Spring – Water Supply / Drought Outlook

Water Policy Interim Committee

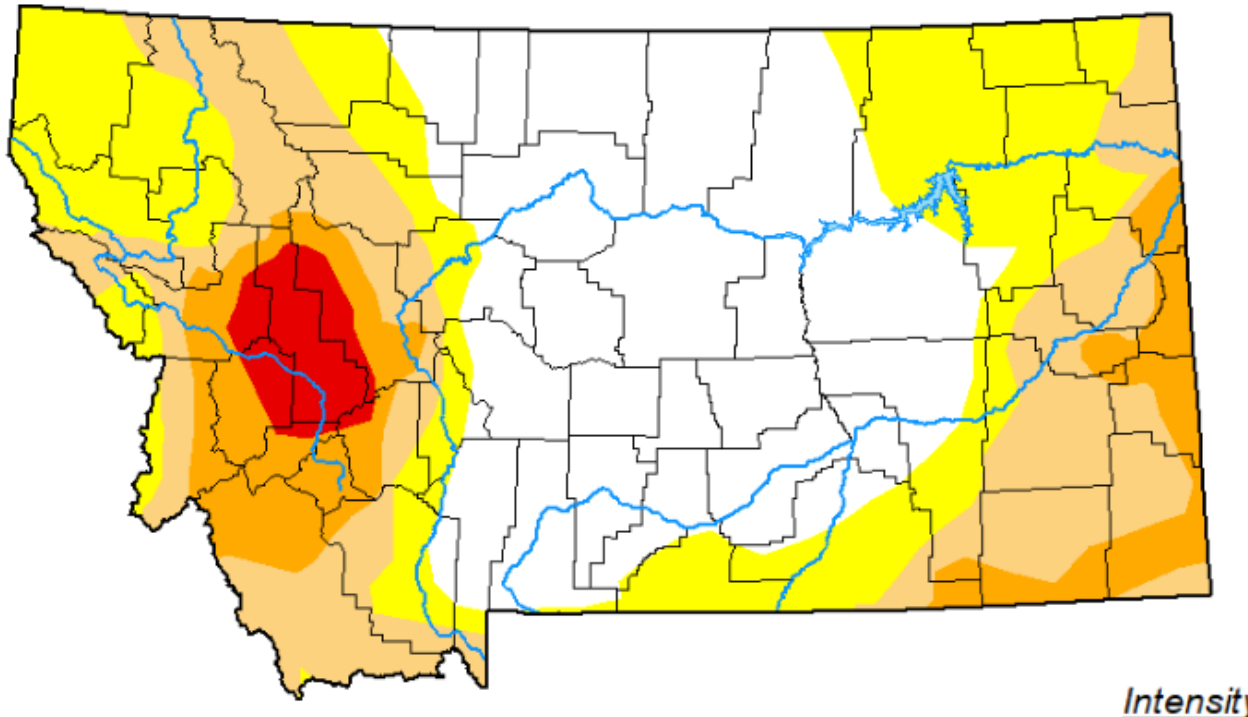
March 26, 2026

Michael Downey – DNRC, Drought Program Coordinator

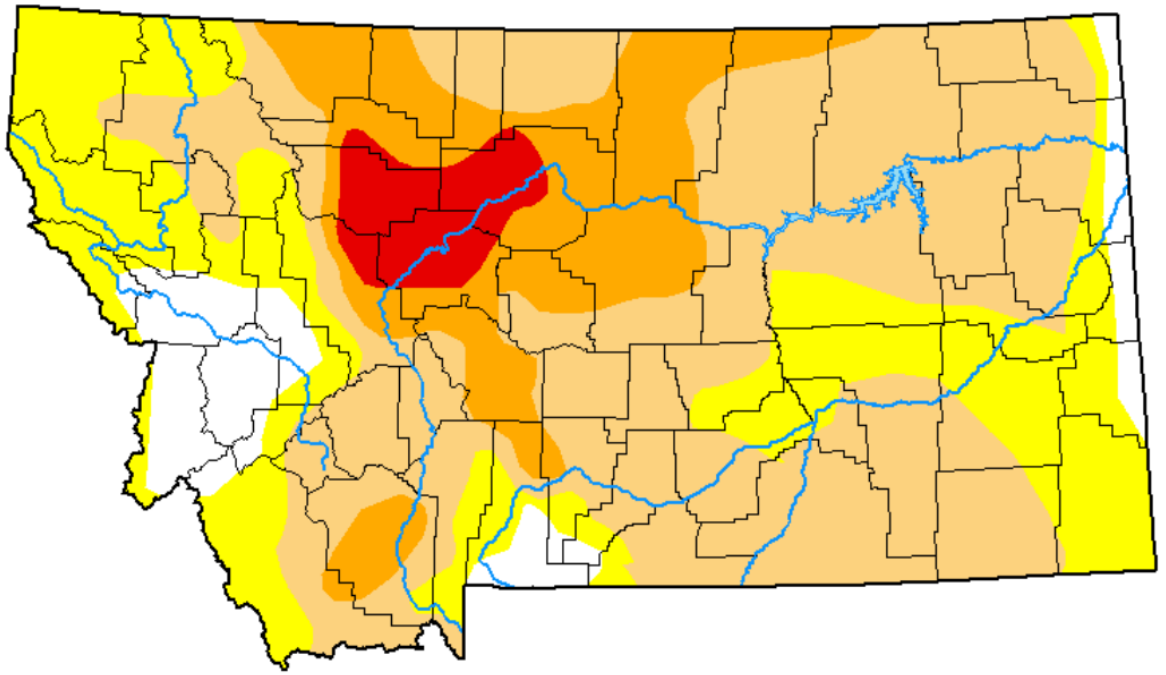
Rocky Mountain Front near Dupuyer, MT

Photo: Michael Downey

US Drought Monitor 3/18/25



US Drought Monitor 3/17/26



Intensity:

- None
- D0 Abnormally Dry
- D1 Moderate Drought
- D2 Severe Drought
- D3 Extreme Drought
- D4 Exceptional Drought

