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 the previous outlook, other than noticeable melt-off of snowpack in lower elevations of the Kuskokwim Delta and Tanana Valley. While not in full-swing, breakup began with the Kuskokwim at Nikolai on April 25.

The most notable change is in the spring temperature outlook, which now favors near-normal to below normal temperatures through the first half of May. This is a change from the outlook a week ago, which favored above normal temperatures through early May. This trend could delay breakup across the state an extra day or two and is helping maintain ice cover and slow melt out. Climate models do continue to indicate above normal temperatures the second half of May. This rapid transition could increase the likelihood of a dynamic breakup, but timing will be critical. There is a good chance that widespread breakup will occur before the rapid warmup sets in. Overall, this combination continues to increase the likelihood of a more dynamic breakup.

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 river levels at freeze-up, rough ice or freeze-up ice jams reported in several Interior locations, and the 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. Communities are encouraged to review their flood response plans and preparedness actions in advance of breakup.

Beyond main river ice effects during breakup, snowmelt flooding in small channels and ponding on frozen ground during warm days is possible. Ice may block these channels, causing rapid rises, strong currents, and localized flooding. Use caution when traveling off main rivers and stay aware of recent weather and river conditions.

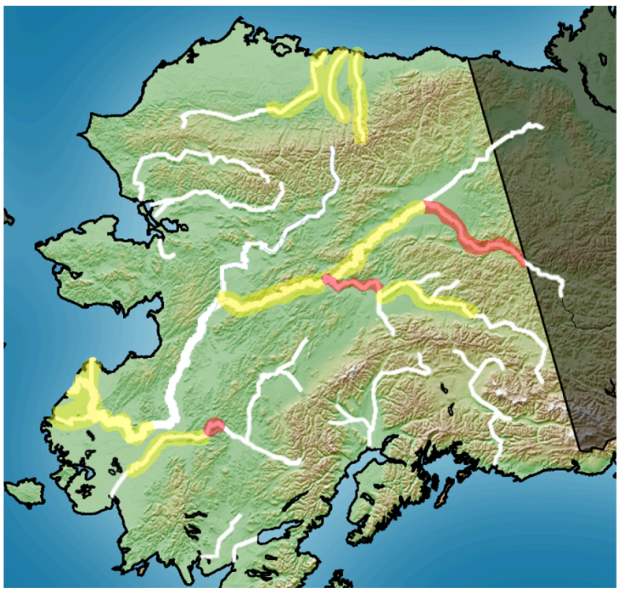
2026 Breakup Flooding Potential

Areas of Greatest Concern:

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

Other Areas with Elevated Concern:

