March - September 2026
CCIEA Ecosystem Survey Highlights

Supplemental Informational Report 7
September 2026

Coastwide Risk Factors: Warm-water assemblages, habitat compression & reduced prey

Peak spring snowpack levels very low

Extensive wildfires throughout WA & OR

Exceptionally dry conditions. Long-term drought impacts

Above-average air & streamflow temperatures

Below-normal summer streamflow

Widespread & extreme snowpack deficits

Washington - Oregon

- Warm-water assemblage/modest abundance, positive southern copepod anomaly, and low winter ichthyoplankton biomass indicate poor prey conditions
- Average catches of juvenile chinook & coho salmon
- Juvenile rockfish abundant
- Pseudo-nitzschia above alert levels, high levels of domoic acid affecting shellfish harvesting in some areas

North - Central California

- Highly compressed habitats - warm water offshore causes many species to move closer to shore than normal
- Domoic acid from Pseudo-nitzschia blooms impacting marine wildlife, linked to humpback whale strandings
- Very high numbers of juvenile rockfish, anchovy, and market squid. Average krill abundance
- Warmer than average outmigrating temperatures suggest poor conditions for juvenile salmon

Southern California Bight

- Low overall plankton volume in spring, though anchovy eggs and larvae were abundant and widespread. Very few juvenile rockfish
- Elevated seabird mortalities and below-average productivity due to lack of pelagic prey associated with marine heatwaves
- Near 40% decline in San Miguel CA sea lion pup births; offshore fur seals show low birthrates and declining populations over last 5 years

good fair poor

NOAA FISHERIES

Learn more at: https://www.integratedecosystemassessment.noaa.gov/regions/california-current

Map from USGS

March - September 2026
CCIEA Oceanographic Indicators

Oceanographic conditions in 2026 so far have been variable to the north, and dominated by non-El Niño marine heatwaves to the south

- Extremely low snowpack, warm air temperatures, and drought in many regions (**Fig. 1**)
- High temperature anomalies along entire coast preceding impending fall/winter El Niño (**Fig. 2**)
- Upwelling has been near normal, but nutrients poor in the south, while warm offshore waters have led to considerable east-west habitat compression (**Fig. 3**)
- ENSO is trending strongly positive; non-El Niño marine heatwaves predicted to be replaced by El Niño-driven warming this fall and winter (**Fig. 4**)

Fig. 1. SWE (% snow water equivalent of historical mean) was extremely low as of April 1, 2026, especially in the south, suggesting poor conditions for outmigrating salmon.

El Niño typically leads to low precipitation in winter in the Pacific Northwest, which could exacerbate this trend.

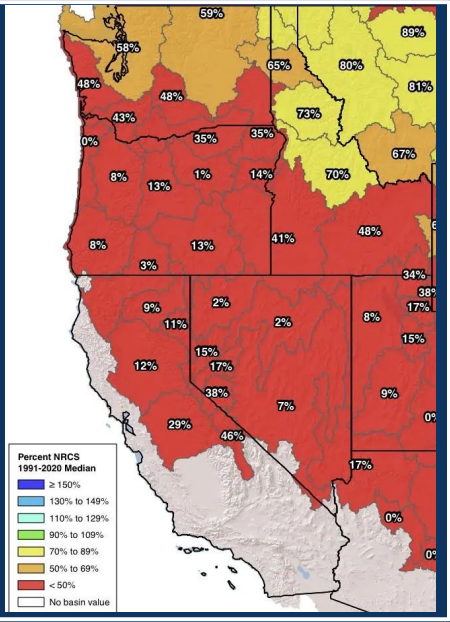


Fig. 2. Average coastal (out to 150km offshore) sea surface temperatures have been anomalously high since last fall, particularly off southern CA due to non-El Niño marine heatwaves.

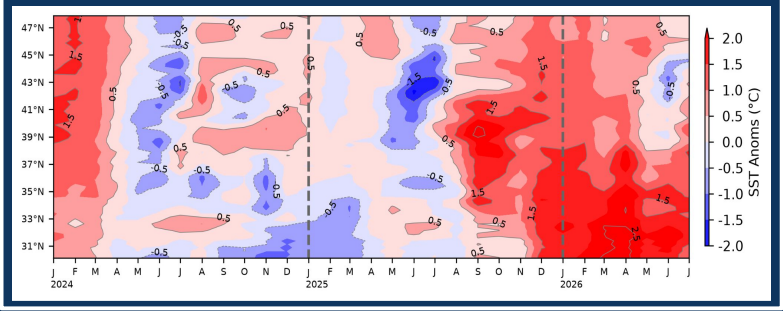
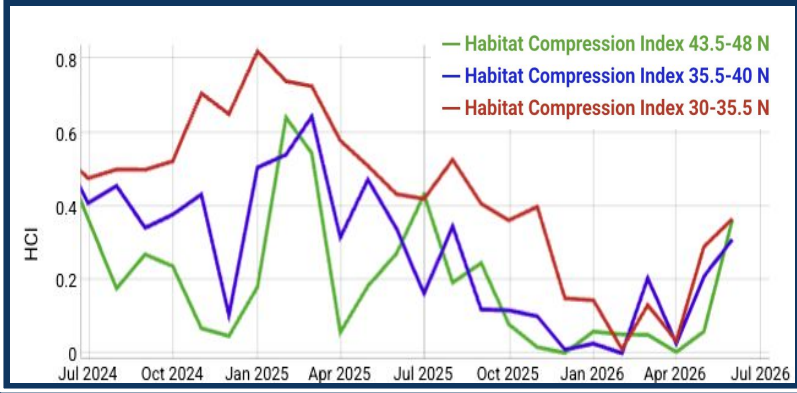