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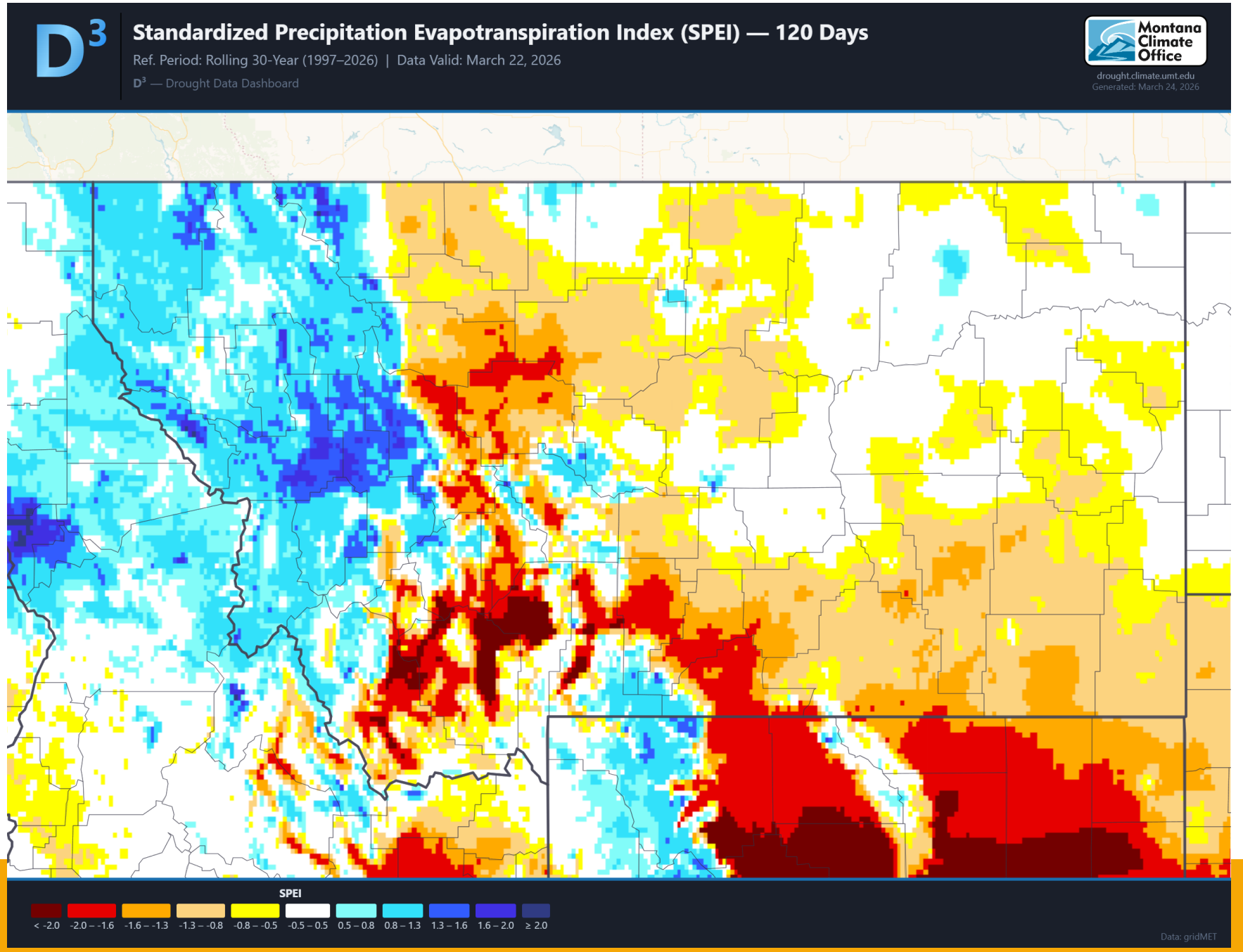
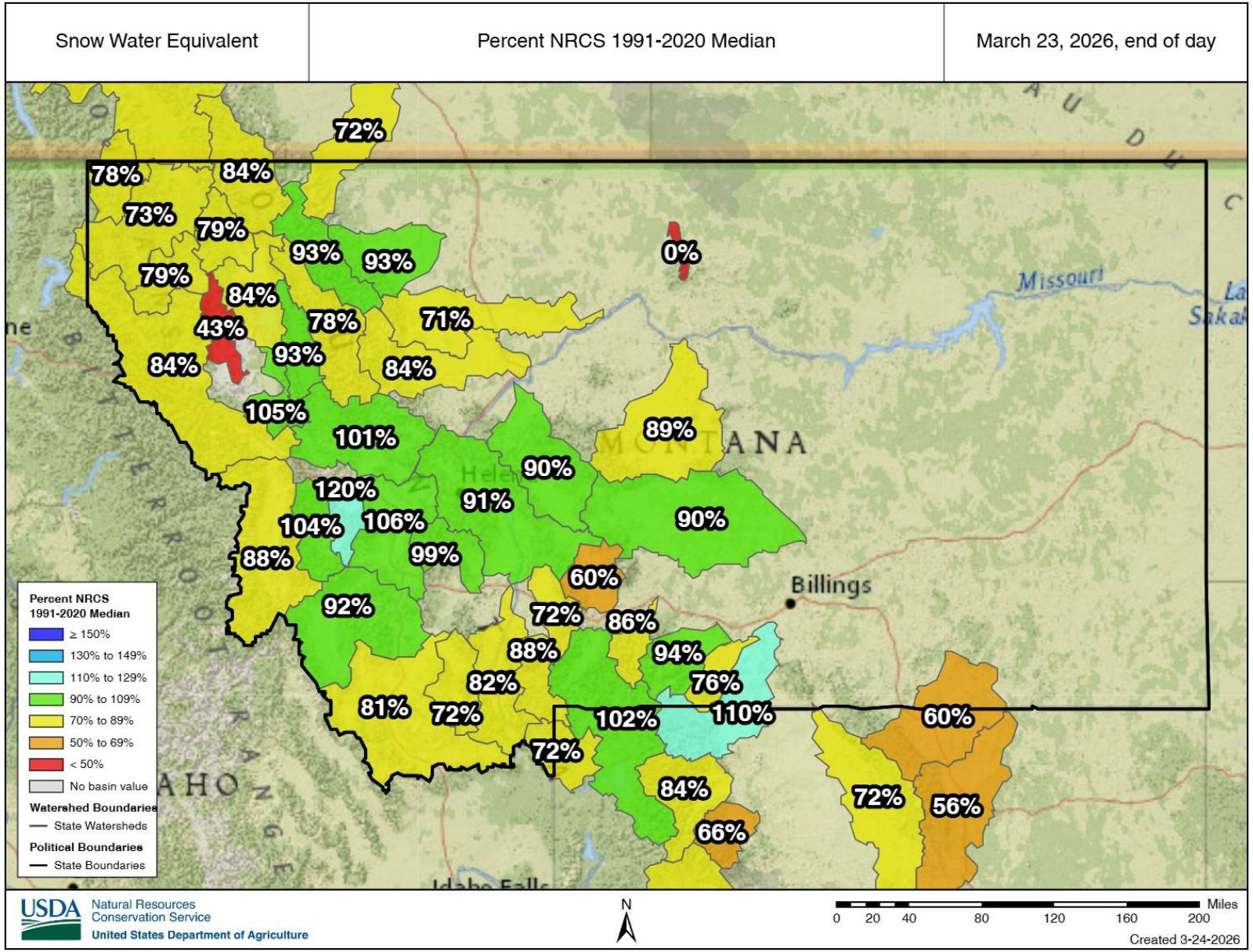
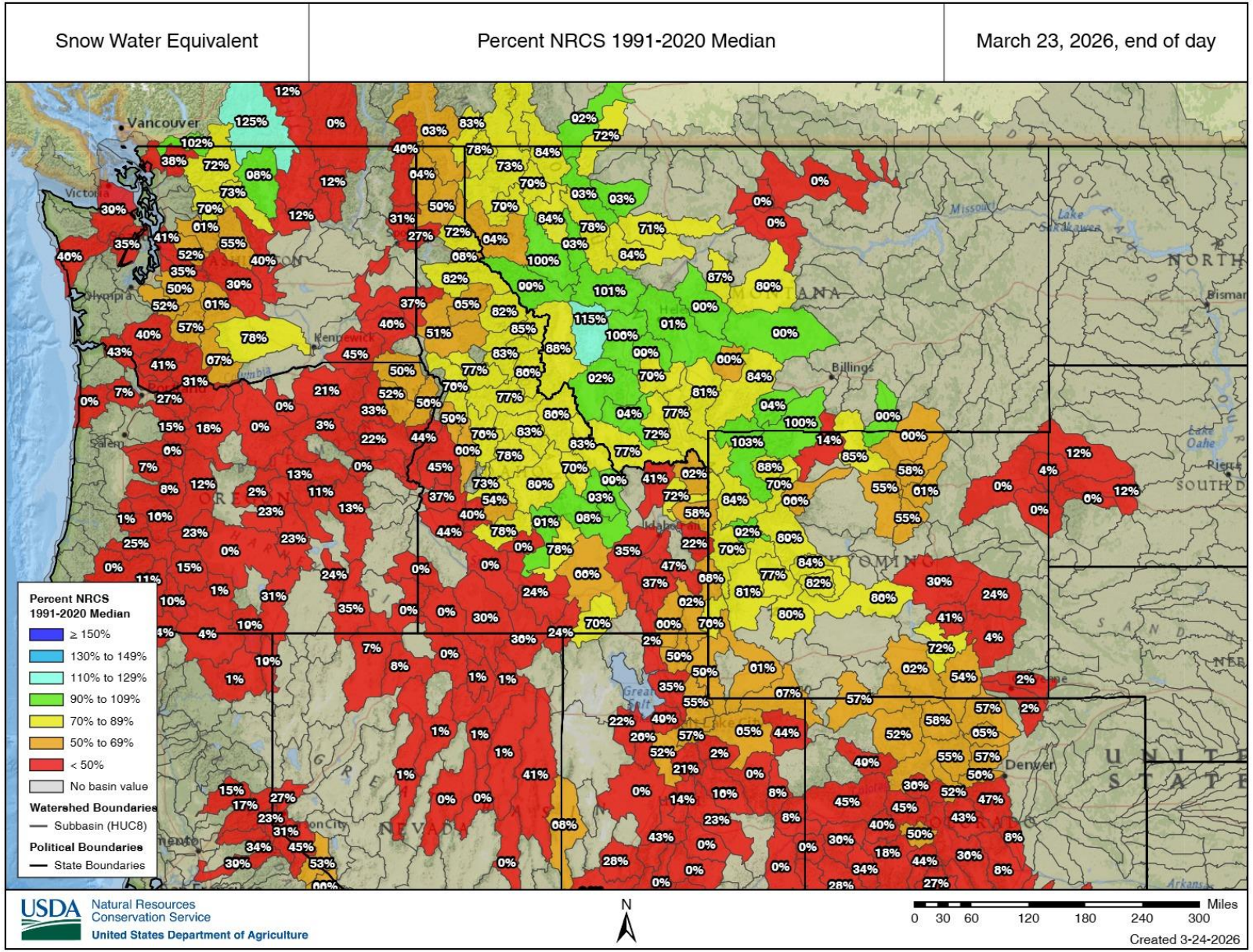

D3
Standardized Precipitation Evapotranspiration Index (SPEI) — 120 Days
Ref. Period: Rolling 30-Year (1997–2026) | Data Valid: March 22, 2026
D3 — Drought Data Dashboard
Montana Climate Office
drought.climate.umt.edu
Generated: March 24, 2026
SPEI
< -2.0
-2.0 – -1.6
-1.6 – -1.3
-1.3 – -0.8
-0.8 – -0.5
-0.5 – 0.5
0.5 – 0.8
0.8 – 1.3
1.3 – 1.6
1.6 – 2.0
≥ 2.0
Data: gridMET

