

Drought Information Statement for West Central and Southwest Florida

Valid April 2, 2026

Issued By: National Weather Service Tampa Bay, FL

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

- This product will be updated April 10, 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.
-
- Moderate to Extreme Drought persists across 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.



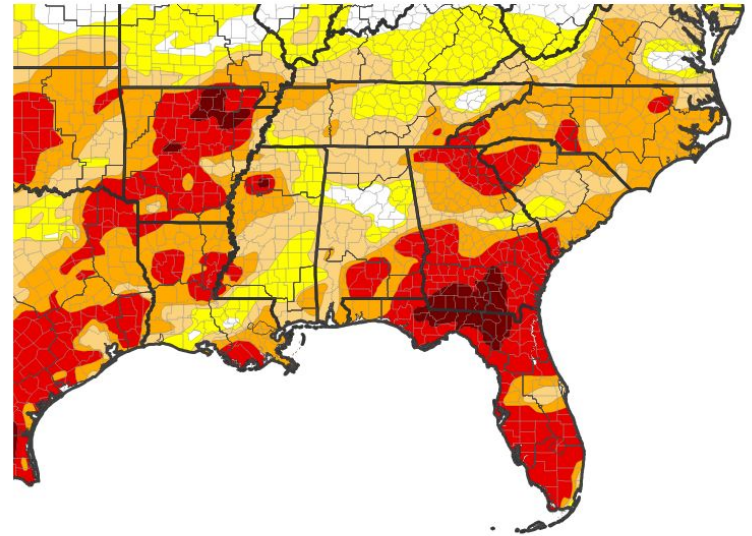


U.S. Drought Monitor

Link to the [latest U.S. Drought Monitor](#) for West Central and Southwest Florida

- Despite rainfall over the last week, it has not been enough to result in any improvements across the area.
- The extended duration of limited rainfall has necessitated the continuation and expansion of the D3 Extreme Drought across portions of West Central Florida.
- Drought intensity and Extent
 - **D3 (Extreme Drought)**: Levy, Citrus, N Sumter, Pinellas, Hillsborough, Central and Southern Polk, Manatee, Sarasota, Charlotte, Lee, Hardee, Desoto, and Highlands Counties.
 - **D2 (Severe Drought)**: Sumter, E Hernando, E Pasco, N Polk County.
 - **D1 (Moderate Drought)**: NE Polk County.

U.S. Drought Monitor



U.S. Drought Monitor



Source(s): NDMC, NOAA, USDA, NASA; image courtesy of Drought.gov

Data Valid: 03/31/26



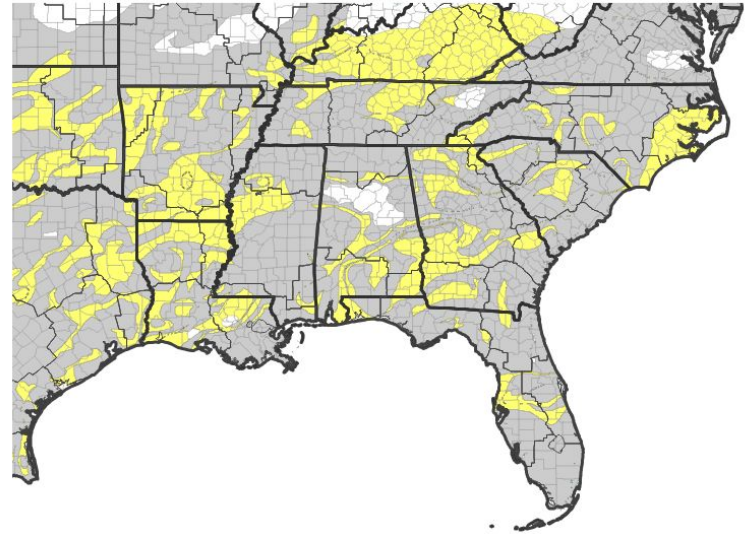


Recent Change in Drought Intensity

Link to the latest [4-week change map](#) for West Central and Southwest Florida

- Despite some rain, this has not led to any meaningful improvements to the long-term deficit.
- **Many locations continue to report the Top 5 Driest conditions on record for September 1 - March 31.**
- **One Week Drought Monitor Class Change**
 - **One Week Degradation:** Citrus, Hernando, Pasco, N Pinellas, N Hillsborough, and Central Polk Counties.
 - **No Change:** The rest of west Central and Southwest Florida.

U.S. Drought Monitor 1-Week Change Map



Drought Change Since Last Week



Source(s): NDMC, NOAA, USDA, NASA; image courtesy of Drought.gov

Data Valid: 03/31/26



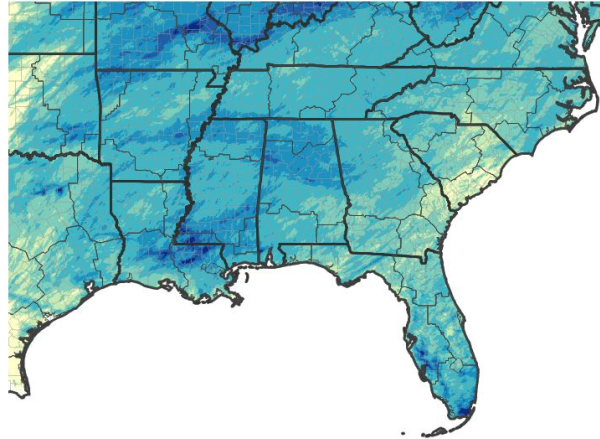


Precipitation

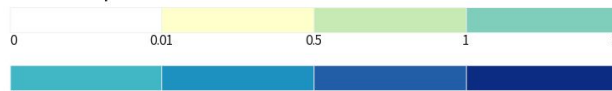
Last 30 Days

- With some heavy rain over the last couple of weeks, some spots (mainly across Southwest Florida) have seen above normal rainfall over the last 30 days.
- However, much of the Nature Coast has seen very little rain; much of this region is running below normal.
- Long term deficits continue to show greater impacts.

