

National Drought Summary for May 19, 2026

Summary

During the week, the contiguous United States exhibited significant regional temperature anomalies driven by a highly amplified synoptic pattern. Early in the period, a pronounced unseasonable cold air mass influenced the Northern Plains, Upper Midwest, and Northeast, depressing temperatures 5°F to 15°F below normal across the Dakotas, Minnesota, New York, and Pennsylvania. Conversely, the Southwest and South Texas experienced anomalous warmth, with maximum temperatures exceeding 90°F and averaging up to 15°F above normal. By the latter half of the week, this warm air mass expanded eastward into the Ohio Valley and Mid-Atlantic, initiating an early-season heatwave with observed maximum temperatures climbing into the mid-80s to low 90s.

Precipitation regimes during this period were characterized by severe convective outbreaks and pronounced moisture disparities. In the early portion of the week, persistent onshore moisture transport resulted in heavy rainfall totals of 4 to 6 inches across the central Gulf Coast, specifically affecting Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. Between May 17 and 18, a powerful frontal system traversing the central United States triggered widespread severe weather across the Great Plains and Midwest. This system produced damaging winds up to 80 mph, large hail, and multiple tornadoes across South Dakota, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, and Missouri, alongside localized flash flooding. In contrast, extreme moisture deficits persisted west of the Rocky Mountains, where weekly precipitation totals generally remained under 0.10 inches, further elevating wildfire risk across the southern High Plains.

Northeast

Temperatures varied across the region, ranging from the upper 40s and low 50s in northern Maine to the mid-to-upper 60s across the southern Mid-Atlantic. Looking at departures from normal, the majority of the Northeast experienced a warm week, with temperatures generally averaging 1°F to 4°F above normal. Pockets of more pronounced warmth emerged in eastern New York, western Vermont, and eastern Massachusetts, where departures climbed 4°F to 8°F above average. The main exception to this regional warmth was concentrated in the southwest, where a cooler air mass held temperatures in West Virginia and western Pennsylvania 2°F to 6°F below normal for the week. Precipitation totals across the Northeast were starkly divided during this week, characterized by a concentrated wet zone in northern New England and widespread deficits elsewhere. The heaviest rainfall occurred across northern New York, Vermont, New Hampshire, and western Maine, where totals reached 2.0 to 3.5 inches, representing a significant positive departure of 1.0 to 2.5 inches above normal. Above-normal rainfall justified moderate (D1) to severe (D2) drought and abnormal dryness (D0) improvements in Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and eastern New York. Abnormal dryness (D0) was also improved in central Pennsylvania. In contrast, the rest of the region experienced exceptionally dry conditions. A vast swath covering much of West Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania, and parts of southern New York, southern New England, and northern Maine received less than 0.5 inches of rain—with many areas dropping below 0.1 inches—resulting in

widespread precipitation deficits of 0.5 to 1.5 inches below normal. Extreme (D3) drought was introduced in southern and eastern West Virginia, while severe (D2) drought expanded in central parts of the state. Moderate (D1) drought was also expanded in southern portions of New England, south-central Pennsylvania this week.

Southeast

Much of the Southeast experienced widespread moisture deficits, with a vast majority of Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, the Carolinas, and Virginia receiving less than 0.25 inches of total rainfall. This extended dry spell resulted in widespread negative departures ranging from 0.75 to 1.5 inches below seasonal averages across the interior heart of the region. Exceptional (D4) drought was introduced in western North Carolina, while extreme (D3) drought expanded across parts of Virginia, eastern North Carolina, and central South Carolina. Severe (D2) drought was also expanded in northeast parts of North Carolina. Significant precipitation was strictly confined to the southern peripheries of the Southeast. Localized convective activity delivered 2.0 to 3.5 inches of rain along the eastern Georgia-Florida border and across southern Florida, resulting in improvements to these areas. Exceptional (D4) drought was improved in portions of southern Georgia and within the Florida Panhandle, while improvement to extreme (D3) drought occurred in central and southern Georgia, southern Alabama, and in northern and eastern parts of Florida. Weekly mean temperatures exhibited a typical latitudinal gradient, spanning from the upper 50s and low 60s across southern Appalachian Mountains to the upper 70s and low 80s across the Florida Peninsula. In terms of departures from normal, a broad swath of the interior Southeast—encompassing Alabama, Georgia, and the Carolinas—experienced a distinctly cool week, with mean temperatures averaging 2°F to 4°F below normal. Conversely, the Florida Peninsula and the coastal plain of Virginia observed unseasonable warmth, with departures averaging 2°F to 4°F above normal.