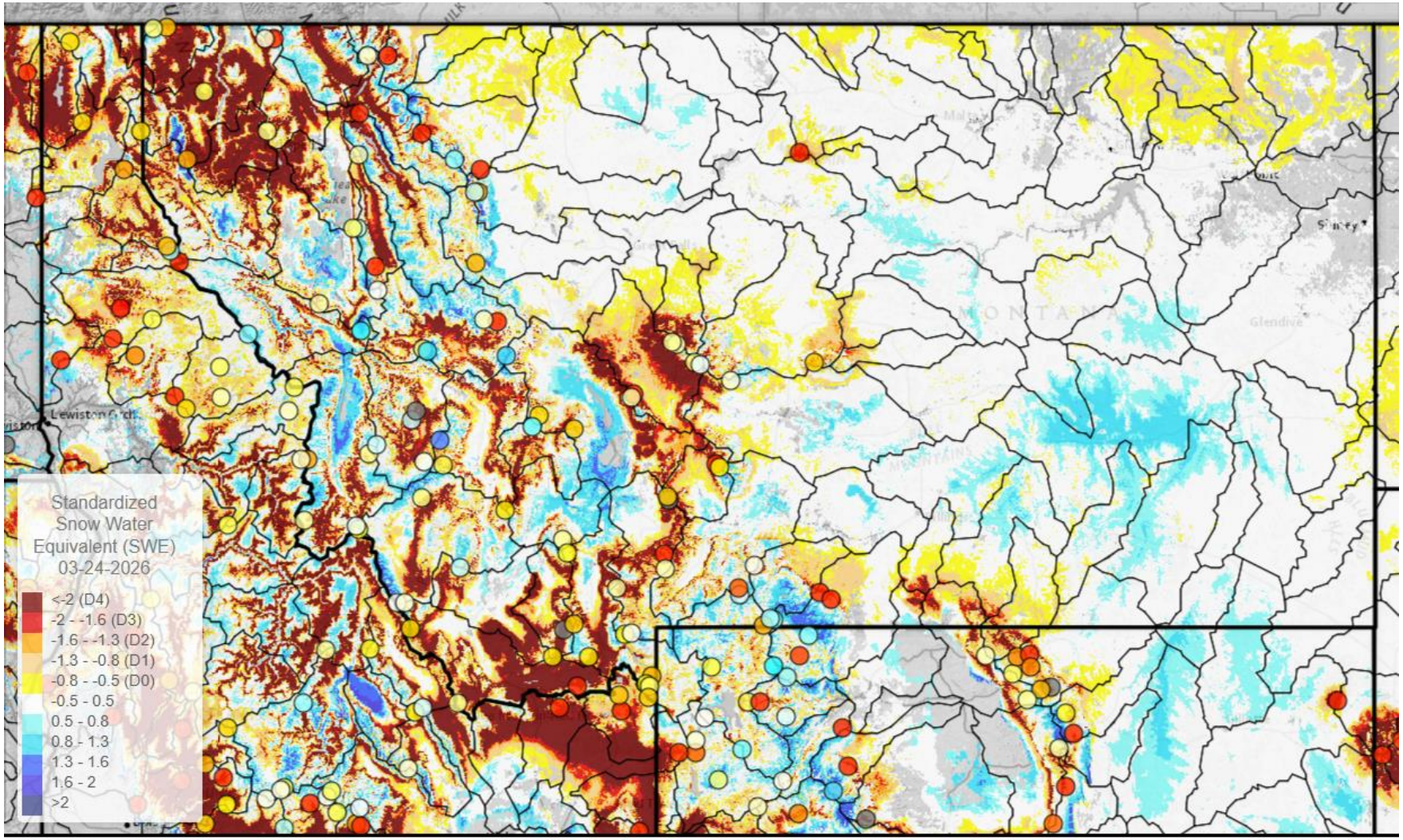
Snow Water Equivalent by Basin 3/23/26



Snow Water Equivalent by Basin 3/23/26



Standardized Snow Water Equivalent by Basin (SNODAS) 3/24/26



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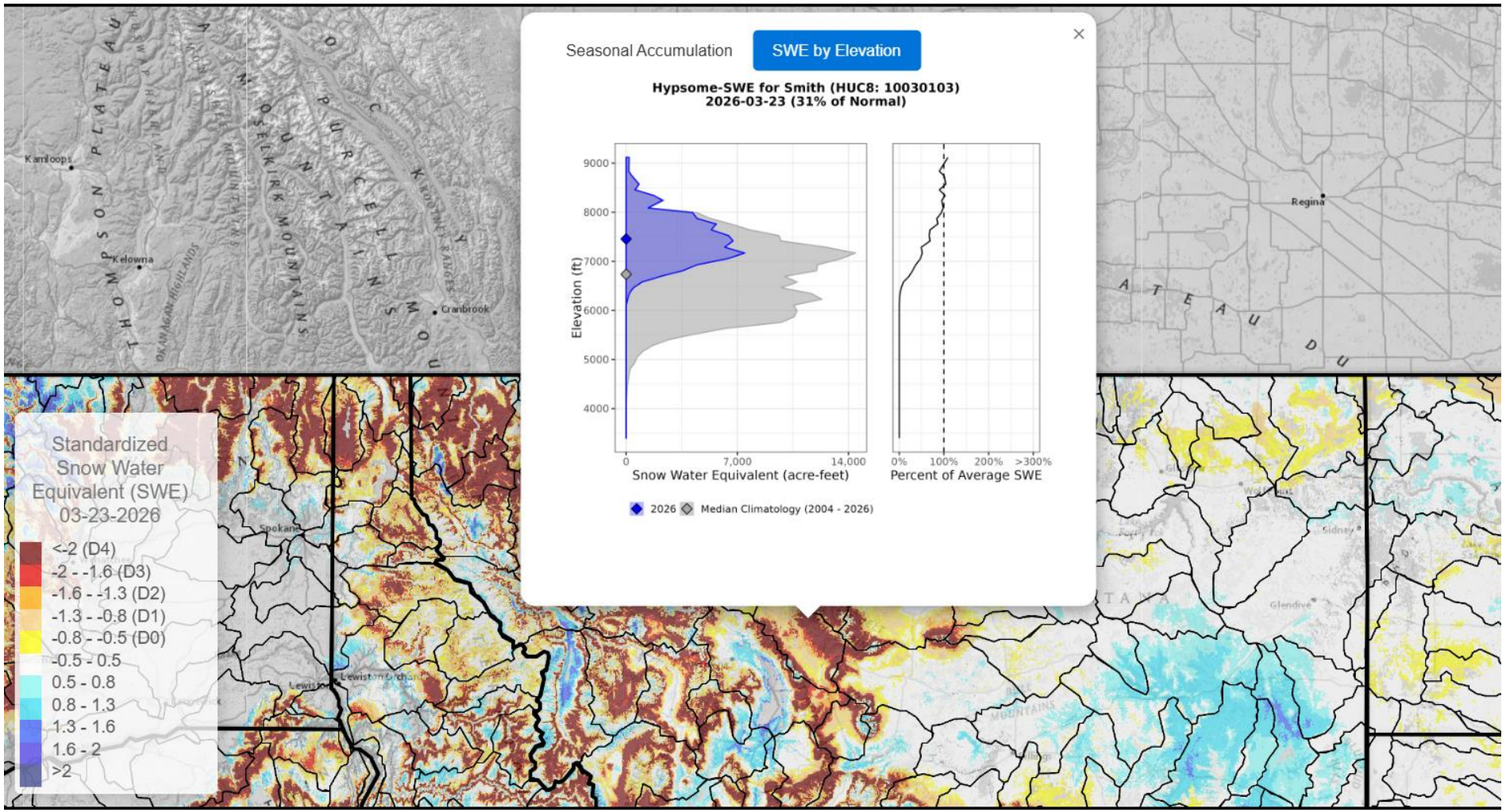
Standardized Snow Water Equivalent – Smith River Basin 3/23/26



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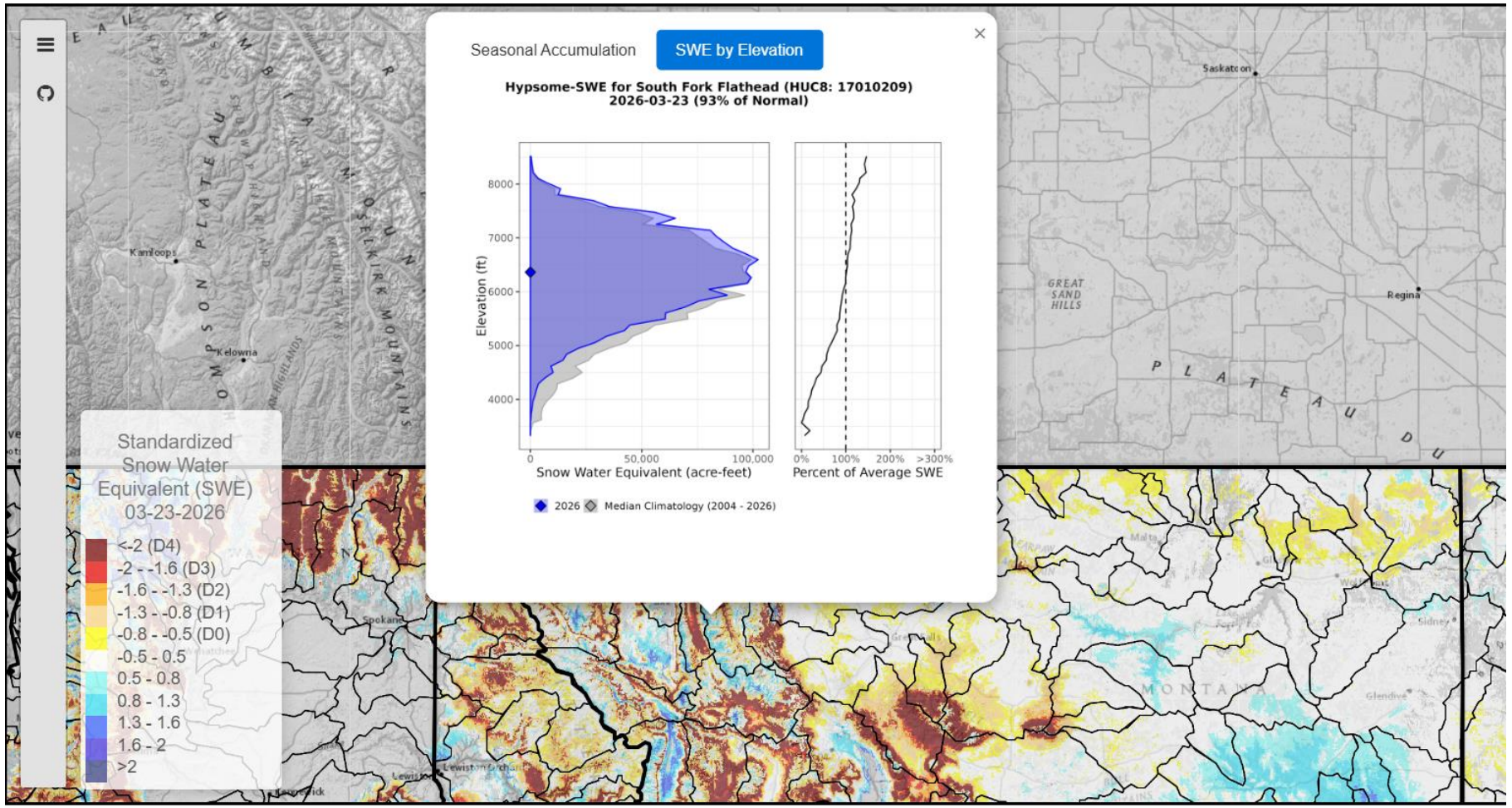
Standardized Snow Water Equivalent – South Fork Flathead Basin – 3/23/26



