

National Drought Summary for March 17, 2026

Summary

This week, a powerful storm system crossed from the Great Plains into the Great Lakes, bringing widespread rain and thunderstorms to parts of the Midwest, and a historic blizzard to portions of the Upper Midwest, especially in northern Wisconsin and Michigan near Lake Superior. Total precipitation amounts exceeded 2 inches in a large area of the western Great Lakes, while lighter amounts, mostly 0.5-3 inches of precipitation, fell across parts of the southern and eastern Contiguous U.S. Improvements to ongoing drought and dryness occurred across large portions of the Midwest, parts of the lower Mississippi River Valley, and in the Northeast outside of northern New England. Heavy rain and, in some areas, mountain snow, fell across parts of the Northwest, locally improving drought conditions. However, significant deficits in snow still exist in many parts of the West, including the Pacific Northwest, which limited the longer-term benefits of the precipitation that fell. Much of the Southwest, and the central and southern Great Plains, missed out on precipitation, and instead dealt with a dry, warm and windy week. Precipitation deficits, and lack of snowpack in the mountains, continued to worsen amid high evaporative demand, leading to widespread worsening of abnormal dryness and drought, especially in South Dakota and Nebraska, southwest Kansas, southern Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, and parts of Oregon that missed out on precipitation. A kona low delivered heavy precipitation to all of Hawaii this week, leading to widespread 1- and local 2-category improvements to ongoing drought conditions from Molokai eastward.

Northeast

In the Northeast, 0.5-2 inches of precipitation fell this week, with local amounts in the 2-3 inch range, leading to some improvements to conditions in New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and southern New England. In many areas that saw conditions improve, long-term precipitation deficits had lessened in severity and groundwater levels rose. Two or more inches of precipitation were most common this week downwind of lakes Erie and Ontario, central and northeast Pennsylvania, Connecticut and eastern Maine. Warmer-than-normal temperatures occurred across the entire region; temperatures were mostly 6-12 degrees above normal in New England, and 9-12 degrees above normal elsewhere.

Southeast

In the Southeast, drought conditions worsened in a few areas, improved in a few areas, and remained unchanged for most as drought and abnormal dryness maintained a hold in the region. Heavy rain fell this week in central and northeast Alabama and northwest Georgia, and amounts checked in at or above 2 inches in most locations. Given the very dry conditions beforehand in northwest Georgia, this rain acted more to prevent worsening drought. In central Alabama, the rain improved soil moisture and precipitation deficits enough for improvement in some areas of abnormal dryness or moderate drought. A similar story played out in a few locales in North Carolina, though with lesser rain amounts, improvements were much more isolated. Severe drought expanded or contracted in a couple spots in South Carolina (due to

worsening or improving precipitation deficits and soil moisture), though conditions across the Palmetto State remained mostly the same. Exceptional drought developed along the Florida-Georgia state line, where soil moisture and precipitation deficits worsened and several streamflow gauges moved into record-low territory for mid-March. Severe drought expanded in west-central Virginia, as soil moisture remained low and 6-month precipitation deficits highlighted worsening conditions amid temperatures ranging from 9-12 degrees warmer than normal for the week. Very heavy rain fell in parts of Miami-Dade County in Florida, resulting in some improvements to drought conditions, though the benefit of the heavy rain was likely limited given runoff and very low water levels in the Everglades. Airboat operators in the Everglades have recently had to pause or re-route tours given how low water levels have been there.

South

This week, parts of east Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Tennessee benefitted from localized rains of at least 2 inches. Elsewhere, deep south Texas, western Texas, and northern and western Oklahoma were mostly dry this week. Temperatures across the region were warmer than normal, with readings varying widely from a degree or two above normal to 9-12 degrees above normal. Soil moisture levels improved and precipitation shortfalls lessened in parts of east-central Texas, Louisiana and southeast Arkansas, leading to localized improvements to drought conditions in these areas. Despite heavier rains, a small area of extreme drought shifted northeast in southeast Tennessee due to very large precipitation deficits that continued this week. Growing short-term precipitation deficits led to the development of severe drought in a small area of northwest Tennessee. Heavy rain in Dallas improved local conditions. Warm, dry and windy conditions were the rule elsewhere in the southern Great Plains and deep south Texas, leading to localized degradations in central and northern Texas, deep south Texas, south-central and northwest Oklahoma, and the Oklahoma and Texas panhandles.