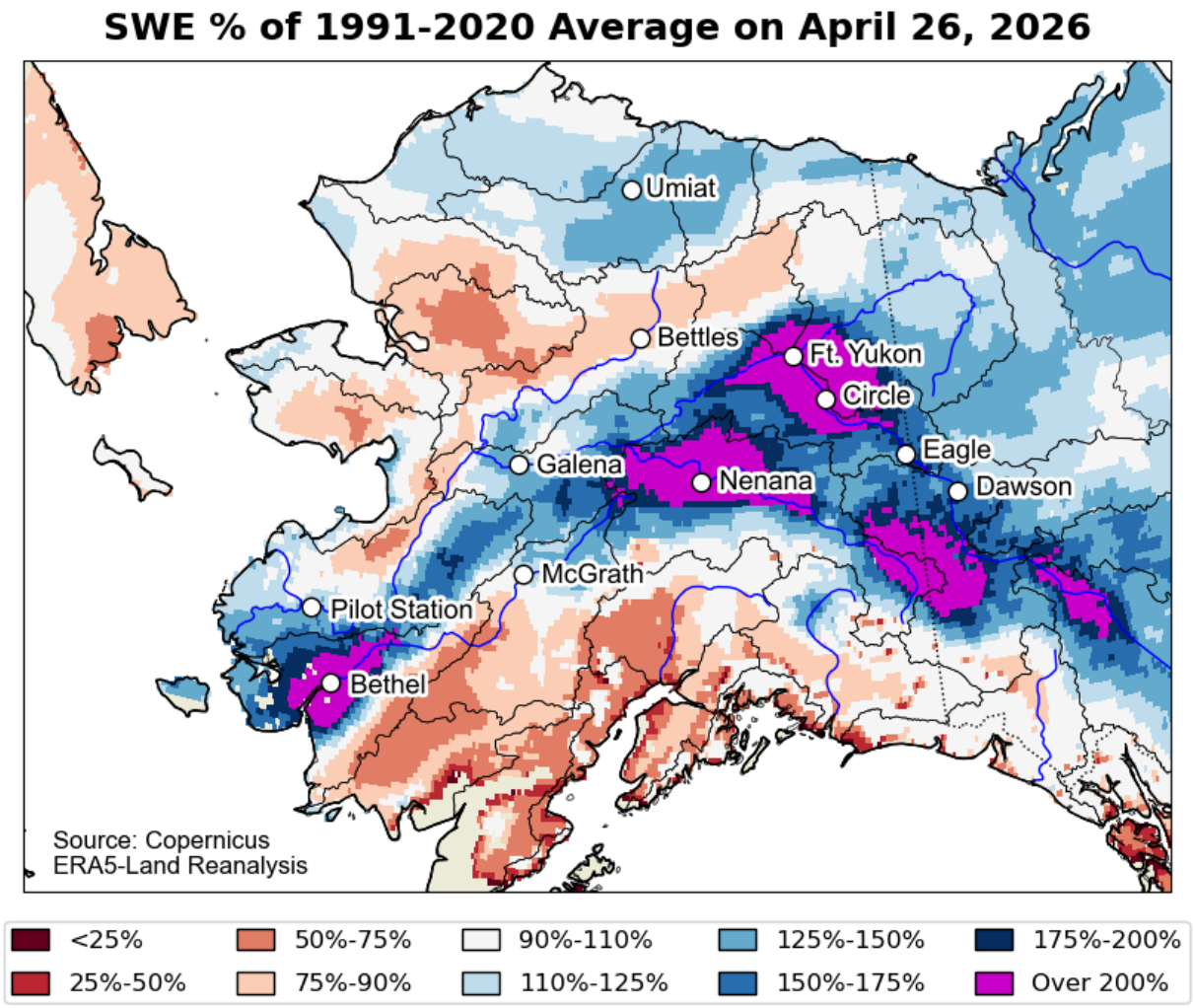
- **Middle and Lower Yukon River**
- **Middle Tanana River**
- **Middle and Lower Kuskokwim River**
- **North Slope**



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), indicated 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 remained well above average through mid April. Above-average snowpack is also present in parts of the Kuskokwim Delta and parts of the North Slope. 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. The May 1 snowpack analysis is not yet available but will be included in next week's update. Current automated snowpack observations indicate that snowmelt has been steady in the Kuskokwim basin and has started to accelerate in recent mild temperatures over the Alcan and lower elevation of the Tanana Valley, but has been slow at higher elevations in the Chena Basin.



