Drought Information Statement for West Central and Southwest Florida

Valid February 19, 2026

Issued By: National Weather Service Tampa Bay, FL

Contact Information: sr-tbw.webmaster@noaa.gov

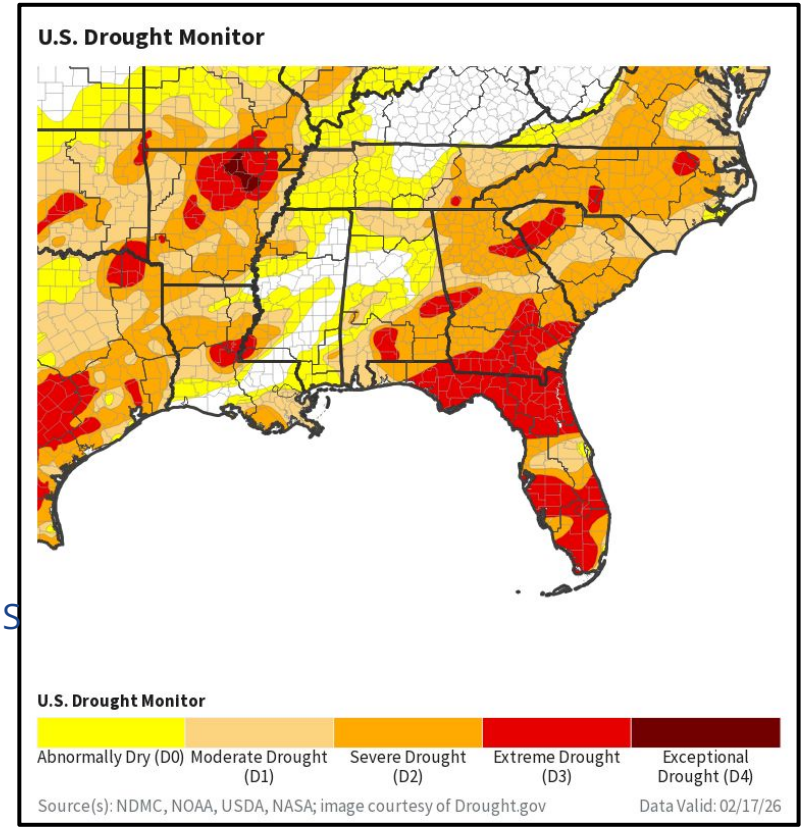
- This product will be updated February 27, 2026 or sooner if drought conditions change significantly.
- Please see all currently available products at https://drought.gov/drought-information-statements.
- Please visit https://www.weather.gov/tbw/DroughtInformationStatement for previous statements.
- Please visit https://www.drought.gov/drought-status-updates for regional drought status updates.

- Extreme Drought has been expanded across interior portions of West Central Florida.
- Moderate to Severe Drought persists across the remainder of West Central and Southwest Florida.
- Drought characteristics are largely long term type impacts as rivers, streams, and ponds are at very low levels for this time of year.
- Fire danger is also increasing due to very dry conditions.

U.S. Drought Monitor

Link to the latest U.S. Drought Monitor for West Central and Southwest Florida

- Despite some rainfall over the last week, it has not been enough to result in significant improvements, except for a small portion of the Nature Coast.
- The extended duration of limited rainfall has necessitated the greater expansion of D3 Extreme Drought into portions of West Central and Southwest Florida.
- Drought intensity and Extent
  - **D3 (Extreme Drought)**: Levy, N Citrus, N Sumter, S Pinellas, S Hillsborough, S Polk, Manatee, Sarasota, Charlotte, N Lee, Hardee, Desoto, and Highlands Counties.
  - **D2 (Severe Drought)**: S Citrus, Central Sumter, Hernando, W Pasco, N Pinellas, Central Hillsborough, Central Polk, E Highlands, SE Charlotte, and Central and S Lee Counties.
  - **D1 (Moderate Drought)**: S Sumter, SE Hernando, E Pasco, NE Hillsborough, and N Polk counties.