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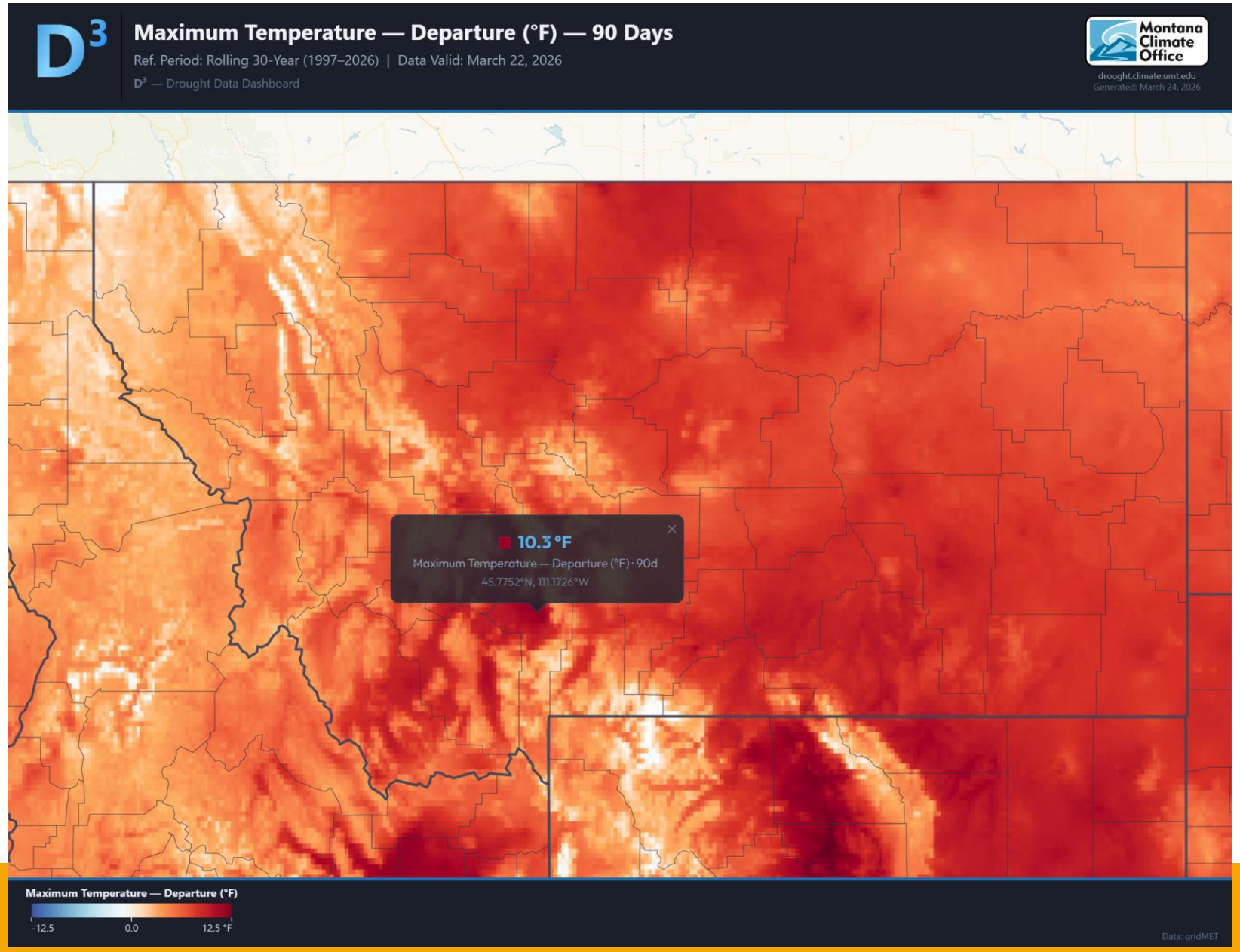
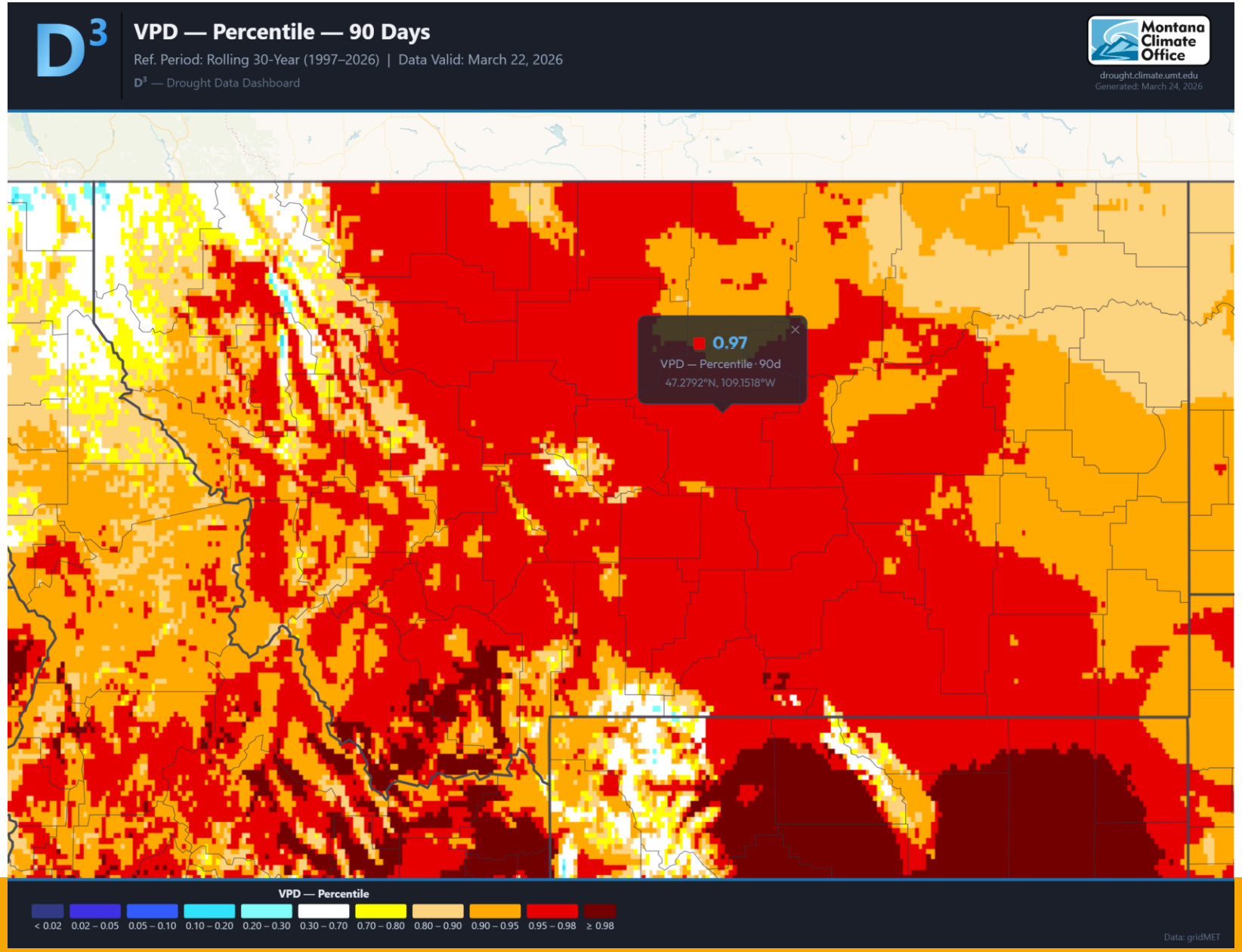
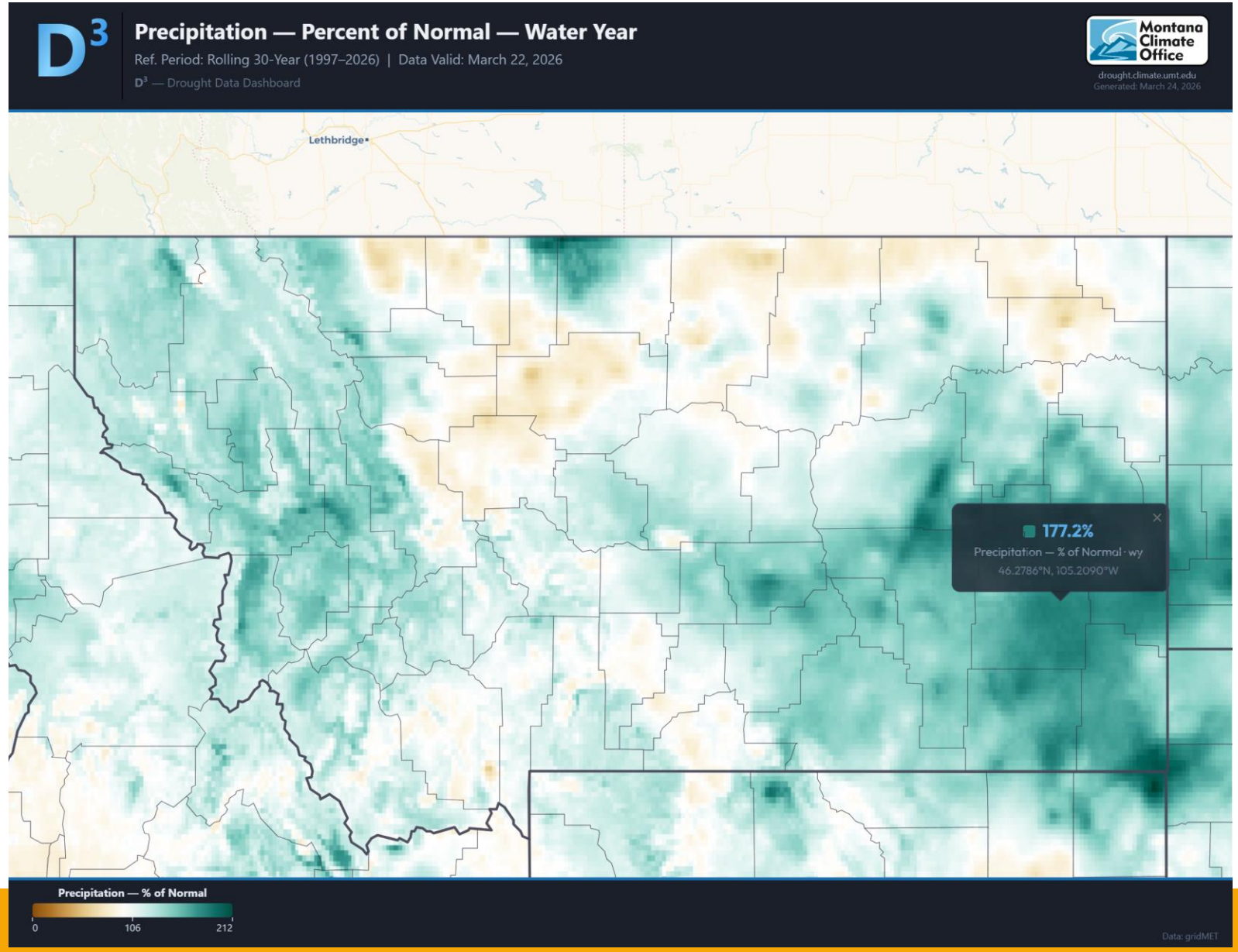
Maximum Temperature Departure from Average 12/21/25 – 3/22/26