River Ice Observations

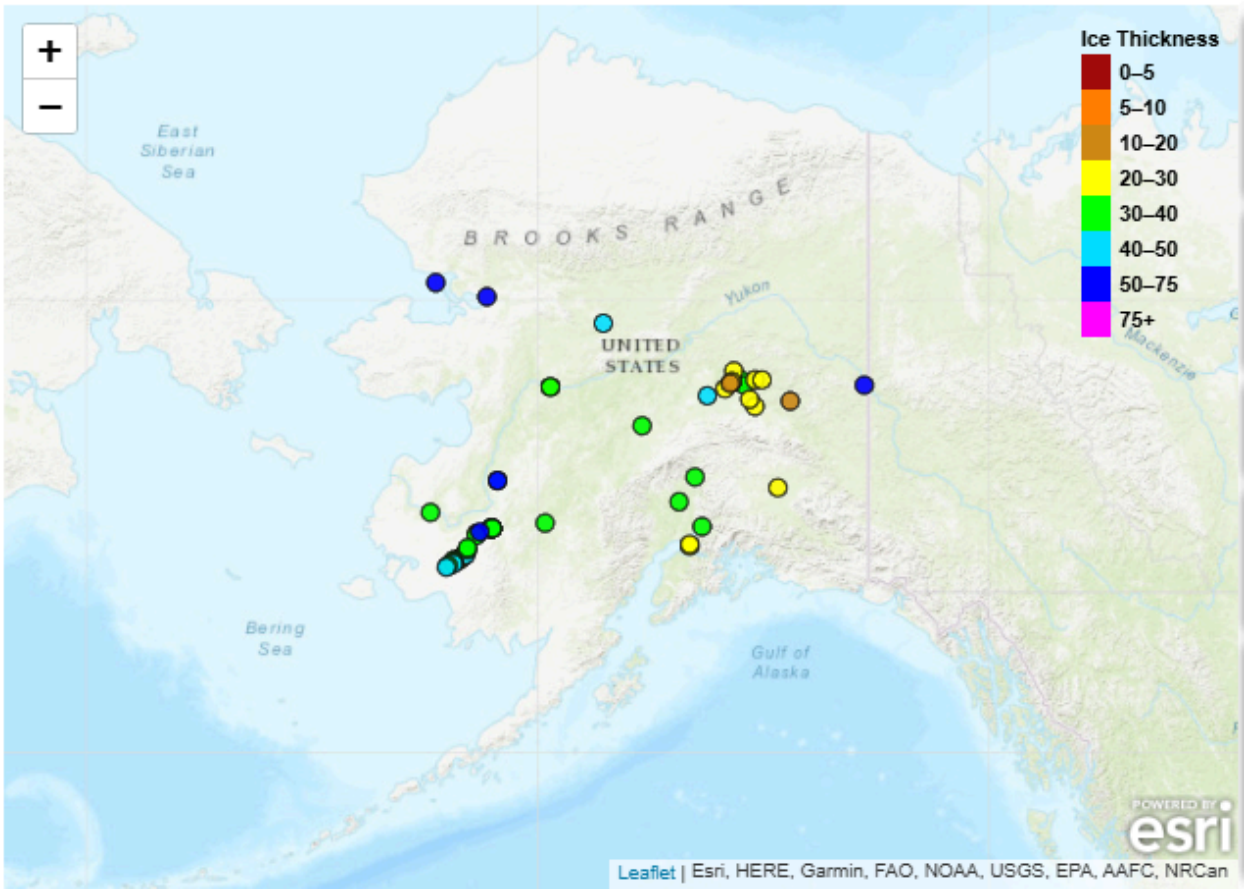
Interior Alaska experienced its coldest winter in approximately 30 to 50 years, resulting in generally above-average river ice thickness based on measurements from late February through mid April. On the Tanana River at Nenana, early April ice thickness remained well above average. However, it was recently reported that the Nenana River, a tributary of the Tanana River, has several open leads with flowing water.

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 gage 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.

Based on these observations the likelihood of ice jam formation is increased and the risk of flooding is elevated during spring breakup.

On the Kuskokwim River, a freeze-up ice jam occurred just below Crooked Creek this past winter, similar to conditions that preceded the record flooding in 2011. In addition, stretches of very rough, broken ice have been observed between Aniak and Bethel. Ice on the Kuskokwim remains largely solid, but signs of change are beginning to emerge. Nikolai broke up on the south fork of the upper Kuskokwim on April 25. There have been reports that ice in the Tuluksak River is shifting, and that the Kwethluk River and Napaskiak Slough are open.

