

National Drought Summary for March 3, 2026

Summary

Since the beginning of December 2025, drought expanded and intensified across the Lower Mississippi Valley and Southern Great Plains which is typical during a La Nina winter. Much needed precipitation at the end of February led to small improvements across parts of the Southeast and also at least briefly stabilized the drought status for this region. Widespread severe to extreme drought is designated for much of the Carolinas, Georgia, southeastern Alabama, and Florida. A longer-term drought continues to affect the Mid-Atlantic and portions of the Northeast. The unusually dry winter persisted across the Midwest through the end of February with additional degradations made this past week. These worsening drought conditions extend west to the Central Great Plains along with the Central to Northern Rockies. Below-normal snowpack remains a major concern for the West heading into the spring. Drought coverage decreased in Hawaii during the past few weeks, while Alaska and Puerto Rico remained drought-free.

Northeast

Since the Noreaster on February 22 and 23, little to no precipitation has occurred throughout the Northeast. A consensus of meteorological and hydrological drought metrics at various time scales supports the current Dx depiction. Therefore, drought coverage and intensity remained steady this past week. 12 and 24-month precipitation deficits are more than 8 and 16 inches, respectively, across portions of the Mid-Atlantic and New England. Severe (D2) to extreme (D3) drought continues for parts of New England, northern New Jersey, and eastern to southern Pennsylvania. 28-day average streamflows remain low (below the 10th percentile) for much of the Northern Mid-Atlantic.

Southeast

Heavy rainfall (1 to 3 inches, locally more) resulted in 1-category improvements to parts of Alabama, Georgia, and the Coastal Plain of the Carolinas. Despite the locally heavy rainfall, only modest improvements were warranted for the Southeast as 90-day precipitation deficits exceed 6 inches across much of Alabama, Georgia, and the Upstate of South Carolina. Extreme drought (D3) was expanded across south Georgia with severe drought (D2) extending north through most of North Carolina and into south-central Virginia. Consistent with a La Nina winter, drought has worsened the past few months with more than two-thirds of the Sunshine State designated with extreme (D3) drought. According to the National Interagency Fire Center, a wildfire at Floridas Big Cypress National Preserve has grown to over 35,000 acres burned at the beginning of March.

South

Heavy rainfall (1 to 3 inches, locally more) resulted in a small 1-category improvement to parts of northeastern Tennessee. For the Lower Mississippi Valley and Southern Great Plains,

drought continued to expand and intensify through the end of February and beginning of March. The major change this past week was a widespread 1-category degradation to Mississippi and also north-central Oklahoma. Since the beginning of December, precipitation has averaged less than 50 percent of normal across much of the Lower Mississippi Valley and Southern Great Plains. Impact reports from north-central Oklahoma include poor wheat conditions and surface water supply shortages. An expansion of moderate drought (D1) was also warranted for northeastern New Mexico. In addition to the drier-than-normal winter, 90-day temperatures have averaged 2 to 6 degrees F above normal. The lack of winter precipitation combined with periods of unseasonably warm temperatures and enhanced winds led to an increasing coverage of severe (D2) to extreme (D3) drought from the Mississippi River west through Oklahoma and Texas.

Midwest

Drought continued to expand and intensify across the Ohio Valley through the beginning of March, with 90-day precipitation averaging less than half of normal across western Kentucky, southeastern Missouri, and much of Indiana and Illinois. Paducah, Kentucky and Carbondale, Illinois had their driest meteorological winter (December 1, 2025 to February 28, 2026) on record. Drought initially over the Central Great Plains has recently overspread northwestern Iowa and southwestern Minnesota. Despite widespread precipitation amounts of 0.5 to 1.5 inches across central to southern Missouri from February 24 to March 2, little to no change was warranted for those areas.

High Plains

Although late winter is a relatively dry time of year across the Central Great Plains, periods of unseasonably warm temperatures and enhanced winds this past month led to intensifying drought across northeastern Colorado and Nebraska. 30-day temperatures averaged 6 to 10 degrees F above normal throughout the Great Plains. A 1-category degradation was made this past week to parts of Kansas and South Dakota. Widespread drought of varying intensity remains designated for much of Colorado and Wyoming. As of March 3, snow water equivalent is less than 70 percent of normal across the Central Rockies.