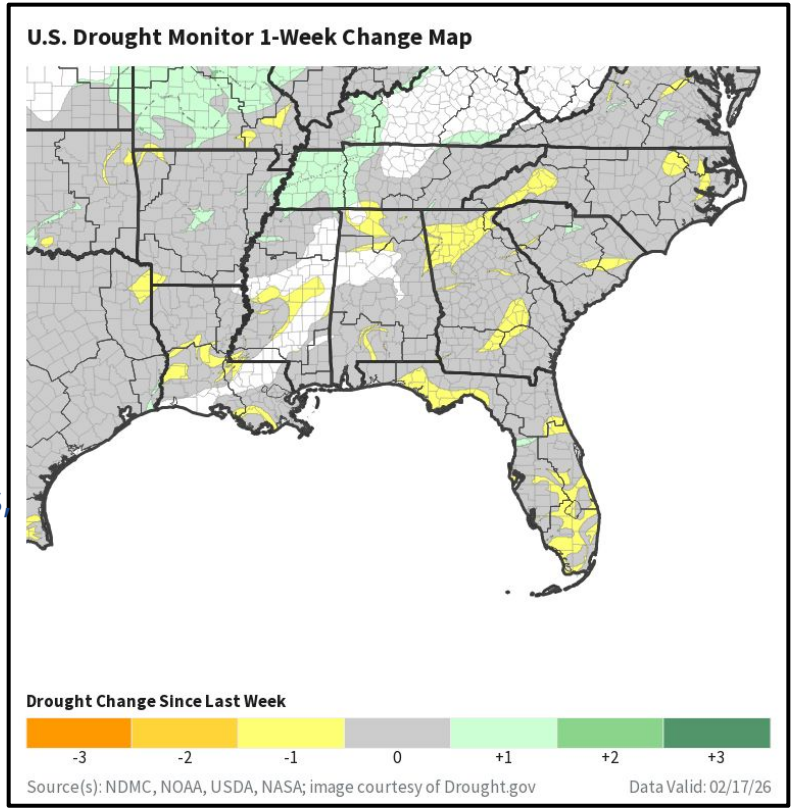
Recent Change in Drought Intensity

Link to the latest 4-week change map for West Central and Southwest Florida

- With low rainfall totals, drought conditions have worsened across West Central Florida and Southwest Florida. Only a small section of the Nature Coast saw slight improvement due to a heavier rain band.

- Changes were based upon long-term deficits rather than weekly rainfall, **with several locations currently continuing to report the driest conditions on record.**

- **One Week Drought Monitor Class Change**
  - **One Week Degradation**: S Pinellas, Central Hillsborough, S and Central Polk, Eastern Highlands, and N Lee County
  - **One Week Improvement: Central Citrus and N Sumter County**
  - **No Change:** The rest of West Central and Southwest Florida.

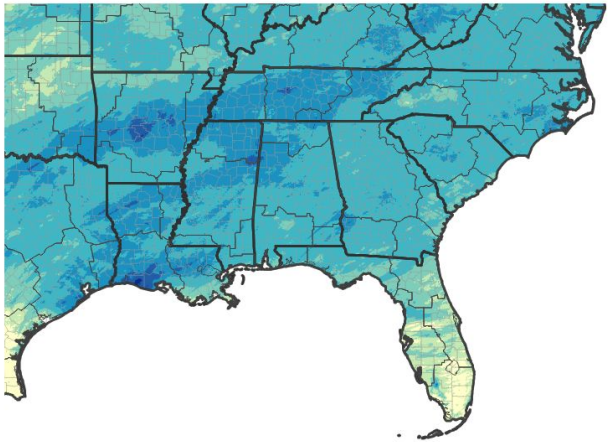


Precipitation

Last 30 Days

- A small section of the Nature Coast has seen near normal rainfall.
- Elsewhere, rainfall has continued to be below normal, with some locations less than 25% of normal and many locations less than 50% of normal over the last 30 days.
- Long-term deficits continue to show greater impacts.

30-Day Precipitation Accumulations (Inches)



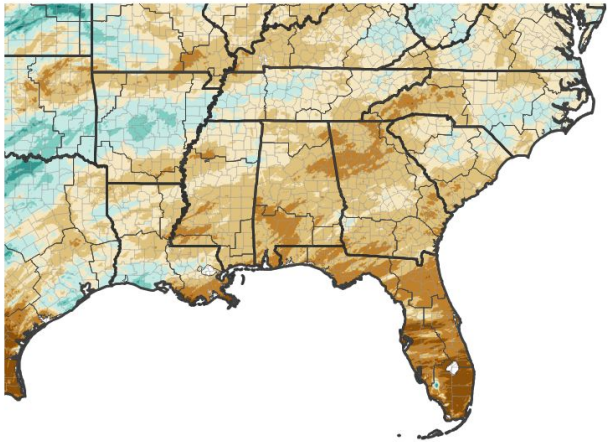
Inches of Precipitation

0 | 0.01 | 0.5 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 6 | 8

Source(s): National Weather Service Multi-Radar Multi-Sensor System; image courtesy of Drought.gov