30-Day Precipitation Accumulations (Inches)

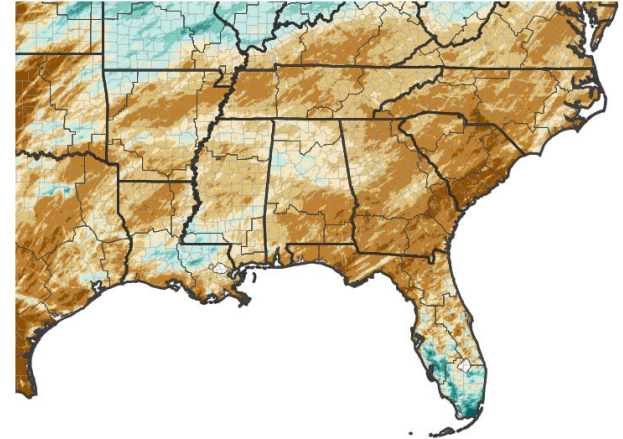


Inches of Precipitation

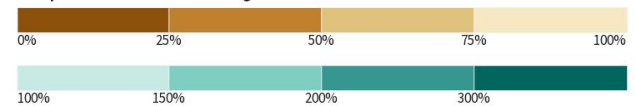


Source(s): National Weather Service Multi-Radar Multi-Sensor System; Last Updated: 04/02/26
image courtesy of Drought.gov

30-Day Percent of Normal Precipitation



Precipitation Shown as a Percentage of Normal Conditions



Source(s): National Weather Service Multi-Radar Multi-Sensor System; Last Updated: 04/02/26
image courtesy of Drought.gov






Local Precipitation

Table of Accumulated Rainfall (inches) for some Official Locations - September 1, 2025 to March 31, 2026

- Since September 1, 2025 rainfall has been well below normal across much of the area with numerous locations less than 50% of normal for this time period.
- Several locations are running in the Top 5 Driest on Record for the time period of September 1st to March 31st.

 Rainfall Sep 1, 2025 - Mar 31, 2026			Rainfall (in.) Sep 1, 2025 - Mar 31, 2026	Normal Rainfall (in.) Sep 1-Mar 31	Departure from Normal	Percent of Normal	Ranking Sep 1-Mar 31	Records Began
Site ID	Site Name	County						
BKV	Brooksville	Hernando	12.05	20.97	-8.92	57%	4th Driest	1892
FMY	Fort Myers - Page Field	Lee	12.68	22.04	-9.36	58%	15th Driest	1902
GIF	Winter Haven	Polk	11.94	19.63	-7.69	61%	7th Driest	1941
PGD	Punta Gorda	Charlotte	15.04	21.07	-6.03	71%	18th Driest	1914
PIE	St. Pete/Clearwater	Pinellas	9.36	20.90	-11.54	45%	2nd Driest	1998
RSW	Fort Myers - SW Int'l	Lee	13.84	20.86	-7.02	66%	4th Driest	1998
SPG	St. Petersburg	Pinellas	7.95	19.79	-11.84	40%	Driest	1914
SRQ	Sarasota-Bradenton Int'l	Manatee	10.32	20.46	-10.14	50%	2nd Driest	1911
TPA	Tampa Int'l	Hillsborough	9.83	20.18	-10.35	49%	4th Driest	1890
ACHF1	Archbold Bio Stn	Highlands	12.97	21.65	-8.68	60%	9th Driest	1969
BARF1	Bartow	Polk	11.16	21.59	-10.43	52%	3rd Driest	1892
BRAF1	Bradenton 5 ESE	Manatee	8.54	22.25	-13.71	38%	Driest	1965
CHIF1	Usher Tower	Levy	14.25	25.13	-10.88	57%	3rd Driest	1956
FTGF1	Fort Green 12 WSW	Manatee	9.51	22.20	-12.69	43%	2nd Driest	1948
INVF1	Inverness 3 SE	Citrus	13.24	21.99	-8.75	60%	5th Driest	1948
LDF1	Lakeland Linder	Polk	10.66	23.58	-12.92	45%	4th Driest	1915
PLCF1	Plant City	Hillsborough	15.22	21.98	-6.76	69%	21st Driest	1892
STLF1	St. Leo	Pasco	16.22	22.70	-6.48	71%	14th Driest	1895
TBW	Ruskin - NWS Tampa Bay	Hillsborough	7.60	22.97	-15.37	33%	Driest	1976
TRPF1	Tarpon Springs	Pinellas	8.59	23.48	-14.89	37%	3rd Driest	1892
VNCF1	Venice	Sarasota	8.06	22.01	-13.95	37%	Driest	1955
WAUF1	Wauchula	Hardee	10.50	20.96	-10.46	50%	5th Driest	1933



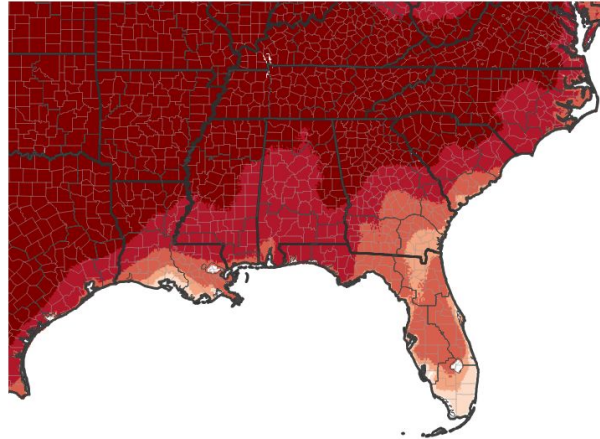


Temperature

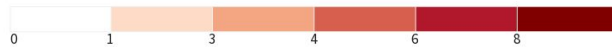
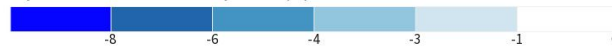
7-Day and 30-Day Temperature Anomalies

- Temperatures are now steadily on the rise.
- With spring here, vegetation is coming back to life.
- As the spring bloom occurs, vegetation typically uses more water, which further contributes to a decline in water that is available.
- Near to slightly above normal temperatures are expected over the next week, contributing to greater evaporation of water as well.