Alaska Rivers and Lakes Ice Thickness Map

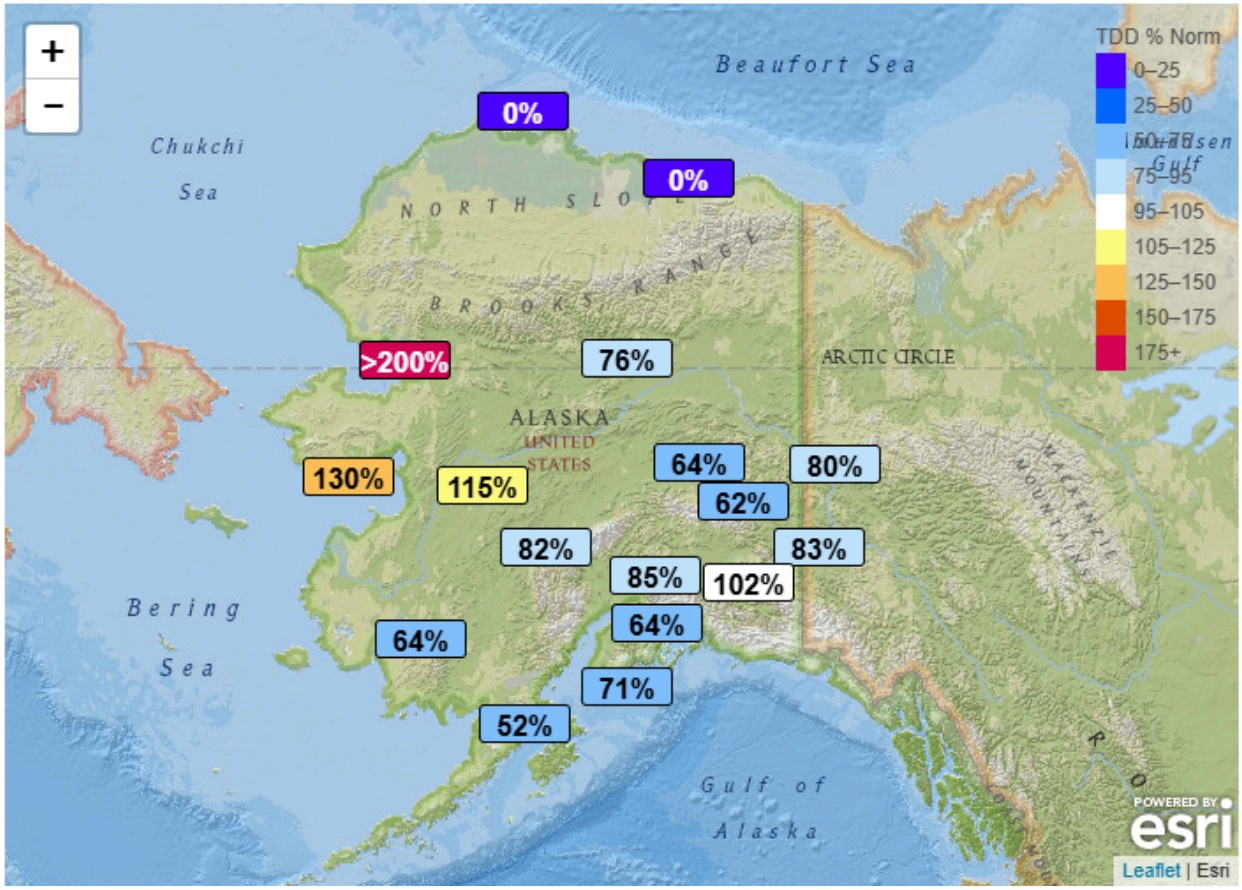


[Link to % Average ice thickness map]

Thawing degree days (TDD) are used to measure the accumulation of warmth over time. As TDDs increase in spring, they reflect the progressive melting of snowpack and weakening of river ice. The current TDD map points to a notably delayed spring warm-up over much of Alaska. Across most of the Southwest and Interior Alaska, values generally range from about 0%–40% of normal, suggesting below-normal thaw progression and a slower weakening of ice

cover. These conditions continue to favor a later breakup timing, though conditions could still shift quickly with sustained warming.

