

October Rains Plentiful For Some, Scarce For Others
November 3, 2014

One weekend of heavy rain brightened the fortunes of some Oklahomans during October while others continued on in the embrace of significant drought. Eastern Oklahoma, especially the far northeast corner, came out the big winner in the moisture sweepstakes. Those across the western half of the state, particularly southwest Oklahoma, were not so lucky. According to preliminary data from the Oklahoma Mesonet, the statewide average rainfall total for the month was 3.42 inches, just a tad above normal and the 41st wettest October since records began in 1895. Punctuating the stark difference in fortunes along the southwest-to-northeast diagonal of the state, northeastern Oklahoma saw widespread totals of 5-9 inches, but much of southwestern Oklahoma received less than an inch. Northeast Oklahoma recorded an average of 5.99 inches, nearly 2.5 inches above normal and the 16th wettest October on record for that area. Meanwhile, southwest Oklahoma garnered a measly 1.34 inches, more than 1.5 inches below normal and the 39th driest on record. The Mesonet site at Oilton led the state with 9.04 inches while Mangum recorded a paltry 0.57 inches. The near normal totals of October kept the year-to-date statewide average in firm deficit mode at 25.07 inches, 6.78 inches below normal to rank as the 26th driest January-October on record. Southwest Oklahoma stands out in that time frame with an average of 18.32 inches, 9.37 inches below normal to rank as the 17th driest.

Unlike precipitation, temperature had no intention of finishing near normal during October. The statewide average temperature, as determined by the Mesonet, was 64.1 degrees, 2.8 degrees above normal to rank as the 20th warmest on record. The month's highest reading from the Mesonet was 99 degrees from several sites on October 7, although 90s were recorded as late as the 27th. The lowest reading of 23 degrees was reported at Oilton on the month's final day. Combined with a somewhat warm September, the average for the first two months of climatological fall was 68.6 degrees, good for the 27th warmest such period on record. The year-to-date average of 62.1 degrees remained 0.7 degrees below normal and ranked as the 28th coolest January-October since 1895.

The warm weather was a disappointment to those hoping drought would begin to taper during what is considered the beginning of Oklahoma's cool season and secondary rainy season. Daytime highs in the 80s and even 90s at times kept pressure on the soils and reservoirs in the areas impacted by significant drought. Owing to the uneven precipitation pattern of October, the U.S. Drought Monitor showed an overall decrease in drought from 73 percent to 64 percent, but an increase in extreme-exceptional drought – the two worst categories – from 21 percent to 23 percent. Nearly the entire eastern half of the state was drought free, although some moderate drought was noted to the east of I-35 in northern and southern Oklahoma. The majority of southwestern Oklahoma remained in extreme or exceptional drought. One year ago, only 27 percent of the state was considered to be in drought according to the Drought Monitor.

The November precipitation outlook from the National Weather Service's Climate Prediction Center (CPC) showed increased odds for above normal precipitation across the state. There was not a clear signal for the November temperature outlook. The precipitation outlook for the November-January period portrayed the southwestern half of the state with increased odds for above normal precipitation. That same area also had increased odds of below normal temperatures. No clear signal exists for either precipitation or temperature in the northeastern half of the state. CPC's U.S. Monthly Drought Outlook for November calls for drought to either persist or intensify across the western third of Oklahoma, but some improvement or even removal is likely to the east of that area.