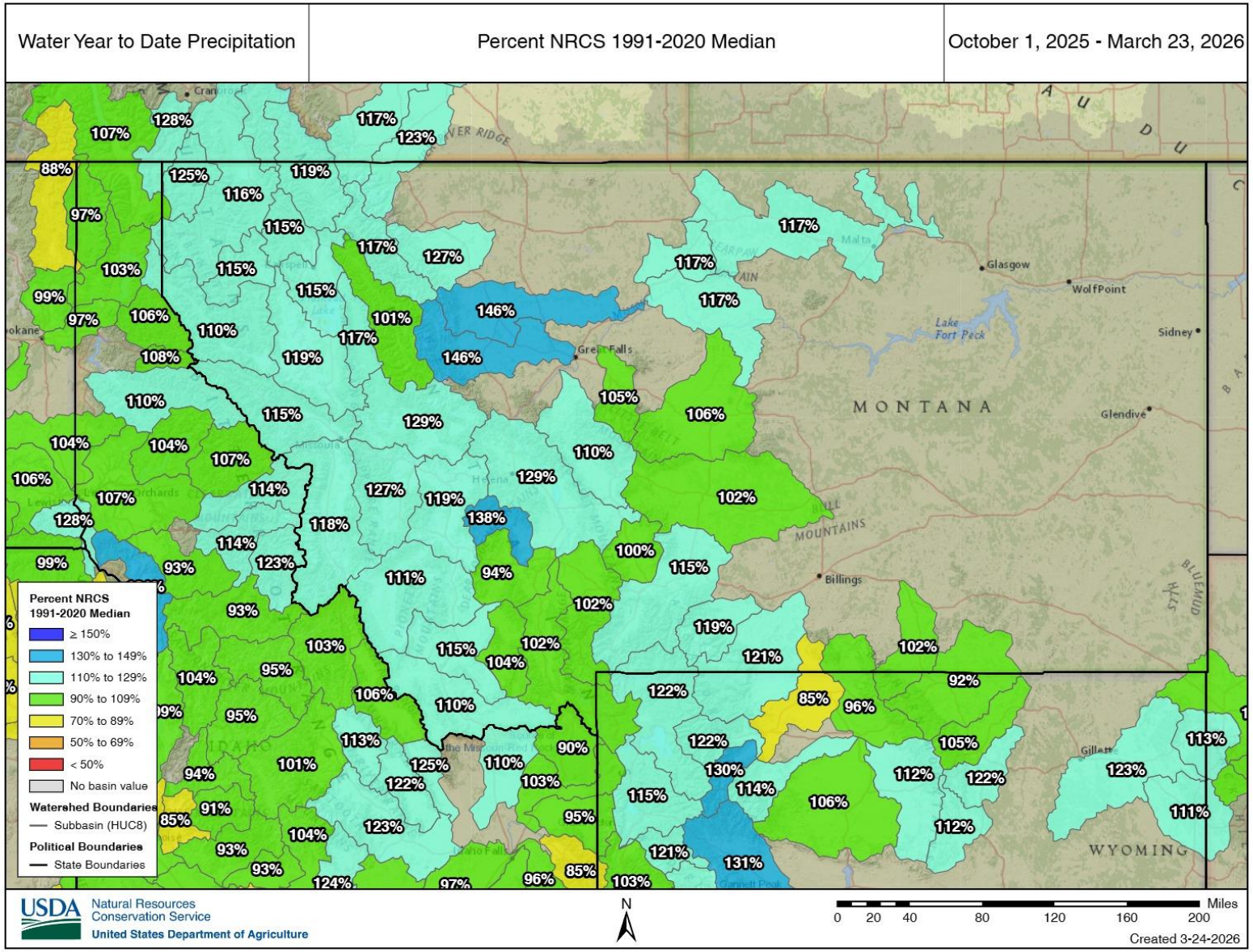
Vapor Pressure Deficit– 12/21/25 – 3/22/26



