2026-27 Fire Season Outlook for the Puketoi to Pacific Catchment Collective

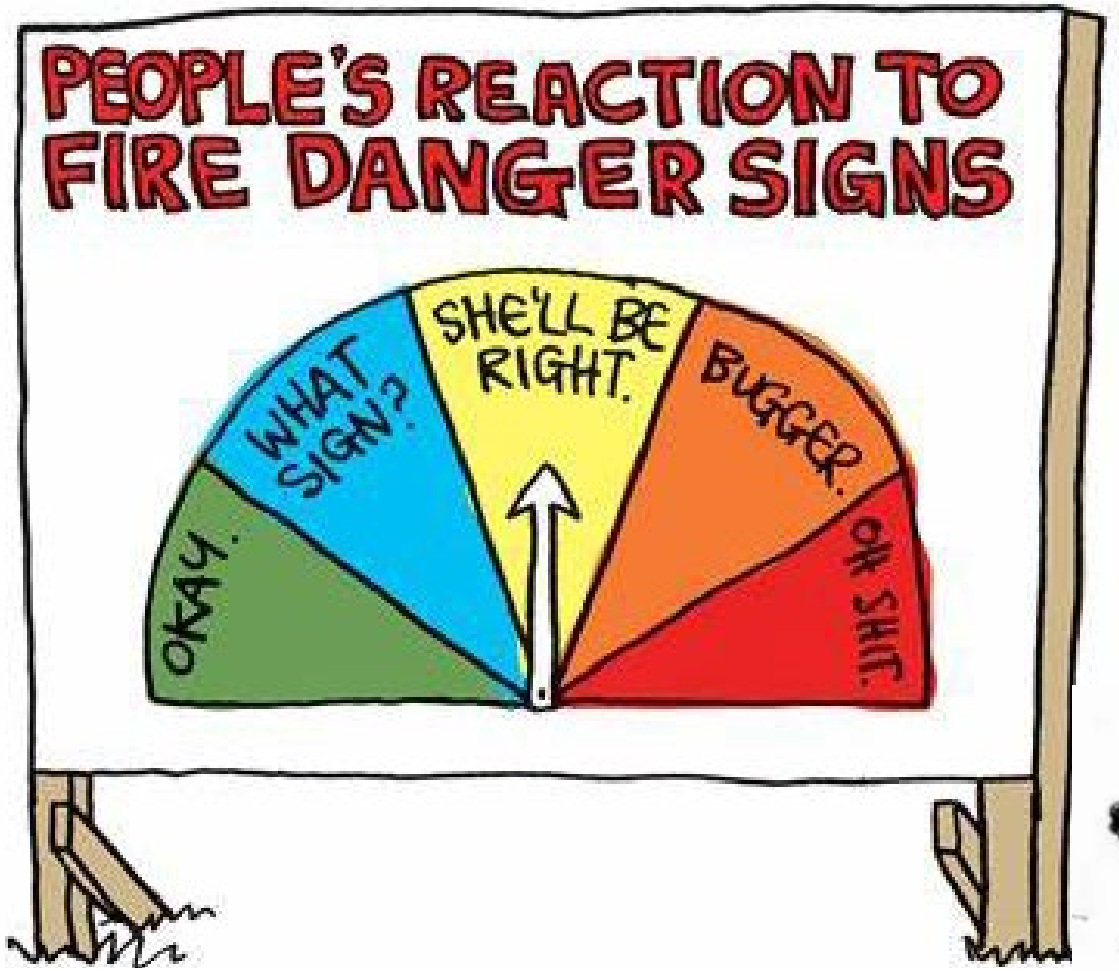
Fire Season Signs

The Fire Danger and Season Sign



The Fire Danger Sign







The New Fire Season Sign



The Tararua Wildfire Season Outlook

Why Tararua Is Different

Local Risk Factors

- Plantation forestry.
- Extensive hill-country grasslands.
- Forestry slash.
- Remote terrain.
- Steep access.
- Lifeline infrastructure exposure.

Operational Challenges

- Long travel times.
- Limited water availability.
- Communications limitations.
- Aviation dependence for remote incidents.
- Resource build-up times.