7-Day Temperature Anomaly

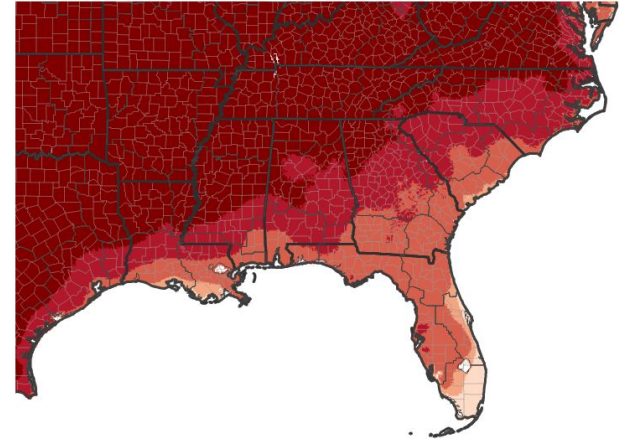


Departure from Normal Max Temperature (°F)

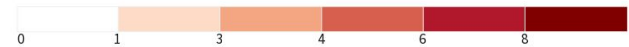
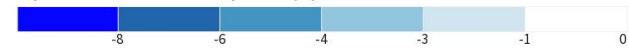


Source(s): NOAA's National Centers for Environmental Information; image courtesy of Drought.gov Data Valid: 03/29/26

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: 03/29/26





Summary of Impacts

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

Hydrologic Impacts

- The Southwest Florida Water Management District created this [video](#) highlighting impacts in the Withlacoochee River Basin. [A River System Update](#) was issued April 01, 2026.
- Streamflows remain exceptionally low for this time of year. Many areas are much lower than they were during last year's dry season.
- Groundwater levels in the Withlacoochee River Basin are currently in the 11th percentile for this time of year.
- In the Green Swamp, there is essentially no water movement; and all the cypress swamps and wet prairies that seasonally flow to the Withlacoochee River are dried up.

Images of dry conditions around the region, courtesy of SWFWMD





Summary of Impacts

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

Hydrologic Impacts

- Areawide, surface/groundwater levels remain especially low, accentuating the long term nature of this drought.
- Saltwater intrusion into South Florida aquifers is of significant concern and has necessitated mitigation actions.
- Many ponds and lakes are drying up across the region.



Imperial Marsh Preserve - November 2025

Photos
courtesy of
Michael
Braun -
WGCU



Imperial Marsh Preserve - March 7, 2026





Summary of Impacts

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

Agricultural Impacts

- Crops were stressed by cold weather, and some crop losses were noted.
- Polk County farmers reported earlier in the year that the dryness is the worst seen in at least 15 years and Levy County farmers noted 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 \(KBDI\)](#) ranges from 450 to 650, indicating soils remain fairly dry. While recent rain has led to some improvement in some areas, this is likely to be short-lived.
- Brush fires continue to occur, with several large, highly visible fires in South Florida and numerous other fires across the interior and Tampa Bay regions. Some wildfires have caused damage to structures, temporary road closures, and have grown to thousands of acres before containment.





Summary of Impacts

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

Mitigation Actions - Southwest Florida Water Management District

- Southwest Florida Water Management District has declared a [Modified Phase III “Extreme” Water Shortage](#) beginning April 3, 2026. Always refer to [city or county](#) regulations first.
- An emergency order was issued to Tampa Bay Water to lower the Middle Pool of the Tampa Bypass Canal from 12 feet to 10 feet to continue augmenting the City of Tampa’s Hillsborough River Reservoir. The order expires July 1, 2026.
- An emergency order was issued to the Peace River Manasota Regional Water Supply Authority to modify its diversion schedule to allow increased withdrawals from the Peace River. The order expires May 31, 2026.
- An emergency order was issued to the City of Punta Gorda to temporarily withdraw up to an additional 2.2 million gallons per day from Shell Creek to provide to the Peace River Manasota Regional Water Supply Authority. The order expires July 1, 2026.





Summary of Impacts

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

Mitigation Actions - Other Partners

- Tampa Bay Water has issued a [Stage 3 Extreme Regional Water Supply Shortage](#)
- 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.
- [Burn Bans](#) remain in effect for all counties except Levy, Hernando, Sumter, Citrus, and Manatee. Please contact the county for specifics.
- Several navigation locks on Lake Okeechobee are slated to temporarily close soon to conserve water in the lake. More info available [here](#).





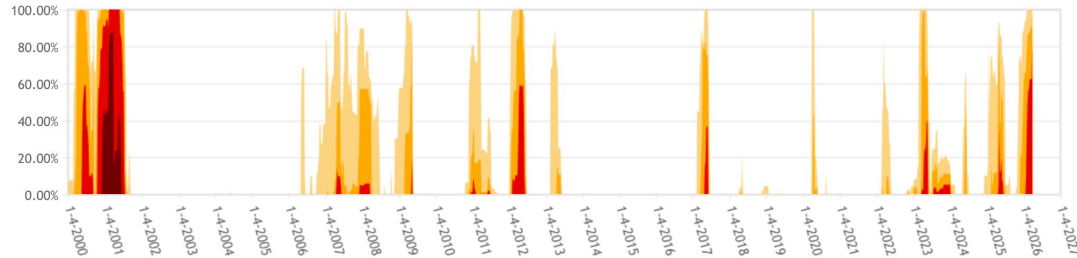
A Perspective on this Drought

Link to [Drought Monitor Time Series](#)

