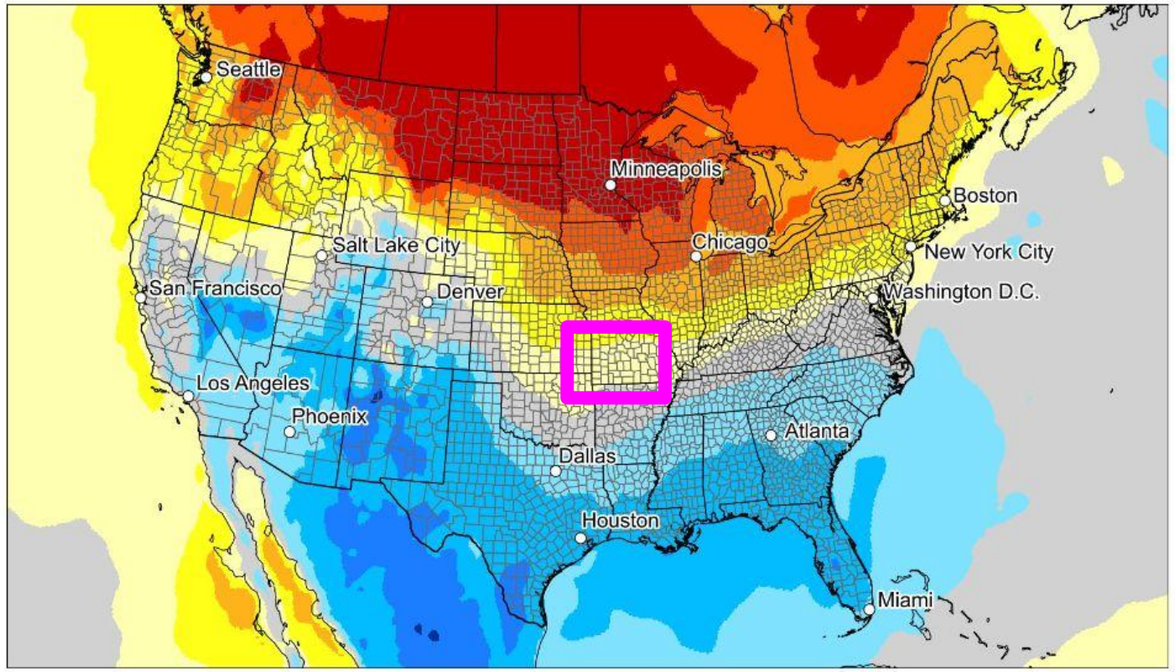
Patterns in temperature anomalies this fall/winter

Temperature Departure for Dec-Feb (Str/Very Str Ninos)



