Spring Breakup Outlook for Alaska
Valid April 17, 2026
Alaska-Pacific River Forecast Center
Next Product Issuance: April 24, 2026
www.weather.gov/aprfc

2026 Spring Breakup Outlook for Alaska

Updates from the previous Spring Breakup Outlook

This Breakup Outlook continues to be refined to include more detailed flood potential and breakup timing information, including graphics and tables with community-specific flood risk and forecast breakup dates. Snowpack and ice conditions remain largely unchanged from last month's outlook. The most notable change is in the spring temperature outlook, which now favors below-average temperatures persisting through April. This shift continues to increase the likelihood of a more dynamic breakup. Also, due to recent additional reports of rough, thick ice at Aniak and Kalskag, flood potential has been increased for those communities.

Statewide Flood Potential Overview

The breakup flooding potential is above average across parts of mainland Alaska. In the Interior, the primary areas of concern are the upper Yukon and lower Tanana Rivers, along with the middle Kuskokwim River near Crooked Creek and Aniak/Kalskag. Portions of the middle and lower Yukon, lower Kuskokwim, and the North Slope also face an elevated risk. This increased threat is driven by a combination of above-average snowpack, average to above-average ice thickness, high freeze-up levels, rough ice or freeze-up ice jams reported in several Interior locations, and the potential for delayed snowmelt from below-average April temperatures. In contrast, the Koyukuk, Kobuk, and upper Kuskokwim rivers, as well as rivers across Southcentral Alaska, have a lower breakup flood threat due to below-average snowpack. As we wrap up Flood Preparedness Week on Saturday 4/18, we encourage communities to review flood response plans and preparedness actions ahead of the breakup.

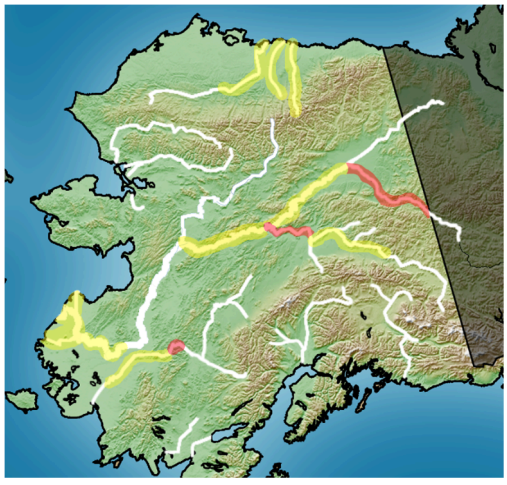
2026 Breakup Flooding Potential

Areas of Greatest Concern:

- **Upper Yukon River**
- **Lower Tanana River**
- **Kuskokwim at Crooked Creek**

Other Areas with Elevated Concern:

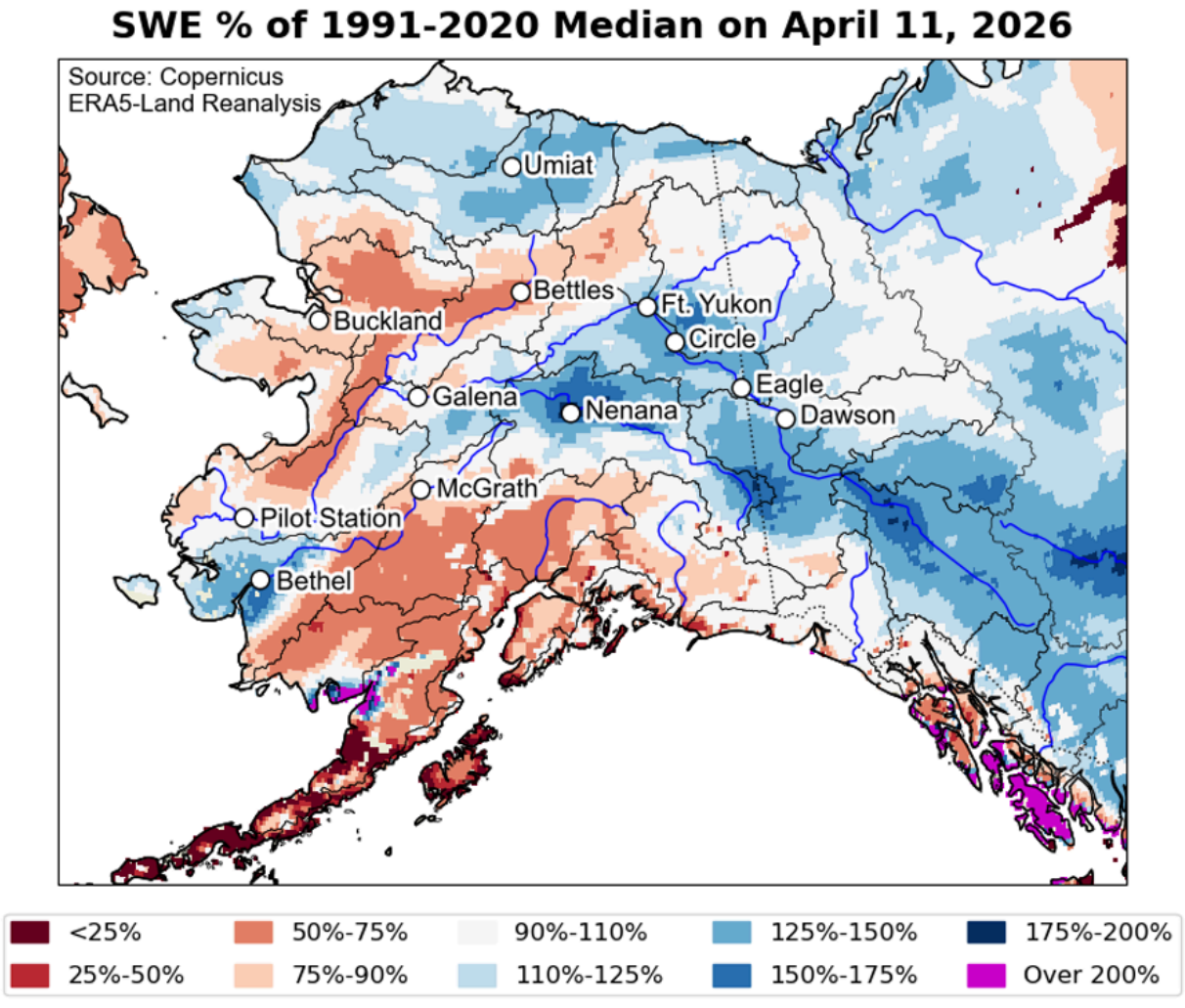
- **Middle and Lower Yukon River**
- **Middle Tanana River**
- **Middle and Lower Kuskokwim River**
- **North Slope**



This outlook is based on observed snowpack, ice thickness reports, and seasonal temperature outlooks. The term ‘normal’ is defined as being at or near the climatological average, which is typically defined over a 30-year period of record.

