

If It's January, A Hard Freeze Impacts the RGV/Deep S. Texas Ranchlands For Third Year in a Row, Mid-to-Late-January Brings The Cold

Overview

Just because the winter forecast indicates an overall warm prediction for the Rio Grande Valley, it doesn't mean that the opportunity won't present itself for at least one "Arctic Express" situation – one where very cold air slides down the front range of the Rockies on through Texas and into northern Mexico. Such indicators were present several months [before winter arrived](#) – favoring January into early February 2026. Beginning in November, and peaking through January, periodic cold air blasts originated near the North Pole, then moved from the western Canadian prairies east-southeast into the northern Plains, the upper Midwest/Great Lakes, and through the Northeast U.S. These blasts spared the southern Plains into the Rio Grande Valley and northeast Mexico for much of the period. In fact, until January 24th, meteorological winter (Defined as December-February) ranked among the top five **warmest** on record for the region as a whole.

While it took a bit longer in 2026, the "arctic express" event finally arrived. And by "finally", it was only a little bit later than those in the past three winters: In 2024, a similar event occurred between [January 15 and 17](#); in 2025, between [January 20 and 22](#).

Unlike in the past two winters, where a period of freezing rain (icing) or freezing rain mixed with sleet occurred in portions of the Rio Grande Valley and/or Deep South Texas ranchlands, the 2026 arctic express only had a short period of non-freezing drizzle during the evening of the 24th into the post-midnight Janhours of the 25th, before dry air overwhelmed the lower and mid levels of the atmosphere. Similar to the those events, however, the region saw two consecutive days of freezes and hard freezes under clear skies, before a notable warmup ended the event by mid-morning of the 27th.

The Event: Freezes and Frigid "Feels Like" Temperatures

Before the arrival of the sub-freezing ambient (actual) temperatures and wind chill ("feels like") temperatures, the sharpest temperature change of the winter occurred during the afternoon of the 24th for the populated RGV. For many areas, temperatures crashed 20 to 30°F during that time. "Feels like" temperature drops were more impressive. Between noon and 6 PM, apparent temperatures fell between 30 and nearly 50°F! Figure 1 shows the ambient temperatures at noon (apparent temperatures were similar); Figure 2 shows the apparent temperatures at 6 PM. This was quite the shock to the system for people in light-weight clothes without sufficient layers to be ready. Just before midnight, all areas had fallen into the upper 30s to upper 40s (ambient), with apparent temperatures in the mid 20s (ranchlands) to mid 30s (Valley).



Ambient Temperature, RGV, noon Jan. 24

January 30, 2026
6:47 AM

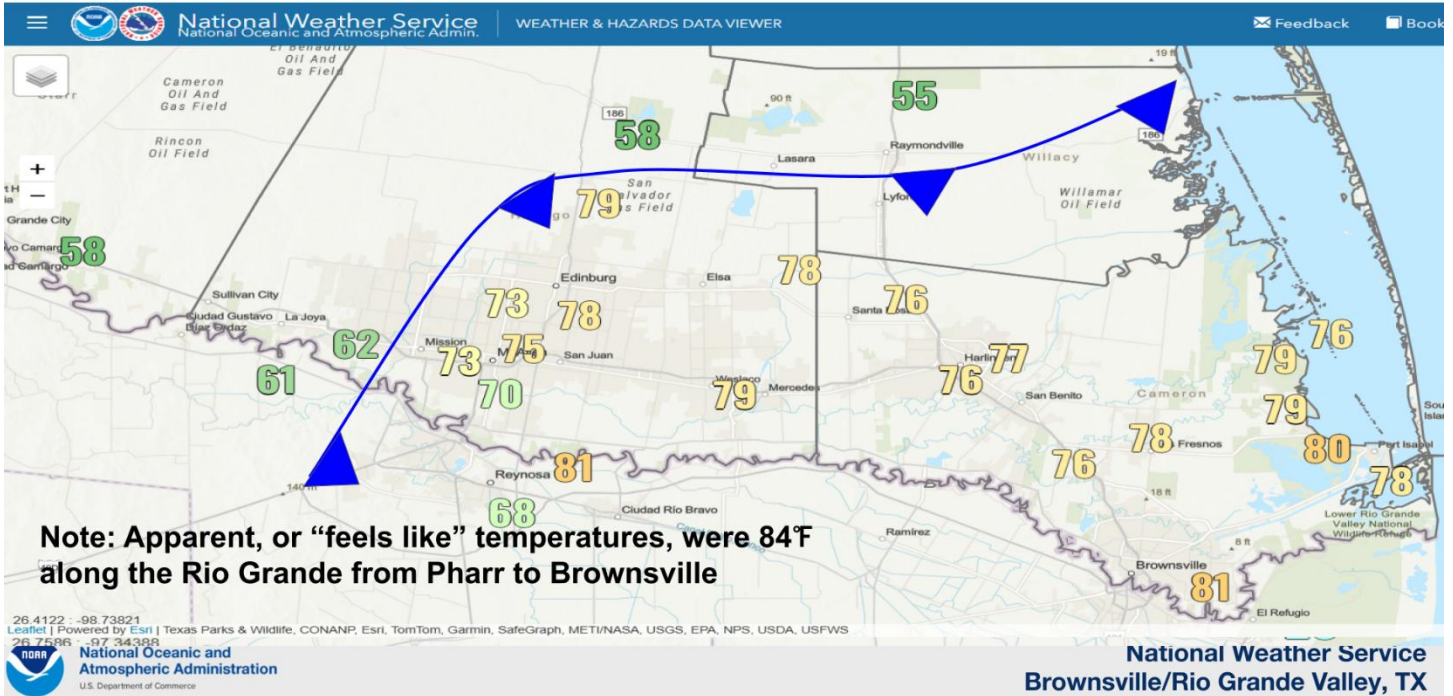


Figure 1. Ambient (actual) temperature at noon CST, January 24th, prior to the sharp cold front (blue line/triangles) for most of the RGV.