West

Water-year-to-date precipitation (October 1, 2025 to March 2, 2026) averaged below-normal for the Great Basin which led to a slight increase in moderate (D1) coverage across northeastern Nevada this past week. Following a drier- and warmer-than-normal February, a 1-category degradation was also made to parts of Montana. A 1-category degradation was also warranted for parts of Idaho, reflecting the below-normal precipitation and low snowpack this past winter. Even for areas of the West that have received above-normal precipitation since the beginning of October 1 such as the Northern Intermountain West and Northern Cascades of Washington, snow water equivalent (SWE) is running below normal. The low snowpack throughout much of the West is a major concern heading into the spring. As of March 3, SWE is less than 50

percent of normal from the Cascades of the Pacific Northwest southward through the Great Basin and Four Corners region. Although California remains drought-free, SWE is 59 percent of normal statewide according to the California Department of Water Resources.

Caribbean

Only a small area of abnormal dryness remains designated for southern Puerto Rico with most areas receiving above-normal precipitation during the past 30 to 120 days.

The U.S. Virgin Islands received meager precipitation over the past week but saw above normal rainfall for February, which is typically a dry time of year. St. Thomas and St. John received less than a third of an inch over the past week, according to citizen weather observers. St. Croix got from 0.11 inches to 0.59 inches.

The Vegetation Health Index indicates some mild stress for St. Croix. Water levels in wells on all three islands are dropping. All islands continue to be drought-free.

Pacific

Due to heavy snowfall during late February, abnormal dryness (D0) was discontinued across the Seward Peninsula. Also, D0 was reduced to the west of Anchorage. Based on below-normal snowfall, D0 was expanded to include more of the Prince William Sound area.

Recent heavy rainfall supported removal of abnormal dryness (D0) in Oahu. Based in part on 28-day average streamflows, a 1-category improvement was made to windward areas of Molokai and Maui. Additional improvements may be needed next week after further analysis of the heavy rainfall during late February.

The Republic of Palau received 1.87 and 1.94 inches of precipitation at Palau IAP and Koror, respectively. Water supplies should be sufficient as these locations need 2 inches of rainfall per week to meet minimum water needs.

The Mariana Islands all received 1.63 inches to 5 or more inches for the week. One inch is the weekly amount these islands need to meet minimum water needs. Guam reported 5.42 inches, Rota got 2.69 inches, and Tinian collected 2.31 inches.

The Federated States of Micronesia were mixed for the week. Lukunor and Yap remain at D0 and received less than 2 inches of rain. Precipitation has been low for Woleai in recent weeks, so the site entered D0. Kapingamarangi and Kosrae received less than 2 inches but reported ample rainfall in previous weeks and should have sufficient water supplies. Chuuk, Nukuoro, and Pohnpei all received more than 2 inches.

Some of the Marshall Islands reported plenty of precipitation, while other islands were lacking. Utirik and Wotje are in D2 and collected just 0.55 and 0.37 inches, respectively. Rainfall has been scarce for Kwajalein in recent weeks, so it was set to D0 this week after getting just 1.22 inches of rain. Ailinglaplap, Jaluit, Majuro, and Mili received between nearly 3 inches to more than 6 inches of rain. On Feb. 28, Majuros reservoirs held 37.8 million gallons of water.

American Samoa remained at D0 as rainfall has been below normal. Pago Pago and other

locations each received 1.03 inches or less of rain. These islands require 2 inches of rain per week to meet minimum water needs.

Looking Ahead

A major pattern change is underway which will promote multiple low pressure systems tracking across the Great Plains and Midwest during early to mid-March. The Weather Prediction Center (valid March 5-9) depicts a swath of heavy precipitation (1 to 3 inches, locally more) from eastern Texas and southeastern Oklahoma northeast through the Lower to Middle Mississippi and Ohio Valleys. This heavier precipitation is forecast to extend into parts of the Northeast, but little to no precipitation is expected from Virginia south to Florida. Much-needed snowfall is expected across the Northern to Central Rockies, while dry weather prevails across California and the Southwest. Much above-normal temperatures are forecast across the southeastern and central U.S. where daily record highs may be broken from March 5 to 9.

The NWS 6-10 day outlook (valid March 10-14) calls for an increased chance of above-normal temperatures for the East, Middle to Lower Mississippi Valley, Southern Great Plains, Southwest, and California. Below-normal temperatures are more likely from the Pacific Northwest east to the Northern Great Plains. Below-normal temperatures are strongly favored for Alaska. The 6-10 day outlook favors above-normal precipitation from the Mississippi Valley to the East Coast. Above-normal precipitation probabilities decrease west across the Great Plains. Above-normal precipitation is also favored for the Pacific Northwest and Northern Rockies. Near to below-normal precipitation is favored across Alaska, while large above-normal precipitation probabilities are forecast throughout Hawaii.

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