Fig. 3. The Habitat Compression Index (HCI) indicates the presence of cold-water habitat near the coast. Coastal habitats have been highly compressed (low HCI values) since Jan 2026, a pattern previously associated with increased whale entanglements.



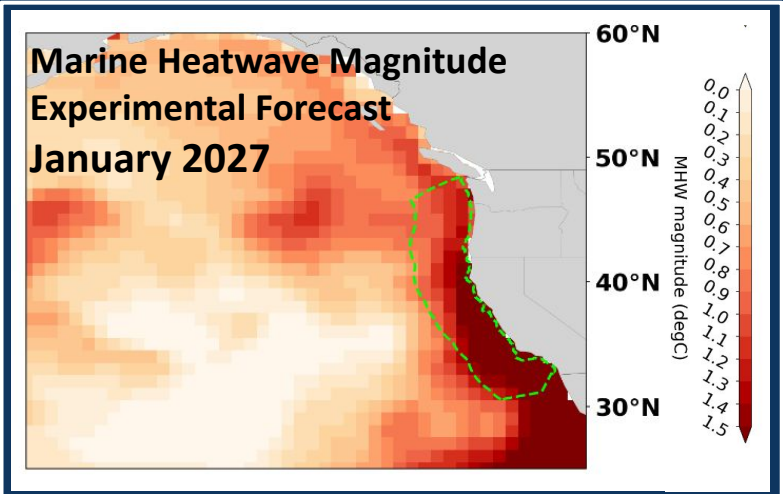


Fig. 4. Looking Ahead: The Center for Climate Prediction's current forecast suggests ENSO is strengthening, with a >90% chance of a very strong event during Northern Hemisphere fall and winter 2026-27. Marine heatwave forecasts (shown above) indicate high likelihood of continued warmer-than-normal waters due to El Niño through the winter along the US West Coast.

To learn more about these data see
https://cciea-esr.github.io/dashboard/

2026 - Eyes on the Water

Please contribute your observations!

NOAA's Northwest and Southwest Fisheries Science Centers are preparing their annual Ecosystem Status Report for the Pacific Fishery Management Council, regional partners, and coastal communities. The Science Centers are looking for input from commercial, recreational, and tribal fishery partners, and citizen scientists, with a focus on **unusual or unexpected conditions** observed during the 2026 fishing season. Examples of helpful observations include:

- *Did you see species in different places, different depths, or at different times of the year than you normally see them?*
- *Are you catching anything new or unusual?*
- *Were water temperatures warmer/colder than normal, or other unusual environmental conditions observed?*
- *What are you seeing in the diet / stomachs of fish you catch?*
- *Have any new challenges emerged for fishing, have operating costs changed?*

Report your observations to: CaCurrent.Observations@noaa.gov

Below are some examples of observations that have been reported this year, but which are not meant to be an exhaustive or fully representative view of conditions

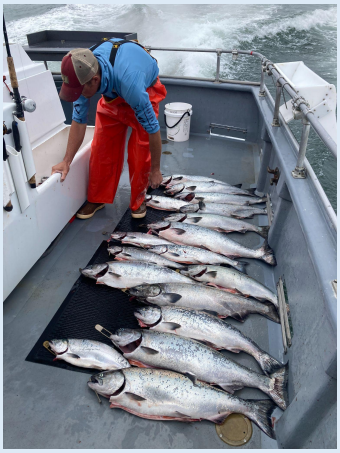
www.integratedecosystemassessment.noaa.gov/regions/california-current/fishing-industry-input-needed-2026-27-california-current-ecosystem

Species distribution shifts leading to some reports of strong catches in recreational marine fisheries

"Never in 40 years have I seen as much salmon as this year…" (Recreational fisherman, Oregon)

"What is unusual is the sheer volume of [bluefin tuna] being reported off San Francisco. One or two reports may not be that noteworthy, but numerous records of private recreational vessels getting limits of big bluefin is definitely unusual." (California)

"Unusually high water temperatures in March and April led to excellent fishing…" (Recreational fisherman, southern California)



Sound and Sea Charters, Westport WA

Bodega Bay Fishing Charters, Bodega Bay CA

Jed Chernabaeff / Ventura County Harbor De

Unusual conditions are harming some species

Citizen scientists have noted unusual die offs this spring and summer in marine birds, particularly in the south, and whale strandings and deaths to the north, mostly attributed to starvation and harmful algal blooms. The unusual marine heatwaves this year have likely played a role in exacerbating these problems. The oncoming El Niño is predicted to extend the heatwaves through winter.