



2026 North Atlantic Hurricane Forecast Review

*Forecasts, climate drivers, and our positioning
ahead of the 2026 mid-year renewals.*

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A snapshot of the 2026 outlook.

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CSU NAMED STORMS

April 2026 forecast

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TSR NAMED STORMS

April 2026 forecast

90

CSU ACE INDEX

27% below 1991-2020 average

66

TSR ACE INDEX

45% below 1991-2020 average

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FROM THE LEADENHALL TEAM

Following an active multi-year period in the North Atlantic basin, the 2026 outlook from the two leading academic groups — Colorado State University (CSU) and Tropical Storm Risk (TSR) — points to a season meaningfully below the long-term climatological average. In the pages that follow, we summarise both forecasts, walk through the climate drivers that underpin them, recap the 2025 season for context, and set out how these signals are flowing through into our pricing, underwriting and portfolio construction ahead of the 2026 mid-year renewals.

SECTION 01 · EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A below-average 2026 season — and a clearer signal than last year.

Both CSU and TSR see substantial reductions in forecast activity versus the long-term climatology, driven by an emerging strong El Niño.

OUTLOOK

The 2026 North Atlantic hurricane season is forecasted to be below the long-term average, diverging from the heightened activity expected in the last few years.

FORECAST HIGHLIGHTS

CSU predicts: 13 named storms, 6 hurricanes, 2 major hurricanes, ACE = 90.

TSR predicts: 12 named storms, 5 hurricanes, 1 major hurricane, ACE = 66.

All forecasts are below 2025 levels, and below the climatological average (1991 to 2020) of 14 named storms, 7 hurricanes, 3 major hurricanes, ACE = 122.

ACE (Accumulated Cyclone Energy) values place these forecasts in the “below normal” range.

KEY INFLUENCING FACTORS

ENSO (El Niño–Southern Oscillation): Forecasts expect a strong El Niño during peak season (August - October), reversing from La Niña conditions in 2024. Increased wind shear and reduced vertical stability with potential to limit hurricane formation.

Sea Surface Temperatures (SSTs): Mixed SST signals—warmer in the western tropical Atlantic, cooler in the eastern and central regions. Overall, SSTs are expected to have a minor enhancing effect, outweighed by El Niño conditions.

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The season appears more favourable than recent years, with lower forecast risk. Forecasts are being incorporated into our updated pricing and underwriting strategies ahead of the 2026 mid-year renewals

— LEADENHALL VIEW

IMPLICATIONS FOR LEADENHALL

Leadenhall plans to adopt its baseline LCP View of Risk, which includes a 9% basin frequency adjustment and a 15% increase in average annual loss versus the standard long-term Verisk model.

This approach reflects a moderately elevated risk outlook in our modelling, as we recognise forecast skill is unlikely to be 100% precise.

CONCLUSION

Forecasts are inherently subject to uncertainty, however recent history suggests forecasting skill is improving over time – and therefore the forecasts are a positive signal.

It's not just about how many hurricanes occur, but how many make landfall—and where and with what strength—that ultimately drives losses.

Despite their limitations, forecasts remain a valuable tool for guiding our research and informing our portfolio management strategy: diversify our portfolios, strictly adhere to each fund's risk limits and attachment points targets, and be highly selective of our counterparties.

SECTION 02 · FORECAST DATA

2026 North Atlantic Hurricane Forecast.

A side-by-side view of CSU's and TSR's April 2026 outlooks, set against the 1991–2020 climatological average.

The 2026 North Atlantic hurricane season is forecasted to be below average, with significant reductions in expected activity versus the historical norm from both Colorado State University (CSU), and Tropical Storm Risk (TSR), two of the most prominent institutions that issue seasonal outlooks.

Below we provide a summary of the latest forecasts, discuss the reasoning behind them, and look at how we at Leadenhall are incorporating this information into our pricing and underwriting in advance of the mid-year renewals for 2026.

The table above displays the latest forecasts for April from both Colorado State University (CSU), and Tropical Storm Risk (TSR), and how this year's forecasts compare with longer-term climatological average.