Water Year Precipitation 10/1/25 - 3/22/26

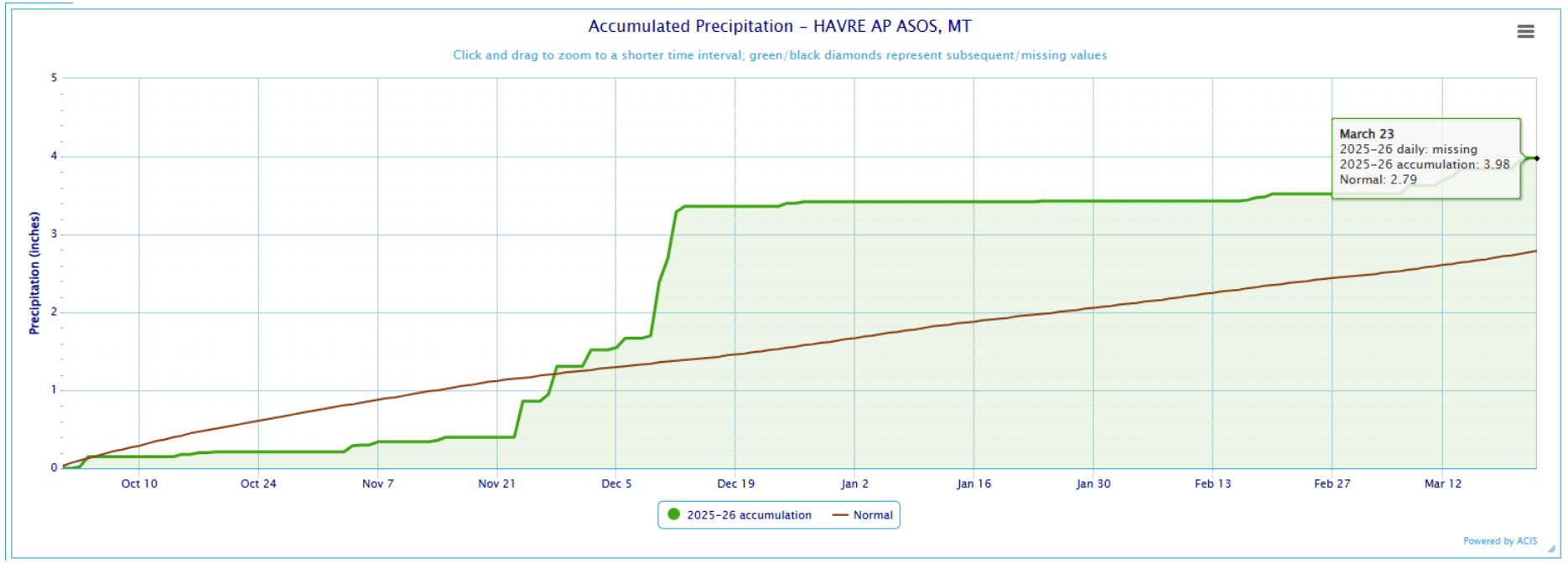


Water Year Precipitation 10/1/25 - 3/22/26

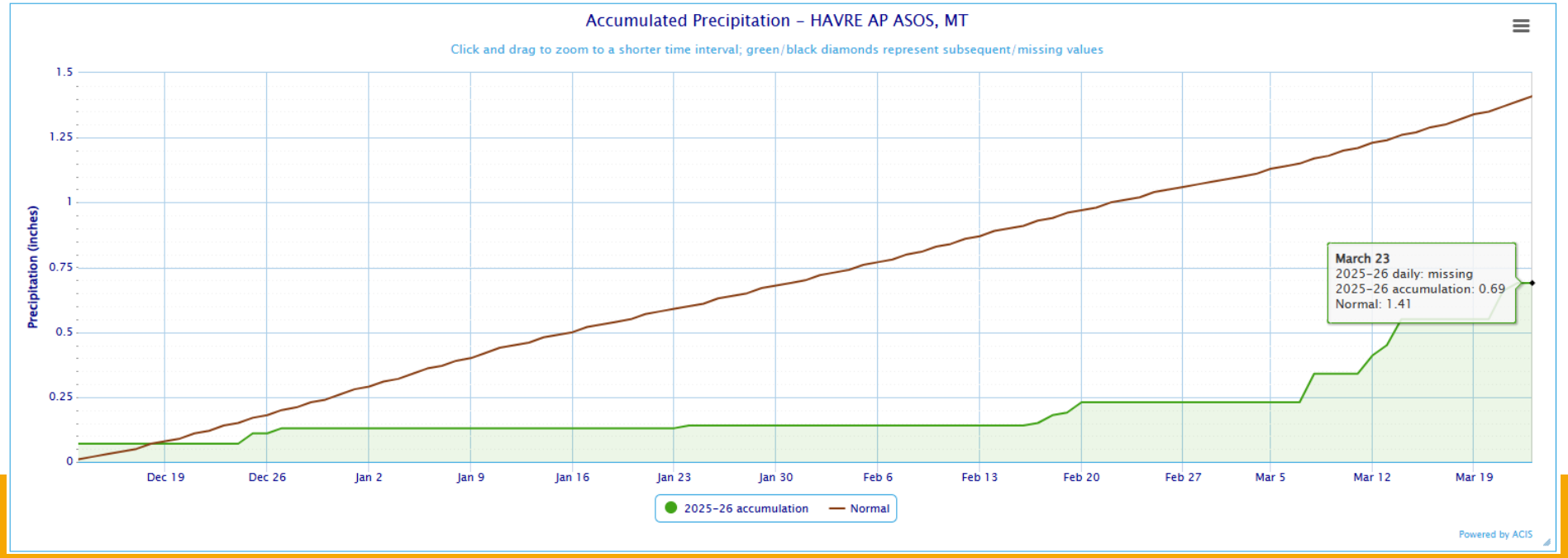


North Central MT

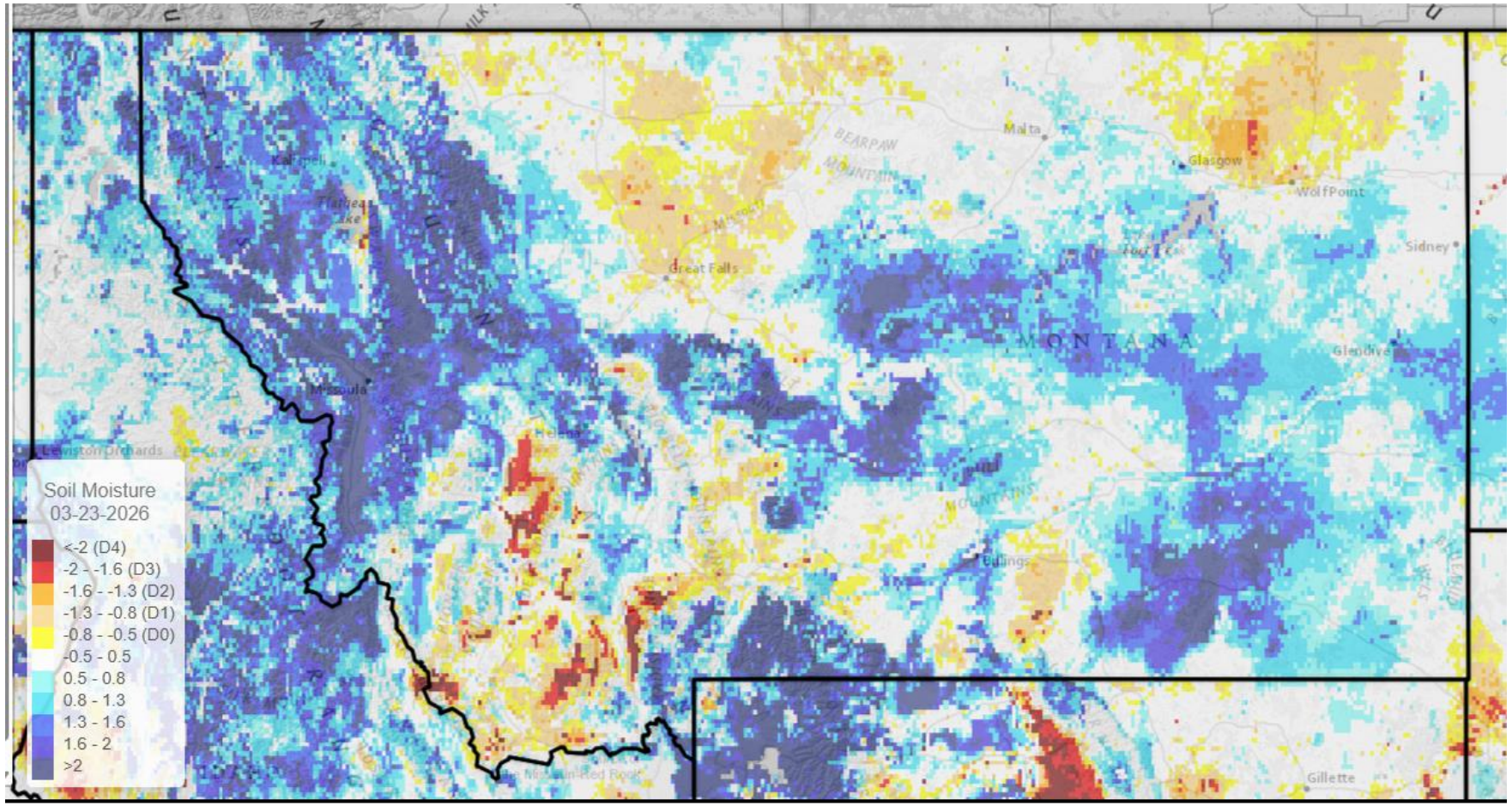
Havre – Precipitation
10/1/25 – 3/23/26



Havre – Precipitation
12/13/25 – 3/23/26



SPoRT Modeled Soil Moisture 3/19/26



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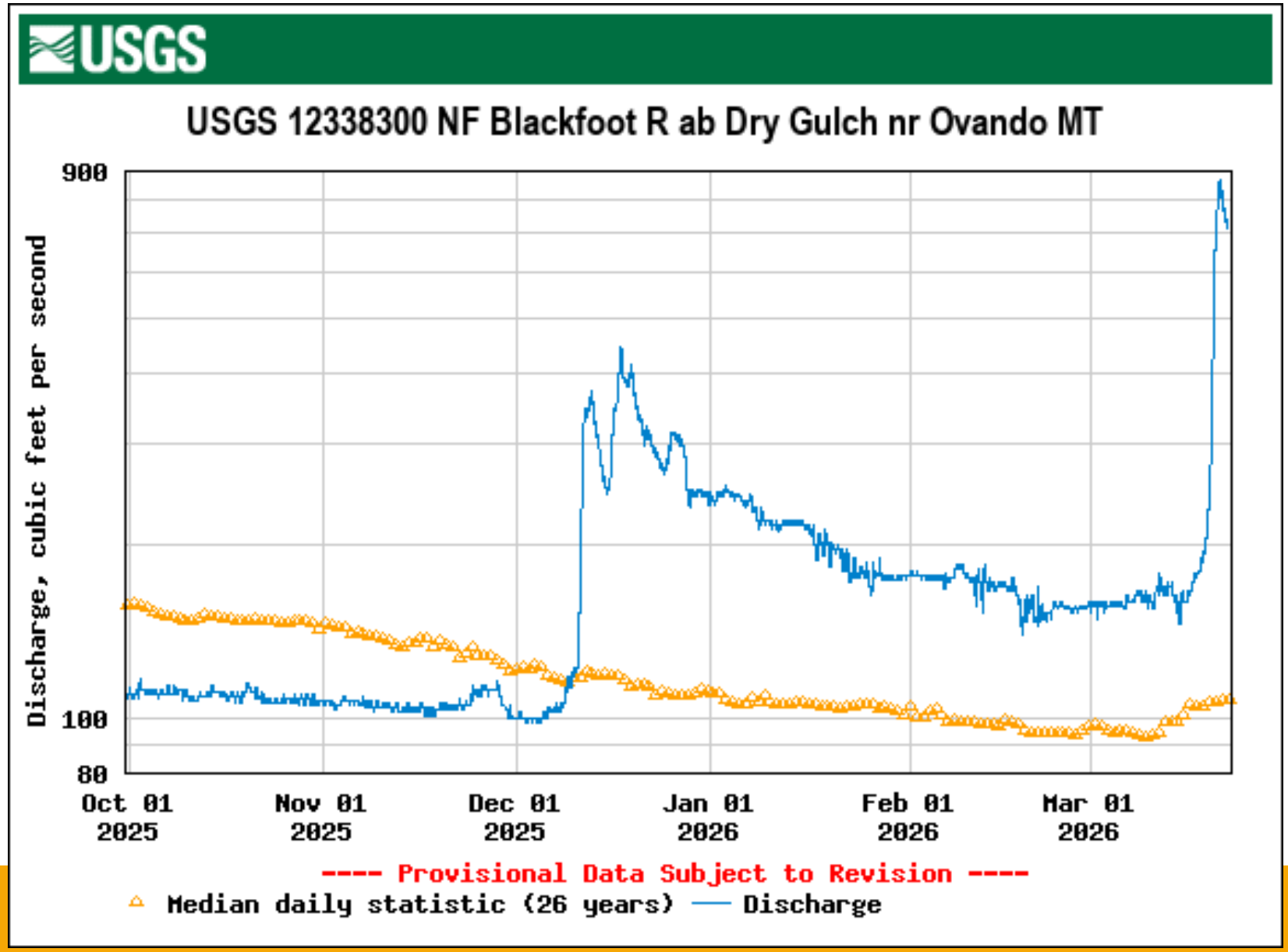
NF Blackfoot River 10/1/25 – 3/23/26