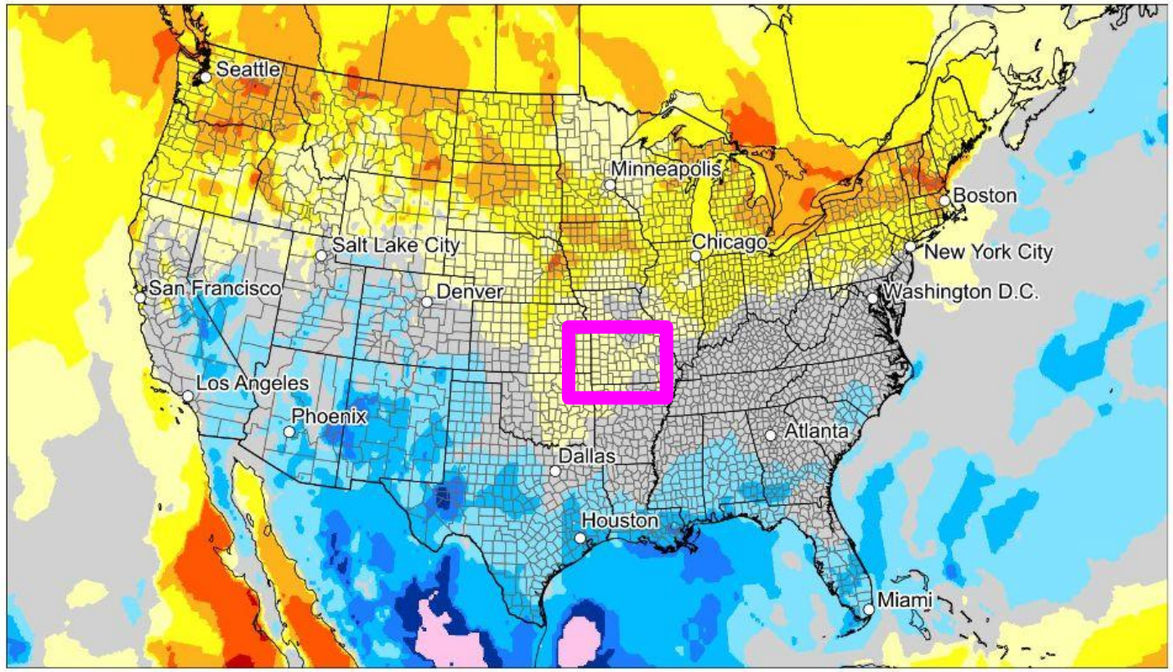
Source: ERA5 Reanalysis | Composite of 11 years since 1950. | Map by: Brian Brettschneider

Years: 1958, 1966, 1973, 1983, 1988, 1992, 1998, 2003, 2010, 2016, 2024

-2.7F | -2.1F | -1.5F | -0.9F | -0.3F | 0.3F | 0.9F | 1.5F | 2.1F | 2.7F

Departure From (Detrended) Average (F) Since 1950

Temperature Count for Dec-Feb (Str/Very Str Ninos)



Source: ERA5 Reanalysis | Composite of 11 years since 1950. | Map by: Brian Brettschneider

Years: 1958, 1966, 1973, 1983, 1988, 1992, 1998, 2003, 2010, 2016, 2024

0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5-6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11

Count of Dec-Feb Periods ≥ +0.0F of Detrended Average (Since 1950)

Key Message: Perhaps a slight lean to above normal temperatures, however, only 6-7 out of 11 strong El Niño Events on record led to above normal temperatures. This means 4-5 events were below normal.

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What Does A Strong El Niño Mean For Us?

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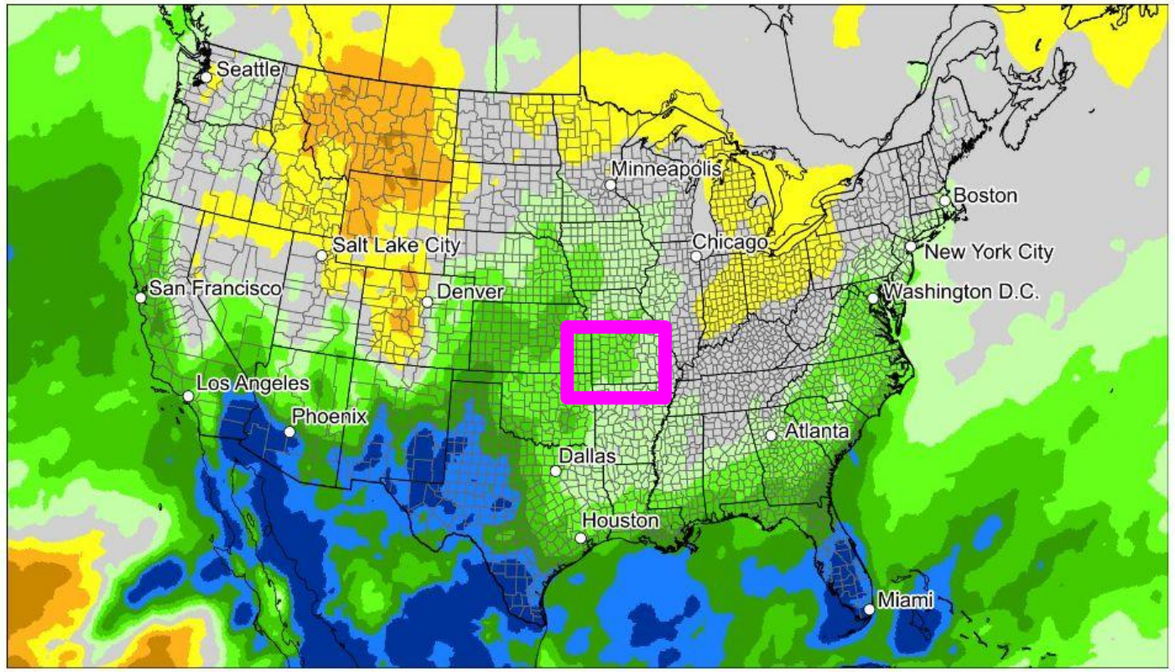
Patterns in precipitation anomalies this fall/winter