Thawing Degree Days - Percent of Normal



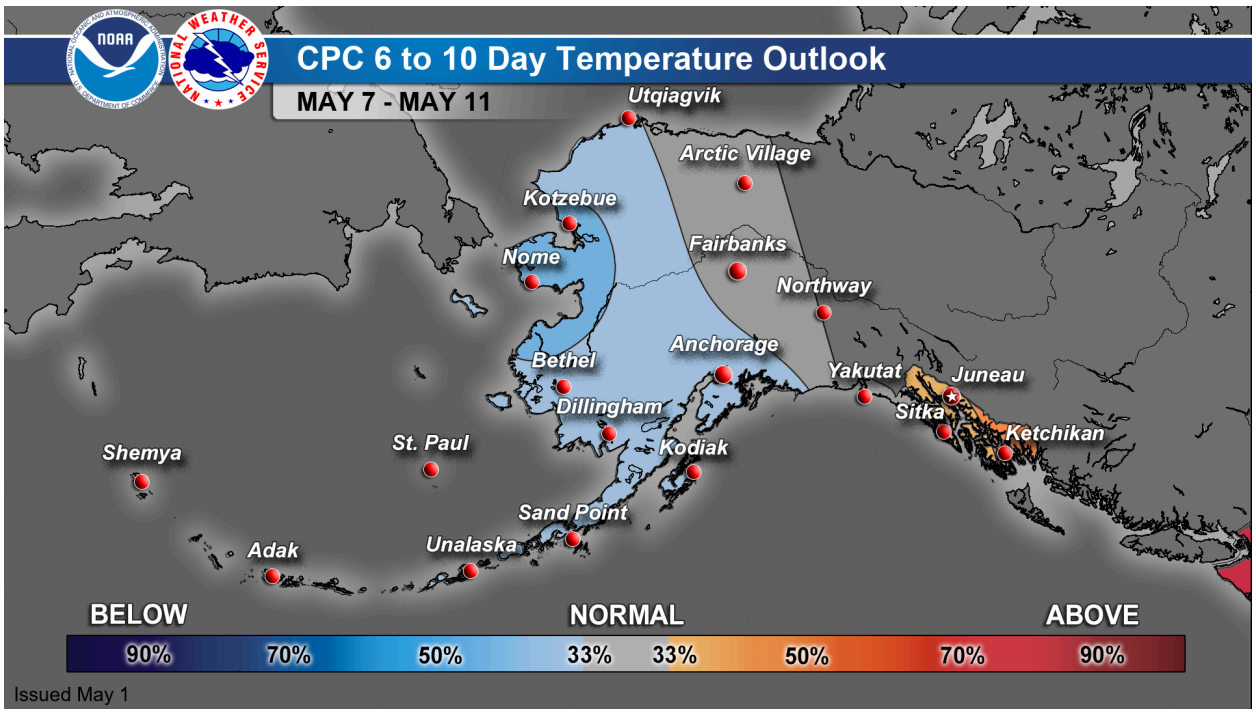
Link to thawing degree day map

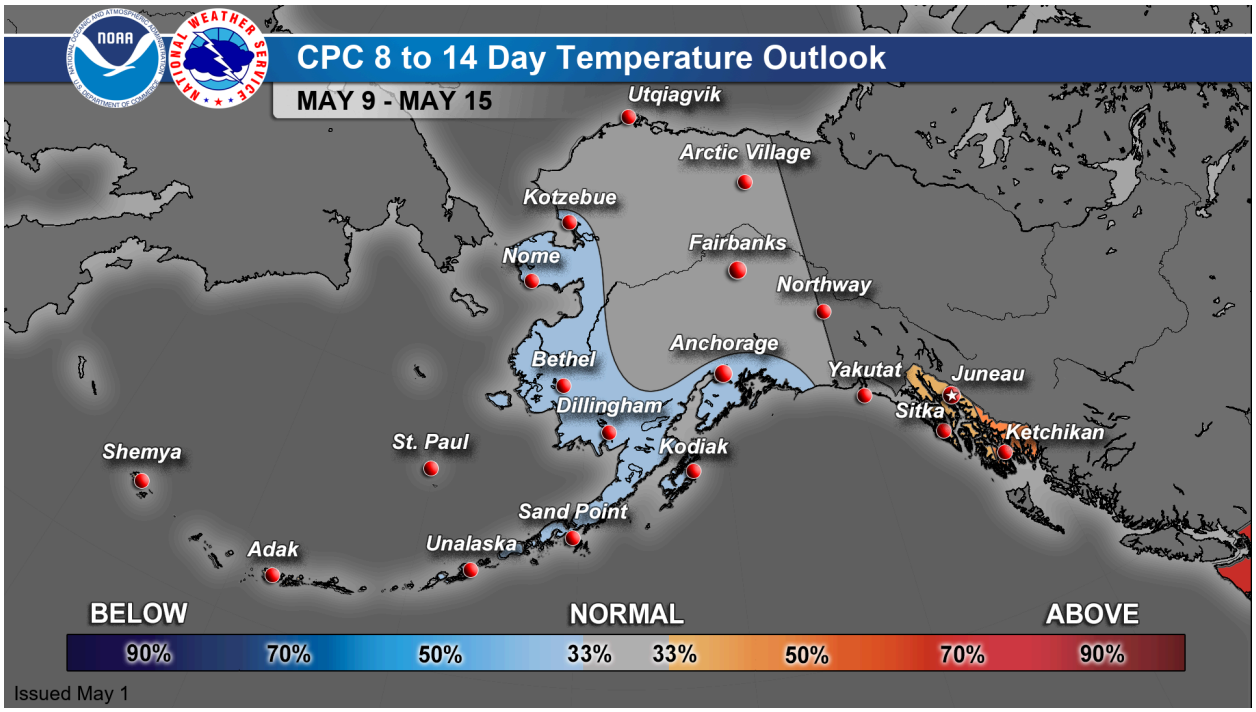
Climate Outlook

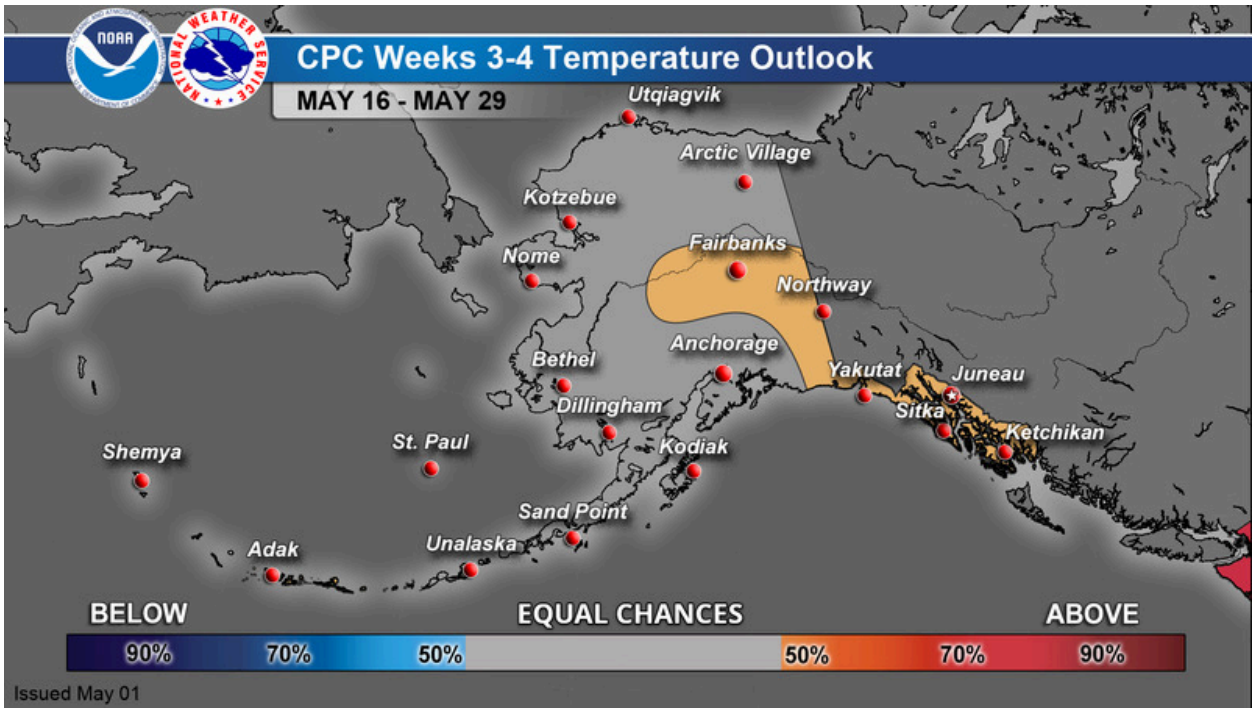
Spring temperatures in April and May are the most critical factor in determining the severity of ice breakups. Dynamic breakups, which carry a higher risk of ice jam flooding, typically require cooler-than-normal temperatures in early April, followed by a rapid warm-up to summer-like temperatures in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

