

National Drought Summary for December 16, 2025

Summary

This week, temperature and precipitation patterns varied sharply across the country. Temperatures were generally warmer in the West and colder in the east, with much of the Cascades and Rocky Mountains running well above normal while the Midwest experienced much colder-than-normal conditions. Multiple Pacific storm systems brought widespread precipitation to the Pacific Northwest and northern Rockies, falling as rain at lower elevations and snow in the mountains; however, despite recent snowfall, snowpack remains below normal for mid-December. East of the Rockies, precipitation was more limited and uneven, and where it did occur across the northern Plains and Midwest, it often fell as snow. As a result, drought conditions improved mainly across parts of the Pacific Northwest and northern Rockies. Additional localized improvements occurred in parts of the Southeast, where lingering benefits from rainfall in prior weeks continued to support soil moisture and streamflows. In contrast, areas farther south and east that missed meaningful precipitation saw conditions persist or worsen. Across portions of the southern Plains, lower Mississippi Valley, Ohio Valley, Mid-Atlantic, and Northeast, continued precipitation deficits and declining streamflows led to degradations. In the Midwest, colder temperatures limited precipitation to fall as snow, slowing hydrologic response and resulting in mostly localized changes.

Northeast

PlaceholderThe Northeast continued to dry during the past week, as light and uneven precipitation provided little relief to areas that have experienced ongoing precipitation deficits. While some precipitation occurred, it was not sufficient to improve soil moisture or streamflows, allowing drought conditions to expand in several parts of the region. Conditions worsened across portions of the Mid-Atlantic, where Pennsylvania, Maryland, and New Jersey all saw conditions degrade. In these areas, continued precipitation deficits and persistently low streamflows supported worsening drought, including the expansion of severe drought (D2) in northwestern New Jersey into eastern Pennsylvania. Farther north, abnormally dry (D0) conditions expanded across parts of New York and Connecticut as short-term precipitation remained limited, and soils continued to dry. In Massachusetts, growing long-term dryness led to the introduction of severe drought (D2) in the central part of the state and Nantucket Island, where hydrologic stress has continued to intensify despite recent precipitation.

Southeast

Rainfall patterns generally drove drought changes across the Southeast this week. While some areas continued to benefit from rainfall that occurred in prior weeks, much of the region experienced a mostly dry week. Across parts of Alabama and Georgia, drought conditions improved slightly where remnants of prior rainfall continued to improve soil moisture, leading to improvements in moderate (D1) and severe drought (D2) in localized areas. Despite light precipitation in southern Virginia and the Carolinas, conditions continued to deteriorate with abnormal dryness (D0) and moderate drought (D1) expanding. Similarly, northern Virginia saw

worsening streamflows and soil moisture, leading to the expansion of severe drought (D2). In Florida, conditions diverged across the state. Portions of the central Florida Panhandle saw one-class improvements, where the prior weeks soaking rainfall continued to ease drought impacts. The central Florida Peninsulas lack of recent precipitation and growing moisture deficits led to deterioration across the central and south-central parts of the Peninsula.

South

Drought conditions across the South generally worsened this week, as limited precipitation did little to improve the growing moisture deficits. Louisiana and some areas of Mississippi saw some improvements due to precipitation, including the removal of severe drought (D2) in west-central Louisiana. In Texas and Oklahoma, ongoing precipitation deficits led to further expansion of abnormally dry (D0) and moderate drought (D1) conditions. In south-central Texas, longer-term hydrologic stress continued and intensified with the expansion of severe (D2) and extreme drought (D3). Across Arkansas and Tennessee, despite cooler than normal temperatures, dry conditions continued to worsen with growing precipitation deficits, drying soils, and decreasing streamflows leading to the expansion of abnormal dryness (D0) and moderate drought (D1).

Midwest

The central and southern Midwest saw mixed and localized changes this week, shaped by uneven precipitation and below-normal temperatures, particularly across the northern part of the region where conditions largely remained unchanged. Much of the recent precipitation fell as a mix of rain and snow. In east-central Iowa, one-class improvements were made where repeated precipitation helped ease short-term dryness. In central Ohio, abnormally dry conditions (D0) were trimmed following recent precipitation and a reduction in short-term dryness. Elsewhere, abnormally dry (D0) conditions expanded across parts of southwestern Kentucky and southwestern Illinois, where limited precipitation did little to alleviate growing dryness. In Illinois and Missouri, longer-term precipitation deficits and low streamflows persisted, and recent precipitation was insufficient to improve conditions, leading to expansions of abnormal dryness (D0) and moderate drought (D1) along the Missouri-Illinois border. In southwestern Missouri, one-class degradations reflected continued hydrologic stress.

