Drought Information Statement for West Central and Southwest Florida

Valid September 18, 2026

Issued By: National Weather Service Tampa Bay, FL

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

- This product will be updated September 25, 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.

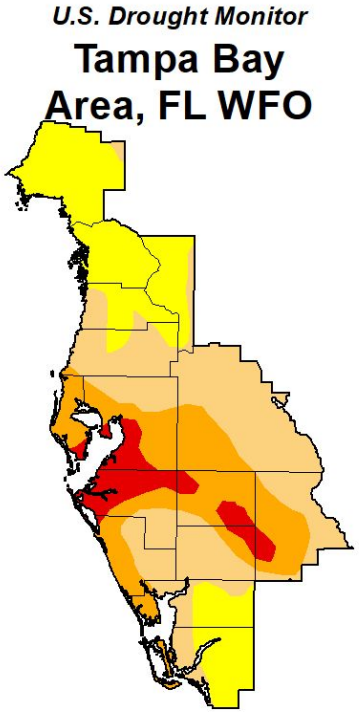
- The Abnormally Dry to Extreme Drought conditions persist across West Central and Southwest Florida.
- Slight improvements continued this week across portions of the region.

U.S. Drought Monitor

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

- The extended duration of limited rainfall has continued the need for D1 (Moderate Drought) to D3 (Extreme Drought) across much of West Central and Southwest Florida.

- Drought intensity and Extent
  - **D3 (Extreme Drought):** S Pinellas, S Hillsborough, W & N and Manatee, NW and SE Hardee, NE Desoto, and SW Highlands Counties.
  - **D2 (Severe Drought):** N and Central Pinellas, Central Hillsborough, SW Polk, W Highlands, Central DeSoto, Western Sarasota, Western Charlotte, Western Lee Counties.
  - **D1 (Moderate Drought):** Extreme NE Levy, E Sumter, SE and W Hernando, Pasco, NE Hillsborough, E Polk, E Highlands, SE Manatee, E Sarasota, Central Charlotte, Central Lee Counties.
  - **D0 (Abnormally Dry):** E Lee, E Charlotte, Levy, Citrus, W and Central Sumter, N and NE Hernando, N Pasco Counties.



September 15, 2026
(Released Thursday, Sep. 17, 2026)
Valid 8 a.m. EDT

Drought Conditions (Percent Area)

	None	D0-D4	D1-D4	D2-D4	D3-D4	D4
Current	0.00	100.00	70.70	31.32	7.80	0.00
Last Week 09-08-2026	0.00	100.00	77.62	34.70	7.80	0.00
3 Months Ago 06-16-2026	0.00	100.00	100.00	91.13	26.81	0.00
Start of Calendar Year 01-06-2026	0.00	100.00	89.37	62.16	0.00	0.00
Start of Water Year 09-30-2025	53.01	46.99	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
One Year Ago 09-16-2025	93.76	6.24	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Intensity:
None
D0 Abnormally Dry
D1 Moderate Drought
D2 Severe Drought
D3 Extreme Drought
D4 Exceptional Drought

The Drought Monitor focuses on broad-scale conditions. Local conditions may vary. For more information on the Drought Monitor, go to https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/About.aspx