Precipitation Departure for Dec-Feb (Str/Very Str Ninos)



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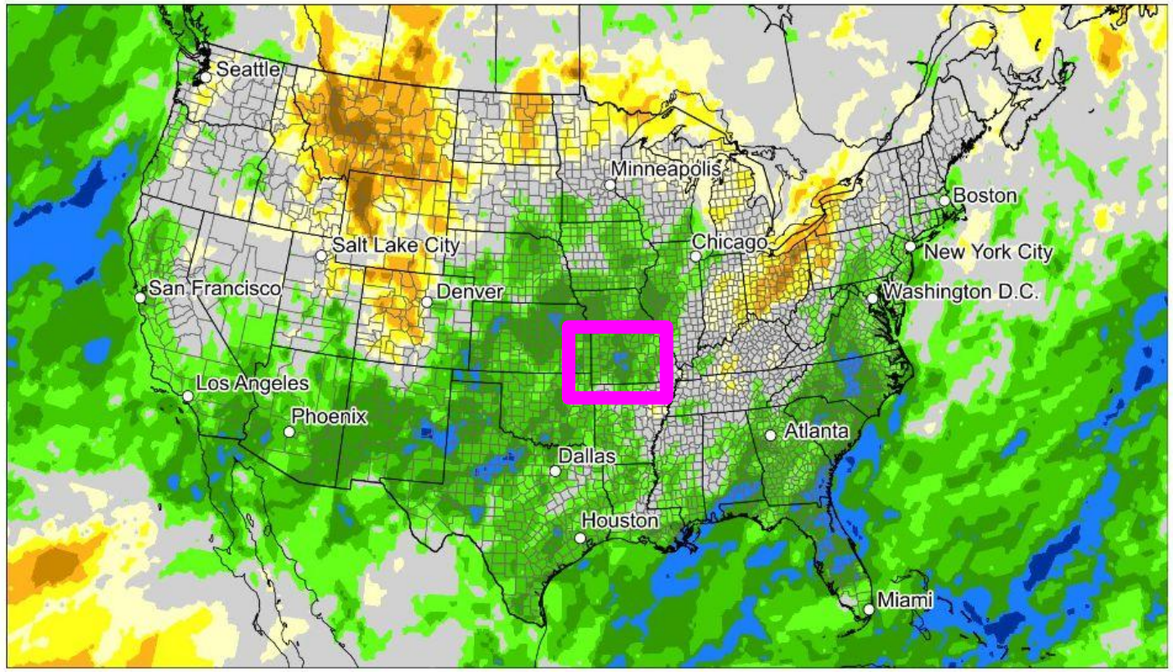
Years: 1958, 1966, 1973, 1983, 1988, 1992, 1998, 2003, 2010, 2016, 2024

50% 75% 85% 95% 105% 115% 125% 135% 145% 155%

Percent of (Detrended) Average(Since 1950)

Precipitation Count for Dec-Feb (Str/Very Str Ninos)



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Years: 1958, 1966, 1973, 1983, 1988, 1992, 1998, 2003, 2010, 2016, 2024

0 1 2 3 4 5-6 7 8 9 10 11

Count of Dec-Feb Periods ≥ +100.0% from Detrended Average (Since 1950)

Key Message: Favors above normal precipitation for much of the area. In fact, 8-10 out of 11 (or 75-90% of) strong El Niño events on record resulted in above normal precipitation.