Snowpack

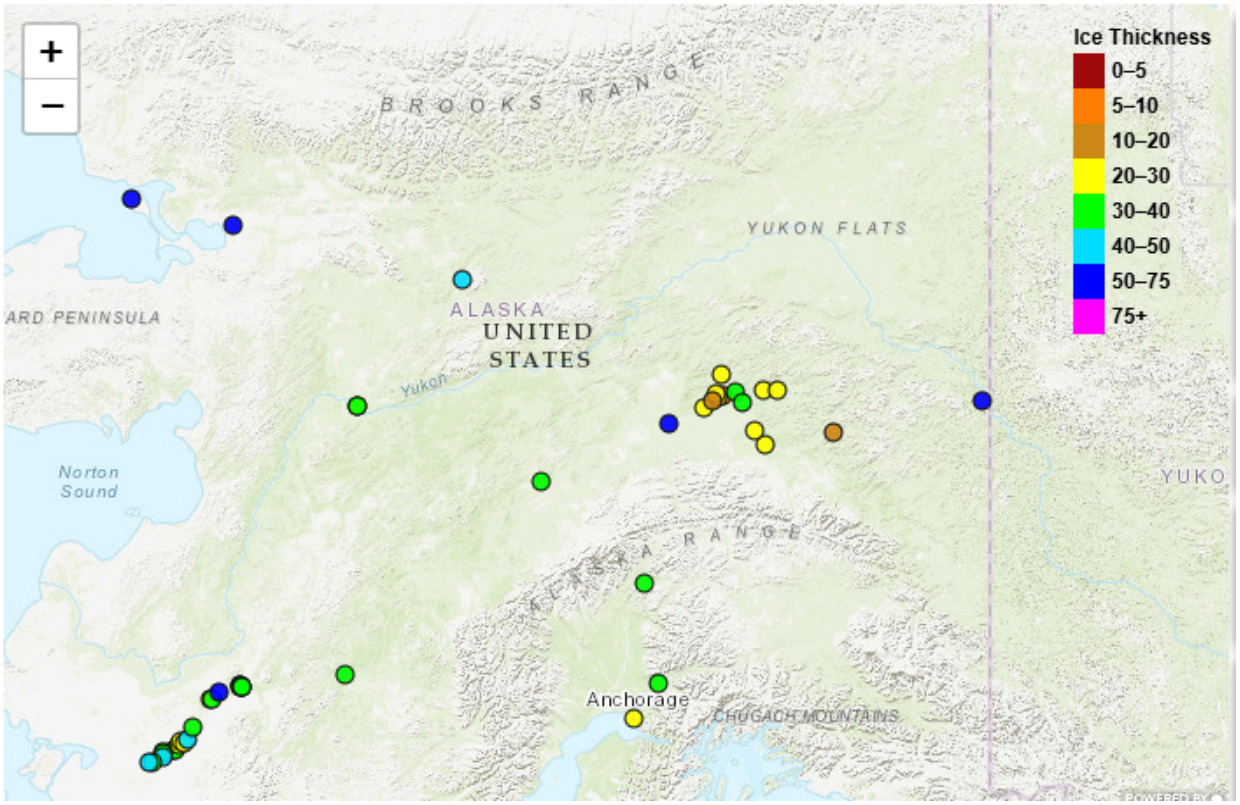
The April 1 snowpack analysis from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), along with the updated ERA5 snow water equivalent estimates (below), indicates a highly variable snowpack across Alaska. Most notably, snowpack across the Canadian Yukon and eastern Interior Alaska, including the Upper Yukon and Tanana River basins, is 130–150% of normal, with several Canadian Yukon sites reporting record-high values. Above-average snowpack is also present across the Kuskokwim Delta and parts of the North Slope (110–125%). In contrast, snowpack is below normal across the Koyukuk and Kobuk River basins, much of southwest Alaska (including key Kuskokwim tributary watersheds), and Southcentral Alaska, generally ranging from 50–90% of normal.



River Ice Observations

Interior Alaska experienced its coldest winter in approximately 30 to 50 years, resulting in generally above-average river ice thickness based on measurements from late February through early April. On the Tanana River at Nenana, early April ice thickness—based on records since 1989—was the second highest observed for that time of year. Many Interior rivers also saw high freeze-up stages and jumbled ice conditions due to freeze-up ice jams. Notably, on the Lower Yukon River, the USGS gauge at Pilot Station recorded its highest freeze-up stage on record. Farther downstream, residents in Emmonak and Alakanuk reported rough ice conditions and strong, well-established shorefast sea ice at the river mouth. On the Kuskokwim River, a freeze-up jam was reported just downstream of Crooked Creek, similar to conditions preceding the record flooding in 2011. Stretches of very rough ice were reported between Aniak and Bethel. These conditions increase the likelihood of ice jam formation and elevate the risk of flooding during spring breakup.