High Plains

The High Plains remained largely unchanged this week. Areas of less than one inch of precipitation fell across some areas of the Dakotas and northeastern Wyoming. In east-central South Dakota, this precipitation led to minor improvements with the removal of some abnormal dryness (D0). Nebraska, Colorado, and most of Kansas remained unchanged. In southeastern Kansas along the Kansas-Missouri border, hydrologic deficits led to further deterioration and the expansion of moderate drought (D1). In southeastern Wyoming, frequent strong winds and above-normal temperatures combined with continued lack of precipitation contributed to further degradation and the expansion of moderate drought (D1).

West

Across the West, drought changes were mainly determined by precipitation. In Washington and northern Oregon, multiple Pacific storm systems, associated with atmospheric river moisture, brought widespread precipitation to the Pacific Northwest. Precipitation fell mainly as rain at lower elevations and snow in the mountains, contributing to ongoing flooding in parts of western Washington and supporting widespread one-class improvements along the coast and nearby interior areas. Since the end of November, snowpack in the Cascades has slightly improved, though snow water equivalent (SWE) values remain below normal for this time of year, particularly where warmer temperatures limited snow accumulation. Across central and southern Oregon and into northern California, conditions show rapid short-term drying. However, last-minute (Dec. 15-16) rainfall of 1 to 2 inches along Oregon's coast was enough to bring improvements where it fell while the areas that missed out on the precipitation saw abnormal dryness (D0) expanded.

In the Northern Rockies, repeated precipitation supported one-class improvements across northern Idaho and northwestern Montana. Lower elevations experienced rain or mixed precipitation, while higher elevations received snow, leading to SWE improvements in northern and central Idaho and western Montana. Despite this week's precipitation, much of Idaho's snowpack remains below normal with SWE at 70 percent of normal, while snowpack across western and central Montana showed the greatest improvement, with SWE near or above 90 percent of normal for this time of year. Farther east and south across central and western Montana, more widespread precipitation supported a swath of one-class improvements.

Across the central Rocky Mountains of Wyoming and Colorado, conditions were more mixed. Portions of the north-central Rockies received enough snowfall to lead to localized improvements, with SWE in some headwater areas approaching near-normal early-season levels. Elsewhere, continued warmth and limited snowfall hindered snowpack development, allowing drought conditions to persist or worsen in some mountain and adjacent areas. Across much of western and central Utah, SWE remains below 50 percent of normal, supporting one-class degradations in north-central and central Utah. In the Southwest, localized changes were made in New Mexico, with improvements in central New Mexico where longer-term precipitation from earlier periods continued show hydrologic improvement, while precipitation deficits led to the expansion of moderate drought (D1) in the southeast part of the state.

Caribbean

This week, Puerto Rico experienced limited and uneven rainfall, with amounts generally below normal, leading to an expansion of dryness across parts of the island. Abnormally dry conditions (D0) were expanded across northwestern Puerto Rico and from east-central areas towards the eastern coast, where recent precipitation has been insufficient to keep up with ongoing moisture demands. Vegetation conditions continued to show signs of stress in northern and northeastern portions of the island, and streamflows were mixed but generally trending lower, with many locations falling below typical seasonal levels.

Abnormal dryness continues to affect the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI). CoCoRaHS stations situated across the St. Croix Island received 0.28 to 0.78 of rain this week. Well water levels at Adventure 28 Well were at 18.69 ft, which was 2.86 ft lower than last week. At St. John Island, CoCoRaHS stations recorded 0.76 to 1.17 of rain. Windswept Beach recorded 0.98 of rain this week. Well water levels at the Susannaberg DPW 3 Well were at 10.65 ft. St. Thomas Island received 0.77 to 0.87 of rain this week, according to CoCoRaHS stations. Grade School 3 Well experienced a slight increase in well water levels compared to last week, which are currently at 5.78 ft. St. Croix and St. John Islands may enter moderate drought should inadequate precipitation continue to fall into next week.

Pacific

This week, Alaska experienced persistent cold and dry conditions, with little precipitation across much of the state. Most areas received minimal new snowfall, particularly across south-central Alaska, where recent precipitation was insufficient to offset ongoing precipitation deficits. In addition, strong wind events affected parts of south-central Alaska during the period, with gusts reaching around 80 mph, further limiting any short-term moisture benefits. Given the continued lack of meaningful precipitation over recent weeks, abnormally dry conditions (D0) were introduced in south-central Alaska. Temperatures remained well below normal, especially across the Interior and northern areas, reinforcing dry conditions but limiting evaporation due to frozen soils. Elsewhere across the state, drought conditions remained status quo.