Apparent Temperature, RGV, 6 PM Jan. 24

January 30, 2026
6:47 AM

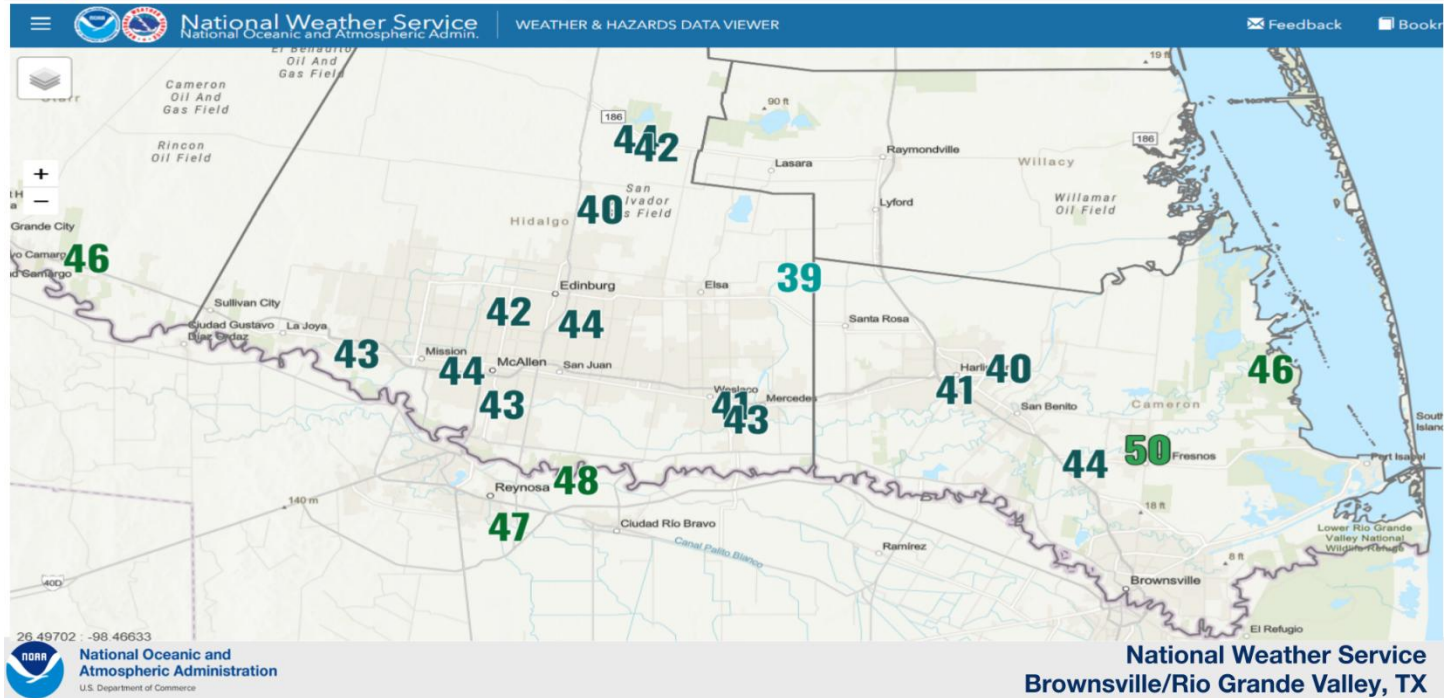


Figure 2. Apparent temperature (wind chill) at 6 PM January 24, 2026, across the RGV. Note differences of -30 to nearly -50 degrees (drops) during this period.