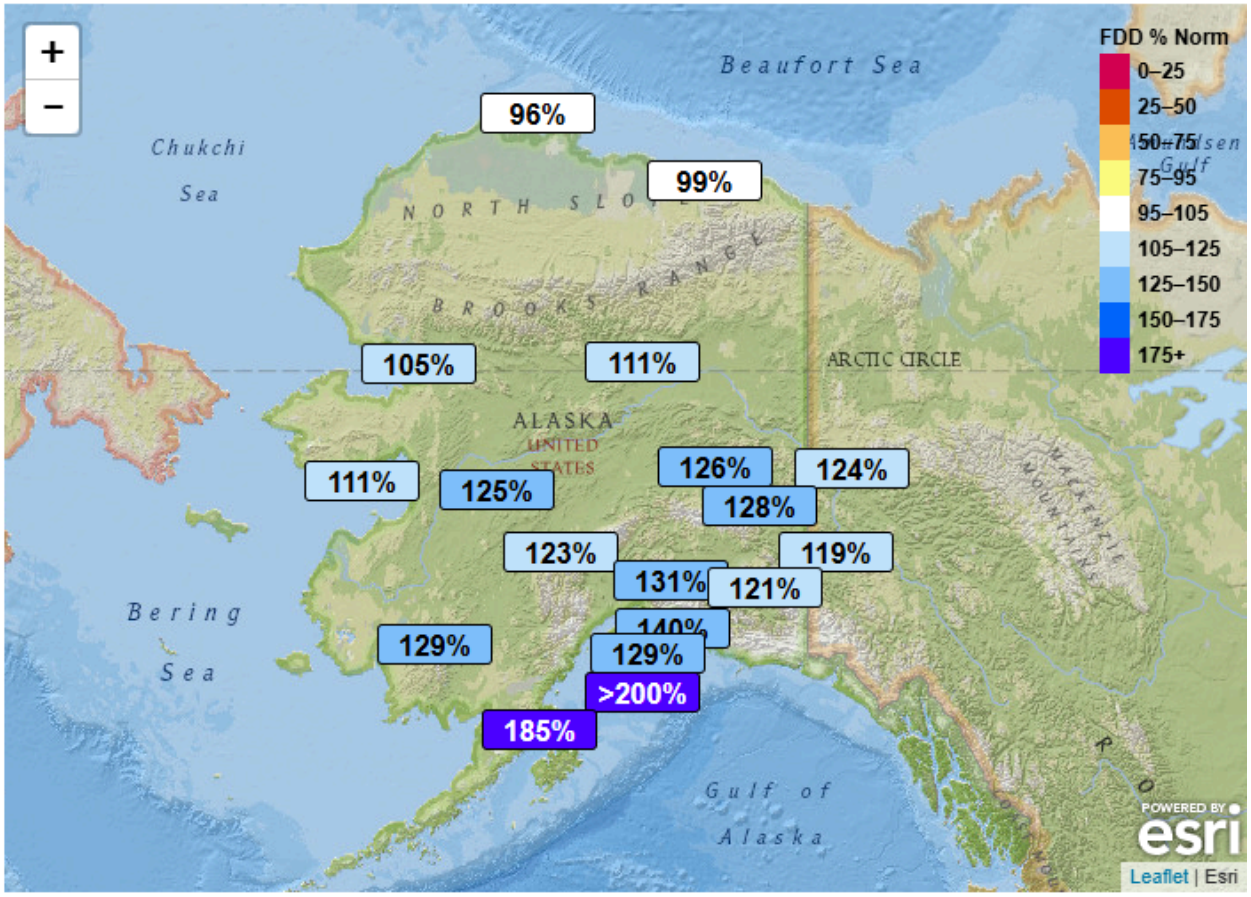
Alaska Rivers and Lakes Ice Thickness Map



[Link to % Average ice thickness map]

Cumulative Freezing Degree Days (FDD) are commonly used as a proxy for river ice thickness in Alaska, especially since sites with direct river ice observations are limited in number. This winter has been notably cold across much of the state. South of the Brooks Range, FDD totals are significantly above normal, generally ranging from 110% to 170% of the long-term average. In contrast, FDD totals north of the Brooks Range have remained near normal.