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What Does A Strong El Niño Mean For Us?

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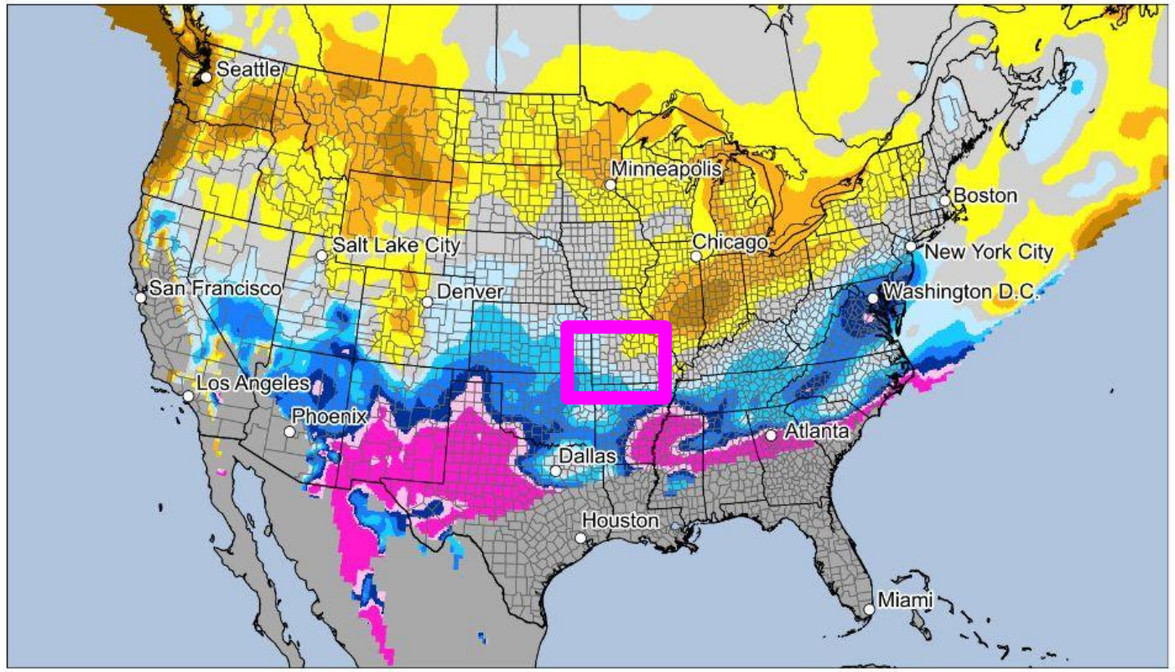
Patterns in snow anomalies this fall/winter

Snowfall Departure for Dec-Feb (Str/Very Str Ninos)