Montana Drought Impact Reporter

Montana Drought Impacts

Disclaimer

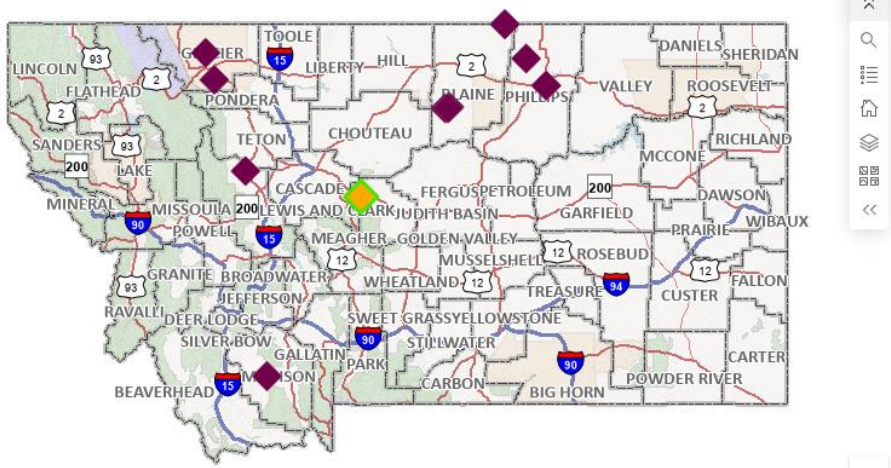
Additional Functionality (all years available)

Reports since October 1, 2024

3/14/26: Madison County
The consistent and pervasive dust storms are not done justice in the first photo. Keep in mind that normally we have some snow cover and or mud for the last several months during this time period of the year. Where there is some soil moisture, the grass has begun to green up, which is over a month earlier than normal.
We received our first snow accumulation of over 1 inch so far this winter last week. It was a good shot of moisture, but has already returned to wind and extremely dusty dry conditions. Abnormal and seemingly constant high winds lasting several weeks now, on top of the long term lack of moisture continue to keep the area dry and very dusty.
Experience: 20 or more years
Photo: Yes

3/13/26: Judith Basin County
Local to western Judith basin county south of hwy 200
Experience: 20 or more years
Photo: No

3/12/26: Lewis and Clark County
There is hardly any snow in the mountains. We have maybe received an inch of moisture this year
Huge area

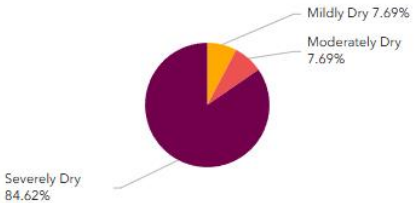


Montana State Library | National Drought Mitigation Center, University of Nebraska

Powered by Esri

Overview Map

How Wet or Dry is it?



How Wet or Dry is it?

2 of 50

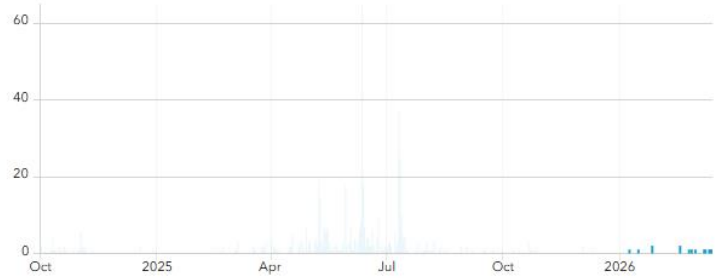
3/8/26 - Madison County

Description: Photo is of the lower foothill area of the Ruby Valley in March which would normally have snow cover most of the winter. It has looked like this for the entire winter so far other than the moisture we received two days ago.