Freezing Degree Days - Percent of Normal



Link to freezing degree day map

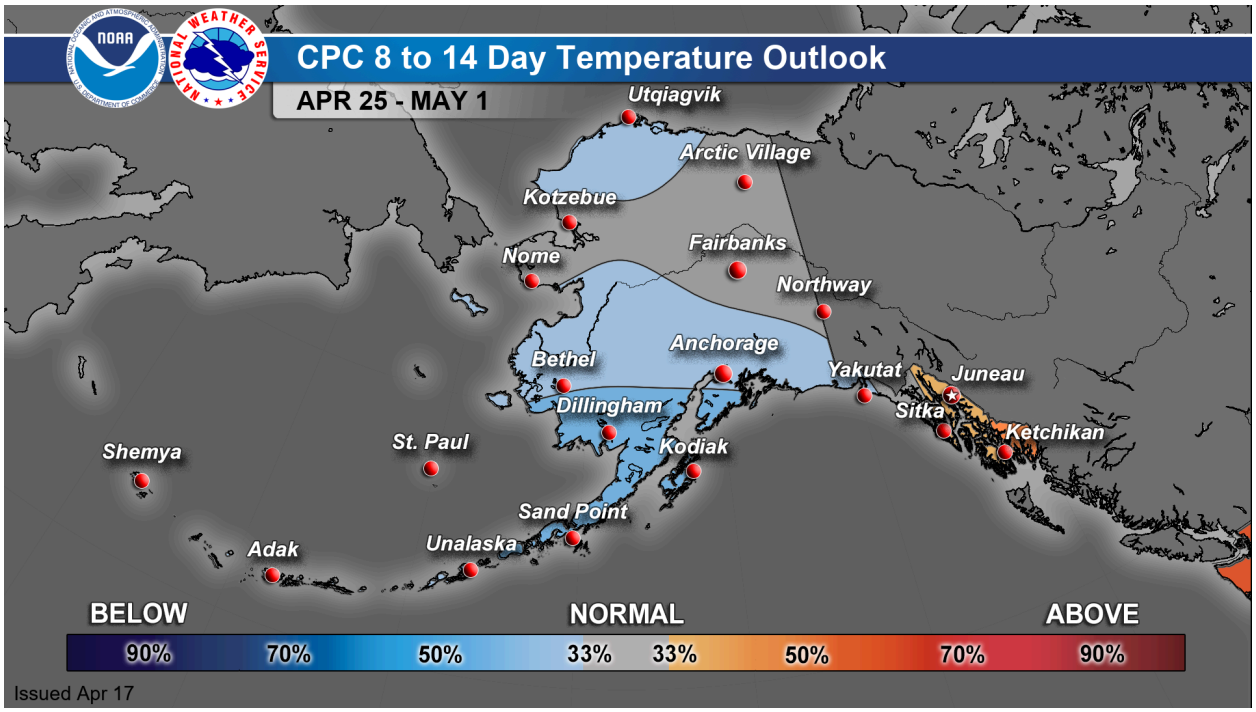
Climate Outlook

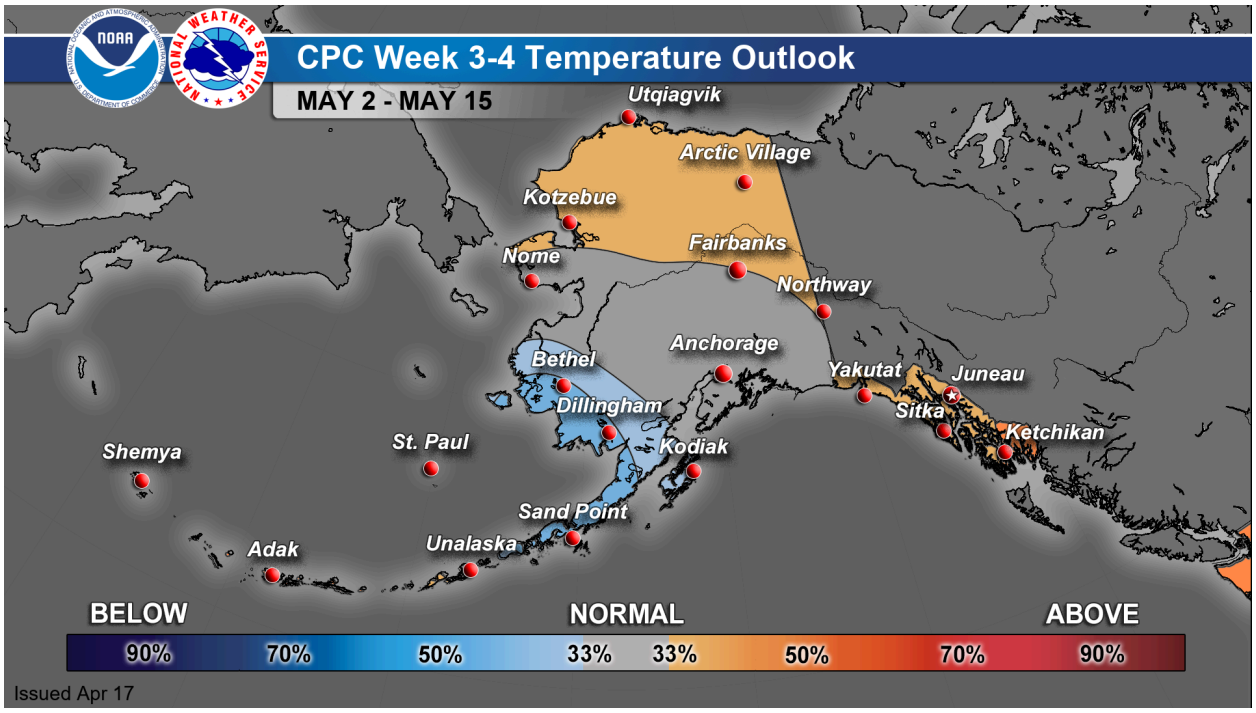
Spring temperatures in April and May are the most critical factor in determining the severity of ice breakups. Dynamic breakups, which carry a higher risk of ice jam flooding, typically require cooler-than-normal temperatures in early April, followed by a rapid warm-up to summer-like temperatures in late April or early May.

The latest Climate Prediction Center (CPC) temperature outlooks favor predominantly below normal conditions across much of Alaska through the remainder of April. The greatest likelihood of below normal temperatures is over the southern mainland, including the Kuskokwim and Lower Yukon Basins, and areas north of the Brooks Range. From the Seward Peninsula

through the northeast Interior, conditions lean closer to near normal temperatures. Extended-range guidance indicates a shift toward a warmer-than-normal pattern into early May, though uncertainty increases at longer lead times.

In the near term, the cooler pattern will likely slow snowmelt, delay river ice degradation, and support later-than-normal breakup timing. Limited sustained warmth will suppress gradual thermal weakening of the ice, allowing thicker, more intact ice to persist into late April, with the potential for a more rapid warmup heading into May. These conditions increase the potential for a more dynamic breakup.