Midwest

A strong low pressure system traversed the Great Plains into the Midwest with it, bringing widespread strong winds, locally heavy rain and a powerful blizzard to the Upper Great Lakes. Weekly precipitation amounts ranged from 2-3 inches, locally more, from central and northern Illinois to eastern Wisconsin, the central and eastern Michigan Upper Peninsula, and much of the Michigan Lower Peninsula (excluding southeast areas) and northern Indiana. Improvements occurred across much of Illinois, Wisconsin, most parts of Michigan that still were experiencing drought or abnormal dryness, and parts of Missouri, Iowa, western Kentucky, Indiana and northeast Ohio. Longer-term precipitation deficits and paltry streamflow still exist in parts of Illinois, Indiana and Ohio, though recent precipitation has alleviated conditions in some areas, so widespread improvements were made this week. The impact of recent precipitation on soil moisture and streamflow in the Midwest will continue to be monitored in the coming weeks. Recent precipitation and improvements in soil moisture and precipitation deficits led to the aforementioned local improvements in Missouri, Iowa and

northwest Kentucky. Weekly temperatures were 3-9 degrees below normal in northwest Minnesota, as cold air wrapped around the powerful storm system, while temperatures in the southern half of the Midwest were 3-12 degrees warmer than normal for mid-March.

High Plains

In the southern half of the High Plains region, warmer-than-normal weather continued this week amid mainly dry and frequently windy conditions. Degradation in drought conditions was widespread across Nebraska and southern parts of South Dakota. A deadly wildfire in western Nebraska, the Morrill Fire, has burned a record amount of land for Nebraska wildfires. This fire, and others across Nebraska, occurred amid weather conditions favorable for fire growth and a background of worsening drought conditions. The Great Plains of southwest Kansas and southeast Colorado also saw worsening drought and abnormal dryness this week, as precipitation deficits continued to mount along with warmer-than-normal temperatures this winter and early spring. Large precipitation deficits and above-normal evaporative demand over the last several months led to extreme drought development in parts of the Black Hills in southwest South Dakota. Colder temperatures and some precipitation kept conditions unchanged (and mostly free of drought or abnormal dryness) in North Dakota and northern South Dakota.

West

Current drought conditions in the West continued to be headlined by snow drought this week. The Sangre de Cristo Mountains and portions of the San Juan Mountains in southern Colorado and northern New Mexico saw widespread worsening conditions this week. Overall dry and warm conditions worsened both precipitation deficits and snowpack conditions in these areas. Some snow-water monitoring sites in the region have seen near-full or full melting of snowpack. Degrations to ongoing drought and dryness were also widespread in Arizona this week, where warmer-than-normal temperatures combined with dry weather to worsen short-term precipitation deficits, increase evaporative demand and support low streamflow levels. High-elevation parts of Arizona that usually have snow on the ground in mid-March are also suffering from snow drought. This combination of drier- and warmer-than-normal weather and snow drought may set the state for drought conditions to worsen in the coming weeks if weather conditions remain warm and dry. Warmer-than-normal and dry weather occurred this week in Nevada, worsening conditions in some areas, especially in the north, where impacts are being reported as a result of unusually warm and dry weather over the last several months and meagre mountain snow. Due to locally heavy precipitation or lack thereof, a mix of small-scale improvements and degradations occurred in Oregon. Amid the snow drought, localized degradations occurred in southwest Idaho, while heavier mountain snows improved snowpack in some mountain ranges in parts of western Montana, leading to localized improvements. The effectiveness of this locally renewed snowpack in improving soil moisture will be analyzed further in the weeks ahead.

Caribbean

Generally drier conditions continued this week in southern Puerto Rico in a small area of abnormal dryness. Otherwise, the island remained free of abnormal dryness or drought this week.

