Spring Breakup Outlook for Alaska
Valid May 15, 2026
Alaska-Pacific River Forecast Center
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www.weather.gov/aprfc

2026 Spring Breakup Outlook for Alaska

Updates from the previous Spring Breakup Outlook

Breakup is in full swing and the end is slowly coming into view. Mild temperatures have worked to delay breakup and reduce flood impacts so far by slowing ice and snow melt. Several cities have experienced minor-to-moderate ice jam flooding along the Yukon, Kuskokwim, Koyukuk and Buckland rivers.

An ice jam on the middle Yukon River that flooded Ruby cleared out late in the day on May 14. Water levels in Ruby and Galena are receding today after this heavy run of ice, and the breakup front is marching downstream.

Kuskokwim River ice jams continue to weaken as the ice thermally degrades. The ice jam impacting Tuluksak, Akiak, and Kwethluk released on May 14. An ice jam that raised water levels to flood stage in Bethel, Napaskiak, and Oscarville remains in place near Napakiak.

Breakup and River Watch attention now shifts to:

- Lower Yukon River - Breakup is progressing downstream toward Kaltag and Grayling. Flooding concern remains elevated for communities at the mouth (Emmonak and Alakanuk).
- Lower Kuskokwim River - An ice jam remains in place near Napakiak. Low-lying areas of Bethel, Kwethluk, Napaskiak, Napakiak and Oscarville continue to experience flooding.
- Breakup and snowmelt have not yet begun on the North Slope. Snowpack is normal-to-above normal.

Locations of significant ice jams and flooding during 2026 Breakup:

- Black River at Chalkyitsik
- Lower Chatanika River north of Murphy Dome
- Koyukuk River at Hughes
- Kuskokwim River at many locations including but not limited to Aniak, Kwethluk, Napakiak, Tuluksak, Napaskiak, Bethel, Oscarville, Kalskag and McGrath
- Yukon River at Ruby and Galena
- Buckland River at Buckland.

Snowmelt flooding was reported for:

- near Anderson due to a blocked culvert

- Stevens Village

The breakup outlook contains an updated analysis of the snowpack, short and long term temperature predictions, and revised breakup timing for individual communities.

This Spring Breakup Outlook for Alaska 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.

Statewide Flood Potential Overview

The breakup flooding potential is normal across most of mainland Alaska. With the Upper/Middle Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers mostly broken up, the remaining areas of concern are the Lower Yukon and the North Slope. The increased threat in these areas 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 locations, and the delayed snowmelt from below average April temperatures. Communities are encouraged to review their flood preparedness and response action plans 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.

