

January Defies Dry Trend
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January seemed destined to finish on the dry side of normal, just as the eight months previous to it had, before a late-month burst of spring changed its fortunes. Tornado watches covered much of the eastern two-thirds of the state on the 29th, a by-product of the storm system that also dumped 1-3 inches of rain across parts of that same area. There were no confirmed tornadoes in Oklahoma, but reports of large hail and wind damage were scattered across the state. The late-month frenzy from Mother Nature brought January's precipitation total 0.2 inches above normal and a final statewide average of 1.6 inches according to data from the Oklahoma Mesonet. That ranks the month as the 45th wettest January since records began in 1895, and the first month since April 2012 to finish with above normal precipitation. Not all areas of the state were so fortunate. Parts of western Oklahoma finished the month with less than an inch of rainfall. Combined with December, the first two months of winter finished 0.9 inches below normal at 2.5 inches, the 39th driest December-January period on record. Coming off the driest May-December on record for the state, the May-January statewide average of 15.4 inches ranked as the third driest such period on record, behind similar periods in 1910-11 (14.5 inches) and 1952-53 (15.2 inches).

To the delight of some and the chagrin of cold-weather enthusiasts, January's temperatures did continue a trend. The month became the 28th out of the last 34 to finish warmer than normal, a rarely-interrupted streak that began with April 2010. Included in that streak are the warmest month (July 2011) and summer (2011) for any state on record, the warmest Oklahoma spring (2012) on record, and the warmest Oklahoma year (2012) on record. According to preliminary data from the Oklahoma Mesonet, the statewide average temperature was 40 degrees, 3.9 degrees above normal and the 28th warmest January on record. Despite the lofty ranking, there were still a few bouts with frigid weather. Kenton recorded the state's lowest temperature for the month at minus 10 degrees on the second. That is the lowest temperature recorded by the Mesonet since Nowata broke the state's all-time low temperature record with minus 31 degrees back on Feb. 10, 2011. The highest temperature of the month was 81 degrees, recorded at Grandfield on the 28th. The first two months of winter had a statewide average temperature of 40.9 degrees, 3.3 degrees above normal and ranked as the 17th warmest December-January period on record.

The U.S. Drought Monitor ended the month with 92 percent of the state in at least Extreme (D3) drought, and 37 percent of that in the Exceptional (D4) category. The Drought Monitor's intensity scale slides from moderate-severe-extreme-exceptional, with exceptional being the worst category. Oklahoma reservoirs, some of which have fallen to historic lows, made some gains in eastern Oklahoma. Broken Bow Lake in McCurtain County rose to 77 percent of capacity, a nine percent rise in about a month's time. Hugo Lake in Choctaw County rose from 37 percent to 61 percent. The lakes farther to the west still remain near those historic lows, however. The reservoir at Altus-Lugert remained at 16 percent of capacity, and nearby Tom Steed Lake hovered at 35 percent. Oklahoma City and Norman have both implemented mandatory water conservation guidelines to their water customers due to low lake levels.

Moisture looks a bit scarce in the short term. Farther out, the latest temperature outlook for February from the National Weather Service's Climate Prediction Center (CPC) indicates increased odds of above normal temperatures across the entire state. The CPC precipitation outlook points to equal odds of above-, below- or near-normal moisture totals. CPC's U.S. Seasonal Drought Outlook for February-April sees drought either persisting or intensifying across the entire state. The CPC outlook for the primary rainy season in Oklahoma, April-June, calls for increased odds of above normal temperatures and below normal precipitation.

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