

National Drought Summary for March 24, 2026

Summary

This week, extreme weather events across the United States painted a starkly contrasting picture of drought development and relief. In the West and Plains, a persistent heat dome drove temperatures 20 to 25 degrees above normal, shattering early-season records and significantly increasing evaporative demand. This intense heat, combined with high winds and pre-existing dryness, threatened to rapidly deplete topsoil moisture and fueled explosive, landscape-altering wildfires most notably the historic Morrill Fire in Nebraska that consumed 642,029 acres. Ultimately, the combination of soaring temperatures and below-normal precipitation resulted in the expansion of drought and abnormal dryness across portions of the West, Great Plains, and parts of the Southeast.

Conversely, other regions experienced abrupt and volatile moisture influxes that mitigated dry conditions but introduced localized severe flooding. In the Pacific Northwest, an atmospheric river stalled over Washington, bringing heavy rain and significant snowmelt. Further east, a powerful winter storm delivered a massive precipitation boost in the form of a late-season blizzard, dropping over 50 inches of snow across parts of the Upper Midwest and Michigan's Upper Peninsula. The most extreme precipitation of the week occurred over the Hawaiian Islands, where a stalled Kona low dumped unprecedented, historic rainfall, resulting in excessive flooding, widespread landslides, and infrastructure damage. Overall, above-normal precipitation resulted in improvements to drought and abnormal dryness across parts of the Midwest, Northeast, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico.

Northeast

Precipitation fell across much of the Northeast this week, with highly variable totals ranging from 0.25 to 3 inches. Beneficial rainfall reaching 150% to 300% of normal for the week helped alleviate ongoing dry conditions across parts of Pennsylvania, New York, and southern New England (Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut). This above-average moisture allowed for the reduction of severe drought (D2) in northern New Jersey and along the Pennsylvania-Maryland border. Moderate drought (D1) was trimmed in parts of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland, and Massachusetts, while abnormal dryness (D0) improved across New York, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Delaware. Temperatures were sharply divided, running up to 10 degrees F below normal in northern areas like New York and Vermont, while southern portions of the region, such as Maryland, experienced departures up to 10 degrees F above normal.

Southeast

Much of the Southeast experienced above-normal temperatures this week, with the exception of Florida and parts of Georgia, which remained cooler than average. Precipitation was scarce, with most of the region reporting little to no rainfall; month-to-date totals from central North Carolina down to northern Florida sit at a dismal 25% of normal or less. This combination of dry weather and elevated temperatures exacerbated short-term SPI/SPEI, streamflow, and soil moisture deficits. Consequently, exceptional drought (D4) expanded from southern Georgia into northern Florida. Extreme drought (D3) grew in south-central North Carolina, northern and southern Georgia, western Florida, and pushed into southern South Carolina. Severe drought (D2) expanded in northwest and southeast North Carolina, and moderate drought (D1) saw a slight increase in central South Carolina. Conversely, isolated pockets of beneficial rain led to minor localized improvements, trimming severe drought to moderate drought and abnormal dryness in small parts of western Virginia and eastern North Carolina.

South

Hot and dry conditions dominated the South this week, driving widespread drought degradation. Temperatures soared 5 to 20 degrees F above normal across the vast majority of the region. This heat was coupled with persistent dryness, as month-to-date rainfall deficits grew to 1 to 3 inches below average (representing only 5% to 50% of normal). Deteriorating short- and long-term indicators justified the introduction and expansion of exceptional drought (D4) in southern Texas and northern Arkansas. Extreme drought (D3) was introduced in the Oklahoma Panhandle and expanded across central Oklahoma, northern Arkansas, southern Texas, and Louisiana. Additionally, severe drought (D2) worsened across parts of Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Tennessee, while moderate drought (D1) and abnormal dryness (D0) expanded in Texas, Mississippi, and southern Louisiana.

Midwest

Unseasonable warmth enveloped most of the Midwest, with temperature departures ranging from 5 to 20 degrees F above normal; the greatest anomalies were centered over western Illinois and southern Missouri. Conversely, parts of Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota observed below-normal temperatures. Precipitation was highly variable: northern and eastern areas (including much of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, northern Michigan, and Minnesota) received 0.5 inches or more, with some locations seeing 150% to 300% of normal weekly rainfall. This above-average moisture and corresponding improvements in streamflow and soil moisture led to the reduction of extreme drought (D3) and severe drought (D2) in Indiana and Ohio, alongside D2 improvements in Illinois. Moderate drought (D1) and abnormal dryness (D0) were also trimmed across

Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, and northern Michigan. However, the southern half of the region largely missed out on precipitation, receiving as little as 5% of normal rainfall. Growing deficits and degrading conditions in these southern areas led to the expansion of moderate drought (D1) in parts of Iowa and Missouri, as well as an increase in abnormal dryness (D0) in northeast Ohio.

High Plains

Intense, unseasonable warmth gripped the High Plains, with temperatures soaring up to 25 degrees F above normal, peaking in parts of Wyoming and Colorado. Precipitation was nearly non-existent, particularly across the southern half of the region. This severe, persistent dryness, coupled with rapidly deteriorating drought indicators, forced widespread expansion and intensification of drought categories. Exceptional drought (D4) expanded in northwest Colorado, while extreme drought (D3) grew across Colorado, southern Wyoming, and southern Nebraska. Severe drought (D2) pushed further into central and northern Wyoming, western and southern Colorado, and advanced from Nebraska into South Dakota. Moderate drought (D1) and abnormal dryness (D0) also expanded broadly across Wyoming, Colorado, Nebraska, and Kansas. No drought improvements were made in the High Plains this week.