January 25th



Wind Chill, 8 AM Jan. 25

January 30, 2026
6:47 AM

For the Rio Grande Valley and Deep South Texas Ranchlands

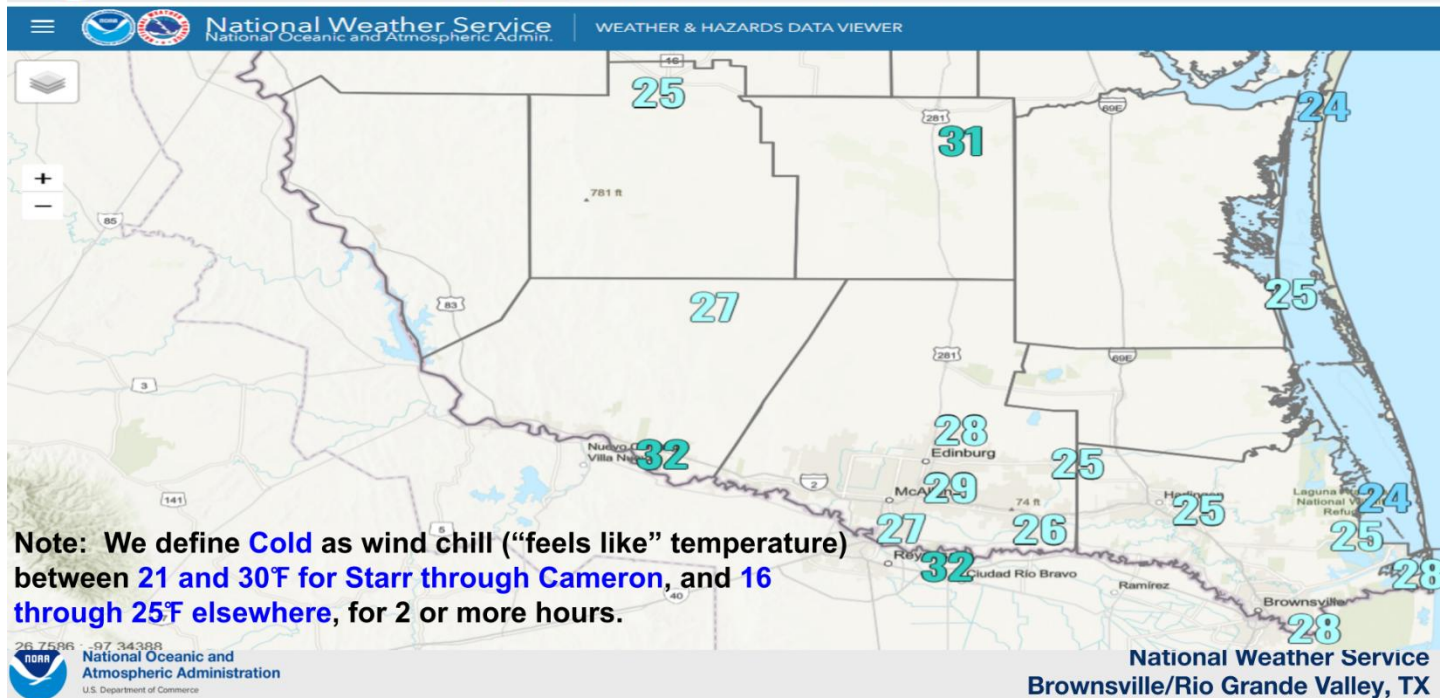


Figure 4. Apparent Temperature (Wind Chill) at 8 AM January 25, 2026 – around the time of the coldest values for the morning period when people were beginning their day.

January 26th

The core of the surface high pressure moved into north Texas overnight (Figure 5), with the ridge extending south through the southern tip of the state and several hundred miles into northern Mexico. During the evening of the 25th, skies cleared over the entire area – with north/northwest winds still running at brisk levels, the coldest air of the winter progressed steadily through the region. By daybreak, temperatures had fallen into the 20s in most areas, with apparent temperatures about 10 degrees colder due to persistent 15+ mph wind. Hard freezes (temperature <28°F for 2 or more hours) were preliminarily noted across livestock ranch areas for 4 to 8 hours, with a pocket of 3-5 hours for critical crop growing locations in Willacy, northwestern Cameron, and northern Hidalgo County. Freezes (temperatures 32°F or lower for 2 or more hours) occurred in all locations, with an estimated 10-14 hours across the livestock-rich northern ranchlands, and 8-12 hours across critical crop-growing locations. Even South Padre Island dropped to 31° for a minimum temperature.

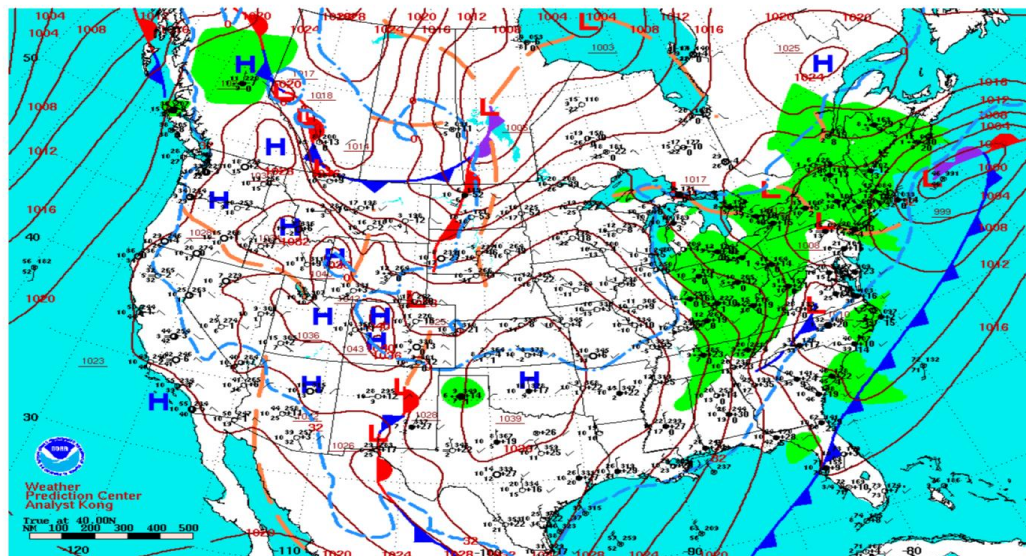
Full sunshine on the 26th, along with slowly diminishing winds, allowed temperatures to rise slowly but steadily – but the source-region chill of the airmass kept locations near the coast, and across the colder ranchlands, from reaching 50°F. Across the upper Valley and Rio Grande Plains, temperatures did reach or just nudge over 50°F.

The frigid temperatures set new daily records for all locations across the Rio Grande Valley, with a tied record at Rio Grande City (Table 1, below).



National Surface Pressure, Jan. 26 7 AM

January 30, 2026
6:47 AM



Surface Weather Map and Station Weather at 7:00 A.M. E.S.T.

Note the center of arctic-sourced high pressure (H) over Oklahoma, with axis across all of Texas.