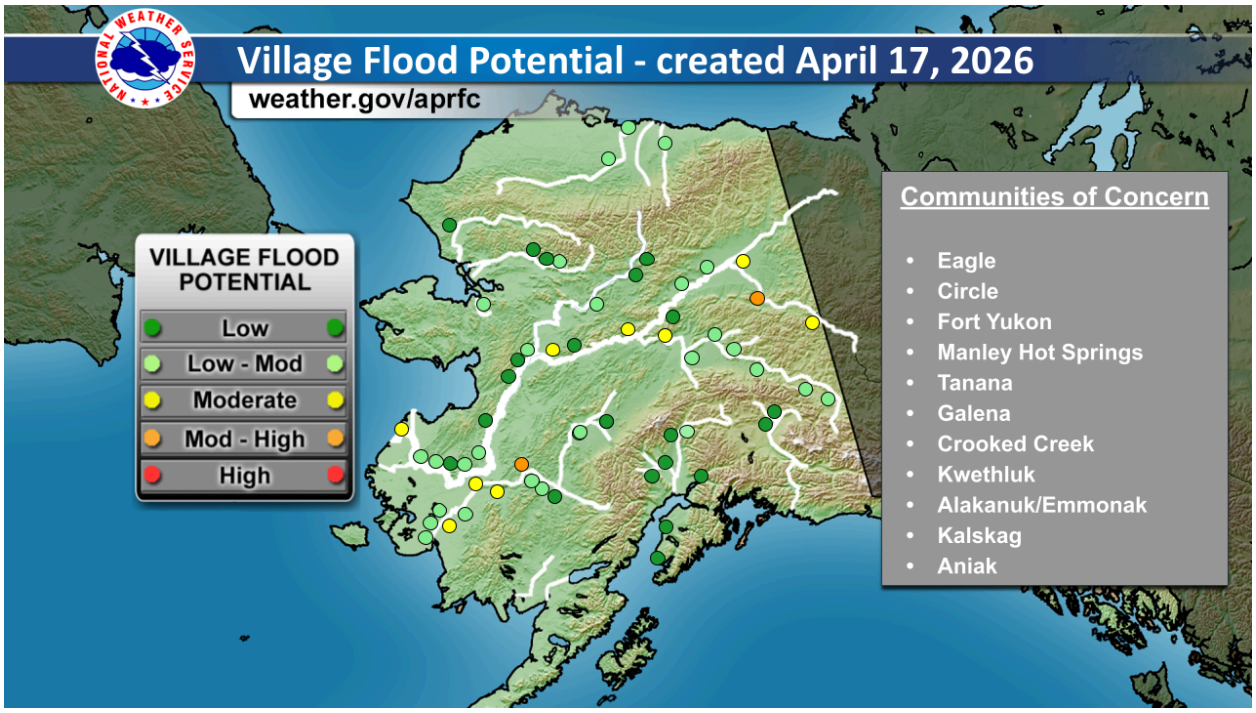




Link to CPC Outlooks

Breakup Flood Potential and Timing

The likelihood of flooding from snowmelt and/or ice jams is initially based on flood frequency within the 2000–2021 historical record and then adjusted to reflect current conditions. This year, communities along the upper Yukon and Tanana Rivers have the highest probabilities of experiencing breakup flooding, along with select communities along the lower Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers.



For more detail and to see the Flood Potential Map refer to the APRFC website at: https://www.weather.gov/aprfc/floodpotential

The current outlook indicates a later-than-normal breakup this year. Rivers in the eastern Interior are expected to break up 3–5 days late, while the Kuskokwim River is forecast to be near normal to approximately 1-4 days late. Breakup timing across all other areas is expected to be near normal.

The following tables give an estimation of snowmelt runoff volume, flood potential, and forecast breakup date range for various locations across the state. Median breakup dates are for the period 1980 through 2023 and are calculated for locations with at least 5 years of data. Forecast breakup timing is expressed as a range based on snowmelt runoff volume and flood potential. Locations where breakup has already occurred are identified with two asterisks following a single date; for example, Kuskokwim River at Nikolai breakup occurred on April 16, 2024 (4/16**).

Tanana-Fairbanks						
River-Reach	**Location**	**Snowmelt Runoff Volume**	**Village Flood Potential**	**Median Breakup Date**	**Years of Record**	**Forecast Breakup Date Range**
Chena River		Above				
	Chena Lakes		Low-Moderate			

	Project					
Tanana River		Above				
	Northway		Low-Moderate	4/26	32	4/28-5/4
	Salcha		Low-Moderate	4/26	5	4/28-5/4
	Fairbanks		Low-Moderate	4/30	23	5/1-5/7
	Nenana		Low-Moderate	4/30	46	5/1-5/7
	Manley HS		Moderate	5/3	33	5/4-5/10

Yukon River						
River-Reach	**Location**	**Snowmelt Runoff Volume**	**Village Flood Potential**	**Median Breakup Date**	**Years of Record**	**Forecast Breakup Date Range**
Yukon River (Upper)		Above				
	Dawson, YT		Low	5/4	46	5/6-5/12
	Eagle		Moderate	5/4	46	5/6-5/12
	Circle		Moderate-High	5/9	42	5/11-5/17
	Fort Yukon		Moderate	5/11	42	5/13-5/19
	Beaver		Low-Moderate	5/11	30	5/13-5/19
	Stevens Village		Low-Moderate	5/11	28	5/13-5/19
	Rampart		Low	5/12	29	5/14-5/20
Yukon River (Mid)		Above				
	Tanana		Moderate	5/8	41	5/10-5/16
	Ruby		Low	5/9	40	5/10-5/16
	Galena		Moderate	5/11	45	5/12-5/18
	Koyukuk		Low-Moderate	5/10	19	5/11-5/17
	Nulato		Low	5/12	27	5/13-5/19
	Kaltag		Low	5/12	40	5/13-5/19
Yukon River (Lower)		Above				
	Grayling		Low	5/12	17	5/13-5/19
	Anvik		Low	5/14	37	5/15-5/21
	Holy Cross		Low-Moderate	5/14	39	5/14-5/20