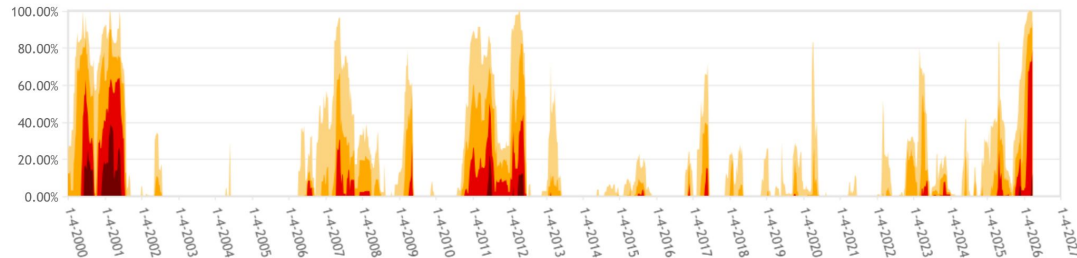
How does this drought compare to past long term droughts in the NWS Tampa Bay forecast area?

- There have been four long duration droughts since 2000 in West Central and Southwest Florida, including the current drought.
- While conditions are significant, they have not come anywhere close to the intensity and duration experienced in the 2000/2001 drought.
- Even though no Exceptional Drought (D4) is present at this time, this is the highest percentage of Extreme Drought (D3) coverage in the NWS Tampa Bay area since 2012.
- This is the most impactful drought within the NWS Tampa Bay area since 2012.
- This is the first time since the drought monitor began in 2000 that the **entire** State of Florida is D1 (Moderate drought) or worse.

Tampa Bay/Ruskin, FL (TBW) WFO Percent Area in U.S. Drought Monitor Categories



Florida Percent Area in U.S. Drought Monitor Categories



Graphs Courtesy of the U.S. Drought Monitor website
 Time series depiction of D1, D2, D3, and D4 drought across the NWS Tampa Bay forecast area by percentage (top).
 State of Florida Time Series of D1, D2, D3, and D4 drought by percentage (bottom). Records go back to 2000.



- D1 (Moderate Drought)
- D2 (Severe Drought)
- D3 (Extreme Drought)
- D4 (Exceptional Drought)

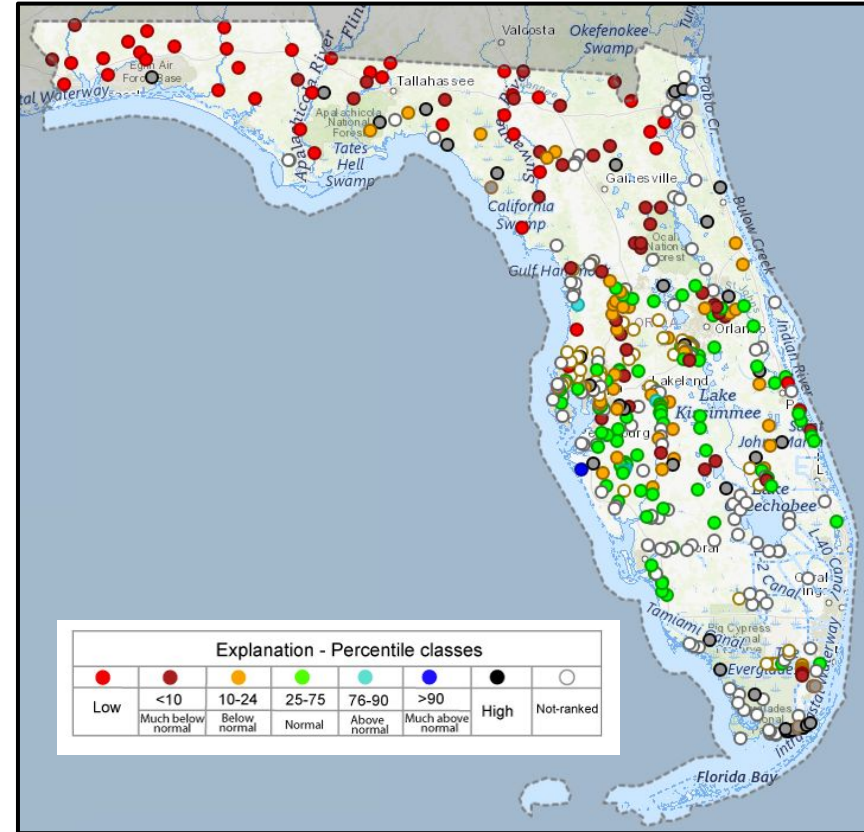




Hydrologic Conditions and Impacts

USGS Streamflow Map for Florida

- With off and on days of rainfall across Central Florida, some streamflows have temporarily returned to near normal in Central and Southwest Florida.
- With little rainfall across the Nature Coast, streamflows remain below normal in this region.
- Improved streamflows across central and SWFL are likely to be short-lived.
- After some better rain chances for a few days, conditions are favored to trend below normal again over the next couple weeks with mainly warm and dry weather expected.