National Weather Service
Brownsville/Rio Grande Valley, TX

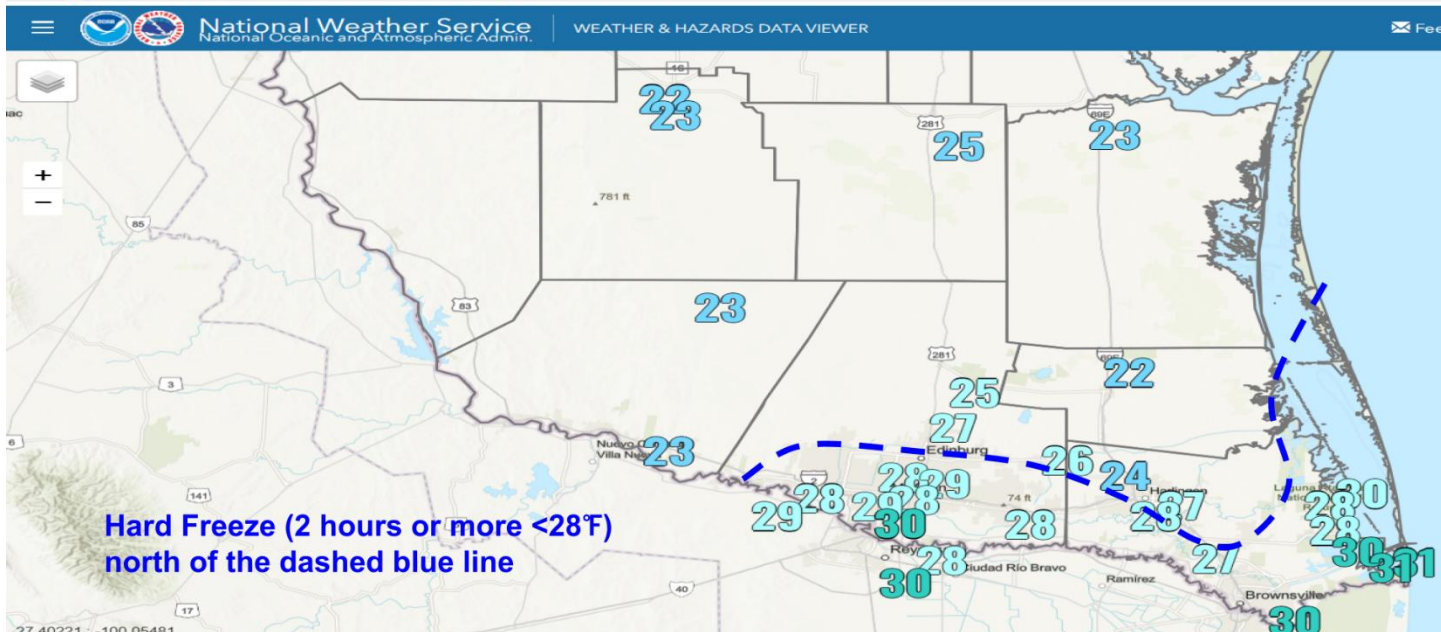
Figure 5. National map of surface pressure and fronts, January 26, 2026.



Minimum Temperature Jan. 26

January 30, 2026
6:47 AM

For the Rio Grande Valley and Deep South Texas Ranchlands



Hard Freeze (2 hours or more <28°F)
north of the dashed blue line



National Weather Service
Brownsville/Rio Grande Valley, TX

Figure 6. Minimum temperatures for January 26, 2026.