Last Updated: 02/19/26

30-Day Percent of Normal Precipitation



Precipitation Shown as a Percentage of Normal Conditions

0% | 25% | 50% | 75% | 100% | 100% | 150% | 200% | 300%

Source(s): National Weather Service Multi-Radar Multi-Sensor System; image courtesy of Drought.gov

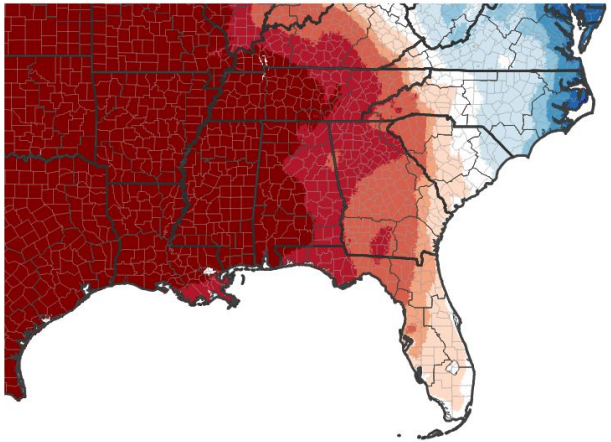
Last Updated: 02/19/26

Temperature

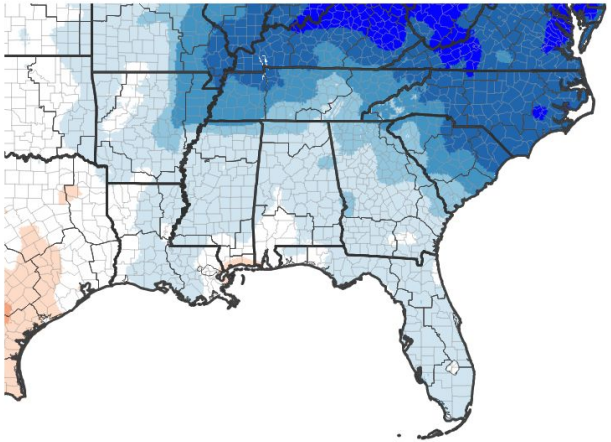
7-Day and 30-Day Temperature Anomalies

- Temperatures have been warming over the last week-and-a-half.
- However, recent freezes mean that much of the vegetation is still dormant.
- Some cold-sensitive plant types experienced damage, or were killed by the extended cold earlier in the month.
- A warming trend has continued this week.

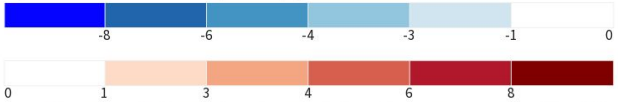
7-Day Temperature Anomaly



30-Day Temperature Anomaly



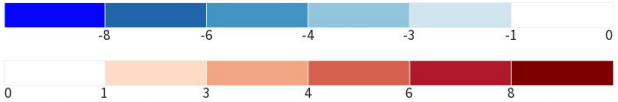
Departure from Normal Max Temperature (°F)



Source(s): NOAA's National Centers for Environmental Information; image courtesy of Drought.gov

Data Valid: 02/15/26

Departure from Normal Max Temperature (°F)



Source(s): NOAA's National Centers for Environmental Information; image courtesy of Drought.gov

Data Valid: 02/15/26

Summary of Impacts

Links: See/submit Condition Monitoring Observer Reports (CMOR) and view the Drought Impacts Reporter

Hydrologic Impacts

- Streamflows remain exceptionally low for this time of year. Many areas are much lower than they were during last year's dry season.
- Surface/groundwater levels remain especially low for this time of year, accentuating the long term nature of this drought.
- Saltwater intrusion into South Florida aquifers is of significant concern and has necessitated mitigation actions.

Agricultural Impacts

- Crops have been stressed by recent cold weather, and some crop losses have been noted.
- Polk County farmers report that the dryness is the worst seen in at least 15 years and Levy County farmers note these are the worst conditions in at least 20 years.
- Supplemental feeding with hay and other feed is required to sustain livestock. Report impacts here.

Fire Hazard Impacts

- The Keetch-Byram Drought Index (KDBI) ranges from 400 to over 700, indicating soils are very dry. While recent rain has led to some improvement across the Nature Coast, most of the area has continued to deteriorate.
- Brush fire occurrence has increased across the interior and the Tampa Bay region. Some wildfires have caused temporary road closures and grown to thousands of acres before containment.