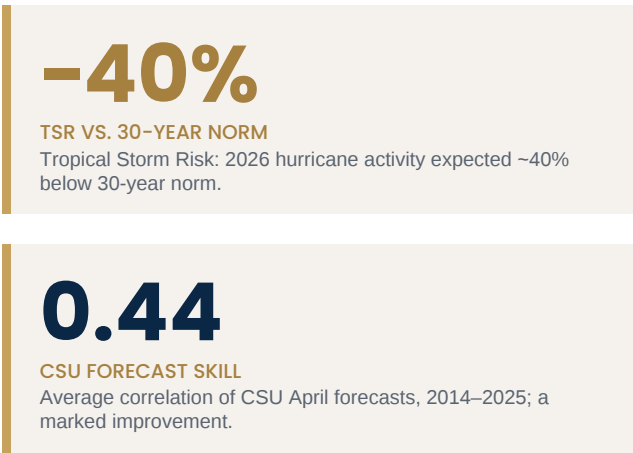
READING THE NUMBERS

CSU anticipates a total of 13 named storms, with 6 of these developing into hurricanes, and 2 reaching the status of major hurricanes, classified as Category 3 or higher. The Accumulated Cyclone Energy (ACE) Index, which measures the total energy output of tropical cyclones over the season, is projected to be 90.

TSR's forecast is even more favourable, predicting 12 named storms, 5 hurricanes, and only 1 major hurricane. Their ACE Index forecast stands at 66, indicating a less intense season compared to CSU's expectations. Both forecasts align more strongly with the named storm and hurricane prediction, whereas the differences in major hurricanes and ACE are where they diverge.

Forecast	Named Storms	Hurricanes	Major (Cat 3+)	ACE Index
CSU April 2026	13	6	2	90
TSR April 2026	12	5	1	66
Average (1991–2020)	14	7	3	122

Figure 1. CSU and TSR 2026 forecasts vs. the climatological average. Source: Klotzbach et al. (CSU, 2026); Lea (TSR, 2026); 1991–2020 normals.



This indicates that the models predict a larger reduction in overall severity than they do in overall hurricane frequency, but in short, both forecasts represent a substantial shift away from the heightened activity seen in recent years. This is illustrated most starkly in the difference in ACE index, where TSR's 66, and CSU's 90 represent a 45% and 27% lower figure than the long term of number of 122 respectively. CSU summarizes their forecast saying the 2026 hurricane season will be "somewhat below normal activity", whilst TSR predicts that hurricane activity will be around "40% below the 30-year norm".

SECTION 03 · CLIMATE DRIVERS

ENSO: the dominant signal for 2026.

An emerging strong El Niño across the August–October peak window — a complete reversal from La Niña in 2024.

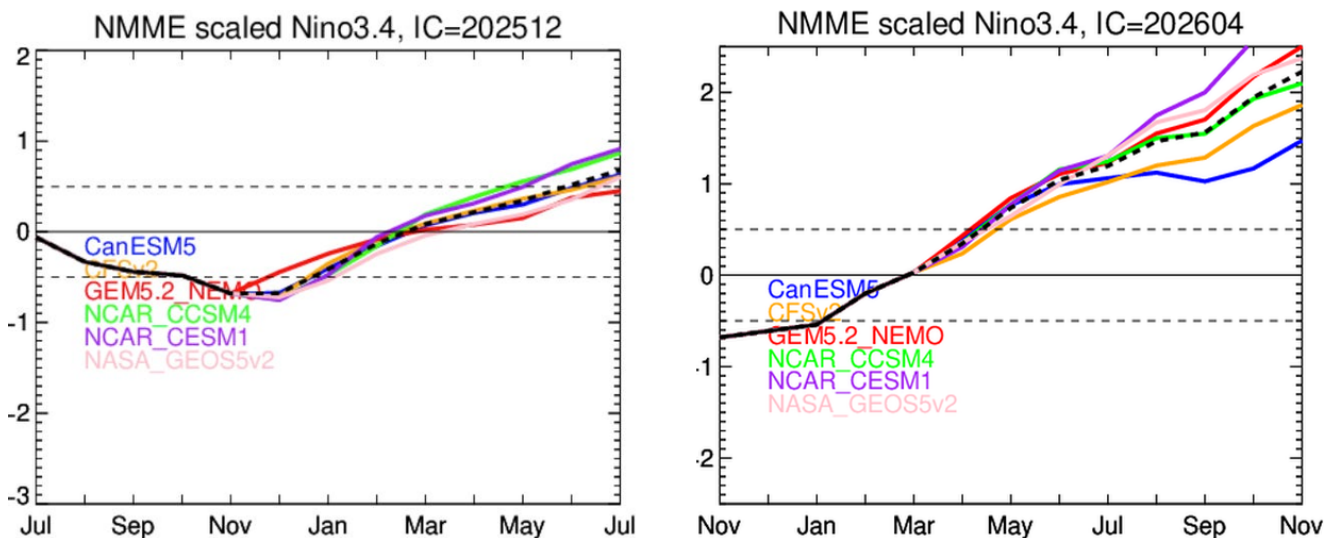
The dominant factor shaping the 2026 forecast is the expected development of a robust El Niño during the peak of the hurricane season (August–October), which represents a complete reversal from the La Niña phase that contributed to elevated activity in 2024. This means we are likely to see an increase in upper-level westerly winds across the Caribbean and tropical Atlantic, increasing wind shear and reducing vertical stability. This disrupts hurricane genesis, making it harder for a system to form and intensify.