In the U.S. Virgin Islands, recent weather conditions have featured occasional showers and gusty trade winds, due to high pressure anchored over the North Atlantic. At Rohlson Airport on St. Croix, peak easterly wind gusts to 40 mph or higher were clocked on March 8, 10, and 16. On St. Thomas, heavy rain was observed on March 12-13, when 24-hour totals near 2 inches were recorded in several locations. Standardized Precipitation Index (SPI) values at all time periods for multiple sites on the three major islands are supportive of neither dryness nor drought. Therefore, the U.S. Virgin Islands have a clean drought map for the fourth consecutive week. Other evidence, including the Vegetation Health Index and well data from the U.S. Geological Survey, also supports drought-free conditions. Current depths to water include 20.5 feet at the Adventure 28 well on St. Croix, about 3.7 feet greater than a year ago, and 13.3 feet at the Susannaberg DPW 3 well on St. John, about 4.4 feet greater than a year ago.

Pacific

Primarily drier-than-normal weather occurred this week in Alaska, though this also occurred amid temperatures ranging from 10-25 degrees below normal outside of southeast Alaska and the North Slope. No changes were made to ongoing areas of abnormal dryness, and most of the state remained free of drought or abnormal dryness this week.

Very heavy rain amounts fell across Hawaii this week, associated with the passage of a kona low, leading to one- or 2-category improvements across all islands from Molokai eastward. As of March 17, Kahului, in central Maui, had already received a record amount of rain, 16.36 inches, for both March and any month on record. Many measuring sites from Maui westward received at least 8 inches above their normal rainfall for the week, while some locations in the southern Big Island received 16-20 inches above their normal weekly rain. Agricultural damage from the storm system was also reported in portions of Oahu. Portions of central Maui improved from extreme to moderate drought this week, and further improvements may be necessary in the weeks ahead as the effect of this weeks storm system is analyzed more.

In the U.S.-Affiliated Pacific Islands, the drought-monitoring period began with Tropical Depression Nuri meandering near Yap, across northwestern parts of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), before dissipating on March 12. All monitored sites in the FSM remained free of drought and abnormal dryness, with missing data noted for Fananu, Pingelap, and Ulithi. Meanwhile, historically wet weather prevailed during the first half of March in the Marianas. At Guam International Airport, month-to-date rainfall through the 17th totaled 12.12 inches (762% of normal). Guam International Airports wettest March on record occurred in 1971, with 16.94 inches. There were neither dryness- nor drought-related concerns in the Marianas and the Republic of Palau, which has also experienced a wet March to date. In contrast, weekly rainfall at Pago Pago International Airport in American Samoa was less than 2 inches for the fifth time in the last six drought-monitoring periods. Given American Samoas

-term dryness at the international airport and other locations, abnormal dryness (D0-S) was retained on Tutuila for a fourth consecutive week. Elsewhere, northern atolls in the Marshall Islands remained quite dry, with severe drought (D2-S) persisting on Utirik and Wotje for a fourth consecutive week. Since December 1, 2025, less than 4 inches of rain has fallen on Utirik, while approximately 7 inches has fallen on Wotje.

Looking Ahead

Through the evening of Monday, March 23, the National Weather Service Weather Prediction Centers forecast depicts mostly dry weather across a large swath of the Contiguous U.S. Precipitation totaling 0.5-1 inch may fall from West Virginia into New York, and in spots in New England. Similar precipitation amounts are forecast in parts of northwest Montana and the Idaho Panhandle. Western Washington is forecast to receive widespread precipitation amounts of at least 1 inch, with some favored mountainous areas forecast to receive 2.5-5 inches of precipitation (or locally more). Elsewhere, the forecast calls for precipitation amounts to remain at or below 0.5 inches, with most of the Great Plains, Mississippi and Lower Ohio River Valleys, and the Gulf Coast states likely to remain completely dry.

Looking ahead from March 24-28, the National Weather Service Climate Prediction Center forecast strongly favors warmer-than-normal temperatures in most of the West, especially in the Southwest, and across much of the Great Plains and South. Near- or below-normal temperatures are favored from northern North Dakota eastward through the Great Lakes into much of the Northeast. Above-normal precipitation is favored in Washington, northern Oregon, the Idaho Panhandle and northwest Montana, and from northern Michigan eastward across the northern half of the Northeast. Wetter-than-normal weather is also forecast in central and southern Florida. Elsewhere in the contiguous United States, below-normal precipitation is more likely, especially from the Great Plains to Utah, Nevada, the Desert Southwest and California.

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