South

Below-normal precipitation dominated the South this week. The vast majority of Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee received less than 0.10 to 0.50 inches of total rainfall, leaving nearly the entire geographic footprint under exceptionally dry conditions. This lack of rainfall translated into widespread departures ranging from 0.75 to 1.50 inches below normal. Below-normal rainfall totals resulted in the introduction of exceptional (D4) drought in the Oklahoma Panhandle and D4 expansion in parts of Arkansas and Mississippi. Extreme (D3) to severe (D2) drought were expanded in parts of Oklahoma, Arkansas, Mississippi, and Tennessee.

The major exception to this dry regime was concentrated in southern portions of the region, specifically southern Texas, where localized convective storms delivered 1.0 to 3.0 inches of rainfall, resulting in the improvement of extreme (D3) drought in southern portions of Texas, Louisiana, and Mississippi. Temperatures were above normal across much of the region, ranging from the upper 50s and low 60s in Tennessee to the upper 80s in parts of Texas. Looking at departures from normal, a highly anomalous zone of intense warmth gripped the western half of the region, where temperatures averaged 6°F to 15°F above historical norms.

Conversely, the eastern tier of the region bucked the western warming trend entirely; Mississippi and Tennessee experienced unseasonably cool conditions, with temperatures suppressing to 3°F to 6°F below normal.

Midwest

Precipitation patterns across the Midwest were defined by an intense, localized corridor of heavy rainfall contrasting with widespread dryness elsewhere. The most significant hydrological activity occurred across southern Iowa, northern and central Missouri, and west-central Illinois, where a series of storm complexes dropped widespread totals of 2.5 to 5.5 inches, with a localized amounts exceeding 6.25 inches in south-central Iowa and north-central Missouri. This wet weather pattern resulted in substantial positive departures of 1.5 to over 4.5 inches above normal.

Conversely, the northern and eastern fringes of the region experienced a remarkably dry week. Northern Minnesota, northern Wisconsin, the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, eastern Indiana, and much of Ohio received less than 0.50 inches of rain—with much of Kentucky dropping below 0.10 inches—yielding widespread precipitation deficits of 0.75 to 1.5 inches below normal.

Anomalous warmth dominated the Midwest this week, with average temperatures ranging from the upper 40s along the Canadian border to the 70s in southwestern Missouri. Looking at departures from normal, unseasonable warmth dominated the western and central Midwest. A broad area encompassing Missouri, Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and western Illinois reported temperatures 2°F to 6°F above historical norms, with the core of the warmth centering over western Iowa and northwest Missouri at 6°F to 10°F above average. In contrast, the southeastern portion of the region bucked this warming trend entirely; eastern Indiana, Ohio, and eastern Kentucky sat beneath a cooler air mass that suppressed weekly mean temperatures to 2°F to 4°F below normal.

High Plains

Temperatures were above normal across much of the region this week, with average readings ranging from the low 40s along the Canadian border and in the mountains to the mid-70s across southern Kansas. Highly anomalous early-season warmth gripped the southern half of the region. The core of this heat anomaly was centered over Kansas and Colorado, where weekly temperatures soared 6°F to 12°F above historical averages, with localized spots in southern Kansas peaking more than 12°F above normal. This unseasonable warmth extended moderately northward into Nebraska, yielding departures of 3°F to 6°F above average. Conversely, the northern High Plains remained under a more seasonal air mass; North Dakota, South Dakota, and northern Wyoming experienced below-normal conditions, fluctuating within 3°F to 6°F of historical baseline temperatures. Precipitation amounts varied across the region, with extreme dryness across the much of the region and a highly concentrated deluge along the southeastern boundary. Large portions of Wyoming, Colorado, and western parts of North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas, reported weekly totals below 0.50 inches, with

