

Summer Sizzles During July
Aug. 1, 2016

The state's sizzling summer continued unabated through July, at least for most Oklahomans. The Oklahoma Mesonet recorded at least one triple-digit temperature in the state on 25 of the month's 31 days. Goodwell and Hooker led all Mesonet sites with highs of 108 degrees on the 11th. Those temperature extremes were reflected in the statewide average for the month. According to preliminary data from the Oklahoma Mesonet, the statewide average temperature was 82.8 degrees, 1.3 degrees above normal to rank as the 43rd warmest July since records began in 1895. That does not paint the complete picture of the miserably hot weather, however. Those temperatures combined with the stifling humidity to boost heat index values well into the dangerous category throughout the month. The Mesonet's 121 stations recorded 984 instances of daily maximum heat indexes of at least 105 degrees, and 89 times at or above 110 degrees. Kingfisher took the top spot in that category at 116 degrees. The climatological summer season, which runs from June 1 through August 31, stands 2 degrees above normal to rank as the 24th warmest June-July on record. Hooker topped the seasonal triple-digit count with 22 days at or above 100 degrees. The January-July statewide average of 61.5 degrees was 2 degrees above normal as well, the ninth warmest such period on record.

Intermittent episodes of very heavy rainfall kept much of the northern half of the state well above normal while far southern Oklahoma was not quite as fortunate. Thirty-four Mesonet sites recorded at least 5 inches of rain during July with Pawnee leading the state at 11.77 inches. Most of central though east central Oklahoma had generous totals of 6-9 inches. That was not the case for southeastern Oklahoma, however. Several stations in that region failed to register an inch of rain for the month with Durant recording the lowest total at 0.23 inches. The statewide average of 3.84 inches was nearly an inch above normal to rank as the 32nd wettest July on record. Thanks to a dry June, the first two months of summer remained on the dry side at nearly a half-inch below normal, although west central and southwestern Oklahoma had a soggy start with their 37th- and 28th-wettest June-July periods, respectively. The first seven months of the year combined for a statewide average of 20.97 inches, about an inch below normal.

The heavy rains from central through northeastern Oklahoma put a halt to the spread of flash drought in those regions, counteracting dry weather that began back in late April. Unfortunately, the aforementioned lack of rain across southern Oklahoma led to flash drought erupting in that region by month's end. The July 5 U.S. Drought Monitor report had four percent of the state in moderate drought and an additional 15 percent in "abnormally dry" conditions – a drought precursor. The final Drought Monitor of the month had over nine percent of the state in moderate drought, mostly across southeastern Oklahoma, and 29 percent was considered abnormally dry. A small section of Bryan and Choctaw counties had intensified to severe drought. The Drought Monitor's intensity scale slides from moderate-severe-extreme-exceptional, with exceptional being the worst classification. Several state lakes had begun to show signs of drought stress according to the Oklahoma Water Resources Board. Broken Bow Lake in McCurtain County fell 6 feet below normal as of July 27 and Lake Stanley Draper in central Oklahoma was 10 feet down at that time. Lugert-Altus, Foss, Atoka and Skiatook were some of the other major reservoirs that had dipped below normal.

The Climate Prediction Center's (CPC) August outlooks called for increased odds of above normal temperature across the eastern half of the state and below normal precipitation across the far southeast. The seasonal outlooks see increased odds for above normal temperatures across the entire United States through early fall and the southern half through winter and next spring. Below normal precipitation over the country's southern tier, including Oklahoma, is indicated from late this fall through next spring. CPC's Monthly Drought Outlook expects drought to persist across Oklahoma through August, although no new drought was projected to develop.

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