

National Drought Summary for February 24, 2026

Summary

Stormy, briefly colder weather in California and elsewhere in the West helped to improve previously meager mountain snowpack, with an average of approximately 6 inches of snow-water equivalency being added to the Sierra Nevada. However, 4- to 8-foot snowfall totals in the Sierra Nevada also led to travel disruptions through mountain passes and contributed to the nations deadliest avalanchenorthwest of Lake Tahoein 45 years. Meanwhile, the nations mid-section faced several days with record-setting warmth and gusty winds. Portions of the central and southern High Plains endured a rash of wildfires, starting on February 17, with the largestthe Ranger Road Firequickly consuming more than 280,000 acres of cured vegetation in northwestern Oklahoma and southwestern Kansas. Initial reports indicated that there were also livestock losses and property destruction. In contrast, several rounds of storminess affected the eastern U.S., culminating in a late-winter blizzard along the middle and northern Atlantic Coast on February 22-23. The winter storm deposited more than a foot of snow in major East Coast cities from Philadelphia to Boston, with a single-storm record of 37.9 inches measured in Providence, Rhode Island. Earlier, an early-season outbreak of severe weather occurred on February 19, when as many as a dozen tornadoes were reported in Illinois and Indiana.

Northeast

Across the southern tier of the Northeast, a February 22-23 winter storm was preceded by drought-easing rainfall. The combined events led to improvements of up to one drought category, as 7-day precipitation totals topped 2 inches in many locations. North of New York City, snowfall was much more powdery, with water equivalency values largely less than an inch, despite hefty accumulations. Additionally, heavy precipitation failed to advance very far inland, leaving status quo drought conditions for much of the Northeast.

Southeast

Virginia alone experienced widespread drought improvement, as the February 22-23 coastal storm was preceded by significant rainfall. Farther south, however, streaks of heavy rain provided only localized improvement. Showers bypassed many areas, leading to slowly worsening drought conditions. Several Southeastern wildfires have flared in recent days, and by February 24, the National Fire had charred 25,000 acres in Collier County, Florida, in Big Cypress National Preserve. Pockets of extreme drought (D3) have developed across the Southeast, most notably in southern Florida and southern Georgia/northern Florida, but extending as far north as the Carolinas.

South

The southern High Plains endured a historic day of wind and wildfires on February 17, when the Ranger Road Fire was ignited in Beaver County, Oklahoma. The Ranger Road Fire soon scorched more than 280,000 acres of grass and brush, expanding into northwestern Harper

County, Oklahoma, and parts of three counties in southwestern Kansas. Meanwhile, the Lavender Fire burned more than 18,000 acres northeast of Vega, Texas, and reportedly destroyed at least 18 structures. On February 17, the day of ignition, peak gusts included 73 mph in Lubbock, Texas, and 67 mph in Guymon, Oklahoma. Due to deteriorating conditions and diminishing topsoil moisture reserves, moderate drought (D1) was broadly introduced across northern and western Oklahoma and the northern panhandle of Texas. Farther east, gradually worsening drought conditions were also observed from the western Gulf Coast region to the Mississippi Delta, with several new areas of extreme drought (D3) being introduced and others being expanded. Coverage of exceptional drought (D4) increased slightly in southern Texas.

Midwest

Continuing a recent theme, improving drought conditions in the vicinity of the Great Lakes contrasted with ongoing drought farther south and west. Notably, patchy extreme drought (D3) persisted from southern Missouri into northwestern Ohio. Some locations in the lower Ohio Valley and neighboring areas may soon complete their driest meteorological winter (December-February period) on record. From December 1 February 24, precipitation in Paducah, Kentucky, totaled 3.21 inches, just 28 percent of normal. Even lower season-to-date totals were observed in Springfield, Missouri (3.13 inches); Carbondale, Illinois (2.49 inches); Poplar Bluff, Missouri (2.44 inches); Joplin, Missouri (2.16 inches); Gape Girardeau, Missouri (2.09 inches); and West Plains, Missouri (1.75 inches).