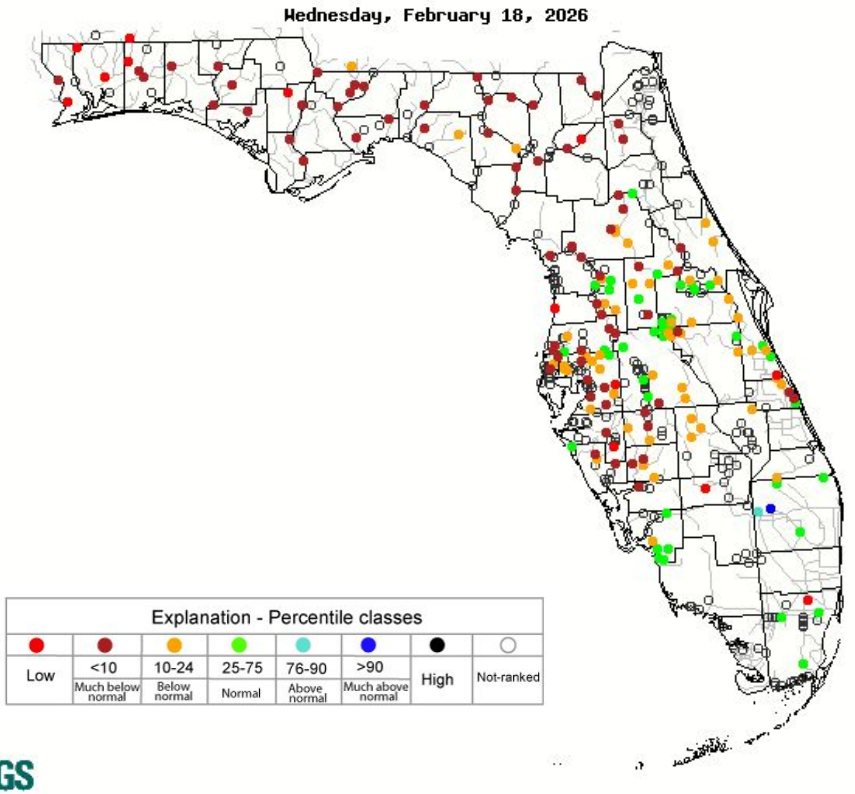
Mitigation Actions

- A State of Emergency has been issued for the area due to the impacts of Winter Weather, Drought, and the increased Wildfire Risks.
- South Florida Water Management District has issued a Water Shortage Warning for Highlands and Lee Counties. Refer to local regulations for additional information.
- A modified Phase IV Water Shortage is in effect for a portion of Northeast Cape Coral in Lee County.
- Southwest Florida Water Management District has implemented a Modified Phase II Water Shortage Restriction. Always refer to city or county regulations first.
- Burn Bans remain in effect for all counties. Please contact the county for specifics.

Hydrologic Conditions and Impacts

USGS Streamflow Map for Florida

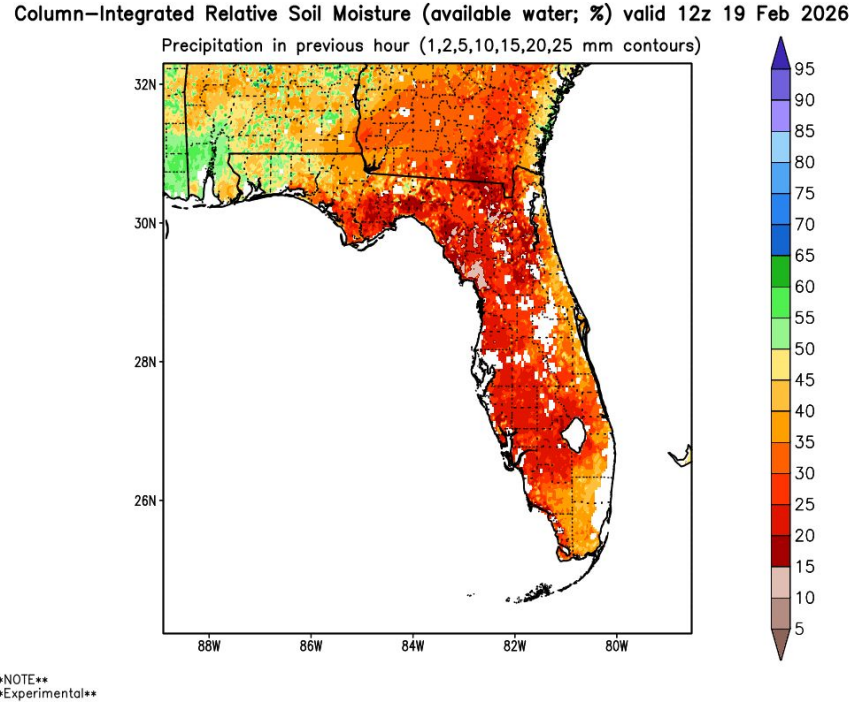
- Most streamflows are running below normal, with many locations much below normal.
- Portions of the Withlacoochee River basin as well as the upper Peace River Basin are still running near normal due to some heavier rain. With some additional rainfall possible this weekend, additional declines may be prolonged.
- Water releases from Lake Okeechobee have kept the Caloosahatchee River near normal.
- Conditions will likely continue to worsen in the weeks to come.