This week, Hawaii saw rainfall that led to short-term improvements across parts of the state, though dry conditions persisted elsewhere. Kauai received widespread rainfall of about 2 to 3 inches, which was sufficient to reduce dryness across the island and resulted in the removal of moderate drought (D1). Oahu generally picked up 1 to 3 inches of rain, with higher totals in windward and upslope areas, supporting improvements across much of the island; southeastern Oahu remained unchanged where rainfall was lighter. Molokai also received beneficial rainfall, particularly across central and eastern areas, leading to improved short-term conditions, though some lingering dryness remained. In contrast, Maui, Kahoolawe, and the Big Island saw lighter and more uneven rainfall, with most locations receiving less than one inch during the period. While recent rainfall provided limited short-term relief in a few areas, it was not enough to offset longer-term precipitation deficits, and drought conditions remained unchanged on these islands.

Most islands in the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) have experienced a dry week. Places like Ailingalapalap, Utirik, and Kwajalein have received less than 0.5 of rain this week, at 0.28, 0.28, and 0.16 of rain, respectively. Few places have received more than 0.5 of rain, with Jaluit receiving 0.62, Majuro receiving 0.93, and Mili receiving 3.43 of rain this week. Wotje received the least rain this week, at 0.08. Should the lack of precipitation persist, Wotje may soon receive a 1-category degradation to abnormal dryness.

The Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) have received considerably more rain compared to the RMI. Places like Kapingamarangi, Kosrae, and Lukunor received 3.04, 3.20, and 3.13 of rain this week. Additionally, beneficial rain has allowed Kapingamarangi to become free of drought and dryness. Pohnpei has received the most rain out of all the islands in the FSM,

receiving 5.9 of rain this week. However, there are places that have not received adequate rainfall. Pingelap, Woleai, and Yap received only 1.07, 0.63, and 0.99 of rain this week, respectively. Chuuk Lagoon received the least rainfall this week, only receiving 0.38 of rain this week. Should the lack of rainfall persist for Yap, the island may receive a 1-category degradation to abnormal dryness.

Rainfall in the Republic of Palau varied. While places like Koror received only 1.14 of rain, the WSO Palau station received 2.14 of rain this week. Similar variation in rainfall occurred in the Marianas Islands. The islands of Guam and Rota received 1.38 and 1.31 of rain this week, while Tinian and Saipan received 0.01 and 0.05 of rain this week. Tinian and Saipan will remain in abnormal dryness this week. American Samoa also experienced a dry week. The Siufaga and Toa Ridges received 0.47 and 0.60 of rain, respectively. The Pago Pago area received only 0.28 of rain this week. However, American Samoa has received adequate rainfall in the past weeks and thus will remain free of drought and dryness.

Looking Ahead

According to the National Weather Services 5-day (Dec. 18-23) quantitative precipitation forecast, the heaviest precipitation is forecast across the West, particularly along the Pacific Northwest coast and into northern California, where widespread totals may exceed 5 inches in some areas. Additional moderate to heavy precipitation is expected across the Cascades and into parts of the northern Rockies, with totals generally ranging from 1 to 4 inches. Lighter but still notable precipitation is forecast to extend eastward into portions of the central Rockies and the northern Plains. Across the central and eastern U.S., precipitation is expected to be more scattered and generally lighter. Portions of the Midwest, Ohio Valley, Southeast, and Gulf Coast may receive light to moderate precipitation, generally ranging from 0.5 to 2 inches. Farther east, a band of precipitation is indicated along parts of the East Coast, with locally higher amounts possible from the Southeast into the Mid-Atlantic and portions of the Northeast. Overall, the forecast highlights a wetter pattern in the West and more limited, variable precipitation across much of the central and eastern U.S.

The Climate Predictions Centers 6 to 10 day temperature outlook (Dec. 22-26) shows an increased likelihood of above-normal temperatures across much of the central and southern U.S., extending from the West Coast through the Plains and into the Southeast. The highest probabilities for above-normal temperatures are centered over the southern Plains and Southwest, with much of the interior West, Rockies, and central Plains also favored to be warmer than normal. Near-normal temperatures are indicated across parts of the Pacific Northwest and the Great Lakes. Below-normal temperatures are most likely across portions of the Northeast, particularly northern New England, while Alaska shows a strong signal for below-normal temperatures across much of the state. Hawaii is favored to see above-normal temperatures during the period. In terms of precipitation, the 6 to 10 day outlook indicates an increased likelihood of above-normal precipitation across much of the West, including California, the Pacific Northwest, and parts of the Great Basin and northern Rockies. Near- to above-normal precipitation probabilities also extend into parts of the interior West. In contrast, below-normal precipitation is favored across much of the central Plains, lower Mississippi

, Southeast, and Florida, with the strongest signal centered over the southern Plains and Gulf Coast region. Near-normal precipitation probabilities are indicated across parts of the Great Lakes and Northeast, while Alaska shows mixed signals, with below-normal precipitation favored in southern portions and near-normal conditions elsewhere.

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