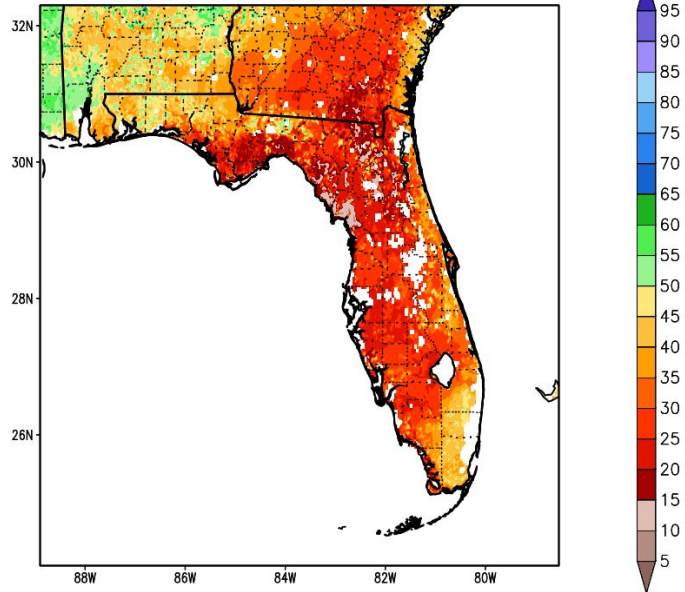
Agricultural Impacts

2025 Florida Crop Report

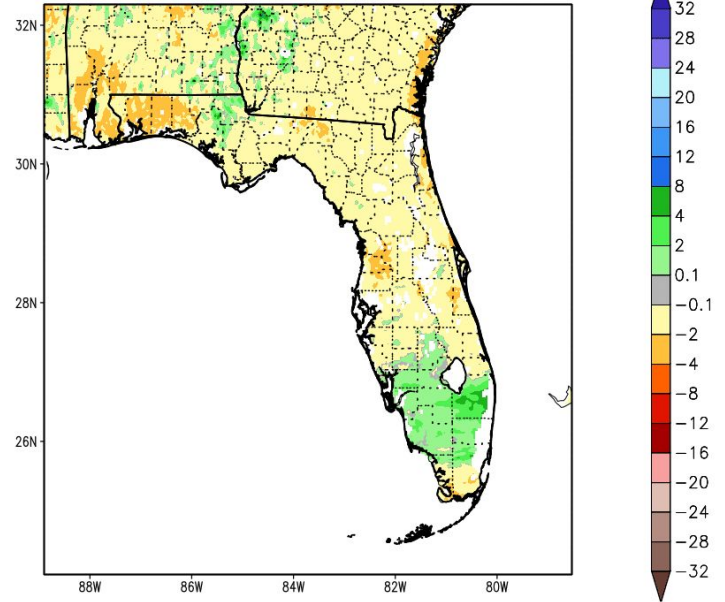
Except in Southwest Florida where heavy rain recently fell, the overall deep layer soil moisture has declined this week. Even in Southwest Florida where rain did fall, the soil remains very dry. Increased water usage by vegetation will favor this continuing even if some rain does fall.

Column-Integrated Relative Soil Moisture (available water; %) valid 12z 02 Apr 2026

Precipitation in previous hour (1,2,5,10,15,20,25 mm contours)



1-Week Difference in Column Relative Soil Moisture (%) valid 12z 02 Apr 2026



NOTE
Experimental

NOTE
Experimental



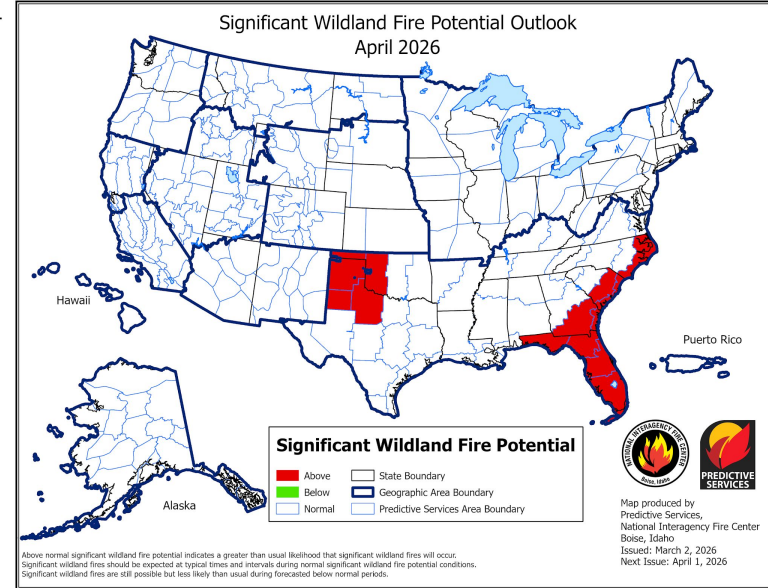
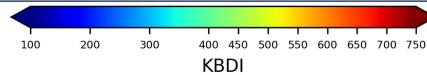
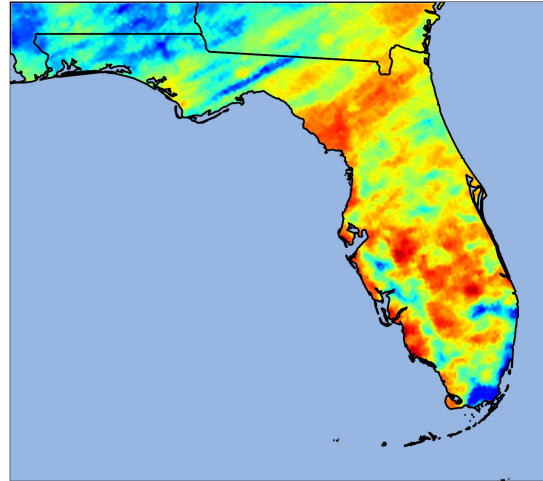


Fire Hazard Impacts

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

- The Keetch-Byram Drought Index (KBDI) improved where rain did fall, as the index is sensitive to rain.
- The KBDI will rise quickly when it does not rain for a few days, with antecedent conditions favoring the rapid absorption and consumption of the water that falls.
- Thus, brush fires have continued to occur with [Burn Bans](#) in effect for several counties.
- The Significant Wildland Fire Potential Outlook for April calls for above normal wildfire activity across the area.