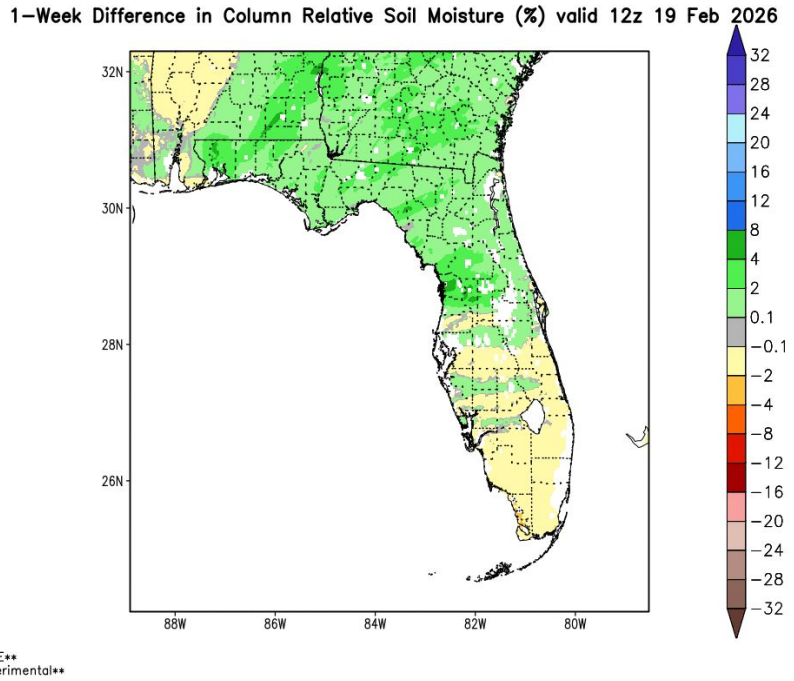
Agricultural Impacts

[2025 Florida Crop Report]

Deep layer soil moisture is very dry, and has generally continued to decline this week, despite some rain.



