

National Drought Summary for January 20, 2026

Summary

The Lower 48 States finally settled into a more tranquil weather pattern, as a ridge of high pressure settled across the West and a deep trough developed over the East. With many parts of the western U.S. reporting below-average snowpack for this time of year, the pattern change led to increasing concerns regarding Western water supply for next summer and beyond, despite robust precipitation in many areas during the first half of the winter wet season. Still, hydrologic signals were mixed, with Californias 154 primary intrastate reservoirs containing 25.9 million acre-feet of water (123% of the historic average) as 2026 began. Meanwhile, storage in the sprawling, multi-state Colorado River Basin stood at just under 17.3 million acre-feet (53% of average), reflecting long-term issues in part related to chronically elevated temperatures and a multi-decadal Southwestern drought. Farther east, the Plains served as the transition zone between mild, dry weather in the West and increasingly cold conditions in the East. The Plains experienced dry weather, aside from wind-driven snow showers on the northern Plains, as well as an occasionally elevated wildfire threat. Elsewhere, areas from the Mississippi Valley eastward noted cold weather, accompanied by occasional rain and snow showers. Some of the heaviest snow fell the Great Lakes States, especially in squall-prone locations. Snow also fell along and near the Atlantic Seaboard, mainly on January 17-18. As colder air became more entrenched in the Midwest and East, drought changes that had been occurring quickly in recent weeks, either due to flash drought or active winter storms, became more muted, with drought effectively frozen in place by chilly, mostly dry conditions. During the second half of the drought-monitoring period, sub-0F temperatures were commonly observed across the upper Midwest and neighboring regions.

Northeast

Due to cool weather and patchy precipitation, there were few changes in the Northeastern drought depiction. Some slight improvements in the drought depiction were noted for interior locations, while parts of coastal southern New England experienced slight drought deterioration or introduction.

Southeast

Light precipitation fell during the drought-monitoring period from northern Florida to southeastern Virginia, but most locations received less than an inch. A few weeks ago, in early January, most Southeastern States reported that topsoil moisture in agricultural areas was rated at least 40% very short to short, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Drought-related impacts have included poor pasture conditions and limited surface water supplies. Due to drought and sporadic cold waves, some fall-sown crops such as winter wheat have struggled to emerge and develop. New areas of extreme drought (D3) were introduced in parts of Alabama and Georgia, while moderate to severe drought (D1 to D2) was expanded in several areas.

South

Worsening drought was a common theme, especially from eastern Texas into Arkansas. A small area of exceptional drought (D4) was introduced in northern Arkansas, amid a punishing period of drought that has left pastures in extremely poor condition and has left many individuals with limited surface water supplies from ponds and streams. Several weeks ago, in early January, the U.S. Department of Agriculture categorized Arkansas topsoil moisture as 46% very short to short and mostly dry weather has prevailed since that report was compiled. From northern Arkansas, a continuous area of severe to extreme drought (D2 to D3) extended southwestward into northeastern Texas. Patchy D2 stretched into neighboring states, including Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee. Much of southern Texas, as well as southern, central, and eastern Oklahoma is experiencing moderate to extreme drought (D1 to D3).

Midwest

Aside from occasional precipitation, including locally heavy snow squalls downwind of the Great Lakes, the Midwest settled into a colder, mostly dry pattern. Any changes were generally minor, with some drought deterioration noted from southern Missouri into southern Indiana. Statewide topsoil moisture was greater than 40% very short to short in early January across Illinois and Missouri, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Meanwhile, some minor improvements were introduced in the Great Lakes region, following recent heavy precipitation and ongoing snow showers.

High Plains

Patchy expansion of dryness and drought was noted, mainly across Nebraska, Wyoming, and southern South Dakota. Due to periods of warm, windy weather, Nebraska reported that statewide topsoil moisture was rated 68% very short to short in early January, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Similarly, Wyoming's topsoil moisture was rated 55% very short to short.