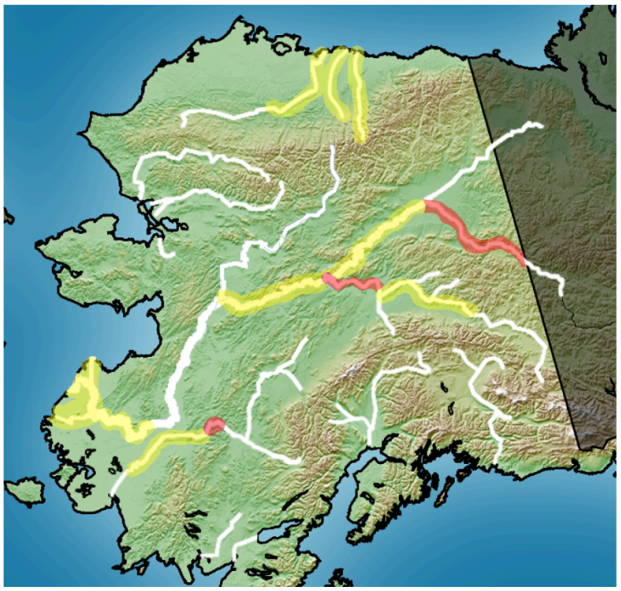
2026 Breakup Flooding Potential

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**



Snowpack

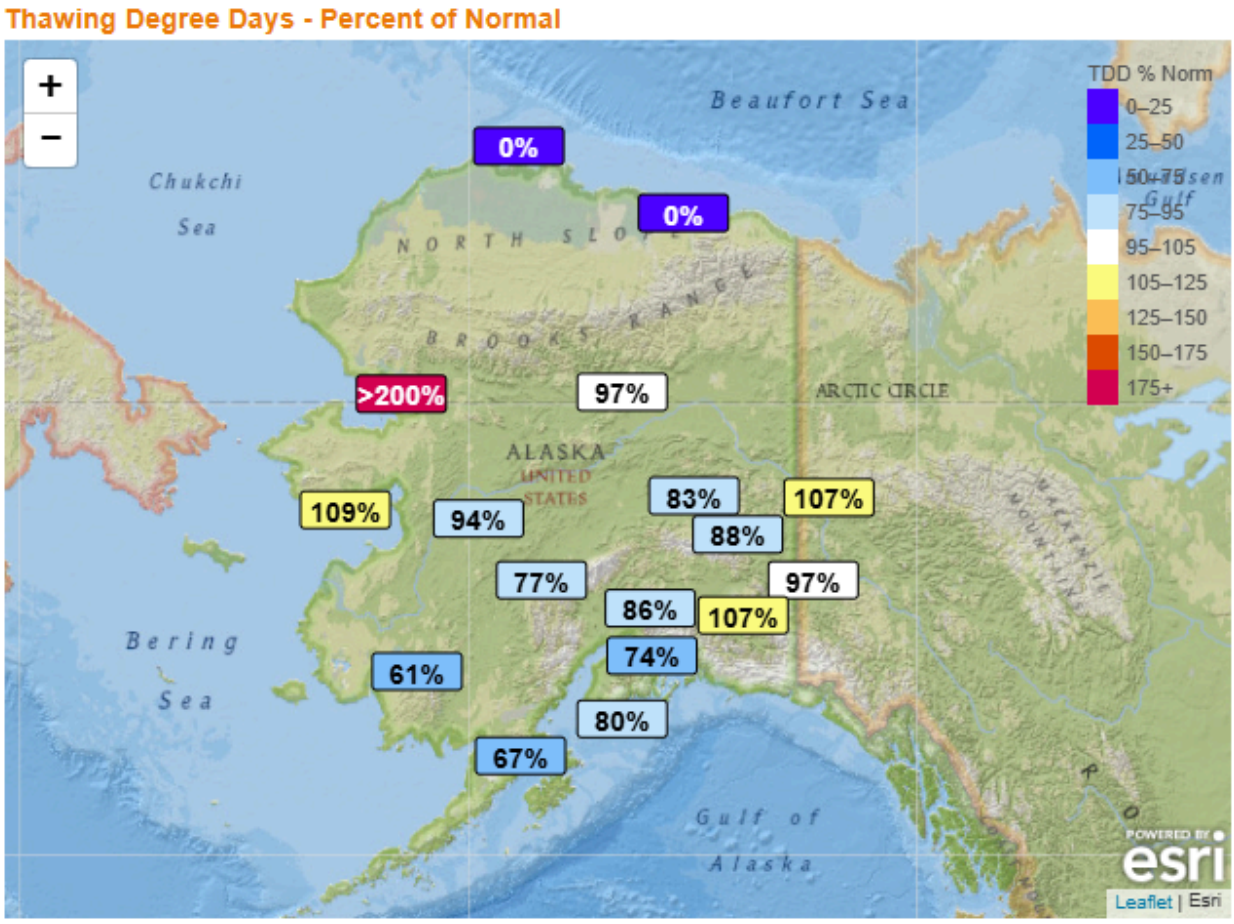
Both the May 1 snowpack analysis from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), along with the updated ERA5 snow water equivalent estimates (below), indicated a highly variable snowpack across Alaska. The Upper Yukon and Tanana Regions have an above average for May 1 primarily from a late melt onset, but also a snowy winter. There has been notable low-elevation snowmelt across a large portion of the interior and southwest, but the mid-to-high elevation snowpack continues to be robust. However, low elevation snowpack persists near the Yukon River delta.

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.

Many Interior Alaska 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.

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 warmup over much of Alaska. Across most of the Southwest and Interior Alaska, values generally range from about 50% to 100% 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.