Should El Niño develop in line with how climate models suggest, it will be the first season since 2016 to revert to strong El Niño conditions. We saw early indications of this pattern emerging back in December 2025 when TSR issued their long-range forecast, which anticipated “a season with activity close to the 1991–2020 climatology”. At this time, TSR reported early indications of an El Niño being present later on in the season but was more conservative, as there was still significant uncertainty inherent in this trend and ultimately their December forecast reported the following numbers:

TSR DECEMBER 2025 LONG-RANGE FIGURES

Tropical Storms — 14 · Hurricanes — 7 ·
Major Hurricanes — 3 · ACE Index — 125.

Figure 2. NOAA Niño 3.4 ensemble forecast · December 2025 release (left) and April 2026 release (right). Source: NOAA/CPC NMME plume.



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When comparing the two graphs we can see that the right-hand side confirms the prediction that we would cross over into the positive phase in March 2026, and climate models are now all in agreement of reaching at least 1 over the coming months with an upward trend clearly shown. With the signal being confirmed, TSR were much more confident to bring their numbers down in the April 2026 forecasts.

However, in the last few months the climate models have tracked close to their December predictions and in doing so increased the confidence around the forecast. The graphs below illustrate the mean ensemble estimates from a number of major climate models, with the December 2025 release on the left and the April 2026 release on the right.

On the x-axis is month, and the y-axis is a relative measure of ENSO state. A positive number over 0.5 represents an El Niño phase, and a negative number under -0.5 indicates a La Niña state. In between these values is termed a neutral phase.

SECTION 04 · CLIMATE DRIVERS

Sea Surface Temperatures and other secondary factors.

Mixed SST signals dampen the bullish read —and recent history shows the limits of long-lead forecasts.

SEA SURFACE TEMPERATURES

Alongside ENSO state, warm sea surface temperatures anomalies are key driver of potential hurricane activity. Though this year, the outcome is less certain. Warmer sea surface temperatures provide more energy for hurricane formation, and therefore warmer anomalies tend to correlate with seasons that have a higher frequency and severity of tropical storms. TSR report that sea surface temperatures are forecast to be slightly warmer than the 1991-2020 climatology, however this is at odds with the greater wind shear effect of the El Niño state. Overall, their assessment is that sea surface temperatures are “to have a small enhancing effect”, but it is clear they expect the effects of El Niño to outweigh the effects of slight warming.

CSU provide a bit more detail in their assessment of the sea surface temperatures, explaining that whilst sea surface temperatures in the western tropical Atlantic are warmer than normal, they are actually slightly cooler than normal in the eastern and central tropical Atlantic. In figure 3., you can see an illustration of the North Atlantic Sea surface temperature anomalies in late March 2026.

Represented by white and blue, there are relatively cooler waters in the central and eastern parts of the basin, which provides mixed signals with regards to peak season activity. According to CSU, “while warm SSTs in the western tropical Atlantic correlate well with what is typically observed in April prior to busy hurricane seasons, cool SSTs in the eastern tropical and subtropical Atlantic are typically associated with quieter hurricane seasons”. Consequently, both CSU and TSR’s forecasts rely less on the impact of sea surface temperatures versus the ENSO state.

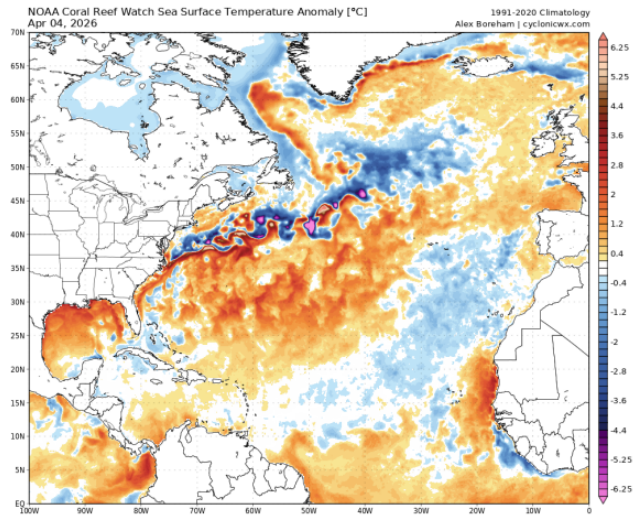


Figure 3. NOAA Coral Reef Watch Sea Surface Temperature Anomaly, 04 April 2026. Source: Alex Boreham, cyclonicwx.com.