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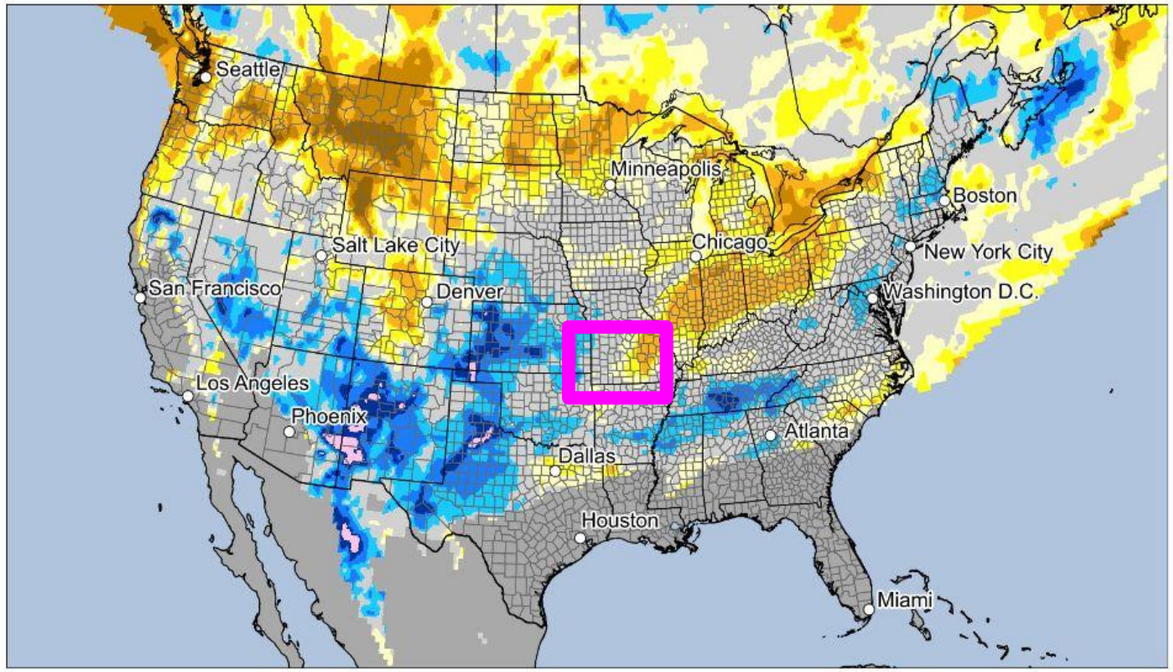
50% 75% 85% 95% 105% 115% 125% 135% 145% 155%

Percent of (Detrended) Average(Since 1950)

Snowfall Count for Dec-Feb (Str/Very Str Ninos)



Source: ERA5 Reanalysis | Composite of 11 years since 1950. | Map by: Brian Brettschneider

Years: 1958, 1966, 1973, 1983, 1988, 1992, 1998, 2003, 2010, 2016, 2024

0 1 2 3 4 5-6 7 8 9 10 11

Count of Dec-Feb Periods ≥ +100.0% from Detrended Average (Since 1950)

Key Message: Leans to above average snowfall, but only 2-5 strong El Niño events led to above average snowfall. This means that chances are there will not be a lot snow events, but if it does snow, it may lean towards more snow than normal.

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What Does A Strong El Niño Mean For Us?