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NASA/GSFC/SSAI

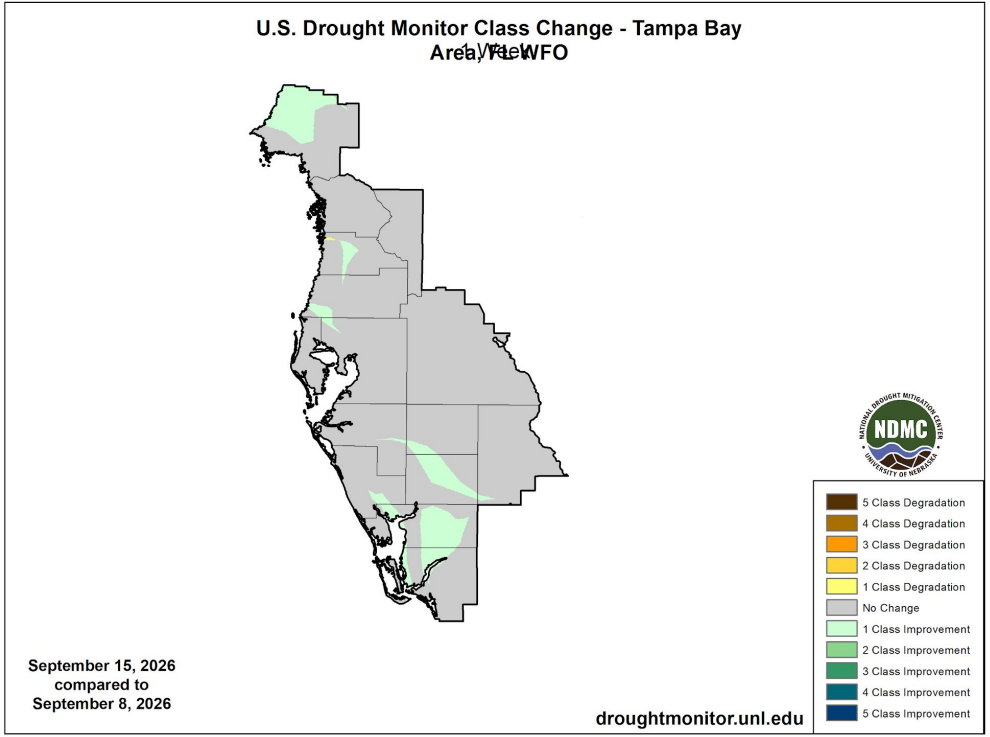
droughtmonitor.unl.edu

Recent Change in Drought Intensity

Link to the latest 1-week change map for West Central and Southwest Florida

- There have been some considerable improvements in the long-term deficits across parts of the region.
- More rainfall is still needed to allow the system to fully recover, but trends are on the right track.

- **One Week Drought Monitor Class Change**
  - **Drought Improved**: N Levy, Central Hernando, SW Pasco, Extreme NE Hillsborough, SW Hardee, Central DeSoto, Extreme SW Highlands, S Sarasota, Central Charlotte, Central Lee Counties.
  - **No Change:** Remainder of West Central and Southwest Florida.

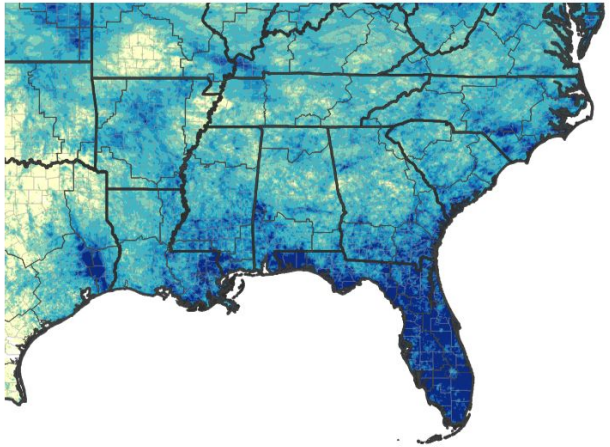


Precipitation

Last 30 Days

- Everyone has seen rainfall over the last month.
- Some areas have seen above normal rainfall, while others were below normal; this is a product of the pop-up summertime thunderstorms.
- Regardless, the long term deficits continue to have an impact.

30-Day Precipitation Accumulations (Inches)