High Plains

Gradual drought deterioration was noted in several areas, except North Dakota, which remains free of drought. In Nebraska, a mostly dry, windy winter has adversely affected winter wheat, which at the end of January was rated just 24 percent in good to excellent condition down from 54 percent in late-November 2025. Snowfall that blanketed parts of Nebraska on February 19 provided only temporary relief from overall dryness. Farther south, parts of Kansas and Colorado contended with high winds, grassfires, and blowing dust, especially on February 17. On that date, wind gusts in Colorado were clocked to 79 mph in Colorado Springs, 72 mph in Burlington, and 71 mph in Pueblo. South of Pueblo, on I-25, chain reaction collisions due to low visibility in blowing dust resulted in five fatalities and involved approximately three dozen vehicles.

West

There were few overall changes in the West, as most of the heavy precipitation fell in areas such as northern and central California currently experiencing no drought. Farther inland, brief bursts of precipitation in drought-affected areas prevented worsening conditions, but provided little overall relief. In Utah's Wasatch Range, Alta received 31.2 inches of snow in a 24-hour period on February 17-18, but will likely end the month with below-average snowfall. Below-average snow-water equivalency remains a concern in much of the West, even in

drought-free areas such as the Sierra Nevada. According to the California Department of Water Resources, the Sierra Nevada snowpack contained an average snow-water equivalency of 16 inches up about 6 inches from earlier in the month, but less than three-quarters of normal for late February. In much of Arizona, New Mexico, and Oregon, snow-water equivalency values were less than 50 percent of normal.

Caribbean

In Puerto Rico, any significant shower activity bypassed existing areas of abnormal dryness (D0), resulting in no changes.

Precipitation varied across the U.S. Virgin Islands this week. Although amounts were low, February is historically one of the driest months of the year for the territory. On St. John, Rafe Boulon/Windswept Beach reported 0.10 inches of rain, bringing the February month-to-date total to 3.30 inches as of February 23, well above the monthly normal. Despite the low weekly total, St. John remains free of drought and abnormal dryness. Groundwater levels at the Susannaberg DPW 3 well were 12.32 ft below land surface on February 24. Analysis shows a steady decline since October 19, when the level was 7.56 ft, though there has been a slight recovery earlier this month when compared to the 12.97 ft reported on February 2. Over the past year, the water level has dropped approximately 4.33 ft (from 7.99 ft on February 24, 2025). The 1-month SPI indicated wet conditions on the island, while 9- and 12-month SPI values showing wetness. Conversely, the 3- and 6-month depicts a slight dry signal. No measurable precipitation was reported on St. Croix (Henry Rohlsen Airport) this week, but the island remains free of drought and abnormal dryness due to other indicators, including vegetation health index and SPI values. St. Croix The depth to water at the Adventure 28 Well was 19.84 ft below land surface on February 24. Groundwater analysis shows a steady decrease of 5.93 ft since May 27, 2025 (when the level was 13.91 ft), and a drop of 3.04 ft compared to this time last year (16.80 ft on February 24, 2025). The 1-, 3-, and 6-month SPI values confirm wet conditions on the island, while longer timescales show drier signals. On St. Thomas, Cyril E. King Airport reported a rainfall total of 0.05 inches, with a February month-to-date total of 2.94 inches as of February 23. This total is well above the 1.90 inch normal for the month. The depth to water at the Grade School 3 well was 6.81 feet below land surface on February 24. This is down 4.76 ft from the 365-day maximum of 2.05 ft recorded on October 19, 2025; however, it is only 0.75 ft lower than the water level from one year ago (6.06 ft on February 24, 2025). SPI values were mixed, showing wet conditions at the 1-month timescale but slightly dry conditions at the 3-month timescale (other timescales were unavailable). Thanks to the monthly precipitation totals, 1-month SPI, and VHI data, short-term abnormal dryness (D0-S) was removed from St. Thomas this week.

Pacific

Stormy weather across parts of Alaska resulted in the elimination of two spots of moderate drought (D1) one in the northwest and one in the southwest. Coverage of Alaskas surrounding areas of abnormal dryness (D0) was slightly reduced. Although not in an area experiencing D0,

Fairbanks received 38.5 inches of snow with a water equivalency of 2.23 inches during the first 24 days of February. Fairbanks snowiest February occurred in 1966, when 43.1 inches fell.

In Hawaii, a winter storm (Kona low) drifted close enough to the island chain to spark flooding rainfall on Oahu and scattered to widespread showers in other areas. From February 20-22, forty-eight hour rainfall totals topped 20 inches in scattered locations on Oahu. For Oahu's areas of abnormal dryness (D0) and moderate drought (D1), one-category improvements were introduced. Although locally heavy showers extended across Maui and Hawaii Counties, rainfall coverage was not extensive enough for widespread improvement, except for a trimming of D0 coverage in windward sections of Maui and Molokai.

