

November Snow Steals Show
December 1, 2014

Oklahoma's weather during November was both simplistic and momentous. It began and ended on the warm side, and had a good dose of January thrown in during the middle. That's the simplified version, of course. As is often the case with Oklahoma weather, however, the excitement lies in the details. A big rain late in the month provided some drought-quenching exhilaration, and the strong arctic cold front on November's final day was a non-gentle reminder of the season. But the big story was undoubtedly the brush with frigid weather in the middle of the month, one of the most significant early-season winter outbreaks on record for Oklahoma. Despite the abundance of warm weather, that mid-November arctic blast pulled the entire month down to a statewide average of 44.5 degrees, 4.8 degrees below normal to rank as the 10th coolest November since records began in 1895. The year is still on course to be one of the coolest in recent memory with a January-November statewide average of 60.6 degrees, 1.3 degrees below normal and the 19th coolest such period on record.

The cold snap began with a cold front on the 11th that dropped temperatures from the 70s and 80s into the 30s and 40s. The Oklahoma Mesonet station at Boise City struggled to a high of 15 degrees on the 12th just two days after reaching a high of 81 degrees. Kenton dropped to a low of 3 degrees on the 17th for the month's lowest reading. Temperatures were on the rise from that point forward signaling an end to the weeklong foray into deep winter, but not before most of the state had spent from 100 to more than 150 hours below freezing. The event also came with a statewide blanket of snow. Amounts of 3-4 inches were common across parts of western, northern and central Oklahoma. Totals of more than 4 inches were reported near Forgan and Laverne. Within a few days, highs had risen back into the 60s and 70s across much of the area, culminating in widespread 70s and 80s on the 28th and 29th. November 30 was a day of transition as the month's second strong cold front barreled through the state.

The snow added a bit of moisture, but the big rains of Nov. 21-23 provided the biggest boost to the month's statewide average of 2.12 inches, 0.4 inches below normal and the 50th wettest November on record. Areas across south central Oklahoma recorded more than 6 inches of moisture with the Mesonet station at Ketchum Ranch in Stephens County leading the way at 6.6 inches. Totals of 3-5 inches surrounded that mark from southwestern up into east central Oklahoma. Much of the far northwest remained considerably dry with less than an inch of moisture. Far southeastern Oklahoma was also left wanting with barely an inch falling across that region. The statewide average precipitation total for climatological fall, September-November, finished at 7.84 inches, 1.74 inches below normal to rank as the 58th driest autumn on record. The year-to-date period remained quite dry at 27.04 inches, more than 7 inches below normal and the 25th driest January-November on record.

Oklahoma did see a reduction in drought intensity according to the U.S. Drought Monitor report. Parts of southwestern through central Oklahoma saw extreme-to-exceptional drought reduced to severe-to-moderate intensity. With the southeastern corner's poor showing during the month, that area actually saw abnormally dry conditions increase. The "abnormally dry" designation is not a drought intensity, but signifies an area that could be entering (or leaving) actual drought conditions. By month's end, 60 percent of the state was considered to be in at least moderate drought. The Drought Monitor's intensity scale slides from moderate-severe-extreme-exceptional, with exceptional being the worst classification.

The December precipitation and temperature outlooks from the National Weather Service's Climate Prediction Center (CPC) indicate increased odds of above normal precipitation and temperature across the state. The expectation according to CPC forecasters is for a dramatic pattern change across the northern two-thirds of the U.S. following the first few days of December, replacing chilly arctic air with above normal temperatures through the month's first couple of weeks. Medium range outlooks call for greatly increased odds of above normal precipitation across the Southern Plains during the second week of December. CPC's U.S. Monthly Drought Outlook sees drought persisting or intensifying across most of Oklahoma, with some improvement or removal likely across south central Oklahoma.

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