Keetch-Byram Drought Index | Wed 04/01/26, 02:00 PM EDT

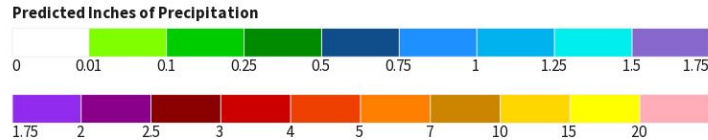
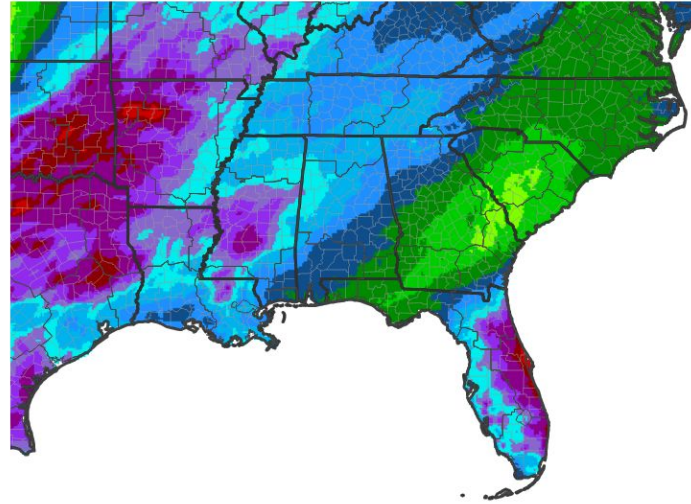




Precipitation Outlook

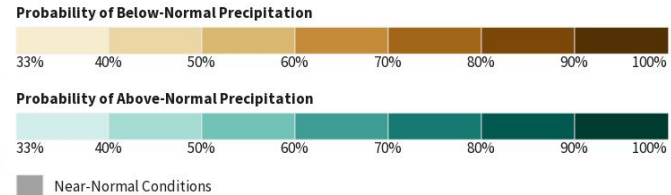
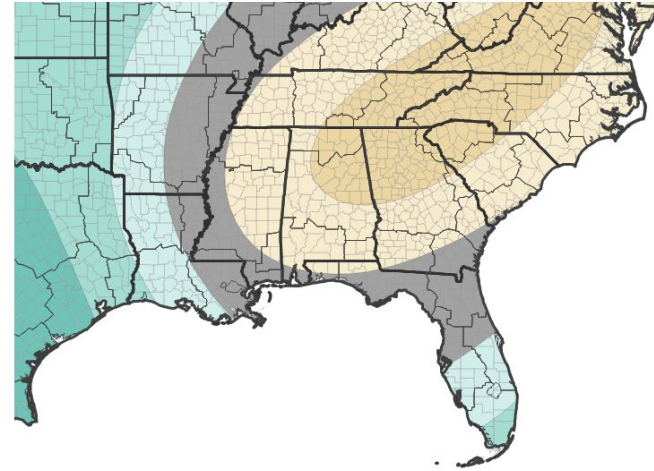
7-Day and 8-14 Day Precipitation Outlooks

7-Day Quantitative Precipitation Forecast for April 2, 2026–April 9, 2026



Source(s): National Weather Service Weather Prediction Center; image courtesy of Drought.gov Last Updated: 04/02/26

8-14 Day Precipitation Outlook for April 8, 2026–April 14, 2026



Source(s): Climate Prediction Center; image courtesy of Drought.gov Last Updated: 03/31/26

- Conditions are favorable for rounds of rain to fall over the next week or so.
- However, a consistent period of rain is needed to substantially alleviate drought conditions.
- Looking out to the next couple weeks, a dry pattern is expected to return.
- With dry weather returning, this does not favor much alleviation of current drought conditions.



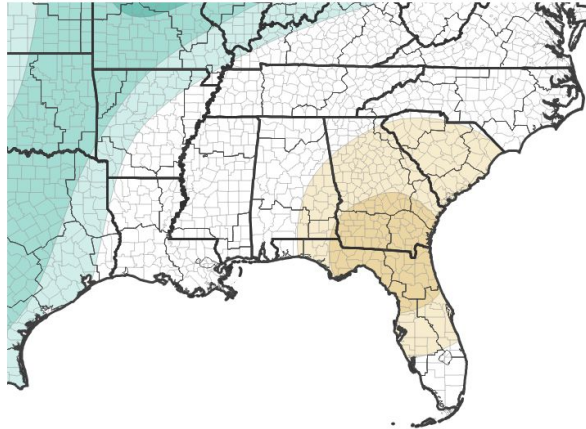


Long-Range Outlooks

The latest monthly and seasonal outlooks can be found on the [CPC homepage](#)

- The outlook for April suggests below normal rainfall and above normal temperatures are favored for the month overall.
- With such large deficits, any rainfall over the next few days will likely not provide significant relief. Thus, drought conditions are forecast to persist.

Monthly Precipitation Outlook for April 1, 2026–April 30, 2026



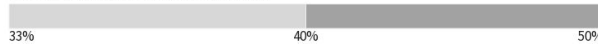
Probability of Below-Normal Precipitation



Probability of Above-Normal Precipitation



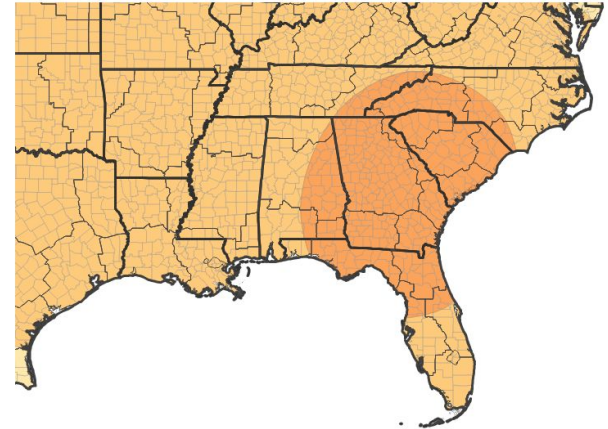
Probability of Near-Normal Precipitation



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

Last Updated: 03/31/26

Monthly Temperature Outlook for April 1, 2026–April 30, 2026



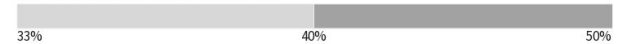
Probability of Below-Normal Temperatures