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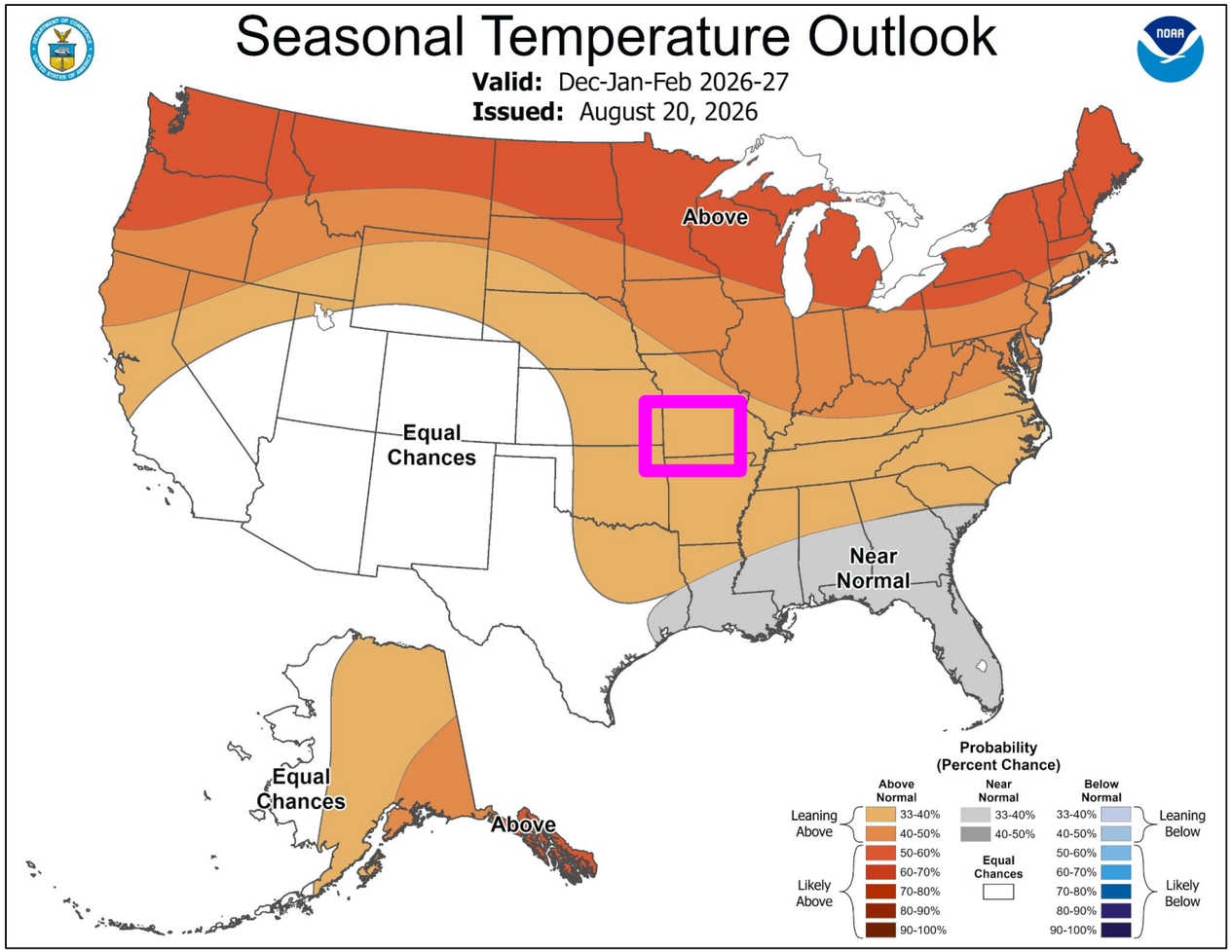
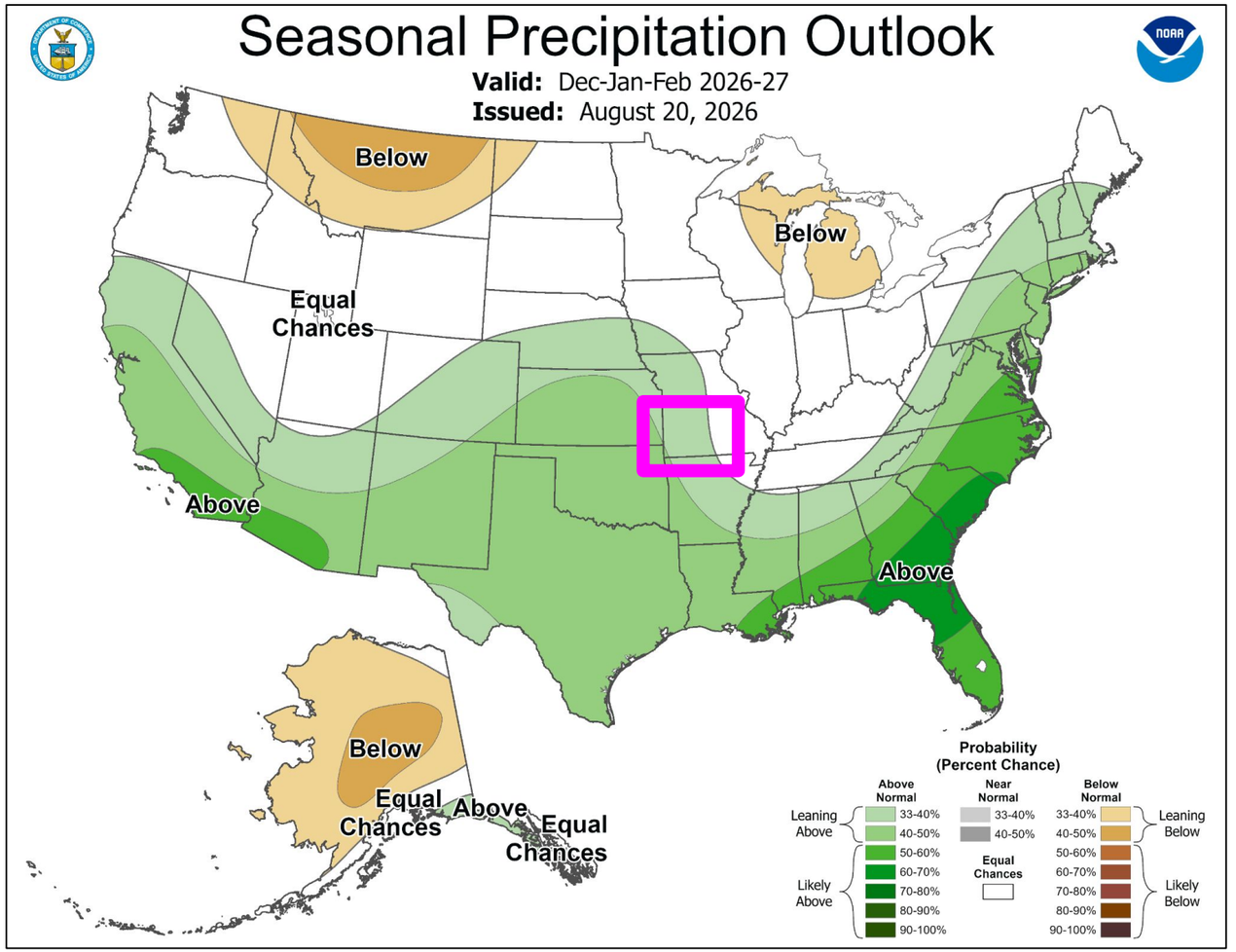
Climate Prediction Center Outlooks combine El Niño effects with model guidance