Wind Chill/Extreme Cold, 7 AM Jan. 26

January 30, 2026

6:47 AM

For the Rio Grande Valley and Deep South Texas Ranchlands

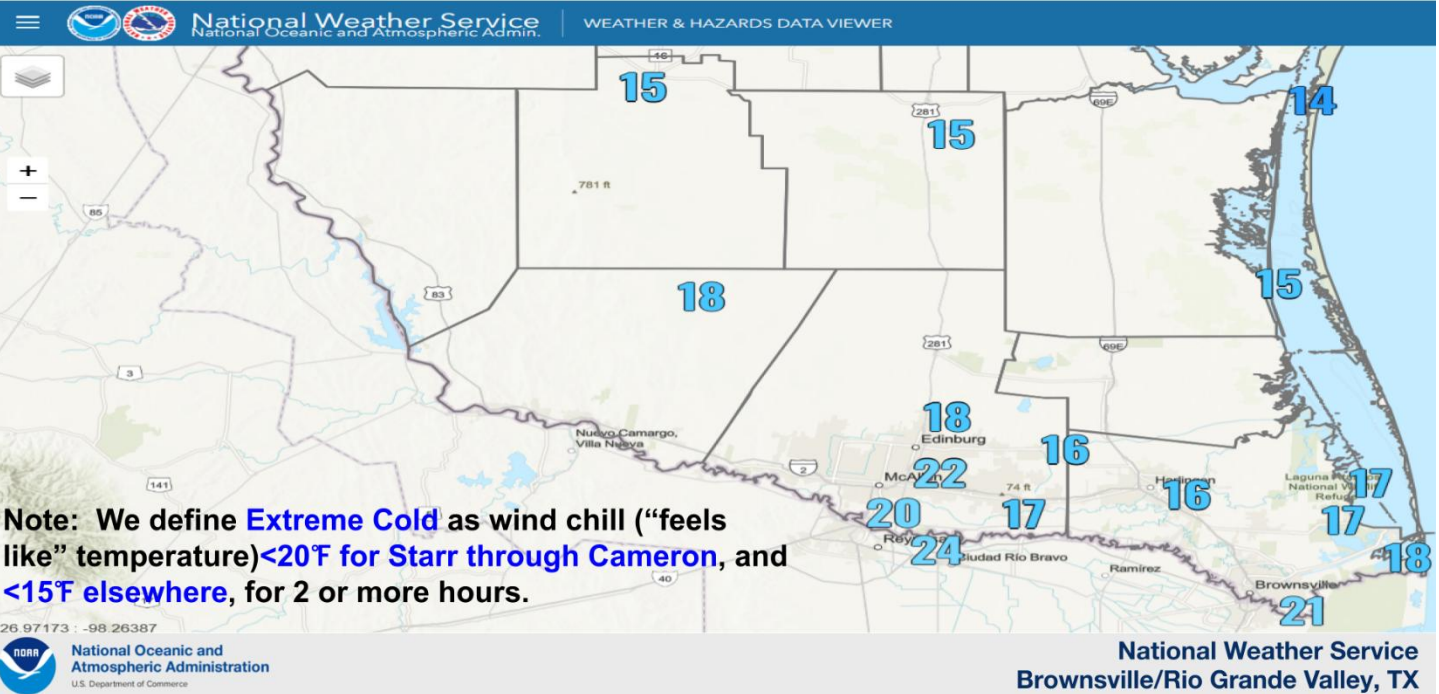


Figure 7. Apparent temperatures (wind chill) as of 7 AM Monday, January 26, 2026.

Table 1: January 26th preliminary observed minimum temperatures at available airports and long-term observation stations. Automated Weather Observing System locations (i.e. Hebbronville/Jim Hogg Co. Airport) do not have a period of record to directly compare with and the daily record column is set to “N/A”. New records shaded in medium blue.

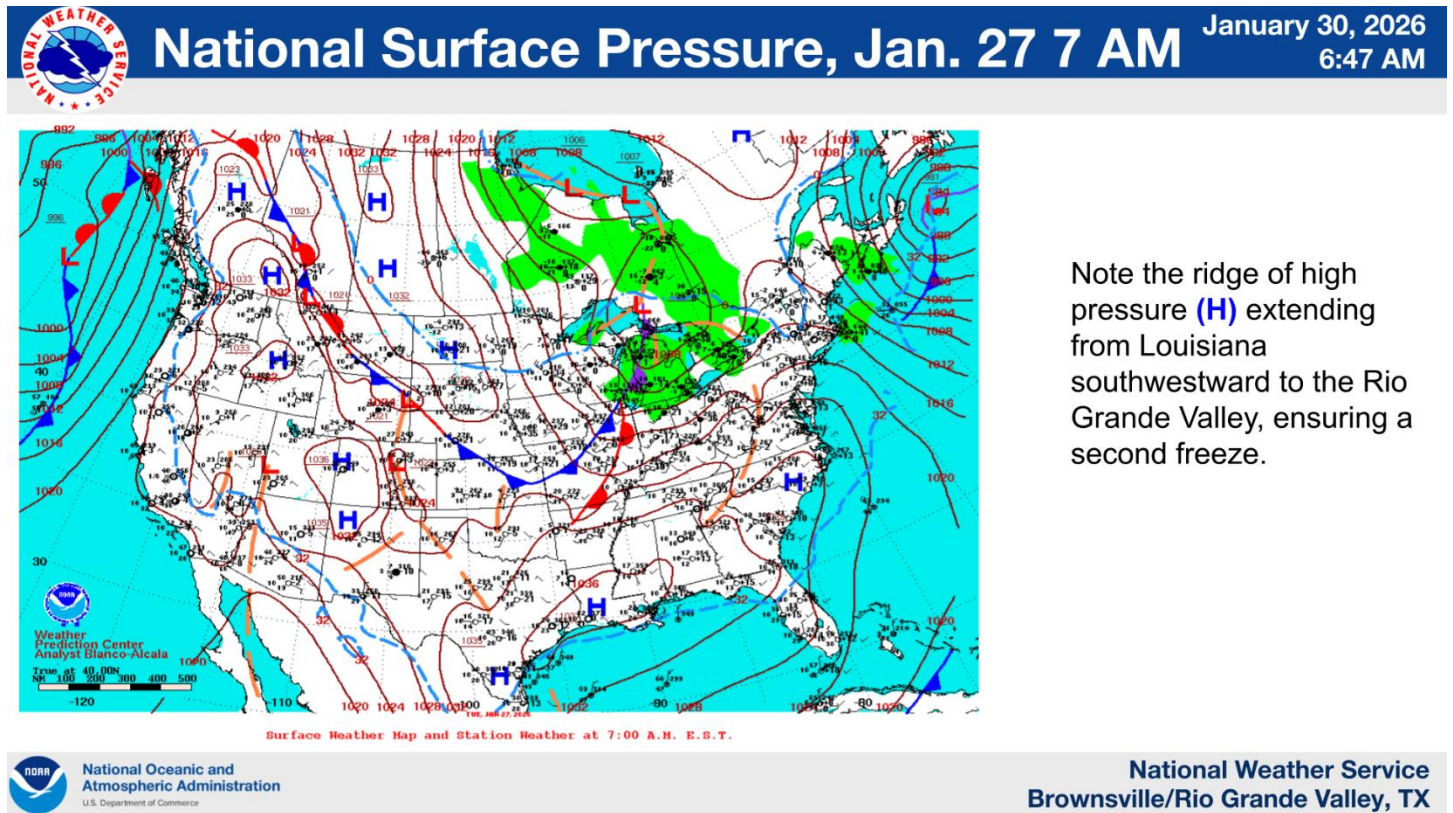
Location	Morning Minimum Temp (Jan 26)	Daily Record?
Brownsville	30	Yes. Prior 32, 1940. Since 1878
Harlingen/Valley	26	Yes. Prior 36, 1961. Records since 1953-62; 1997-present
McAllen	30	Yes. Prior: 35, 1966. Since 1942
Harlingen/Cooperative	28	Yes. Prior: 32, 1940. Since 1912
Bayview/Cameron Co Airport	28	Yes. Prior: 40, 2011. since 1999
Weslaco/Mid Valley Arpt	28	N/A
South Texas Int'l Airport	26	N/A
Hebbronville/Jim Hogg Co. Airport	22	N/A
Falfurrias/Brooks Co. Airport	25	N/A
Armstrong	22	Yes. 32 in 2014. Since 2002.
San Manuel	22	Yes. 34 in 2014. Since 2000.
Port Mansfield	27	Yes. Prior: 35 in 1978. since 1958
Port Isabel	29	Yes. Prior: 35 in 1940. since 1928
Rio Grande City	25	Tied. 25 in 1978. since 1897/1928
Raymondville	26	Yes. 31 in 1940. since 1913
Edinburg	28	37 in 2014. since 2000
McCook	27	Yes. 33 in 2014. since 1942
Weslaco 2 miles east	27	Yes. 29 in 1938. since 1915