NOTE
Experimental



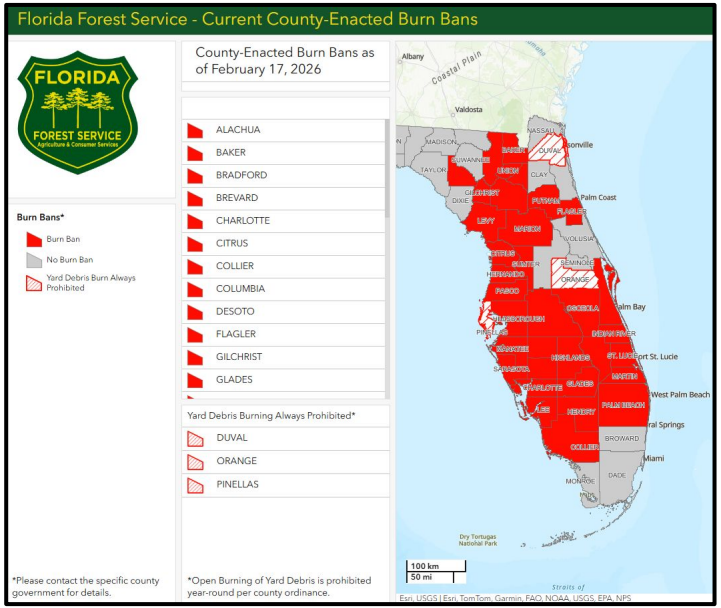
NOTE
Experimental

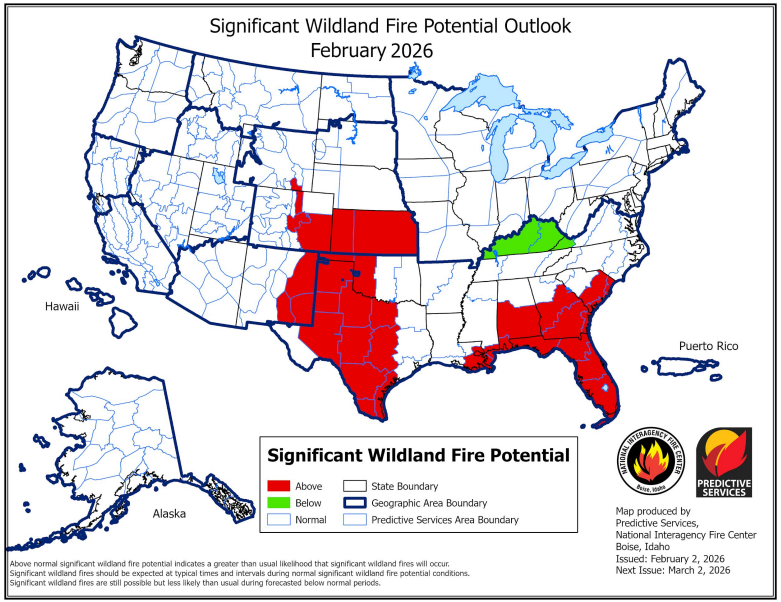
Fire Hazard Impacts

Link to [Wildfire Potential Outlooks from the National Interagency Coordination Center.]

Burn bans are in effect for all counties across West Central and Southwest Florida. The potential for significant wildland fires is above normal.

Latest Florida Burn Ban map available [here].



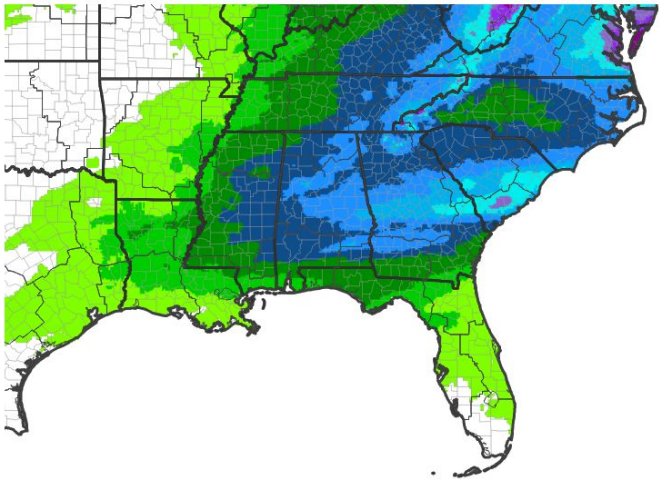


Precipitation Outlook

7-Day and 8-14 Day Precipitation Outlooks

- Everyone saw some rain on Sunday, February 15th and early on Monday February 16th.
- No rainfall has fallen since.
- Some rainfall is possible this weekend, but this won't be enough to make meaningful improvements.
- Longer-term outlook suggests that rainfall totals will be near normal.

7-Day Quantitative Precipitation Forecast for February 19, 2026–February 26, 2026



Predicted Inches of Precipitation

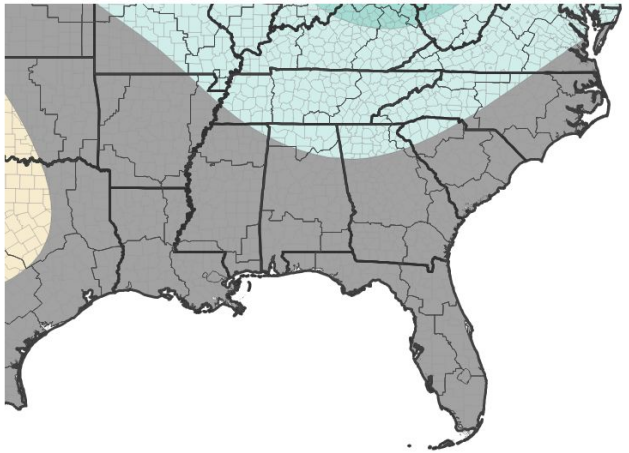
0 | 0.01 | 0.1 | 0.25 | 0.5 | 0.75 | 1 | 1.25 | 1.5 | 1.75

1.75 | 2 | 2.5 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 7 | 10 | 15 | 20

Source(s): National Weather Service Weather Prediction Center; image courtesy of Drought.gov

