

April Rains Hammer Oklahoma Drought May 1, 2015

Mired in significant drought for much of the last five years, western Oklahomans have been in desperate need of moisture. Mother Nature finally granted that wish and provided abundant rainfall during April. Much of Oklahoma saw at least 4-6 inches of rain during the month. According to preliminary data from the Oklahoma Mesonet, the statewide average rain total was 4.8 inches, 1.6 inches above normal and the 17th wettest April since records began in 1895. West central Oklahoma enjoyed its second wettest April on record with an average total of 7.6 inches, 5.2 inches above normal. Only the northeast saw a deficit at 0.5 inches below normal. The Oklahoma Mesonet site at Cheyenne recorded a whopping 13.2 inches of rain for the month, their wettest April on record and their second wettest month ever. Kenton recorded 1.1 inches for the month's lowest total. The year-to-date statewide average of 9.4 inches is now near normal with a deficit of 0.3 inches for the January-April period. The northeast's year-to-date deficit rose to nearly 4 inches while west central Oklahoma had a surplus of 3.3 inches.

The statewide average temperature was on the warm side at 60.5 degrees, 1.2 degrees above normal to rank April as the 40th warmest on record. Hollis recorded the highest temperature of the month with 96 degrees on the seventh. The lowest temperature of 23 was recorded at both Buffalo and Medford on the fourth. The January-April statewide average temperature of 46.9 degrees was 0.5 degrees below normal. Very little in the way of freezing weather occurred during April. Most of the southeastern half of the state never dropped below 32 degrees. Guymon spent the most time below freezing at 12 hours.

At least four tornadoes touched down during April according to preliminary data from the National Weather Service. That total could go up as more possible twisters are investigated. Three of the confirmed tornadoes struck in far west central Oklahoma while the other traveled 12.3 miles from near Vinita to Bernice, injuring one person when it blew two tractor trailers over on I-40. That tornado was rated as an EF-1. Many other instances of severe winds and large hail were reported across the state during the stormy month.

The bountiful moisture provided significant drought relief for much of the state, and that is reflected on the U.S. Drought Monitor maps. The report from April 7 listed 40 percent of the state in extreme-to-exceptional drought, much of that across the western half of Oklahoma. The month's final map on the 30th saw that amount reduced to 24 percent. The amount of the state with no drought increased from 32 percent to 41 percent, mostly across the eastern half of the state. The Drought Monitor's intensity scale slides from moderate-severe-extreme-exceptional, with exceptional being the worst classification. The reservoirs across western Oklahoma saw great benefits from the rains, as did stock ponds and streams. Reservoirs that had shown alarming drops recently rose a foot or more, including Canton, Altus-Lugert, Tom Steed and Foss. Waurika Lake, the city of Duncan's water supply, remained 19 feet below normal storage. Regardless of the gains, most of those lakes remain well below their normal capacity.

The May temperature and precipitation outlooks from the National Weather Service's Climate Prediction Center (CPC) show great promise for further drought relief during May. In addition to increased odds for below normal temperatures across the southwestern one-third of the state, May's precipitation outlook indicates increased odds for above normal precipitation, especially for the western half of the state. CPC's U.S. Monthly Drought Outlook for May conveys those good fortunes with chances for drought improvement and even removal across most of western Oklahoma. Drought is expected to either persist or intensify for north central Oklahoma through the rest of the month, however.

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