	Russian Mission		Low-Moderate	5/15	39	5/15-5/21
	Marshall		Low	5/15	34	5/15-5/21
	Pilot Station		Low-Moderate	5/13	29	5/13-5/19
	Mountain Village		Low-Moderate	5/15	39	5/15-5/21
	Alakanuk/Emmonak		Moderate	5/20	41	5/20-5/26

Kuskokwim River						
River-Reach	**Location**	**Snowmelt Runoff Volume**	**Village Flood Potential**	**Median Breakup Date**	**Years of Record**	**Forecast Breakup Date Range**
Kuskokwim River		Below				
	Nikolai		Low	4/23	40	4/23-4/29
	McGrath		Low-Moderate	5/4	46	5/4-5/10
	Stony River		Low	5/2	38	5/2-5/8
	Sleetmute		Low-Moderate	5/2	37	5/2-5/8
	Red Devil		Low-Moderate	5/3	40	5/3-5/9
	Crooked Creek		Moderate-High	5/4	40	5/4-5/10
	Aniak		Moderate	5/5	43	5/5-5/11
	Kalskag		Moderate	5/5	37	5/5-5/11
	Tuluksak		Low-Moderate	5/7	34	5/6-5/12
	Akiak		Low-Moderate	5/8	40	5/7-5/13
	Kwethluk		Moderate	5/5	13	5/4-5/10
	Bethel		Low-Moderate	5/9	46	5/8-5/14
	Napakiak		Low-Moderate	5/10	31	5/9-5/15

Southeast-Southcentral						
River-Reach	**Location**	**Snowmelt Runoff Volume**	**Village Flood Potential**	**Median Breakup Date**	**Years of Record**	**Forecast Breakup Date Range**
Southeast		Average				

Kenai River		Below				
Anchor River		Below				
Matanuska River		Below				
Susitna River		Below				
	Gold Creek		Low-Moderate	5/2	10	4/29-5/5
	Sunshine		Low	5/2	37	4/29-5/5
Talkeetna		Below				
	Talkeetna		Low	4/28	5	4/25-5/1
Yentna River		Below				
	Lake Creek		Low	5/1	34	4/28-5/4
Skwentna River		Below				
	Skwentna		Low	4/30	31	4/27-5/3
Copper River		Average				
	Gakona		Low	5/1	36	4/28-5/4
	Gulkana		Low	5/1	34	4/28-5/4

North Slope-Northwest						
River-Reach	**Location**	**Snowmelt Runoff Volume**	**Village Flood Potential**	**Median Breakup Date**	**Years of Record**	**Forecast Breakup Date Range**
Koyukuk River		Below				
	Bettles		Low	5/10	44	5/8-5/14
	Allakaket		Low	5/11	40	5/9-5/15
	Hughes		Low-Moderate	5/11	39	5/9-5/15
Seward Peninsula		Below				
	Buckland		Low-Moderate	5/18	36	5/15-5/21
Kobuk River		Below				
	Kobuk		Low-Moderate	5/14	42	5/11-5/17
	Shungnak		Low	5/16	34	5/13-5/19
	Ambler		Low	5/16	40	5/13-5/19

Noatak River		Average				
	Noatak		Low	5/19	27	5/16-5/22
Brooks Range		Above				
	Colville at Umiat		Low-Moderate	5/25	25	5/22-5/28
	Colville at Colville Village		Low-Moderate	6/3	23	5/31-6/6
Sagavanirktok River		Above				
	Dalton Highway		Low-Moderate			

*Median break dates are for the period 1980 through 2023 and are calculated for locations with at least 5 years of data.

For additional details, please see our breakup video from earlier this week.The next Spring Breakup Outlook will be issued on April 24, 2026.

For more information and to submit comments, please contact:

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