West

Anomalous warmth dominated the West, with nearly the much region seeing temperatures 15 to 25 degrees F above normal. Precipitation was largely absent, save for beneficial moisture in parts of Washington and Montana. This localized precipitation allowed for the reduction of severe drought (D2) in central Montana and abnormal dryness (D0) in western Washington. Elsewhere, the combination of soaring temperatures, lacking precipitation, and declining soil moisture and streamflow data resulted in broad drought degradation. Extreme drought (D3) expanded in southern Idaho, central and northeastern Utah, and northwest New Mexico. Severe drought (D2) increased in coverage across Oregon, southern Idaho, southern Montana, southern and eastern Utah, southern and eastern Arizona, and New Mexico. Finally, abnormal dryness (D0) expanded in eastern Oregon and central and southern California.

Caribbean

Storms delivered between 0.5 and 3 inches of rainfall across a large portion of Puerto Rico this week. This beneficial moisture led to the complete removal of abnormal dryness (D0) from the southern part of the island.

The U.S. Virgin Islands experienced showery weather during the drought-monitoring period ending the morning of March 24, with the heaviest rain (locally more than 2 inches) falling on St. Thomas. Most locations on St. John and St. Croix received less than an inch of rain. Still, Standardized Precipitation Index values throughout the territory indicate that neither drought nor abnormal dryness is present. In response to heavier rain on St. Thomas, depth to water at the U.S. Geological Surveys Grade School 3 well improved (decreased) more than 3.3 feet during the 72-hour period ending at 9 am AST on March 25.

Pacific

Temperatures were broadly below normal across Alaska this week, with departures plunging 5 to 25 degrees F below average. Precipitation was below normal for much of the state, though parts of the Panhandle observed wetter-than-normal conditions. Due to a continued decrease in snow water equivalent, abnormal dryness (D0) was expanded across southwest Alaska, specifically south of the Kuskokwim River back toward upper Bristol Bay.

Back-to-back Kona low systems from early to mid-March brought some of the worst flooding in more than 20 years to parts of Hawaii. Maui bore the brunt of the extreme precipitation; Kahului Airport shattered its all-time wettest month on record, amassing an astounding 20.61 inches of rain by March 24. During this same period, airports at Molokai, Lihue, and Hilo reported impressive rainfall totals of 20.35, 13.76, and 12.96 inches, respectively. Consequently, moderate drought (D1) was eradicated from Molokai and Maui, while abnormal dryness (D0) was completely removed from Molokai and Lanai, and further reduced across Maui.

The U.S.-Affiliated Pacific Islands experienced variable weather conditions during the drought-monitoring period ending on March 24, ranging from worsening drought on Utirik in the northern Marshall Islands to flash flooding in Guam. Utirik's designation was changed from severe to extreme drought (D2-S to D3-S), following another week with less than an inch of rain. Since December 1, 2025, Utirik's rainfall has totaled less than 5 inches. Elsewhere in the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Wotje received enough rain (1.22 inches) during the week to prevent deterioration and remains in severe drought (D2-S), while Kwajalein received 1.33 inches and does not yet require a designation of abnormal dryness. Meanwhile, the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) have neither dryness nor drought, with missing data for Fananu, Pingelap, and Ulithi. On March 24, a disturbance over the northwestern FSM produced locally heavy showers across Yap and neighboring areas, including portions of the Marianas. Guam International Airport continued to approach its March rainfall record of 16.94 inches, set in 1971; the airport received 13.15 inches through the 24th, with an additional 1.31 inches falling on March 25. Elsewhere, the Republic of Palau remained free of dryness and drought, while American Samoa continued to experience warm weather and abnormally dry conditions (D0-S). During the first 24 days of March, high temperatures at American Samoa's Pago

Pago International Airport reached 90F or greater ten times, well above average, highlighting a warmer-than-normal regime that has largely been in place for more than 2 weeks.

Looking Ahead

Over the next five days (March 24-28, 2026), the contiguous United States is forecast to experience another week of widespread, record-breaking warmth. A strong upper-level ridge will dominate the western and central U.S., pushing temperatures 20 to 40 degrees above average. This extreme heat, combined with dry conditions and gusty downsloping winds, will elevate fire weather risks across the High Plains on Tuesday and Wednesday. Meanwhile, a deepening low-pressure system will bring even stronger winds to the Northern Rockies. Concurrently, a potent mid-latitude cyclone will track from the Pacific Northwest toward the Canadian Maritimes. This system will initially drop moderate to heavy rain over the Northwest potentially triggering isolated flooding alongside high-elevation snow in the Olympics and Cascades. After weakening over the Central U.S., the system is expected to reinvigorate over the East by late next week, delivering a mix of rain to the south and snow to the north across the Great Lakes, Ohio Valley, and Northeast.

Further out, the Climate Prediction Centers 6-10 day outlook (valid March 29-April 2, 2026) favors above-normal precipitation across much of the contiguous U.S. and Hawaii. Conversely, below-normal precipitation is favored for most of Alaska and along portions of the East Coast, stretching from southern New England to northern Florida. Probabilities for above-normal temperatures are increased across the vast majority of the lower 48 states and Hawaii, while below-normal temperatures are expected to persist across most of Alaska and much of the Northeast.

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