

Early-Season Outlook for Ski Areas and Snow Operations

Amphibian Publishing · October 2026 · temperature and precipitation odds by mountain region; snowfall totals are not forecast

The short version. A very strong El Niño favours a milder-than-normal start across the whole West and the northern tier, with the storm track displaced south: wetter odds for the Sierra, Colorado, Utah and the Southwest, drier odds for the Cascades and the northern Rockies. The Northeast leans mild into early winter with precipitation near usual. For snow operations that reads as: good odds of early moisture in the southern and central Rockies and the Sierra, but warm enough that elevation decides whether it falls as snow; a slow natural start is the risk in the Cascades, northern Rockies and the Northeast lowlands.

Odds by region: below / near / above normal (percent)

Region	Temp, Oct-Nov-Dec 2026			Precip, Oct-Nov-Dec 2026			Temp, Nov-Dec-Jan 2026-27			Precip, Nov-Dec-Jan 2026-27			Reading for Nov-Dec-Jan 2026-27
Northeast (VT NH ME NY)	15	31	55	31	33	36	18	36	46	36	25	39	temperature near usual, precip near usual: no strong lean either way
Mid-Atlantic (PA WV)	23	28	49	33	26	41	33	37	30	33	23	44	temperature near usual, precip near usual: no strong lean either way
Upper Midwest (MI WI MN)	14	32	54	36	34	30	11	32	57	32	32	36	mild lean, precip near usual: mild: late or thin natural start at low elevations is the risk; snowmaking nights fewer than usual
Colorado	12	34	54	25	32	43	21	20	59	21	27	53	mild lean, wet lean: mild and wet: more precipitation, but more of it as rain at lower elevations; favours high base areas
Utah	11	29	60	33	21	46	16	24	59	20	40	40	mild lean, precip near usual: mild: late or thin natural start at low elevations is the risk; snowmaking nights fewer than usual
Northern Rockies (MT ID WY)	19	24	57	43	29	28	14	19	67	38	26	36	mild lean, dry lean: mild and dry: the poor combination for early-season snow; plan on snowmaking windows being the limit
Sierra / Tahoe (CA NV)	10	24	66	22	29	49	13	26	61	25	30	45	mild lean, precip near usual: mild: late or thin natural start at low elevations is the risk; snowmaking nights fewer than usual
Cascades (WA OR)	13	17	70	49	41	11	15	28	57	39	28	33	mild lean, dry lean: mild and dry: the poor combination for early-season snow; plan on snowmaking windows being the limit
New Mexico / Arizona	10	33	56	17	30	53	19	26	55	12	33	55	mild lean, wet lean: mild and wet: more precipitation, but more of it as rain at lower elevations; favours high base areas

Blue/brown = below normal, grey = near normal, red/green = above normal; 33/33/33 would be a coin toss. Normal = 1991-2020. Odds are averaged over the NOAA climate divisions in each region and describe the region's season as a whole, not a single resort or elevation band.

What the outlook covers

Seasonal odds of a cold or mild, wet or dry season by mountain region. Snowfall totals at a resort depend on storm track, elevation and timing, which a three-month outlook does not resolve, so they are not part of this product; what the outlook does set is the odds of an early natural base, the number of snowmaking nights, and the plowing budget. For the back half of the season and spring base depth, see our western snowpack outlook (issued each January).

How to use it

- **Snowmaking:** a mild lean means fewer sub-freezing nights than usual in the early season; plan water and compressor time for the cold windows you do get.
- **Opening dates and staffing:** mild plus dry (Cascades, northern Rockies this year) is the combination that delays natural openings; mild plus wet (Sierra, Colorado, Utah) favours high base areas.
- **Snow removal and road budgets:** precipitation odds set the frequency of events, temperature odds the share that falls as snow at your elevation; a mild, wet lean usually means more rain-on-snow and ice work at valley level.
- **What this does not say:** inches, storm timing, or any individual cold snap. A mild season still contains cold weeks.

Track record

Over 173 seasons since 2012 these temperature and precipitation outlooks scored higher than NOAA's Climate Prediction Center on the standard skill score, mostly because we commit to a call over more of the map; where NOAA commits it is about as accurate. Every season is scored publicly at amphibianpublishing.com/outlook/verification. Monthly region or county odds available; contact: outlook@amphibianpublishing.com.

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