Key Message: The Climate Prediction Center combines known tendencies of El Niño with model guidance and other climate teleconnections to produce a forecast. The current Winter Forecast falls in line with observed El Niño effects.

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Putting it all together!

In General For The Ozarks, Strong El Niño's Favor…

A very *slight preference* for **above normal temperatures** (listed below). However, several strong El Niño's have still resulted in near or below normal temperatures.

Normal Winter Highs: 40-50° Lows: 20-30°

Above normal precipitation. 75-90% of the previous strong El Niño's resulted in above normal precipitation. CPC currently forecasts a 33-40% chance for above normal precipitation.

Normal Winter Precipitation: 7-8 inches

The signal suggests there may be a *slight preference* towards **less snowstorms**, but *if it does snow*, it may be on the **greater accumulation side**.

Normal Winter Snowfall: 10-15 inches

A combination of above normal temperatures and precipitation means that most precipitation we see this winter may lean mostly as **rain rather than snow**. Remember that severe weather events can still occur in the winter!

A Note On “Average” Conditions

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Seasonal forecasts do not guarantee certain outcomes!

Remember:

- A seasonal forecast for “Above Normal/Average” temperatures or precipitation for a given period does NOT mean that the whole period will see above normal temperatures or precipitation.
  - It does not even guarantee that above average conditions will pan out. A 50-60% chance of above normal conditions still leaves a 33% chance for near normal conditions, and a 7-17% chance of below normal conditions.
- It simply means that if you average all the readings within the season, there’s a good chance they’ll tend to be above the normal levels for that period.
  - This means you can still see below normal at some points.
  - “Climate is what you expect, weather is what you get”