extensive areas receiving less than 0.10 inches. This lack of moisture resulted in departures of 0.5 to 1.5 inches below average, causing conditions to deteriorate. Extreme (D3) drought expanded in southwestern Kansas and southern Colorado. Severe (D2) in parts of Colorado and northeast Wyoming, while moderate (D1) drought expanded in parts of South Dakota. In powerful contrast, intense convective activity generated a sharp corridor of heavy rainfall across eastern portions of Kansas and Nebraska. Totals in this localized zone rapidly climbed between 2.5 and 5.5 inches, with departures ranging between 1.5 to over 4.5 inches above normal, resulting in improvements to moderate (D1) to exceptional (D4) drought in Nebraska and moderate (D1) to extreme (D3) drought in Kansas. Heavy rainfall also brought improvements to severe (D2) to exceptional (D4) drought in northern Colorado and a reduction of exceptional (D4) drought in southern Wyoming this week.

West

Temperatures varied across the region this week, with average readings ranging from the mid-30s and 40s across the northern tier and high elevations to the low 80s in the desert Southwest. In terms of departures from normal, unseasonably cold conditions dominated the northern half of the region, with departures ranging between 3°F and 9°F below normal. In sharp contrast, the southern tier experienced unseasonable warmth. A building ridge over the Southwest drove temperatures in southern California, Arizona, and New Mexico 3°F to 9°F above normal, with eastern New Mexico seeing the greatest extremes. Precipitation across the Western region was characterized by an extreme contrast between a highly active storm track in the Pacific Northwest and aridity across the remainder of the region. Above-normal precipitation was confined to much of Washington, and parts of Oregon and Montana, where weekly rainfall totals ranged between 1.5 to 3.5 inches, with localized totals in the Cascade Range exceeding 4.5 inches. This activity generated substantial departures of 0.75 to over 3.0 inches above normal, justifying moderate (D1) to severe (D2) drought and abnormal dryness (D0) improvements in Washington and northern Idaho, and improvements to abnormal dryness (D0) to northwestern Oregon and western Montana. Conversely, dry conditions persisted across nearly the entire remaining geographic footprint. Widespread areas across California, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, and parts of Idaho, Montana, Utah recorded negligible rainfall totals of less than 0.10 inches. Due to the climatological onset of the dry season in parts of the West, this lack of rainfall translated into modest negative departures ranging from near-normal to 0.75 inches below seasonal averages. Nonetheless, deteriorating conditions led to the expansion of exceptional (D4) drought in southern Idaho, and extreme (D3) drought in parts of New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Montana, and southern Idaho. In addition, severe (D2) drought was expanded in Oregon, Montana, and Arizona, while moderate (D1) drought expanded in parts of Idaho, Montana, Nevada, and Arizona.

Caribbean

Warm conditions and limited precipitation across the Caribbean have led to a slight expansion of abnormally dry (D0) conditions in Puerto Rico, excluding the interior and western regions where adequate rainfall was observed. In portions of the southwest, north-central, and the

island of Culebra, 30-day precipitation totals have fallen below 15% to 40% of normal, while objective data indicates deteriorating root saturation and increasing crop stress. Hydrological deficits are also evident in the south-southeast, where USGS-monitored wells continue to decline. Field assessments in the southwest further corroborate these shortages, noting low river flows and early yellowing of vegetation, while the northeast remains excluded from dryness designations due to the high baseline moisture of the rainforest and a lack of clear societal impacts.

This week, the U.S. Virgin Islands continued to experience abnormally dry conditions due to drier-than-normal weather over the past few weeks. Although there were some localized heavy rainfall events recently, there were no significant weather events during this period to alleviate groundwater stress. The territory remained relatively stable, consistent with typical seasonal conditions for May.