*Calendar-day minimum temperature occurred after observation time (observation time is generally before 8 AM), so values are likely a bit lower than shown.

January 27

Following the sunny day with slowly diminishing winds, surface high pressure ridge nudged across Louisiana, but the axis extended southwest across the southern tip of Texas. Only slight modification of the airmass was noted, and wind-protected locations once again fell into the lower to mid 20s, for another hard freeze. Duration of the hard freeze was about the same across the ranchlands, and perhaps a touch longer (3 to 7 hours) across wind protected areas of the crop-growing regions in eastern Hidalgo and Willacy. For yet another day, new low temperature records were set or tied across many locations of the RGV and Deep South Texas ranchlands (Table 2), particularly from Willacy through northwest Cameron and northern Hidalgo to points north and west. Apparent temperatures (wind chill) were only 1-5 degrees below the ambient temperatures – still cold to be sure, but not as impactful as on the 26th.

As the ridge slid into the Gulf and toward the eastern Gulf coast, temperatures rebounded quickly, reaching the upper 40s by 10 AM in most areas, on their way to 60° or higher for the area – ending the event.



Note the ridge of high pressure (H) extending from Louisiana southwestward to the Rio Grande Valley, ensuring a second freeze.

Figure 8. National surface pressure and fronts chart, January 27, 2026.



Minimum Temperature Jan. 27

January 30, 2026
6:47 AM

For the Rio Grande Valley and Deep South Texas Ranchlands

National Weather Service
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

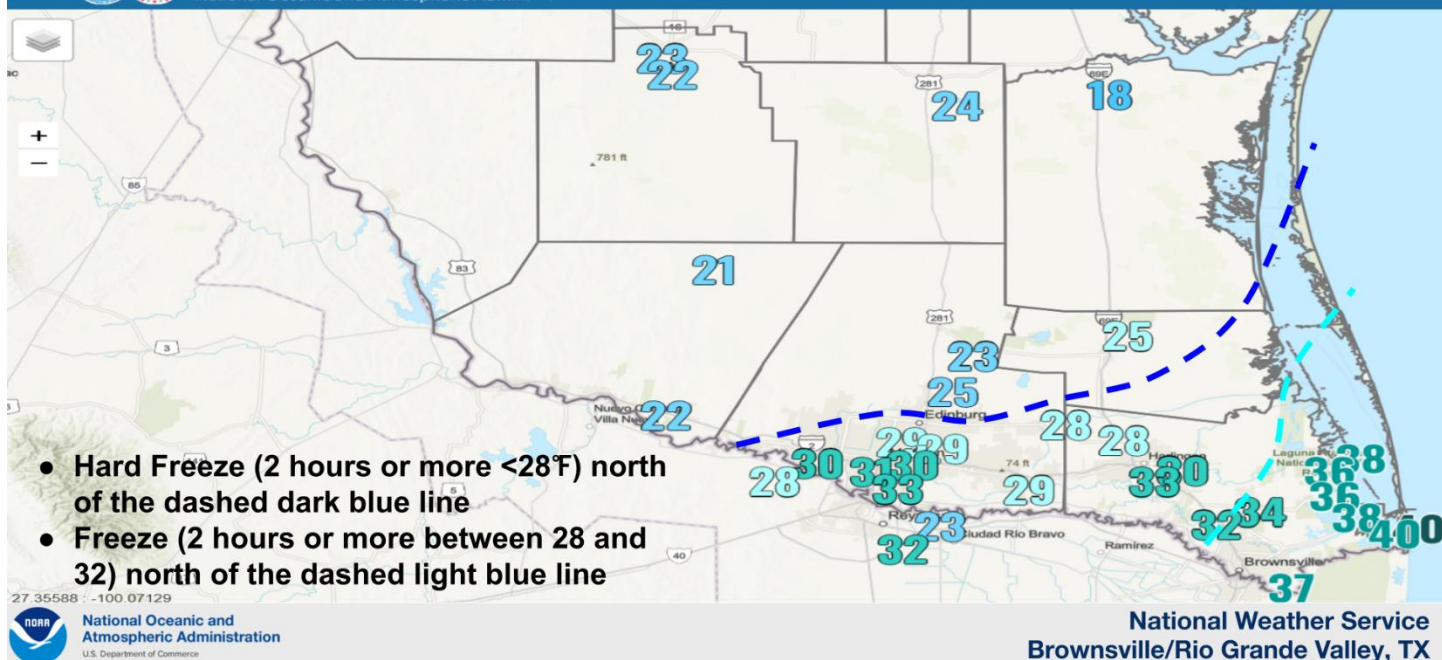


Figure 9. Minimum observed temperatures for January 27, 2026.

Table 2: January 27th preliminary observed minimum temperatures at available airports and long-term observation stations. Automated Weather Observing System locations (i.e. Hebbronville/Jim Hogg Co. Airport) do not have a period of record to directly compare with and the daily record column is set to “N/A”. New records shaded in medium blue.