Dry conditions persisted over American Samoa this week. Pago Pago reported a weekly rainfall total of 1.53 inches, while Toa Ridge and Siufaga Ridge reported 3.27 and 1.17 inches, respectively. At Pago Pago, this is the third consecutive week where rainfall totals fell below the two-inch minimum threshold needed to meet water needs. Furthermore, the month-to-date rainfall total of 4.24 inches (as of February 24) is well below normal precipitation amounts for this period (11.89 inches). For these reasons, Pago Pago was degraded to short-term abnormal dryness (D0-S) this week.

Palau remained free of drought or abnormal dryness this week. The Koror COOP site reported a weekly rainfall total of 2.61 inches and a month-to-date total of 9.10 inches as of February 24.

Conditions were wetter than normal over most of the Mariana Islands this week. Saipan, Rota, and Tinian reported weekly rainfall totals of 4.01, 3.29, and 1.91 inches, respectively well above the islands one-inch minimum threshold to meet water needs. Guam received 0.74 inches. Although this was below the weekly threshold, month-to-date rainfall totals are approximately 190% above normal on Guam. The Marianas remained free of drought and abnormal dryness this week.

Conditions were mixed across the Federated States of Micronesia this week. Kosrae, Chuuk, and Pohnpei reported weekly rainfall amounts of 8.70, 2.81, and 2.60 inches, respectively, and remained free of drought and abnormal dryness. Nukuoro reported a weekly rainfall total of 1.44 inches. Although this is below the two-inch minimum threshold needed for water needs, Nukuoro remained free of drought and abnormal dryness due to previously wet conditions. Short-term abnormal dryness (D0-S) was removed from Kapingamarangi after receiving 3.59 inches this week and due to wetness from previous weeks. On Yap, short-term abnormal dryness persisted, with 1.97 inches of rainfall reported this week. Dry conditions also persist on Lukunoch, which reported a weekly rainfall total of 1.72 inches. Due to multiple weeks of precipitation falling below the weekly minimum threshold, short-term abnormal dryness (D0-S) was added to Lukunoch this week. Data for Pingelap, Woleai, Fananu and Ulithi were insufficient to make any assessments this week.

Precipitation amounts varied across the Republic of the Marshall Islands this week.

Ailinglapalap (with two days missing) reported 5.07 inches and remains free of drought and abnormal dryness. Several locations, including Kwajalein (1.47 inches), Mili (1.60 inches), Majuro (1.01 inches with one day missing), and Jaluit (0.82 inches with one day missing), reported rainfall totals below the two-inch minimum threshold needed to meet water needs; however, these locations remained free of drought and abnormal dryness due to previously wet

conditions. Dry conditions persisted over Wotje and Utirik, which reported weekly rainfall totals of 0.67 inches and 0.06 inches, respectively. Short-term severe drought (D2-S) continues over Wotje and Utirik due to several consecutive weeks and months remaining below the minimum two-inch threshold for water needs.

Looking Ahead

Fast-moving, loosely organized disturbances will traverse the country during the next 5 days. Some of the heaviest precipitation, locally 1 to 2 inches or more, should fall in the Southeast, mainly through Friday. Beneficial showers will linger into the weekend across Floridas peninsula. In contrast, dry weather will prevail during the next 5 days in the nations southwestern quadrant, from southern California to the central and southern High Plains. Record-setting warmth will accompany the dry weather, with temperatures routinely topping 90F in southern Texas and the Desert Southwest. Farther north, a new plume of Pacific moisture will arrive on Saturday across southern Oregon and northern California. That moisture will race eastward, sparking wintry precipitation by Sunday and Monday from the central Plains into the mid-Atlantic, including the Ohio Valley and neighboring regions.

The NWS 6- to 10-day outlook for March 3 7 calls for the likelihood of warmer-than-normal weather nationwide, except for near- or below-normal temperatures in parts of New York and much of New England. Meanwhile, near- or above-normal precipitation across most of the country should contrast with drier-than-normal conditions in coastal North Carolina and portions of the Far West, including California and the western Great Basin.

Author(s)

Richard Tinker, NOAA/NWS/NCEP/CPC

Rocky Bilotta, NOAA/NCEI