

February Brings Early Oklahoma Spring March 1, 2017

If glimpses of winter were sporadic in December and January, they were downright scarce during February. Temperatures often soared into the 70s and 80s, culminating with a maximum of 99 degrees at the Mangum Mesonet site on February 11. That tied the mark for highest temperature ever recorded in Oklahoma during not only February, but winter as well. That record was set previously at Arapaho on Feb. 24, 1918. According to preliminary Mesonet data, the statewide average for February was 49.8 degrees, 7.7 degrees above normal to rank as the fourth warmest February since records began in 1895. February also marks the end of the three-month climatological winter. The December-February statewide average ended at 42.9 degrees, the ninth warmest winter on record, 3.4 degrees above normal. The lowest winter temperature recorded by the Mesonet was minus 19 degrees at Kenton on January 7. The first two months of 2017 also broke the record for the warmest January-February combined with a statewide average of 45.1 degrees, 5.3 degrees above normal, besting 1952's 44.7 degrees.

The lack of substantial cold air was perhaps just as striking as the predominance of the warm extremes. Several cold fronts dropped state temperatures close to seasonal normals, but the truly frigid weather was mostly confined to the western Oklahoma Panhandle. The Mesonet site at Eva recorded a statewide low for the month of 5 degrees on the 25th. The Durant Mesonet site spent 11 hours at or below freezing during February, bottoming out at a relatively mild 29 degrees. In contrast, Eva was below freezing for 215 hours.

Two robust mid-month storm systems boosted the statewide average precipitation total to 2.04 inches, 0.21 inches above normal, to rank as the 34th wettest February on record. Southwestern through central Oklahoma enjoyed the best rains with totals ranging from 2-4.5 inches. Southwestern and central Oklahoma saw their 12th- and 15th-wettest Februaries on record, respectively. El Reno led the state's monthly total at 4.48 inches. Seven Mesonet sites recorded at least 4 inches, and 69 garnered at least 2 inches. Parts of the state were exceedingly dry, however. Kenton led the Panhandle with a paltry 0.28 inches while Goodwell and Hooker tied for the lowest at 0.02 inches. In the northeast, Miami came in about 1.5 inches below normal with 0.63 inches. The winter ended as the 43rd wettest with a statewide average of 5.38 inches, about a tenth of an inch above normal.

Although a bit of severe weather made its presence felt during February, fire danger was the most frequent hazard. Weather conditions prompted Gov. Mary Fallin to issue a burn ban for 53 counties on Feb. 10, although the ban was lifted on Feb. 15 after the beneficial rains. Eleven county burn bans remained in place on the month's final day. The two consecutive storm systems signaled a change in the general weather pattern experienced by Oklahoma since early last fall. The state had been seeing perhaps one good rain a month, allowing for drought intensification in between those systems. The reinforcing moisture allowed for more sustained and significant drought relief. Nearly 80 percent of the state was covered by drought at the end of January according to the U.S. Drought Monitor. That amount was reduced to 68 percent on the last report for the month.

The March outlooks from the Climate Prediction Center (CPC) indicate warm, dry weather is possible during March with increased odds of above normal temperatures and below normal precipitation. With those conditions favored, CPC's U.S. Monthly Drought Outlook sees drought persisting across the state where it currently exists. No drought development is expected during March.

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