Location	Morning Minimum Temp (Jan 27)	Daily Record?
Brownsville	37	No. Prior 32, 1948. Since 1878
Harlingen/Valley	29	Yes. Prior 36, 1961. Records since 1953-62; 1997-present
McAllen	33	No. 30 in 1966. Since 1942.
Harlingen/Cooperative	30 (est)*	Tied. Prior: 30, 1966. Since 1912
Bayview/Cameron Co Airport	36	Yes. Prior: 43, 2016. since 1999
Weslaco/Mid Valley Arpt	29	N/A
South Texas Int'l Airport	25	N/A
Hebbronville/Jim Hogg Co. Airport	22	N/A
Falfurrias/Brooks Co. Airport	24	N/A
Armstrong	22*	Yes. 33 in 2011. Since 2002.
San Manuel	22*	Yes. 31 in 2016. Since 2000.
Port Mansfield	27*	Yes. Prior: 33 in 1966. since 1958
Port Isabel	Unknown	Unknown due to calendar day recordings. since 1928
Rio Grande City	25*	Tied. 25 in 1897. since 1897/1928
Raymondville	25*	Unknown – likely. since 1913
Edinburg	27*	Yes. 38 in 2016. since 2000
McCook	27*	Yes. 28 in 1948. since 1942
Weslaco 2 miles east	29*	Yes. 31 in 1966. since 1915

*Calendar-day minimum temperature occurred is estimated or may not be precisely known, as minimum temperatures are taken generally for the 7 AM to 7 AM period at cooperative sites. Therefore, a re-set temperature readout may show much colder temperatures that occurred just after 7 AM on the original observation day for the following day’s “minimum”. Since January 27 was equally as cold inland as the 26th, we suspect that the minimum temperature is around or close to the actual observed values at observation time.

The Event: Impacts and Actions

Cold-weather preparedness began in earnest several days ahead of the arrival of the coldest temperatures overnight on the 25th and into the morning of the 26th, and again on the morning of the 27th. The following are known initial protective actions that began as early as Thursday, January 22nd and were largely completed by Friday, January 23rd:

Schools: Nearly all local school districts, including private and parochial schools with K-12 students, scheduled 2 or 3 hour delayed openings on January 26th – with most decisions completed by the middle of the day on Friday, January 23rd. Interestingly, while the delays were important to minimize time that students and parents might spend in the very cold conditions, initial school bus pickups between 8 and 830 AM (vs. 6 and 630 AM) on the 26th had to face up to an hour of apparent temperatures in the upper teens to mid 20s, before values slowly rose into the 20s and around 30 between 10 and 11 AM.

A lower number of districts had delays for January 27th, but the final tally was not known as of this writing. Forecast higher apparent temperatures, despite similar forecast minimum temperatures, was likely one reason for the lesser number.

Shelters/Warming Centers: At least two dozen warming centers were opened by Sunday afternoon across the Rio Grande Valley. Preliminary reports from Cameron County noted that just under 100 persons took advantage of centers opened in the County. As of this writing, there were an unknown number of users across the remaining Valley counties, as well as the ranch communities of Zapata, Jim Hogg, and Brooks County.

Sea Turtle Cold Stunning: As the likelihood for at least a moderate stun event increased on the 23rd, Sea Turtle, Inc. began readying their facility for an intake of stunned turtles beginning on the 22nd and 23rd. By the 24th, staff and volunteers were being lined up for rescue operations, which were finalized into Sunday the 25th as temperatures and sea surface temperatures were dropping rapidly. The new facility, which was outfitted to handle the expected incoming stunned turtles, ultimately rehabilitated between 360 and 375 turtles. The turtles were then released on the 29th, when water temperatures returned above 60°F.

Photos of Stunned Sea Turtles Rescued on January 28, 2026



At least 375 sea turtles were rescued from the recent Arctic Blast (photo credit: [Sea Turtle Inc.](#))



Crop and Livestock: The combination of a hard freeze with gusty winds increased vulnerability to at least young cattle herds across the ranchlands on the 26th, with additional potential impacts on the 27th. Details were not yet known as of this writing. As for crops, the combination of a hard freeze with humidity in the 70s produced wet bulb conditions – a measure of evaporation efficiency and enhanced cold for membranes – into the upper teens to lower 20s across the ranchlands, and low to mid 20s across the croplands on both mornings.

As of the 27th, impacts from the freeze were unknown, though Texas Agrilife mentioned that “freeze conditions raised concerns for onions, leafy greens, and other sensitive crops” – which was also the reality following the December 2022 [pre-Christmas freeze/hard freeze](#). If past is prologue, expect to read about at least minor damage to sensitive crops and any early blooms due to the near-record warmth that occurred during the first 24 days of the month before the widespread freezes. Persistent drought was compounding the impact.

While there were no cases of road or structural icing from freezing rain, the cold and dry conditions were sufficient to cause ice on fountains and shallow ponds. Check out this [story from myrgv.com](#) to see some photos from west Harlingen.