This week, St. Croix experienced significant variability in precipitation, with rainfall totals ranging from 0.42 inches at the Henry E. Rohlsen Airport to 1.79 inches at the Frederiksted 1.9NE CoCoRaHS station. This disparity highlights the localized nature of convective activity on the island, with western areas receiving substantial rainfall while eastern sections, such as Christiansted, recorded more moderate amounts. The rainfall measurements at various stations in St. Croix include 0.52 inches at VI-SC-10 (Christiansted 1.6 E), 0.78 inches at VI-SC-20 (Frederiksted 1.7 ESE), 0.6 inches at VI-SC-23 (Christiansted 6.5 W), 0.44 inches at VI-SC-30 (Christiansted 1.7 SW), and 1.28 inches at VI-SC-35 (Frederiksted 1.3 ENE). Despite these localized downpours, the island's hydrological profile remains strained, as observed by the Adventure 28 Well, where the depth of water levels has continued to increase, reaching a depth of 21.29 feet by May 19, 2026, a significant increase compared to the 14.15 feet recorded on the same date last year. Consequently, St. Croix remains in abnormally dry conditions. Despite these recent localized downpours, the island's water supply remains under stress. This is evident at Adventure 28 Well, where the depth of the water level has continued to increase, reaching 21.29 feet by May 19, 2026. This marks a significant increase compared to the 14.15 feet recorded on the same date last year. As a result, St. Croix continues to experience abnormally dry conditions.

St. Thomas experienced the driest conditions among the three islands this week due to a persistent mid-level atmospheric inversion cap that suppressed shower activity. Official records from Cyril E. King Airport reported only 0.08 inches of rainfall, while voluntary reports from the Charlotte Amalie West CoCoRaHS station (VI-ST-15) confirmed similarly minimal precipitation at 0.09 inches. This lack of rain has worsened the island's hydrological deficit. The Grade School 3 well has shown a steady increase in water level depth since April 20, 2026, reaching 8.65 feet by May 19, 2026, compared to just 2.25 feet on the same date in 2025. As a result, St. Thomas remains in abnormally dry conditions.

St. John benefited from the most consistent, topographically forced rainfall across the territory, with the high-elevation Windswept Beach station (VI-SJ-3) capturing 0.75 inches and Cruz Bay 1.6 E (VI-SJ-5) recording 0.38 inches. The SPI values for Windswept Beach on May 14, 2026, are: -0.69 (1 month), 0.46 (3 months), 0.25 (6 months), 0.14 (9 months), and 0.15 (12 months). While these showers provided relief to surface soils and vegetation through orographic lifting, they were insufficient to facilitate meaningful groundwater recharge. The Susannaberg DPW 3

well measured a depth to water level of 14.14 feet on May 19, 2026, marking a continued decline compared to both the previous week and the previous year, when levels were significantly shallower at 8.39 feet (on May 19, 2025). As a result, the island remains in the Abnormally Dry (D0) drought category.

Pacific

Temperatures were broadly below normal across Alaska this week, particularly across the southern half of the state and extending northward into the Interior. This cooler pattern was accompanied by above-normal precipitation across southern Alaska, the Alaska Peninsula, and the Panhandle, resulting in the reduction of abnormal dryness (D0) in south-central Alaska.

Hawaii observed high humidity and above-normal temperatures this week, with coastal maximums sustained in the lower to mid-80s. An unseasonably cool upper-level low-pressure system funneled deep tropical moisture across the archipelago, sparking slow-moving thunderstorms, heavy downpours, and localized flash flooding that brought up to 10 inches of rainfall to Kauai and Oahu this week. On the Big Island, localized storms brought heavy rainfall across parts of the eastern and southern coasts, resulting in the improvement of abnormal dryness (D0) in these areas.

The Marshall Islands experienced a week of heavy rainfall that affected nearly the entire archipelago, from the southern atolls to the northern chain. This week, Wotje in the north recorded the highest rainfall in the territory, accumulating an impressive 7.95 inches, while Majuro received 6.40 inches. Other islands also reported significant rainfall: Kwajalein received 4.19 inches, Mili recorded 3.05 inches, and Utirik had 2.88 inches. Ailinglapalap reported 2.50 inches of rain, while Jaluit received 1.30 inches. As a result, the Marshall Islands are currently free from drought conditions.