Last Updated: 02/19/26

8–14 Day Precipitation Outlook for February 26, 2026–March 4, 2026



Probability of Below-Normal Precipitation

33% | 40% | 50% | 60% | 70% | 80% | 90% | 100%

Probability of Above-Normal Precipitation

33% | 40% | 50% | 60% | 70% | 80% | 90% | 100%

Near-Normal Conditions

Source(s): Climate Prediction Center; image courtesy of Drought.gov

Last Updated: 02/18/26

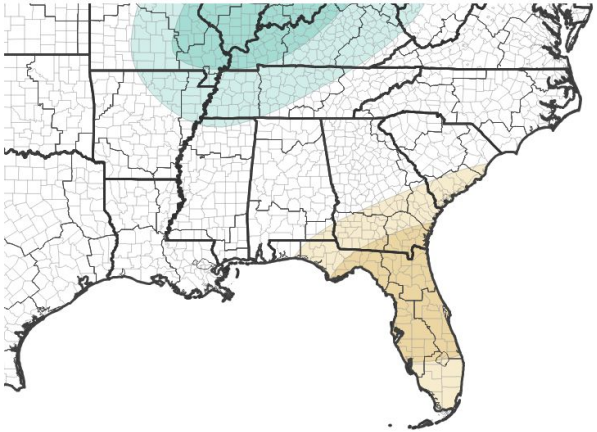
Long-Range Outlooks

The latest monthly and seasonal outlooks can be found on the CPC homepage

- February temperatures started out much below normal, but since have recovered to near to above normal this week. Precipitation has been below normal for most of the area.
- The outlook for March is for a better chance for above normal temperatures and below normal rainfall.
- With such large deficits, this is unlikely to help improve current drought conditions.

Normals	March	
	Temp	Rain
Brooksville	64.2°	2.66"
Tampa	68.6°	2.52"
Lakeland	68.3°	3.06"
Sarasota	68.1°	2.85'
Punta Gorda	68.5°	2.28'
Fort Myers	70.3°	2.07"

Monthly Precipitation Outlook for March 1, 2026–March 31, 2026



Probability of Below-Normal Precipitation

33% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

Probability of Above-Normal Precipitation

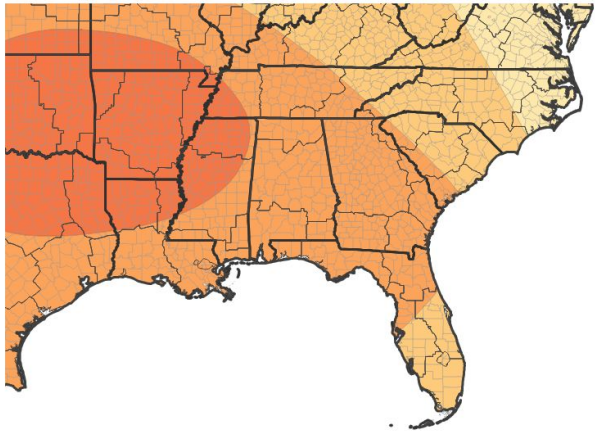
33% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

Probability of Near-Normal Precipitation

33% 40% 50%

Source(s): Climate Prediction Center; image courtesy of Drought.gov Last Updated: 02/19/26

Monthly Temperature Outlook for March 1, 2026–March 31, 2026



Probability of Below-Normal Temperatures

33% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

Probability of Above-Normal Temperatures

33% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

Probability of Near-Normal Temperatures

33% 40% 50%

Source(s): Climate Prediction Center; image courtesy of Drought.gov Last Updated: 02/19/26

Long-Range Outlooks

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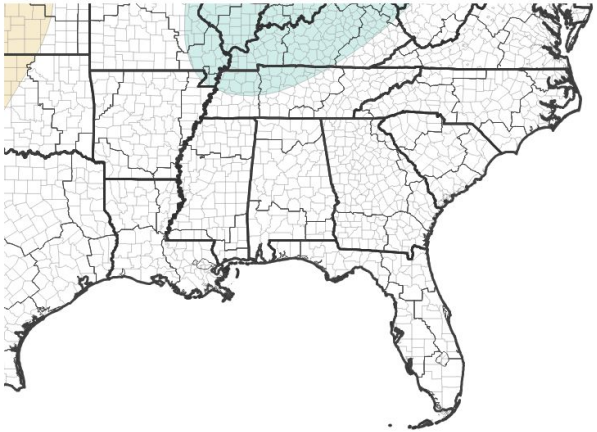
- The next three months are predicted to have above normal temperatures and equal chances of below, above, and near normal rainfall.
- This is consistent with typical La Niña conditions.
- Overall, this favors persistent drought conditions.