OTHER INFLUENCING FACTORS

There are many other factors that can affect the ultimate outcome of the hurricane season, including elements such as precipitation anomalies, the phase of the North Atlantic Oscillation (NAO), as well as intra-seasonal factors such as Saharan air outbreaks, and the frequency of tropical upper tropospheric troughs (TUTTs). TSR refers to precipitation anomalies being estimated as below normal, which could in turn mean the environment is less favourable for deep convection, but there is limited commentary on this aspect.

However, many of these other factors are unreliably predicted this far out from the start of the hurricane season. In fact, both the Saharan air outbreaks and the formation of a TUTT, were two of the main reasons why the TSR and CSU forecasts last year overestimated the actual figures (see Figure 4 below).

Forecast	Named Storms	Hurricanes	Major (Cat 3+)	ACE Index
CSU April 2025	17	9	4	155
TSR April 2025	16	8	4	146
Actual	13	5	4	132

Figure 4. Comparison of CSU and TSR 2025 forecasts vs. 2025 actuals. Source: CSU, TSR, NOAA HURDAT.

SECTION 05 • UNDERWRITING VIEW

Leadenhall's approach: reading the signal, sizing the risk.

Improving forecast skill, a clear major-hurricane lens, and disciplined geographic positioning ahead of the 2026 mid-year renewals.

It is clear that the outcome of this year's seasonal forecasts are favourable, and given that the near-term signals have historically correlated well with seasons of lower hurricane activity, these forecasts do offer an element of confidence. In addition, over time the accuracy of these forecasts has been increasing, as illustrated by this exhibit from CSU below (figure 5). Between 2014-2025, on average CSU's April forecast scores 0.44, which is a marked improvement versus the longer-term averages between 1984-2025 and 1984-2013, suggesting progress and enhancement in methodology and ultimately forecast skill.

Though it must be noted, the other key message from the chart is the reduced skill level of the April forecast versus the June and August forecasts, showing that at this lead time significant uncertainty still exists. However, this uncertainty can manifest itself in overestimation as well as underestimation, as was the case with last year's higher than actual forecasts.

OUR LENS — MAJOR HURRICANES

Due to Leadenhall's risk appetite and underwriting approach, the major driver to expected loss in the portfolio stems from storms that are Cat 3 or greater, i.e. major hurricanes, and therefore the reduced number in this category is a positive sign. If we accept that there will be a given number of major hurricanes forming in the Atlantic basin, we are most concerned with the probability that these major hurricane(s) physically make landfall in the continental US. CSU helps us with this to an extent, also publishing their thoughts on these landfalling probabilities (see table above).

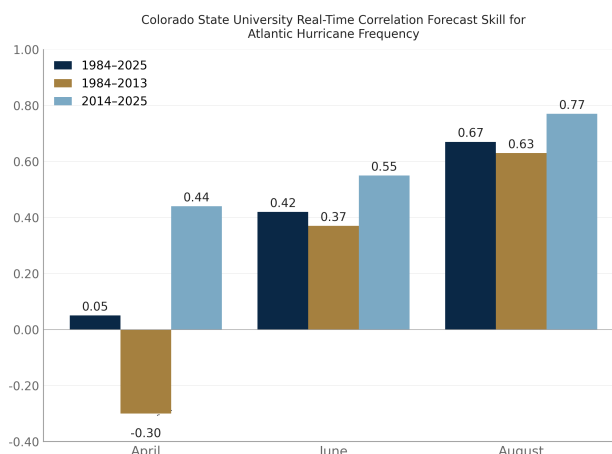


Figure 5. CSU correlation forecast skill analysis for Atlantic hurricane frequency. Source: Klotzbach et al. (CSU, 2026). Note: CSU began issuing seasonal forecasts in April 1995.

CSU LANDFALL PROBABILITIES (2026)

Region	2026	1880–2020 Avg.
Entire continental US coastline	32%	43%
US East Coast (incl. Florida)	15%	21%
Gulf Coast (FL Panhandle → TX)	20%	27%
Caribbean	35%	47%

Probability of at least one major hurricane (Cat 3+) landfall in each region. Source: Klotzbach et al. (CSU, 2026).

Each of these probabilities is below the long-term average; however, there is a clear skew towards the Gulf and Caribbean being more likely landfall regions than the East Coast (from Florida to Maine).

SECTION 07 · References

References & sources.

A list of academic and data sources cited throughout this review.

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