West

Over the last couple of weeks, an uncomfortable silence has settled across the West. With snowpack already below average in many Western watersheds due to this winter's preponderance of warm storm systems, the mid-point of the region's snow-accumulation season has arrived with snow-water equivalencies falling farther behind normal each day. Among Western basins, only those located in the northern Rockies and neighboring areas are reporting widespread near-normal snowpack. By January 20, snow-water equivalencies were broadly less than 50% of average in Oregon (and portions of adjacent states) and the Southwest. Although many areas of the West are reporting above-average season-to-date precipitation, the anomalous winter warmth and corresponding lack of snow could have serious future implications for wildfire activity and summer water supplies. For now, however, more than half of the 11-state Western region including all of California is free of drought.

Caribbean

There were no changes to the coverage of abnormal dryness (D0) in Puerto Rico, as scattered showers were insufficient for further improvement.

Dry conditions persisted this week over the U.S. Virgin Islands this week, with nowhere receiving above an inch of rain this week. St. Croix experienced scattered light rain this week. The totals reported were 0.20 inches at VI-SC-10 (Christiansted 1.6 E) and 0.91 inches at VI-SC-29 (Frederiksted 2.5 NNE). VI-SC-30 (Christiansted 1.7 SW) received 0.24 inches, while VI-SC-34 (Frederiksted 1.9 NE) reported 0.72 inches. The Standardized Precipitation Index (SPI) values for East Hill over the past 1 to 12 months ranged from -0.71 to -1.17, indicating conditions from normal to short-term abnormally dry. In contrast, the 1- to 6-month SPI values (-2.16, -5.14 and 4.02) for Christiansted Hamilton indicate that the western parts of St. Croix are experiencing drought conditions. As of January 20, 2026, the water level at Adventure 28 Well in St. Croix, USVI, is recorded at 19.21 feet. This marks an increase from 19.04 feet in the previous week. Additionally, this level is over 3 feet higher than it was on the same date last year, January 21, 2025, when it was 15.93 feet. These observations indicate that St. Croix is still experiencing abnormally dry conditions (D0-S).

St. John reported low rainfall this week, with only 0.07 inches reported at VI-SJ-3 (Windswept Beach). CoCoRaHS rainfall totals across the island averaged 0.24 inches with VI-SJ-5 (Cruz Bay 1.6 E) and VJ-SJ-8 (Cruz Bay 7.4 E) reporting 0.31 inches of rainfall this week and VI-SJ-9 (Myall Point 0.1 S) and VI-SJ-10 (Cruz Bay 3.1 NNW) reporting 0.26 inches and 0.07 inches respectively. The one- and three-month SPI Windswept Beach were 2.32 and 1.73 as of January 15, 2026, indicating that conditions are drier than normal in the short-term. The depth to the water level below the land surface at the Susannaberg Dpw 3 Well, St. John, USVI, has been steadily increasing since mid-October 2025. On January 20, 2026, the water level reached 12.52 feet, up from last week's 12.11 feet. This persistent increase in the depth of the water level below the land surface indicates the island is in short-term moderate drought (D1-S) conditions.

Similarly, Cyril E. King Airport in St. Thomas recorded 0.24 inches of rainfall this week. Other rainfall totals on the island were 0.34 inches at VI-ST-13 (Charlotte Amalie 1.2 NNW) and 0.27 inches at VI-ST-15 (Charlotte Amalie West 1.3 N). The depth to the water level below the land surface at the Grade School 3 well in St. Thomas, USVI, has been increasing since mid-October. As of January 20, 2026, the water level was recorded at 8.02 feet, up from last weeks 7.66 feet. This rise in water depth indicates that the island is currently experiencing short-term moderate drought (D1-S).

Pacific

A storm system traversing Alaska brought milder weather and widespread precipitation, with the latter helping to reduce the size of an area of abnormal dryness in the south-central portion of the state.