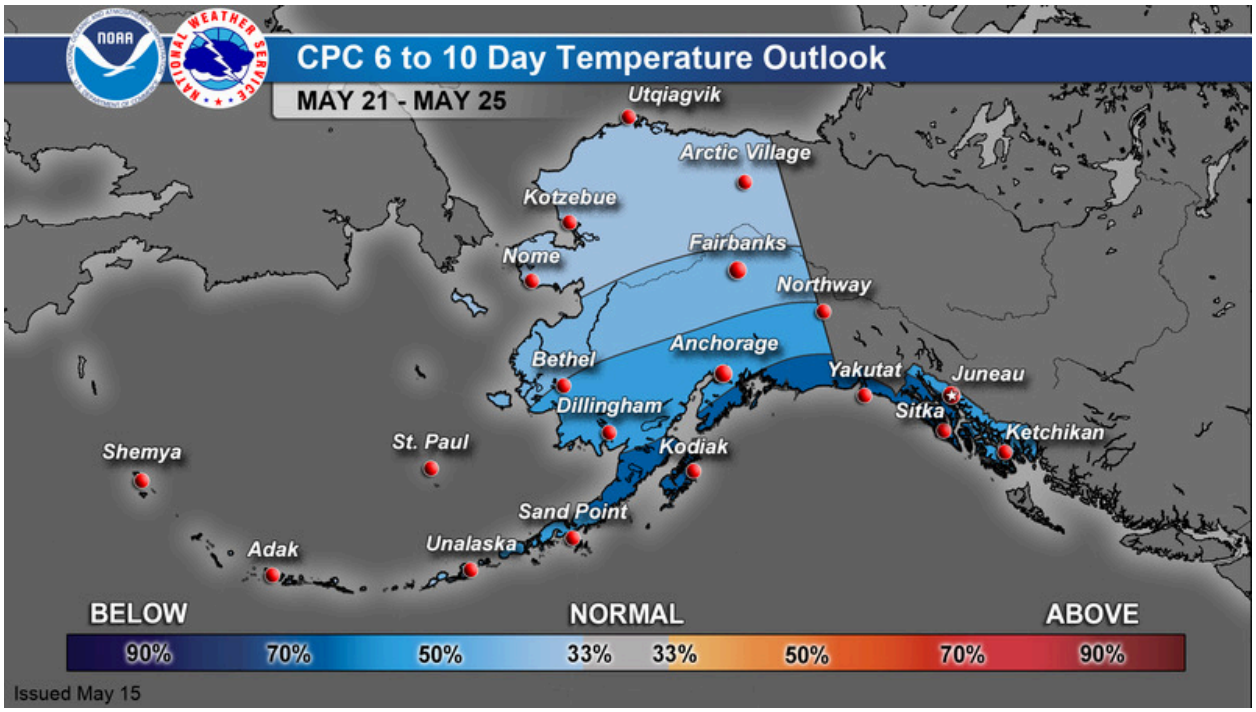


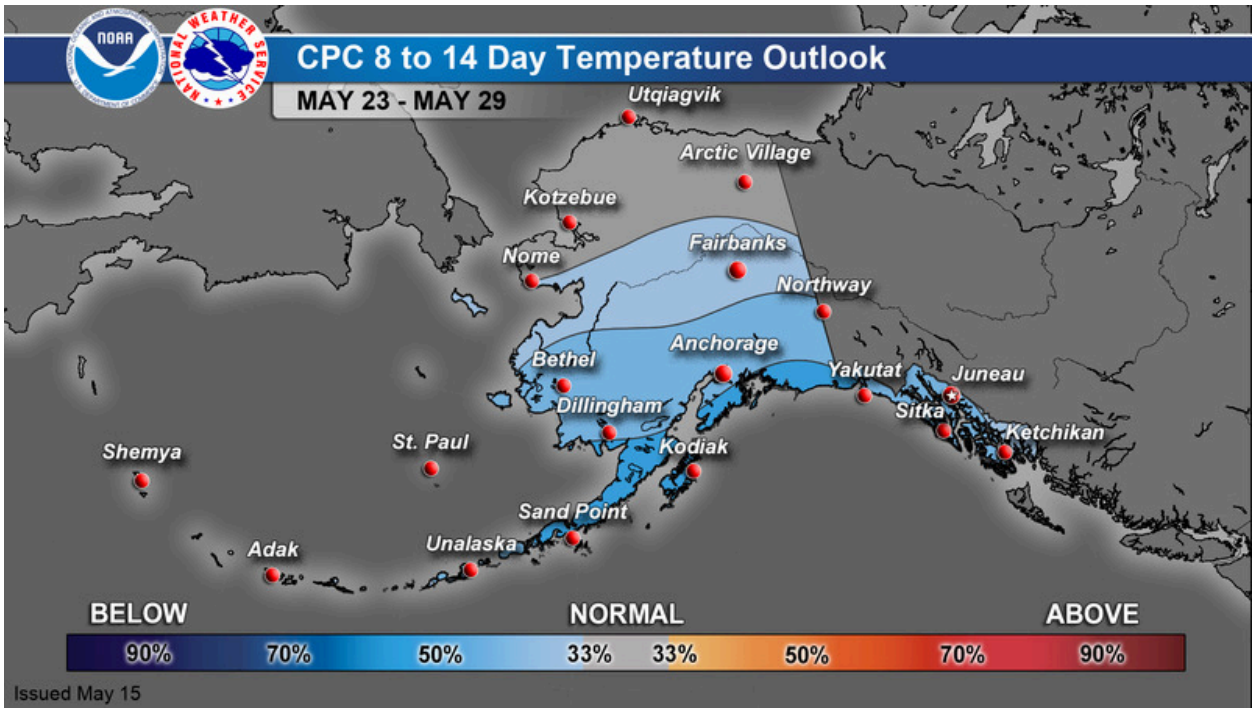
Link to thawing degree day map

Climate Outlook

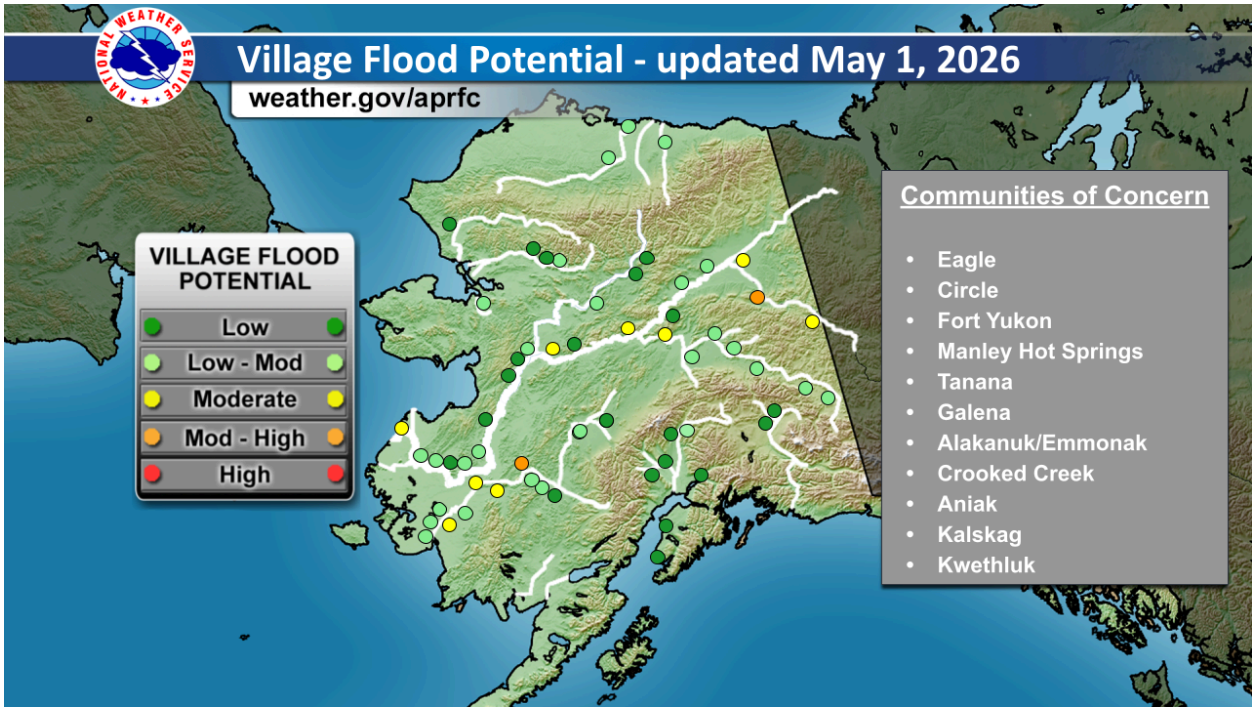
Spring temperatures in April and May are the most critical factors in determining the severity of river ice breakups. April temperatures in general were significantly below average, while May temperatures thus far have been below average to near-normal. Dynamic breakups, which carry a higher risk of ice jam flooding, typically require cooler-than-average temperatures in early April followed by a rapid transition to summer-like heat in late April or early May.

The current climate outlook implies no change in flood potential from previous forecasts. With no rapid warmup on the horizon, winter conditions remain the dominant predictor in flood potential. Currently, the near-term forecast indicates a gradual warmup, with temperatures remaining near or slightly below seasonal averages. The Climate Prediction Center's (CPC) latest outlook favors near normal to below normal temperatures across most of Alaska through the end of May.





[Link to CPC Outlooks]



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

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. The remaining communities which have an elevated flood threat are along the Lower Yukon, Lower Kuskokwim, and North Slope.