This week, the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) experienced dynamic precipitation conditions due to a northward shift in the Near-Equatorial Trough and trade-wind troughs. As a result, widespread moisture affected the eastern states and parts of the western archipelago, while only a few central atolls remained dry. Pohnpei recorded the highest rainfall, totaling 6.79 inches (with one day of data missing). Chuuk Lagoon experienced 2.76 inches of rain (with two days missing), and Kosrae observed 2.18 inches (with two days missing). In the typically dry western islands, Woleai received 3.84 inches, and Yap recorded 2.58 inches, ensuring that these islands remained free from drought. Nearby atolls Nukuoro and Lukunor measured 0.45 inches and 0.16 inches of rain, respectively. Kapingamarangi reported 1.01 inches (with one day missing). Due to the wet conditions over the past weeks, the islands of Kapingamarangi, Nukuoro, and Lukunor are also drought-free this week. However, Ulithi recorded only 0.87 inches (with two days missing), maintaining its abnormally dry conditions.

The primary airport station in Pago Pago does not have data for the period of May 13–19, 2026. However, remote high-elevation sensors across Tutuila indicate that the territory experienced an exceptionally intense tropical rainstorm during this time. Siufaga Ridge recorded an extraordinary 7.72 inches of rain for the week, while Toa Ridge reported 4.73 inches. Most of this heavy rainfall occurred on a single day, May 16, when Siufaga Ridge received 3.60 inches, and Toa Ridge recorded 2.02 inches in just 24 hours. As a result,

American Samoa remains free from drought conditions.

Palau had a very favorable week, with consistent, productive rainfall that helped alleviate existing moisture deficits. During this week, Koror recorded a total of 3.62 inches of rain, while the WSO Palau Airai measured 2.57 inches. As a result, the islands transitioned from abnormally dry conditions to being drought-free.

The Mariana Islands experienced highly localized and variable weather conditions during this week. The southern tip of the archipelago received moderate rainfall, while the northern islands recorded only small amounts. This week, Guam recorded the highest rainfall at 2.61 inches, while neighboring Rota received 1.26 inches. In contrast, farther north, Saipan reported a minimal 0.08 inches. Although there was no direct data for Tinian, regional meteorological experts indicated that it shares similar atmospheric conditions with Saipan due to its close geographic proximity, meaning it likely experienced the same low rainfall. However, due to the wet conditions in previous weeks, both Saipan and Tinian remain free from drought this week.

Looking Ahead

Over the next five days (May 19–23, 2026), the United States can expect a highly dynamic weather pattern characterized by contrasting temperature extremes and widespread storm activity. An early-season heatwave will make headlines across much of the eastern U.S. through midweek, with interior portions of the Mid-Atlantic and the Carolinas seeing highs climb into the lower to middle 90s—warm enough to potentially establish new daily records before a cold front brings cooler relief by Thursday. In stark contrast, the Intermountain West and Rockies will experience below-normal temperatures to start the week, alongside late-season accumulating snow in the higher elevations of Colorado and Wyoming. Meanwhile, a strong cold front tracking across the Plains and Midwest will spark widespread showers and severe thunderstorms. Multiple rounds of heavy rainfall will bring a risk of scattered flash flooding, focusing heavily on Texas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas on Tuesday before an expanded risk of heavy precipitation stretches from western Texas to the central Appalachians on Wednesday.

Further out, the Climate Prediction Center's 6–10 day outlook (valid May 24–28, 2026) favors above-normal temperatures across most of the United States—stretching from the Rocky Mountains all the way to the East Coast, with the highest confidence for this unseasonable warmth concentrated in the Upper Midwest. Hawaii is also leaning toward warmer conditions. In contrast, temperatures are expected to be colder than average across the state of Alaska, and in a pocket of northwestern Washington state. Meanwhile, near-normal temperatures are forecast in parts of the South and along the West Coast. Probabilities for wetter-than-average conditions favor the vast majority of the country, including Hawaii and portions of Alaska. In the contiguous U.S., this wet weather pattern extends from the Southwest to the East Coast, with the greatest probability of above-normal precipitation expected to be in the south-central U.S., specifically across southern Texas. The West Coast, portions of the Pacific Northwest, the northern Rockies, northern parts of the Midwest, and northern Alaska are favored to receive near-normal precipitation during this time. No areas are favored to be drier than normal.

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