

## Ice Storm Tops January Weather Headlines Feb. 1, 2017

January 2017 would have been remembered as exceedingly warm and dull if not for the visit from a powerful mid-month winter storm. The storm struck over the weekend of Jan. 13-15 and prompted a State of Emergency declaration for all 77 counties by Oklahoma Gov. Mary Fallin. An unusually moisture-laden weather system for January, the storm left the northwestern half of the state encased in ice and the southeastern half waterlogged. The freezing line meandered about the I-44 corridor at the beginning of the storm before slowly retreating to the northwest, bringing a mixed bag of impacts from southwestern through northeastern Oklahoma. Far northwestern Oklahoma and the eastern Panhandle were particularly hard hit, with ice thicknesses up to 1.5 inches coating trees and powerlines. Catastrophic impacts occurred in that region with widespread tree and electric utility infrastructure damage. At the height of the power outages, more than 23,000 customers were without service, many for several days. At month's end, there were still approximately 700 customers without electric service. According to the Oklahoma Department of Emergency Management, 65 total injuries were reported with the storm due to cuts, falls and automobile accidents. In addition, two electrical linemen were electrocuted in Beaver County while working to restore services, killing one.

The storm dumped 3-4 inches of moisture across the far northwest and south central regions of the state, while 1-2 inches of precipitation fell across most other areas. Another storm the following weekend added to those previous totals to produce a decidedly wet January across Oklahoma. According to preliminary statistics from the Oklahoma Mesonet, the statewide average was 2.52 inches of liquid precipitation, nearly an inch above normal and the 13<sup>th</sup> wettest January on record. Those records date back to 1895. January was the wettest on record for the Panhandle with an average of 2.4 inches, close to 2 inches above normal. North central and west central sections each tallied their fourth highest totals on record. Skiatook led the Mesonet with 4.05 inches of rain, although Tulsa was close on its heels at 4.02 inches. The Mesonet's lowest total of 0.84 inches came at Hobart. That was the only Mesonet station that failed to record at least an inch of rain during the month.

Although the ice storm monopolized the headlines, the temperatures were certainly noteworthy as well. An arctic blast on the sixth and seventh of the month plunged Oklahoma into a frigid pool of air not seen in the state since February 2011. Kenton reached minus 19 degrees on the seventh, and Kingfisher and Chickasha fell to minus 12 that same day. Wind chill temperatures dropped into the minus teens to minus 20s over a broad region that morning. Forty-five of the Mesonet's 121 stations recorded lows below zero during that period and only one station, Tulsa, remained in double-digits with a low of 11 degrees. Several days later, many stations recorded highs in the 70s and 80s. Altus reached 84 degrees on the 11<sup>th</sup>, January's highest reading on the Mesonet. Overall, January was pleasantly mild with a statewide average of 40.6 degrees, nearly 3 degrees above normal to rank as the 17<sup>th</sup> warmest on record.

Before the mid-month deluge, drought had taken firm control over much of the state. Accounts of empty farm ponds, flagging reservoirs, wildfire outbreaks and destroyed wheat crops and grasslands were being reported from all areas of Oklahoma. By January 10, the U.S. Drought Monitor had 88 percent of the state affected by drought, with 58 percent of that being severe-to-extreme. The Drought Monitor's intensity scale slides from moderate-severe-extreme-exceptional, with exceptional being the worst classification. The month's final map reflected a reduction in drought to about 80 percent of the state. The severe-to-extreme drought coverage had dropped from 58 percent to 31 percent. About 49 percent was considered "moderate" on the month's final map.

The Climate Prediction Center's (CPC) February temperature outlook shows greatly increased odds of above normal temperatures across much of the United States, including Oklahoma. The precipitation outlook shows slightly increased odds of below normal precipitation across the western two-thirds of the state. With those two outlooks in mind, and combined with long-range computer modeled precipitation forecasts, CPC's February Drought Outlook indicates a persistence of drought across Oklahoma where it existed at the end of January. No further development is expected during February, however.

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