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		Broken Up			5/2**
Tanana River		Above				
	Northway		Broken Up	4/26	32	5/2**
	Salcha		Broken Up	4/26	5	5/2**
	Fairbanks		Broken Up	4/30	23	5/4**
	Nenana		Broken Up	4/30	46	5/4**
	Manley HS		Broken Up	5/3	33	5/6**

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Yukon River						
River-Reach	**Location**	**Snowmelt Runoff Volume**	**Village Flood Potential**	**Median Breakup Date (1980-2025)**	**Years of Record (1980-2025)**	**Forecast Breakup Date Range**
Yukon River (Upper)		Above				
	Dawson, YT		Broken Up	5/4	46	5/5**
	Eagle		Broken Up	5/4	46	5/5**
	Circle		Broken Up	5/9	42	5/7**
	Fort Yukon		Broken Up	5/11	42	5/8**
	Beaver		Broken Up	5/11	30	5/9**
	Stevens Village		Broken Up	5/11	28	5/10**
	Rampart		Broken Up	5/12	29	5/11**
Yukon River (Mid)		Above				
	Tanana		Broken Up	5/8	41	5/11**
	Ruby		Broken Up	5/9	40	5/14**
	Galena		Broken Up	5/11	45	5/14**
	Koyukuk		Broken Up	5/10	19	5/14**
	Nulato		Broken Up	5/12	27	5/15**
	Kaltag		Broken Up	5/12	40	5/15**
Yukon River (Lower)		Above				
	Grayling		Low	5/12	17	5/17-5/19
	Anvik		Low	5/14	37	5/17-5/19
	Holy Cross		Low-Moderate	5/14	39	5/17-5/19
	Russian Mission		Low-Moderate	5/15	39	5/18-5/20
	Marshall		Low	5/15	34	5/18-5/20
	Pilot Station		Low-Moderate	5/13	29	5/18-5/20
	Mountain Village		Low-Moderate	5/15	39	5/20-5/22
	Alakanuk/Emmonak		Moderate	5/20	41	5/23-5/25

Kuskokwim River						
River-Reach	**Location**	**Snowmelt Runoff Volume**	**Village Flood Potential**	**Median Breakup Date (1980-2025)**	**Years of Record (1980-2025)**	**Forecast Breakup Date Range**
Kuskokwim River		Below				
	Nikolai		Broken Up	4/23	40	4/25**
	McGrath		Broken Up	5/4	46	5/11**
	Stony River		Broken Up	5/2	38	5/7**
	Sleetmute		Broken Up	5/2	37	5/6**
	Red Devil		Broken Up	5/3	40	5/3**
	Crooked Creek		Broken Up	5/4	40	5/4**
	Napaimute		Broken Up	5/1	13	5/3**
	Chuathbaluk		Broken Up	5/3	15	5/6**
	Aniak		Broken Up	5/5	43	5/6**
	Kalskag		Broken Up	5/5	37	5/11**
	Tuluksak		Broken Up	5/7	34	5/14**
	Akiak		Broken Up	5/8	40	5/14**
	Akiakchak		Broken Up	5/15	11	5/14**
	Kwethluk		Broken Up	5/5	13	5/12**
	Bethel		Broken Up	5/9	46	5/13**
	Napaskiak		Broken Up	5/8	6	5/14**
	Napakiak		Broken Up	5/10	31	5/15**

Southeast-Southcentral						
River-Reach	**Location**	**Snowmelt Runoff Volume**	**Village Flood Potential**	**Median Breakup Date (1980-2025)**	**Years of Record (1980-2025)**	**Forecast Breakup Date Range**
Southeast		Average				
Kenai River		Below				
Anchor River		Below				4/19**
Matanuska River		Below				
Susitna River		Below				
	Gold Creek		Broken Up	5/2	10	5/6**
	Sunshine		Broken Up	5/2	37	5/6**
Talkeetna		Below				
	Talkeetna		Broken Up	4/28	5	5/6**
Yentna River		Below				
	Lake Creek		Broken Up	5/1	34	5/6**
Skwentna River		Below				
	Skwentna		Broken Up	4/30	31	5/6**
Copper River		Average				
	Gakona		Broken Up	5/1	36	5/6**
	Gulkana		Broken Up	5/1	34	5/6**

North Slope-Northwest						
River-Reach	**Location**	**Snowmelt Runoff Volume**	**Village Flood Potential**	**Median Breakup Date (1980-2025)**	**Years of Record (1980-2025)**	**Forecast Breakup Date Range**
Koyukuk River		Below				
	Bettles		Broken Up	5/10	44	5/12**
	Allakaket		Broken Up	5/11	40	5/12**
	Hughes		Broken Up	5/11	39	5/12**
Seward Peninsula		Below				
	Buckland		Low-Moderate	5/18	36	5/15-5/21
Kobuk River		Below				
	Kobuk		Broken Up	5/14	42	5/14**
	Shungnak		Low	5/16	34	5/14-5/20
	Ambler		Low	5/16	40	5/14-5/20
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			

The next Spring Breakup Outlook will be issued on May 22, 2026.

For more information and to submit comments, please contact:

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