Probability of Above-Normal Temperatures



Probability of Near-Normal Temperatures



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

Last Updated: 03/31/26

Normals	April	
	Temp	Rain
Brooksville	69.2°	2.18"
Tampa	73.9°	2.55"
Lakeland	73.2°	2.82"
Sarasota	72.6°	2.46"
Punta Gorda	73.1°	2.23"
Fort Myers	74.8°	2.44"



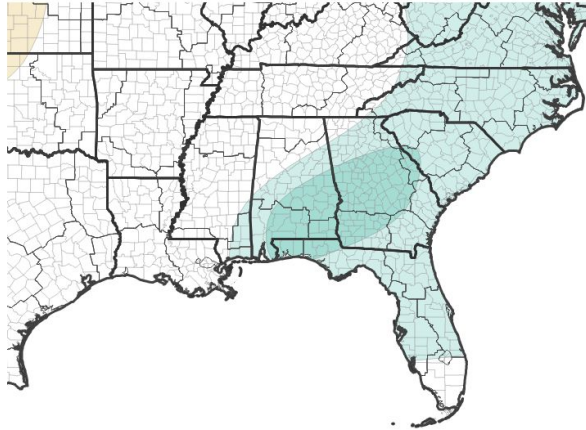


Long-Range Outlooks

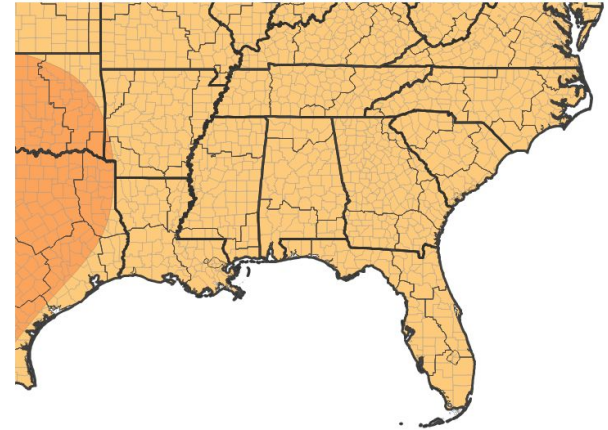
The latest monthly and seasonal outlooks can be found on the [CPC homepage](#)

- With June in the long-term outlook, a signal for above normal precipitation is beginning to show up, coinciding with the anticipation of the arrival of the rainy season.
- However, this does not typically set in until late May, early June.
- Overall, this favors persistent drought conditions for at least the next couple of months.

Seasonal (3-Month) Precipitation Outlook for April 1, 2026–June 30, 2026



Seasonal (3-Month) Temperature Outlook for April 1, 2026–June 30, 2026



Normals	April		May		June	
	Temp	Rain	Temp	Rain	Temp	Rain
Brooksville	69.2°	2.18"	75.3°	3.35"	80.1°	7.91"
Tampa	73.9°	2.55"	79.5°	2.60"	82.9°	7.37"
Lakeland	73.2°	2.82"	78.2°	3.80"	81.8°	8.69"
Sarasota	72.6°	2.46"	77.8°	2.58"	81.8°	7.05"
Punta Gorda	73.1°	2.23"	77.9°	3.26"	81.7°	9.24"
Fort Myers	74.8°	2.44"	79.3°	3.46"	82.3°	9.66"

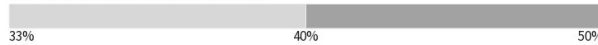
Probability of Below-Normal Precipitation



Probability of Above-Normal Precipitation



Probability of Near-Normal Precipitation



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

Last Updated: 03/19/26

Probability of Below-Normal Temperatures



Probability of Above-Normal Temperatures



Probability of Near-Normal Temperatures



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

Last Updated: 03/19/26

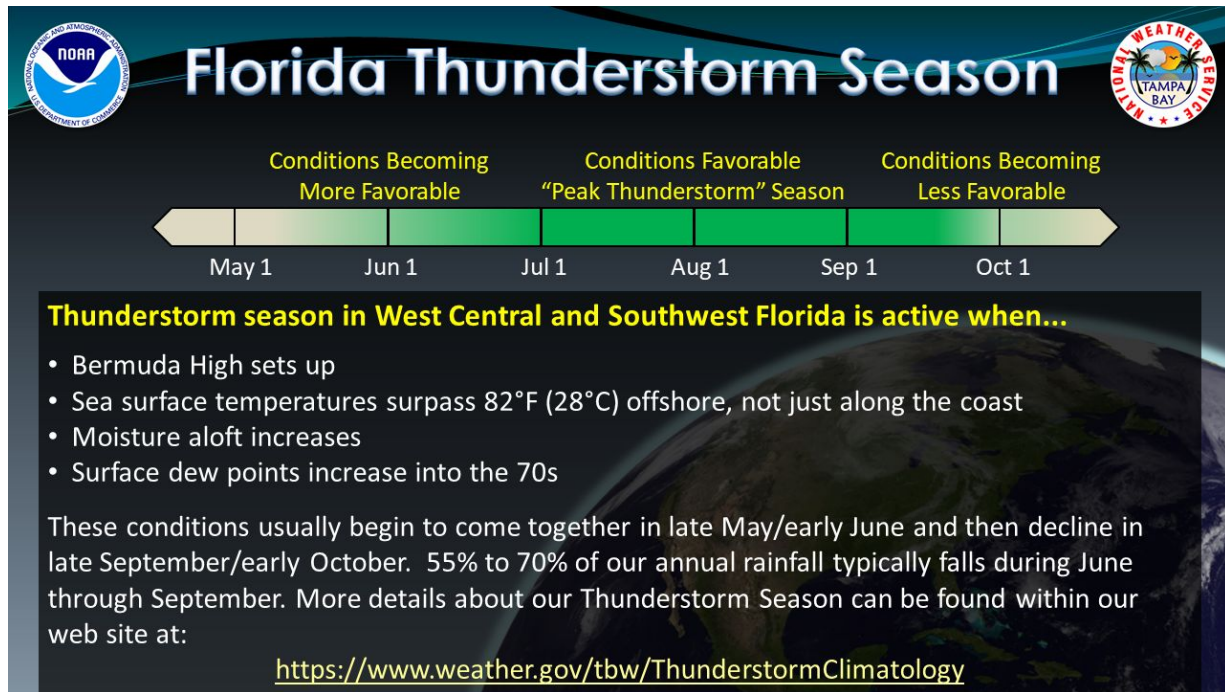




When Does the Rainy Season Usually Start?

