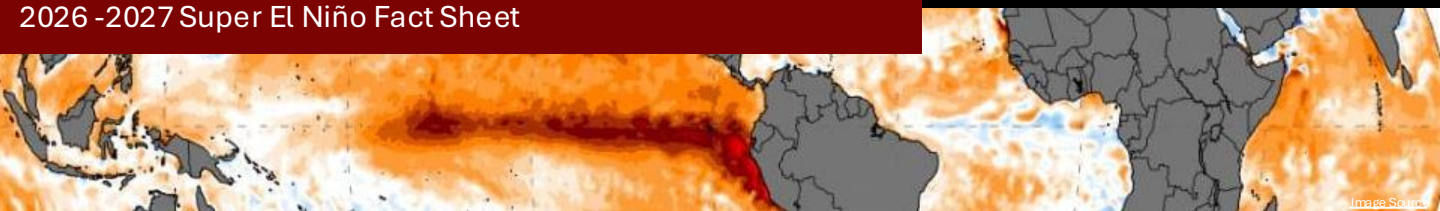


El Niño & the Okanagan:

2026 -2027 Super El Niño Fact Sheet



What is El Niño?

El Niño is a natural climate cycle in the Pacific Ocean that strongly influences global temperature and precipitation patterns. **In Canada, an El Niño means a higher likelihood of warm, dry weather.**

El Niño conditions happen when warm ocean water conditions form in the Western Pacific Ocean. This warm water at the equator influences air temperature and humidity, changes wind patterns, and can affect circulation patterns like the jet stream.

It is part of a 2–7-year cycle called the El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO). ENSO also has a neutral phase and a cool “La Niña” phase. During La Niña, warm ocean water is closer to Asia, and in North America we typically experience colder, wetter weather.

Past El Niño years include 1997, 2003, 2016, and 2023, all of which saw notable heatwaves.

How is this year different?

This year, a stronger-than-normal “**super El Niño**” has developed. A super El Niño is when surface ocean temperatures are 2 °C above normal at the equator. The current event could be the strongest on record at the equator.

Is this related to climate change?

ENSO is different from climate change. It is part of natural climate variability.

The combination of climate change-driven warming and a strong El Niño is likely why this event will break many temperature records.

Scientists are still working to understand whether climate change is shifting the severity or timing of El Niño events; for now, there is no clear evidence that ENSO is changing.

What will this mean for the Okanagan?

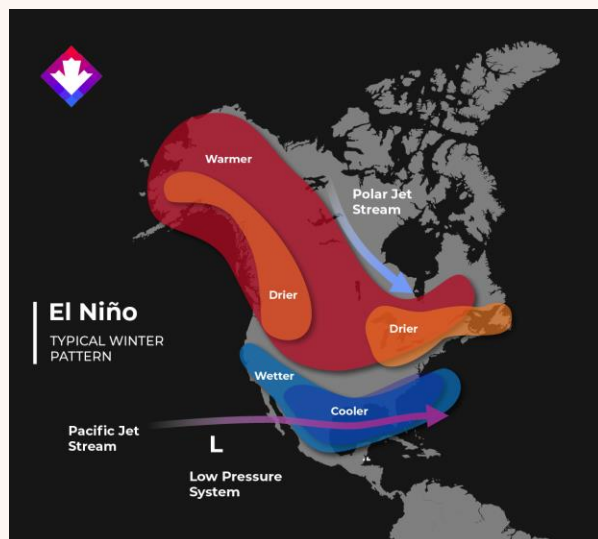
The current super El Niño increases the likelihood of a warm and dry fall and winter. These conditions are likely to continue into next spring.

The event will peak between October and December, so the strongest effects will be this winter.

Snowpack will likely be low and melt early this winter, and more precipitation will fall as rain rather than as snow, reducing storage.

The Okanagan relies heavily on snowpack for our annual water budget, this means **an elevated chance that drought conditions will continue into 2027.**

El Niño conditions have also been linked to increased wildfire risk in B.C.



Disclaimer: El Niño conditions increase the likelihood of very warm and dry weather; however, cold and/or wet conditions can still occur

For additional information on El Niño, please visit [Climate.ca](https://climate.ca) and the [World Meteorological Organization](https://www.wmo.int/)

1) Adv. Geosci. The impact of El Niño-Southern Oscillation on the Canadian climate. (Shabbar 2006) 2) Can. J. Civ. Eng. Evaluating ENSO-driven risks to strengthen transportation system resilience of Canadian provinces. (Islam et al., 2025) 3) Int. J. Appl. Earth Obs. Geoinf. White blanket, blue waters: Tracing El Niño footprints in Canada. (Amiri et al., 2024) 4) Ecol. Model. Correlations between forest fires in British Columbia, Canada, and sea surface temperature of the Pacific Ocean. (Wang et al., 2010)