Hawaii experienced a cold frontal passage, although heavy rain tapered to scattered showers as the front shifted eastward and weakened. Still, a small amount of abnormal dryness (D0) was removed from western Oahu, where the cold front produced some heavy rain. Otherwise, the Hawaiian drought depiction was unchanged.

American Samoa remained free of drought and abnormal dryness (D0-S). Conditions were mixed this week with Pago Pago and Tao Ridge recording 1.76 and 3.71 inches of rain respectively, while Siufaga Ridge reported just 1.29 inches.

Palau remained free of drought or abnormal dryness (D0-S) this week. The Koror COOP site reported a weekly rainfall total of 0.32 inches, with a monthly total precipitation of 6.13 inches.

The Northern Mariana Islands, Tinian and Saipan, reported weekly totals of 2.18 and 1.72 inches, while the southern islands Rota and Guam received weekly rainfall totals of 0.64 and 0.87 inches, respectively. Since January is part of the dry season and given the monthly precipitation totals are all above 2.6 inches, the Marianas remained free of drought and abnormal dryness (D0-S) this week.

Conditions were largely wet across the Federated States of Micronesia this week, with all but Pingelap (which remained in abnormal dryness), free of drought or abnormal dryness. Kosrae (4.06 inches), Pohnpei (3.04 inches), Lukunoch (4.60 inches), Chuuk (4.29 inches), Kapingamarangi (3.69 inches), Woleai (4.98 inches) and Nukuoro (5.12 inches) reported weekly rainfall amounts above the 2-inch minimum threshold for water needs. Yap (0.76 inches) and Pingelap (0.36 inches) reported rainfall totals below the 2-inch minimum threshold, though Yaps monthly total is 6.65 inches while Pingelaps monthly total is 0.41 inches. Data for Fananu and Ulithi were insufficient to make any assessments this week.

Conditions were mixed across the Republic of the Marshall Islands this week. In the south, Ailinglapalap (2.7 inches), Jaluit (3.37 inches) and Mili (5.37 inches) recorded over two inches of rain for the week. Majuro (1.67 inches) fell short of the 2-inch minimum for water needs this week, but the monthly total is 5.59 inches, so the island remained free of drought or abnormal dryness. While Kwajalein (0.06 inches) saw only trace amounts of precipitation, the monthly total is 7.27 inches. Similarly, Wotje (0.06 inches) and Utirik (0.0 inches) saw little to no precipitation this week, but monthly precipitation totals are less than one inch (Wotje 0.79 inches and Utirik 0.59 inches) leading to both islands degrading to short-term moderate drought (D1-S).

Looking Ahead

From January 23-26, an expansive and potentially dangerous winter storm will unfold from southern sections of the Rockies and Plains to the middle and southern Atlantic States, excluding areas along and near the Gulf Coast. Much of the South will face multiple weather hazards, including wintry precipitation (snow, sleet, or freezing rain), gusty winds, and unusually low temperatures. Wintry weather may extend at least as far south as central Texas and northern sections of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia. Post-storm temperatures should fall to 10F or below along and north of a line from central Texas to northern Georgia, with particular concern for areas that lose electricity due to downed power

from accumulations of ice and snow. Farther north, sub-0F readings will be common as far south as the central Plains and the Ohio Valley. The storm is likely to have serious agricultural impacts, including significant stress on livestock due to exposure to cold, wind, wintry precipitation, or a combination of weather extremes. Temperatures could briefly plunge to -30F or below from North Dakota into the upper Great Lakes region.

The NWS 6- to 10-day outlook for January 27 31 calls for the likelihood of below-normal temperatures throughout the eastern half of the U.S., while warmer-than-normal weather will prevail in the West. Meanwhile, near- or below-normal precipitation nearly nationwide should contrast with wetter-than-normal conditions in a few areas, including southern Florida and southern and coastal Texas.

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