Number of Reports Since 10/1/2024

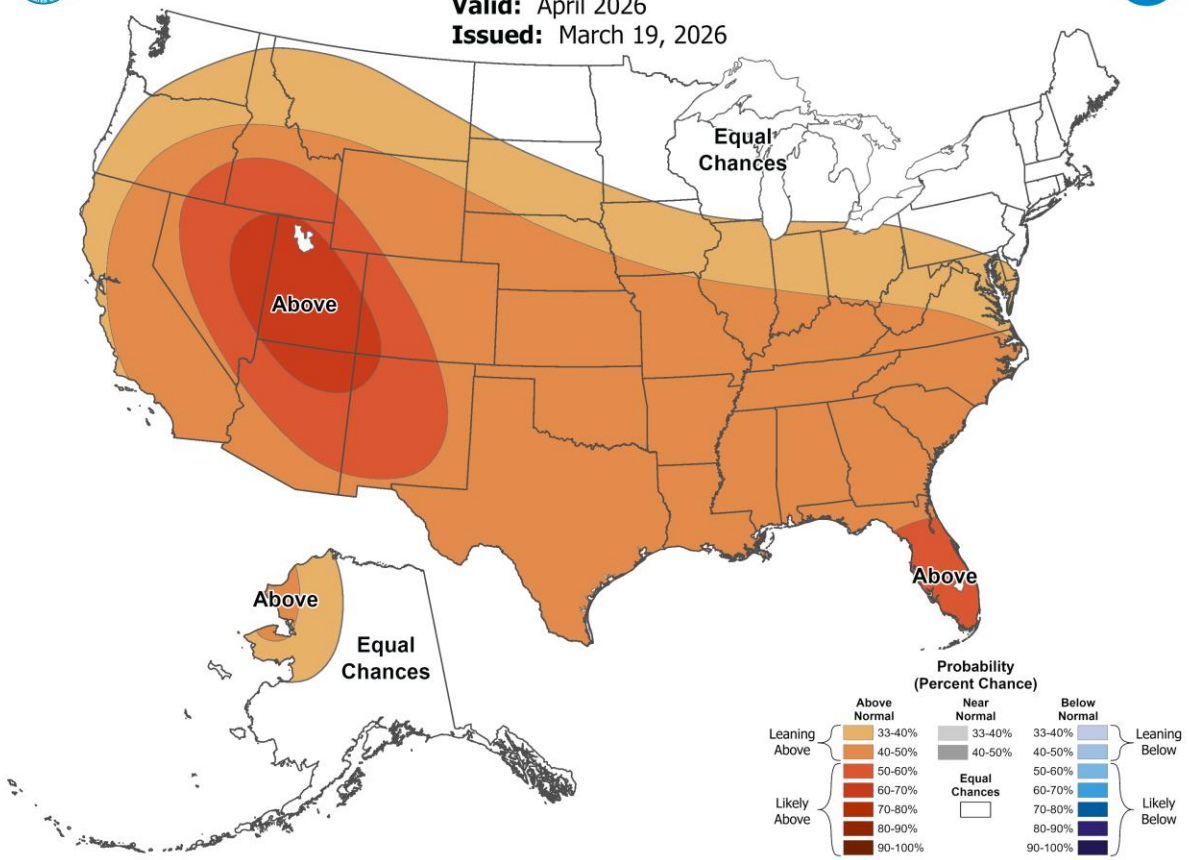
14

Number of Reports by Date



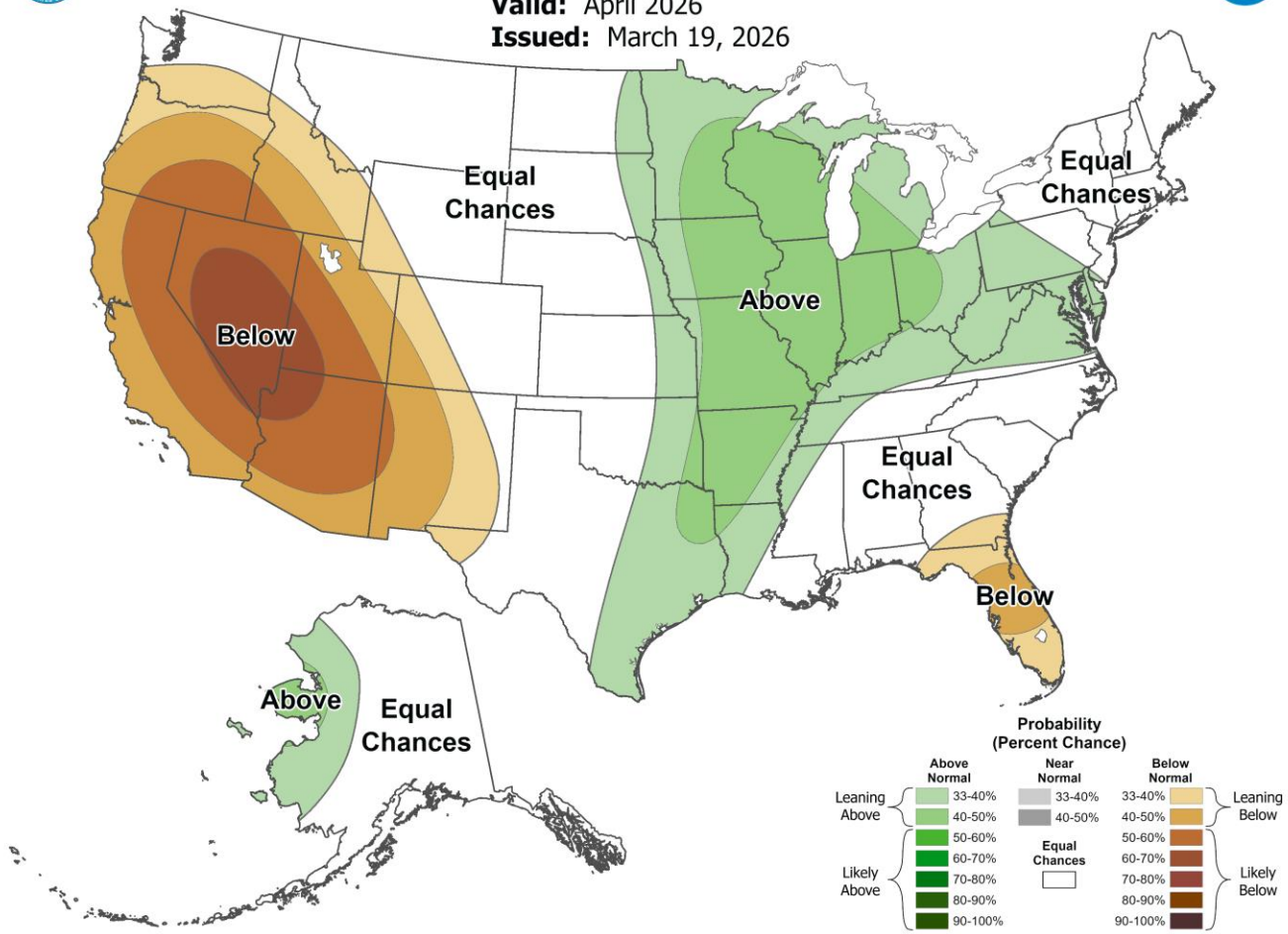
Monthly Temperature Outlook

Valid: April 2026
Issued: March 19, 2026



Monthly Precipitation Outlook

Valid: April 2026
Issued: March 19, 2026



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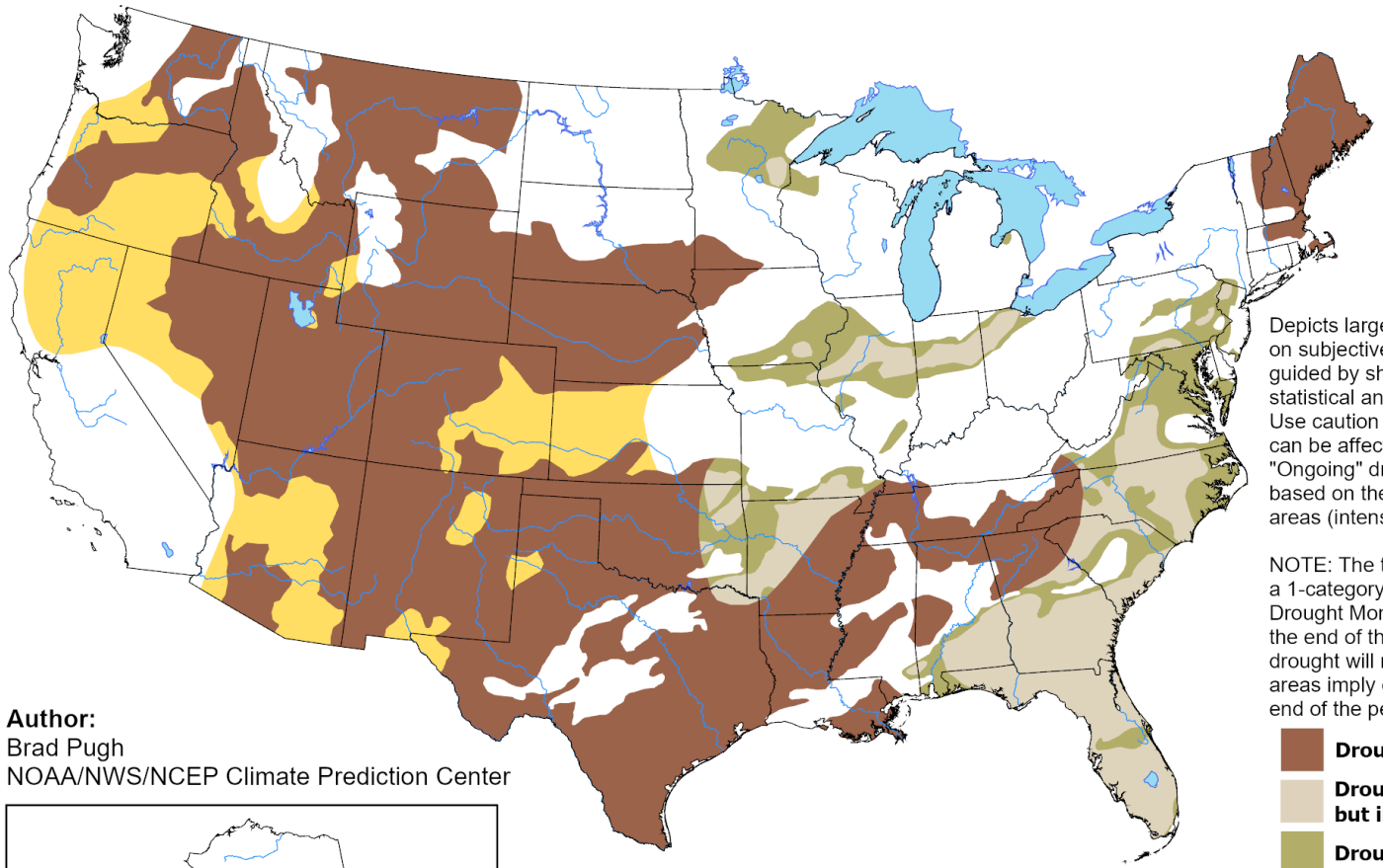
U.S. Seasonal Drought Outlook

Drought Tendency During the Valid Period

Valid for March 19 - June 30, 2026
Released March 19, 2026

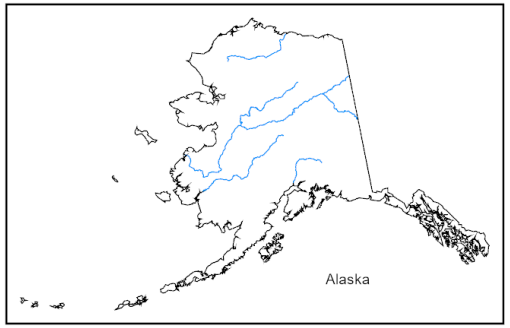


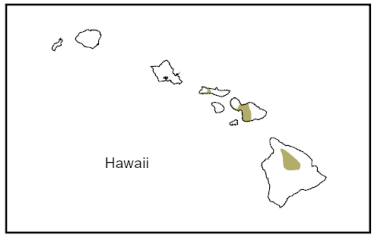
Depicts large-scale trends based on subjectively derived probabilities guided by short- and long-range statistical and dynamical forecasts. Use caution for applications that can be affected by short lived events. "Ongoing" drought areas are based on the U.S. Drought Monitor areas (intensities of D1 to D4).

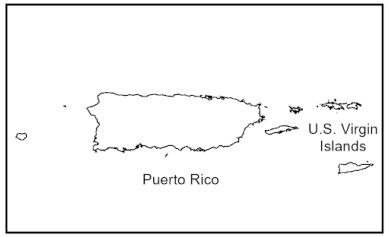
NOTE: The tan areas imply at least a 1-category improvement in the Drought Monitor intensity levels by the end of the period, although drought will remain. The green areas imply drought removal by the end of the period (D0 or none).

- **Drought persists**
- **Drought remains, but improves**
- **Drought removal likely**
- **Drought development likely**
- **No drought**

Author:
Brad Pugh
NOAA/NWS/NCEP Climate Prediction Center







https://go.usa.gov/3eZ73

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Key Takeaways:

- 66% of Montana is currently in drought, 20% of that is severe to extreme due to low snowpack.
- Soil moisture is good to excellent across most of the state. Areas of concern appear in the southwest, north central and northeast regions.
- Streamflows may be reduced this summer due to low snowpack and reduced soil moisture. (Big Hole, Beaverhead, Ruby, Jefferson, Madison, Gallatin, Smith, Shields, Tongue and Powder standout.)
- Low levels in dugouts and stock water ponds could present challenges for livestock and wildlife.
- Conditions in northwest Montana appear better than we have seen since 2022.
- Statewide conditions are uncertain. High temperatures and low snowpack are cause for concern, but good soil moisture and average to wetter than average precipitation over the last 6 months offer reason for optimism.
- Precipitation accumulation and temperatures over the next 8 to 10 weeks will likely determine conditions for the summer.


Questions/Comments?
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406-444-9748
UMRB Drought Indicators Website
//drought.climate.umt.edu