Exampletember

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
S M T W T F S 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30	S M T W T F S 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31	1 55°	2 58°	3 51°	4 27°	5 38°
6 45°	7 50°	8 48°	9 51°	10 54°	11 59°	12 63°
13 67°	14 70°	15 66°	16 61°	17 58°	18 44°	19 47°
20 46°	21 49°	22 50°	23 53°	24 51°	25 59°	26 55°
27 50°	28 60°	29 48°	30 33°	31 39°		

Month Normal: **50°** Month Average: **51.8°**

Additional Resources

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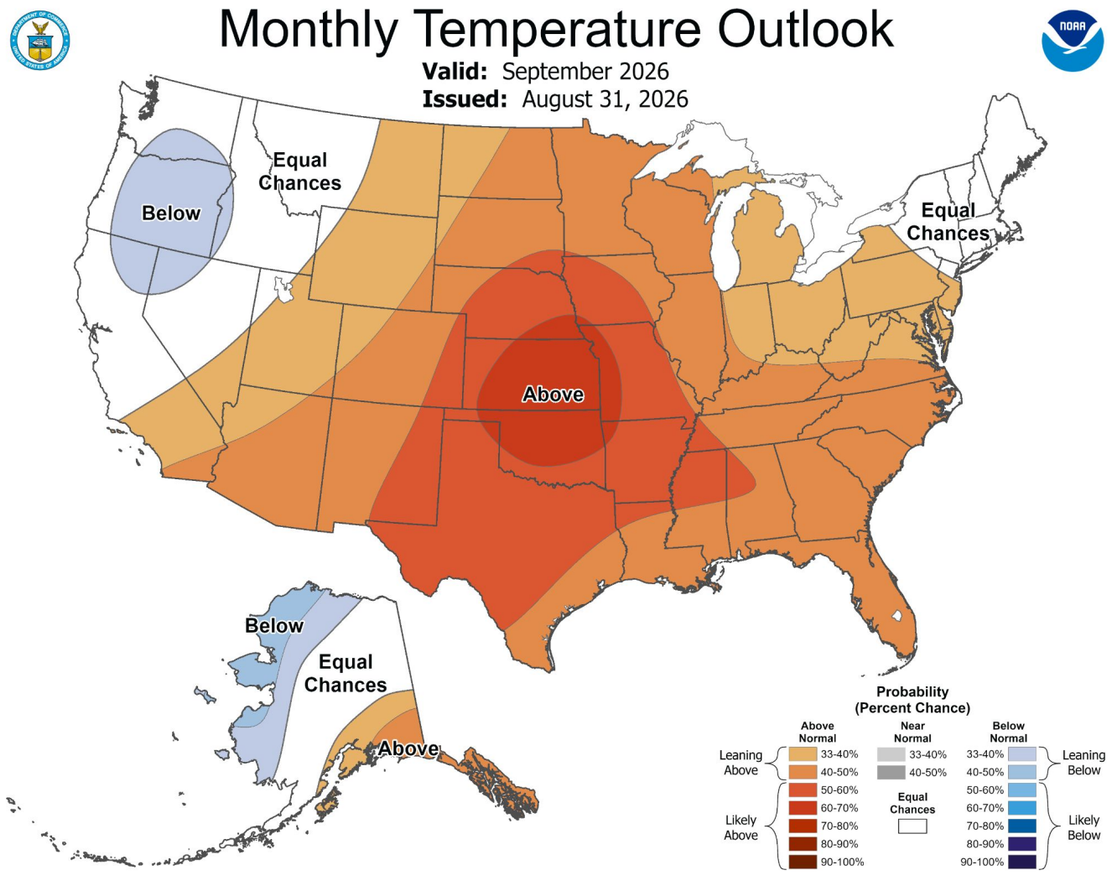
For Additional Information

- ➔ NWS Springfield Webpage
- ➔ CPC Outlooks
- ➔ NOAA Relative Oceanic Niño Index Outlook
- ➔ Current Relative Oceanic Niño Index
- ➔ El Niño Resources
- ➔ What are El Niño and La Niña?



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