The Climate Prediction Center's (CPC) latest outlook indicates that near-normal to below normal temperatures are favored across most of Alaska through early May. The extended-range guidance suggests a warmer than normal pattern to initiate mid-May through the end of the month, though uncertainty increases toward the end of the forecast period.

The current cooler weather pattern has delayed snowmelt and the weakening of river ice has resulted in a later-than-normal breakup. Due to a lack of sustained warmth, river ice across most of Alaska has retained its thickness and integrity.



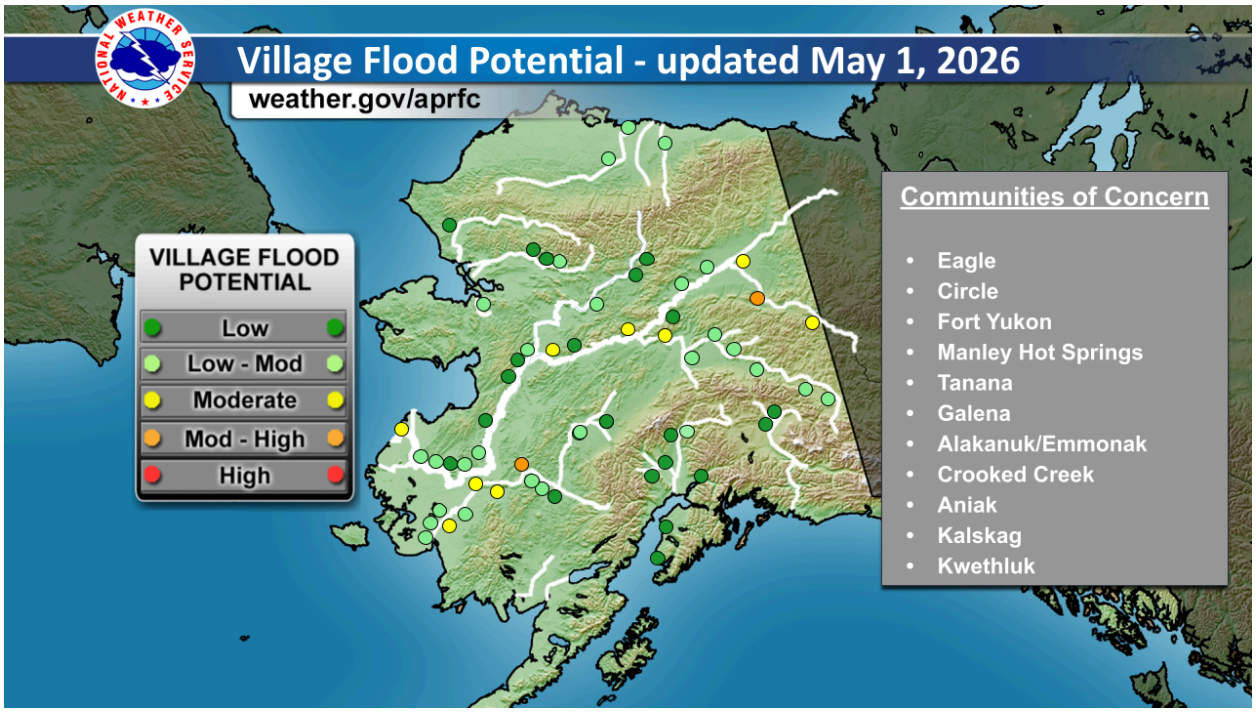




Link to CPC Outlooks

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, with most rivers across the interior and southwest Alaska forecasted to break up several days later than normal. 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 25, 2026 (4/25**).

Tanana-Fairbanks						
River-Reach	Location	Snowmelt Runoff Volume	Village Flood Potential	Median Breakup Date (1980-2025)	Years of Record (1980-2025)	Forecast Breakup Date Range

Chena River		Above				
	Chena Lakes Project		Low-Moderate			
Tanana River		Above				
	Northway		Low-Moderate	4/26	32	5/2-5/8
	Salcha		Low-Moderate	4/26	5	5/2-5/8
	Fairbanks		Low-Moderate	4/30	23	5/2-5/8
	Nenana		Low-Moderate	4/30	46	5/2-5/8
	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	5/5-5/11
	Eagle		Moderate	5/4	46	5/5-5/11
	Circle		Moderate-High	5/9	42	5/10-5/16
	Fort Yukon		Moderate	5/11	42	5/12-5/18
	Beaver		Low-Moderate	5/11	30	5/12-5/18
	Stevens Village		Low-Moderate	5/11	28	5/12-5/18