A Quick Look at the Meteorology

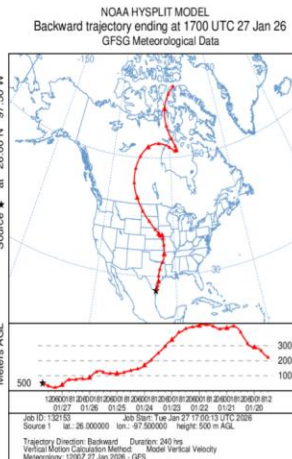
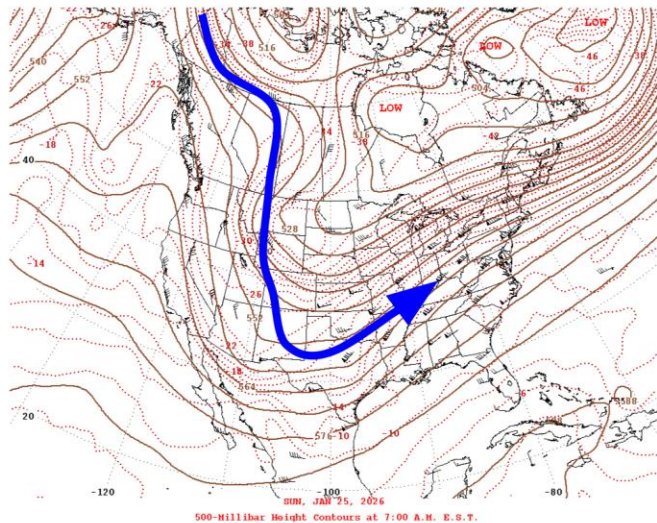
Similar to the arctic express events during the past four winters, the January 25-27 event featured a “classic” atmospheric setup. After weeks of Texas experiencing “glancing blows” at most from arctic-sourced fronts – nearly all which were driven to the east/southeast rather than the south/southeast, into the Upper Midwest, Great Lakes, and Mid Atlantic/Northeast, the steering pattern finally shifted just far enough west to open the door to frigid air to drive due south from the Canadian prairies due south through the Great Plains states and into northern Mexico (Figure 10).

Note the trajectory of this air mass did not come directly from northwest Canada (Northwest Territories, Yukon) but rather west of Greenland, with a nudge just far enough west into the southern Canadian Prairies (Alberta, Manitoba) to have a better opportunity to reach all of Texas, including the Rio Grande Valley. The lack of any feed of tropical/subtropical moisture into the region cut off the precipitation chances here. However, the energy wave (base of the “U-shape” to the left of the arrowhead) was sufficient to create necessary lift for minor to moderate snow and ice across Texas, roughly from San Antonio to Victoria Crossroads to points north (Figure 11).



The Pattern of Cold - Jan. 25-27, 2026

January 30, 2026
6:47 AM



Using NOAA's Hysplit Backward Trajectory Model, this image depicts the source of our recent cold air outbreak January 25-27, 2026). It was truly an Arctic sourced airmass!



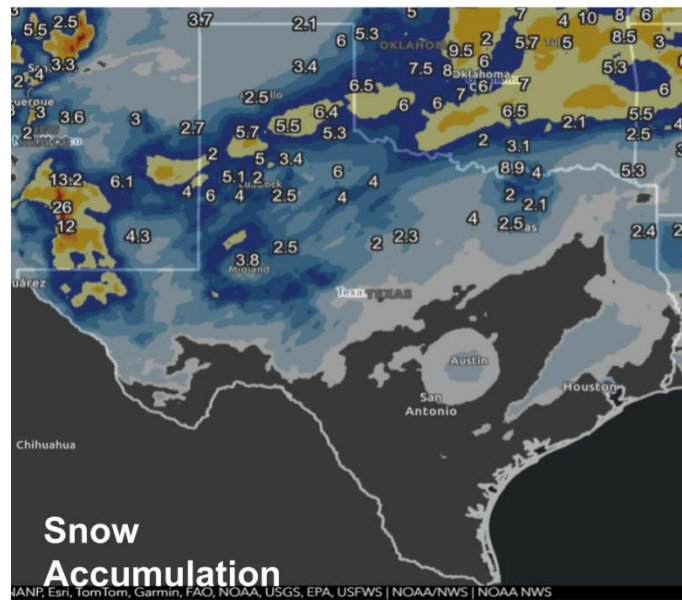
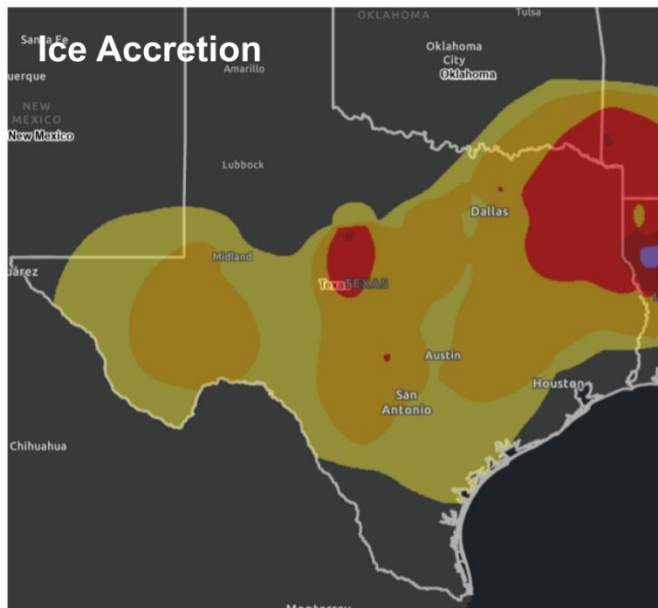
National Weather Service
Brownsville/Rio Grande Valley, TX

Figure 10. Steering pattern and trajectory of arctic surface air for the January 25-27, 2026 cold outbreak.



Texas Ice and Snow Jan. 24-26, 2026

January 30, 2026
6:47 AM



National Weather Service
Brownsville/Rio Grande Valley, TX

Figure 11. GIS screen shots of Texas ice (accretion) and snow (accumulation) between January 24-26, 2026. Note the cutoff of icing across south Texas, from Laredo to just north of Corpus Christi.