Normals	March		April		May	
	Temp	Rain	Temp	Rain	Temp	Rain
Brooksville	64.2°	2.66"	69.2°	2.18"	75.3°	3.35"
Tampa	68.6°	2.52"	73.9°	2.55"	79.5°	2.60"
Lakeland	68.3°	3.06"	73.2°	2.82"	78.2°	3.80"
Sarasota	68.1°	2.85'	72.6°	2.46"	77.8°	2.58"
Punta Gorda	68.5°	2.28'	73.1°	2.23"	77.9°	3.26"
Fort Myers	70.3°	2.07"	74.8°	2.44"	79.3°	3.46"

Seasonal (3-Month) Precipitation Outlook for March 1, 2026–May 31, 2026



Probability of Below-Normal Precipitation

33% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

Probability of Above-Normal Precipitation

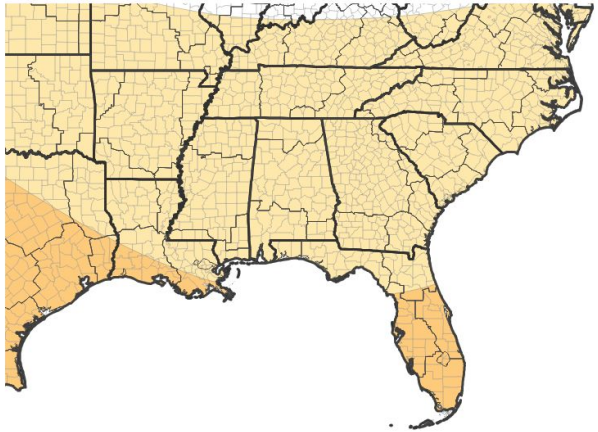
33% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

Probability of Near-Normal Precipitation

33% 40% 50%

Source(s): Climate Prediction Center; image courtesy of Drought.gov Last Updated: 02/19/26

Seasonal (3-Month) Temperature Outlook for March 1, 2026–May 31, 2026



Probability of Below-Normal Temperatures

33% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

Probability of Above-Normal Temperatures

33% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

Probability of Near-Normal Temperatures

33% 40% 50%

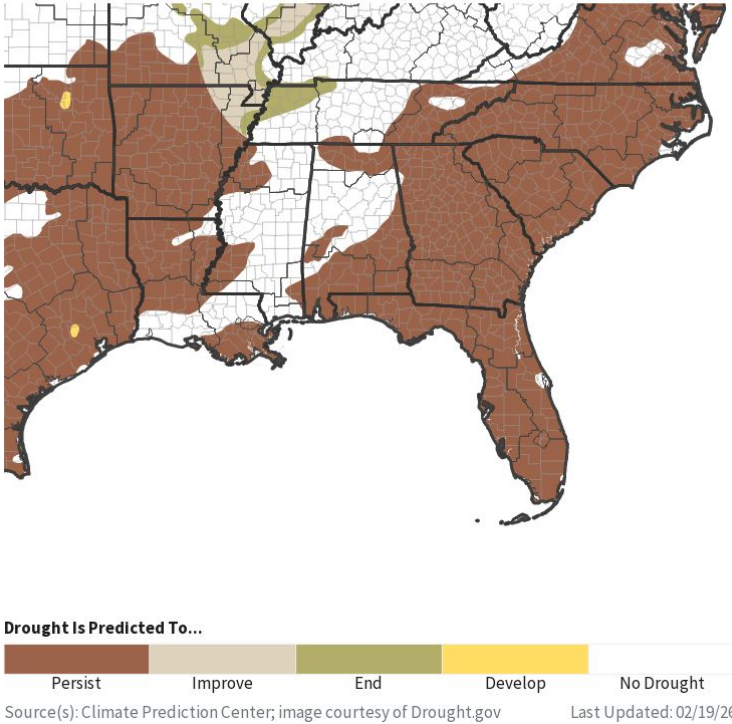
Source(s): Climate Prediction Center; image courtesy of Drought.gov Last Updated: 02/19/26

Drought Outlook

The latest monthly and seasonal outlooks can be found on the CPC homepage

- Given the prediction for below normal precipitation in the months ahead, drought is expected to persist across the region over the next three months.
- Should rainfall over the next three months be much below normal, drought conditions could worsen with time, especially heading into spring when temperatures also warm.
- Spring time is likely to see the greatest impacts from current drought conditions if this pattern persists.

Seasonal (3-Month) Drought Outlook for February 19, 2026–May 31, 2026



Links to the latest:
Climate Prediction Center Monthly Drought Outlook
Climate Prediction Center Seasonal Drought Outlook