Key Message

Tararua-based fires can become a logistics problem before they become fire problems

What Has Changed Since The Start of Spring?

Climate Drivers

- Very strong El Niño firmly established.
- Positive Indian Ocean Dipole reinforcing drying trends.
- Below normal rainfall favoured.
- Above average temperatures more likely.

What this means on the ground

- Fuels remain generally receptive to spring growth.
- Drying trends expected to strengthen through late spring.
- More frequent elevated fire danger periods likely.
- Strong north-westerly wind events remain the primary driver.
- Grass curing expected to accelerate through summer.

Seasonal Outlook

NOVEMBER

- Fire danger begins increasing.
- Grass curing becomes more noticeable.
- Strong north-westerly winds become increasingly important.
- Drying trends begin developing.

DECEMBER

- Elevated fire danger periods become more common.
- Localised rainfall deficits may emerge.
- Strong wind events increasingly influence fire behaviour.

Peak Fire Season and Beyond

January to March

- Traditionally the highest fire danger period.
- Soil moisture deficiencies may become more widespread.
- Strong north-westerly and foehn winds remain key drivers of fire behaviour.
- Low humidity and foehn wind events may periodically accelerate fuel drying and increase fuel availability.

April to June

- Fire danger normally eases.
- Autumn rainfall will be important.
- Areas experiencing rainfall deficits may remain drier for longer than normal.
- Continued awareness may be required until fuel moisture levels recover.

Expected Fire Environment

Factor	Tararua
Primary Driver	Wind
Ignition	High
Spread Potential	High
Large Fire Risk	High
Season Type	Episodic
VHE Days	18 –25

What This Means For Eastern Tararua

Our Primary Concern is Dry Fuels + Wind

Strong west to north-westerly winds can:

- Increase fire spread rates.
- Carry embers ahead of the fire.
- Increase suppression difficulty.
- Allow small fires to grow quickly.

Areas we are paying particular attention to:

- Hill-country grasslands.
- Coastal farming areas.
- Scrub and regenerating vegetation.
- Forestry and harvest residue areas.

What We're Watching This Season

Seasonal Indicators

- Grass curing.
- Rainfall deficits.
- Soil moisture trends.
- Fuel moisture.
- Foehn wind events.
- Relative humidity trends.

Operational Indicators

- Frequency of escaped burns or unwanted fire.
- Machinery ignitions.
- Fire permit activity.
- Forecast wind events.

Why These Matter

They help us understand how quickly conditions are changing and whether additional restrictions or messaging may be needed.

2026 – 2027 Fire Season Forecast

What have we done to prepare?

Planning

- Readiness review
- Escalation model

Communications

- District comms plan

Resources

- Pre-positioning plans
- Fatigue planning

Partnerships

- Forestry
- CDEM
- Stakeholders

Real-time messaging





Spot the Signs, Stop Wildfire









Practical Actions for Landowners

Property Preparedness

✅ Review farm fire plans and evacuation trigger points.

✅ Ensure RAPID numbers are clearly visible.

✅ Confirm water supplies remain accessible.

✅ Maintain 4m x 4m access clearance where possible.

✅ Manage vegetation around homes, sheds and critical infrastructure.

Staff & Contractor Awareness

✅ Brief staff and contractors.

✅ Review communication arrangements.

✅ Check short- and long-range weather forecasts before undertaking higher-risk work.

Machinery Operations

✅ Carry firefighting equipment.

✅ Remove dry vegetation from machinery.

✅ Conduct regular inspections.

✅ Implement mitigation measures to prevent unwanted or escaped fires.

✅ Consider postponing higher-risk work during strong wind events.

FENZ Priorities

1. Life



2. Property



3. Vegetation



We can't control the season, but we can influence how well prepared we are for it

The Outlook For Eastern Tararua Points Toward A Season Where:

- Strong north-westerly wind events remain the primary fire weather concern.
- Fuel drying is expected to increase through late spring and summer.
- Localised rainfall deficits may develop.
- Periods of low humidity may accelerate fuel availability.
- Fire danger is expected to increase through summer.

The Greatest Wildfire Risk Is When

Dry Fuels + Strong Winds + An Ignition Source

Occur at the same time



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