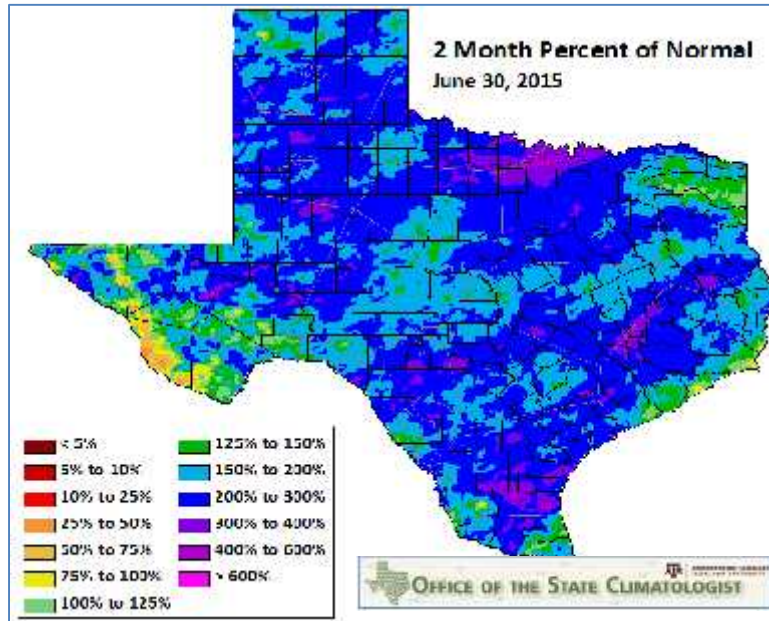




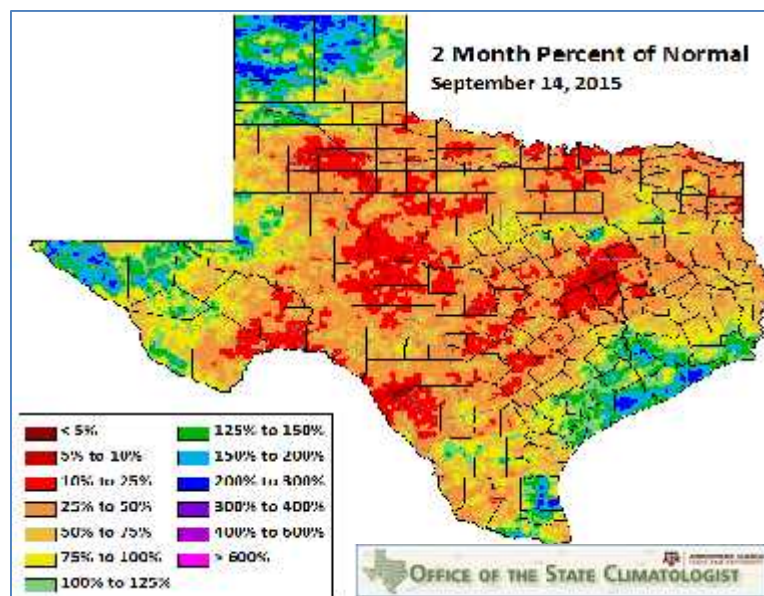
## Fall & Winter Wildfire Potential Outlook

Updated September 14, 2015

Looking ahead to the fall of 2015 and winter of 2016, there are a couple of concerns that could promote increased wildfire activity. First is the effect of the above normal precipitation levels of late spring and early summer. (See graphic below) Record amounts were seen in many regions of the state during the month of May.



On top of this was the continued above normal precipitation across the western plains regions of the state through the later parts of summer. (See graphic below)



The rains of spring and early summer resulted in a bumper growth of grasses similar to the image below in Taylor County near Abilene. The concern is that these grasses could become fuel for a wildfire.



With the onset of a “Flash Drought” during the second half of the summer over the central and eastern regions of the state, this increase in grass loading did promote a corresponding increase in wildfire activity. With this grass loading in place going into the fall and winter, there is a concern that it could also promote an increase in wildfire activity for these seasons as well. This is particularly the case for the plains regions where the late summer rains have continued to help support grass growth there. When these grasses cure in the winter they will represent a threat for increased wildfire potential.

The second concern for increased wildfire potential is the presence of dead brush and trees left over from the severe drought of 2011. These dead trees have added to increased difficulty of control on fires this summer, particularly in the Hill Country. An example of the complexity these fuels add to the fire environment can be seen in the image below. This was taken in Hays County during the latter part of summer. The grasses can carry fire into areas where dead trees are still present, allowing them to ignite and burn.



On the positive side, the good news is that El Nino conditions are expected to continue into the winter months. (See the accompanying fall and winter weather outlook) El Nino's typically provide the state with an increased chance for precipitation during the fall, winter, and early spring. Under normal fuel loading conditions, wildfire activity is generally suppressed by the presence of El Nino. But this year there is the added threat of increased grass loading. This added loading will provide an extra dimension to the wildfire potential compared to what we normally see during El Nino years. With the grass loading present, especially in the plains regions, it is likely that the state could see periods of increased wildfire activity this winter. While conditions in the fall are generally unfavorable to increased wildfire activity, the loading could also have an impact depending on how the grasses respond to precipitation, when it occurs.

**The threats for increased wildfire potential this fall and winter include:**

- 1. Increased grass fuel loading across the state, especially in the plains regions**
- 2. The presence of dead brush and trees left over from the drought of 2011**