	Rampart		Low	5/12	29	5/13-5/19
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	4/25**
	McGrath		Low-Moderate	5/4	46	5/5-5/11
	Stony River		Low	5/2	38	5/3-5/9
	Sleetmute		Low-Moderate	5/2	37	5/3-5/9
	Red Devil		Low-Moderate	5/3	40	5/4-5/10
	Crooked Creek		Moderate-High	5/4	40	5/5-5/11
	Napaimute		Moderate	5/1	13	5/5-5/11
	Chuathbaluk		Low	5/3	15	5/5-5/10
	Aniak		Moderate	5/5	43	5/5-5/12
	Kalskag		Moderate	5/5	37	5/6-5/12
	Tuluksak		Low-Moderate	5/7	34	5/8-5/14
	Akiak		Low-Moderate	5/8	40	5/9-5/15
	Akiakchak		Low	5/15	11	5/10-5/16
	Kwethluk		Moderate	5/5	13	5/6-5/12
	Bethel		Low-Moderate	5/9	46	5/10-5/16
	Napaskiak		Low-Moderate	5/8	6	5/9-5/15
	Napakiak		Low-Moderate	5/10	31	5/11-5/17

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				4/19*
Matanuska River		Below				
Susitna River		Below				
	Gold Creek		Low-Moderate	5/2	10	5/3-5/9
	Sunshine		Low	5/2	37	5/3-5/9
Talkeetna		Below				
	Talkeetna		Low	4/28	5	5/2-5/8
Yentna River		Below				
	Lake Creek		Low	5/1	34	5/4-5/10
Skwentna River		Below				
	Skwentna		Low	4/30	31	5/3-5/9
Copper River		Average				
	Gakona		Low	5/1	36	5/1-5/7
	Gulkana		Low	5/1	34	5/1-5/7

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			

For additional details, please see our breakup video. Please note that climate graphics depicted in the video are now outdated. The next Spring Breakup Outlook will be issued on May 8, 2026.

For more information and to submit comments, please contact:

Kyle Van Peursem, Service Coordination Hydrologist
Alaska-Pacific River Forecast Center
Anchorage, AK
Phone: 907-266-5155
Email: kyle.vanpeursem@noaa.gov