When Could There Be Some Drought Relief?

- Any consistent rainfall to provide some drought relief would likely not arrive until late May/early June.
- However, the beginning of the rainy season is usually a transition period rather than a single date.
- Therefore, drought conditions may persist into early summer until daily rains become more consistent.
- There will also be day-to-day variability in thunderstorm coverage that could impact how quickly areas recover.



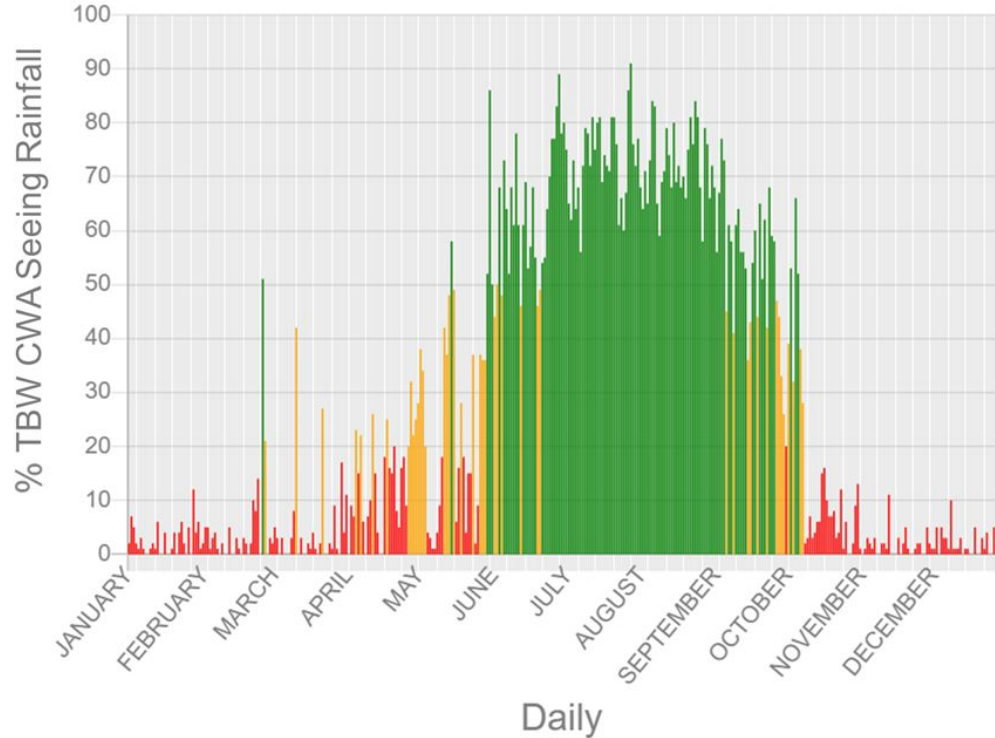


When Does the Rainy Season Usually Start?

When Could There Be Some Drought Relief?

- The most consistent and widespread rainfall historically does not kick in until mid-June.
- However, there are often some days/weeks in May where greater thunderstorm coverage does occur.
- More details about our Rainy Season can be found [here](#).

NWS TBW (All) - 2002 - 2019
Median Daily Rainfall Coverage - % of TBW CWA > 0.01"



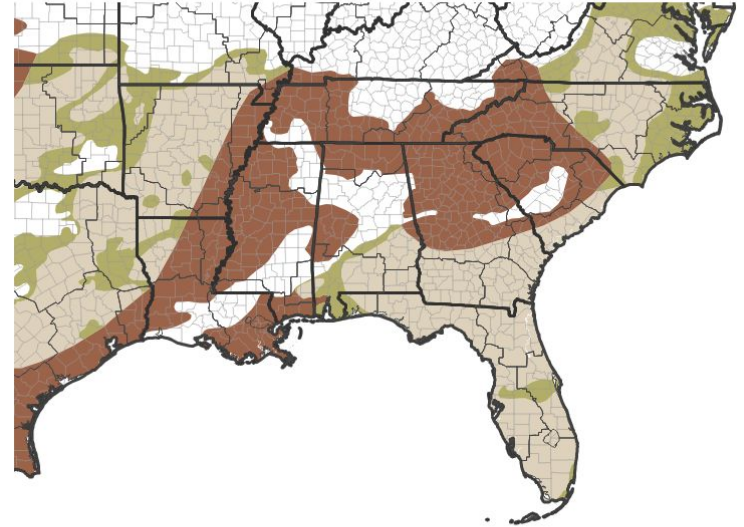


Drought Outlook

The latest monthly and seasonal outlooks can be found on the [CPC homepage](#)

- Given the prediction for above normal precipitation in the months ahead, drought is expected to improve across the region over the next three months - if not end altogether; but not likely until late May or June when the rainy season arrives.
- Should rainfall over the next three months be much below normal, drought conditions could still get worse before improving, especially with temperatures now looking to be consistently warm.
- The next couple months are likely to see the greatest impacts from current drought conditions if this pattern persists.

Seasonal (3-Month) Drought Outlook for March 31, 2026–June 30, 2026



Drought is Predicted To...



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

Last Updated: 03/31/26

Links to the latest:

[Climate Prediction Center Monthly Drought Outlook](#)

[Climate Prediction Center Seasonal Drought Outlook](#)