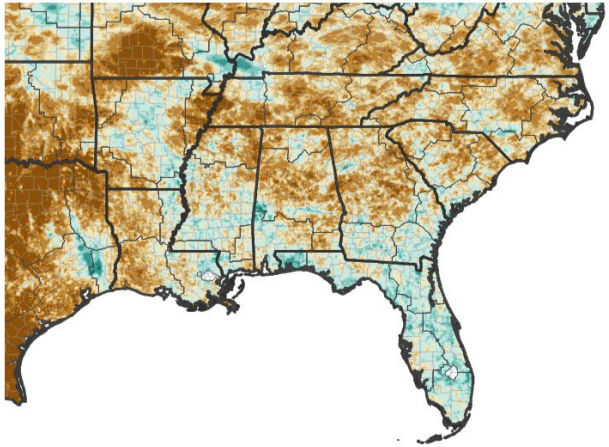
Inches of Precipitation

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: 09/18/26

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

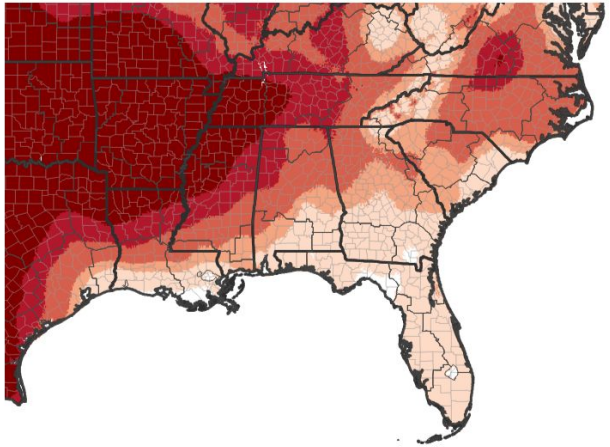
Last Updated: 09/18/26

Temperature

7-Day and 30-Day Temperature Anomalies

- Temperatures over the last week and month have remained slightly above normal.
- Slightly above normal temperatures are expected over the next few weeks.
- It won't necessarily be any hotter than it has been, but because this is typically when a slight seasonal decline in temperature starts to occur, the continued warm, humid conditions will be above normal.

7-Day Temperature Anomaly



Departure from Normal Max Temperature (°F)

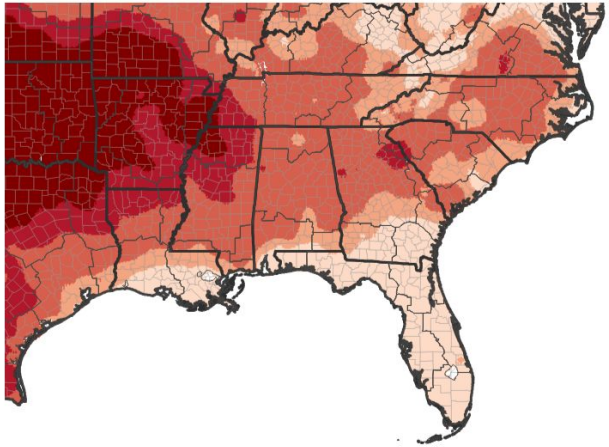
-8 -6 -4 -3 -1 0

0 1 3 4 6 8

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

Data Valid: 09/14/26

30-Day Temperature Anomaly



Departure from Normal Max Temperature (°F)

-8 -6 -4 -3 -1 0

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

Data Valid: 09/14/26

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 provided a River System Update on **September 01, 2026** for the Withlacoochee River.
- Streamflows remain exceptionally low in many spots for this time of year; but have increased slightly.
- The C.W. Bill Young Regional Reservoir held 7.3 billion gallons as of September 2, about 47.1 percent of its 15.5-billion-gallon capacity.
- Areawide, surface/groundwater levels remain lower than normal for this time of year, accentuating the long term nature of this drought. Aquifer levels as of the first week of September were in the 21st percentile.
- We are gradually seeing the deficit diminish. More water is being stored, but remains well below normal.

Dry wetlands between the Withlacoochee River and Tsala Apopka Chain of Lakes (August 2026). Courtesy of SWFWMD

Summary of Impacts

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

Agricultural Impacts

- Agricultural impacts have declined due to summer rainfall.
- Report impacts here.

Fire Hazard Impacts

- The Keetch-Byram Drought Index (KBDI) has decreased substantially. Near-surface soils are more saturated.
- Brush fire activity has diminished quite significantly, but the occasional brush fire does continue to occur.

Mitigation Actions - Southwest Florida Water Management District

- A Modified Phase III "Extreme" Water Shortage until October 1, 2026 from the South Florida Water Management District. Always refer to city or county regulations first.

Mitigation Actions - Other Partners

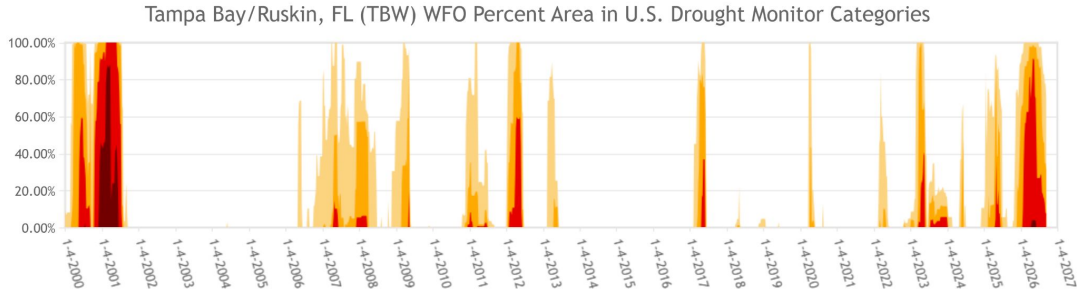
- A modified Phase II Water Shortage is in effect for a portion of Northeast Cape Coral in Lee County.
- No Burn Bans remain in effect due to drought conditions. However, some annual bans remain in place.

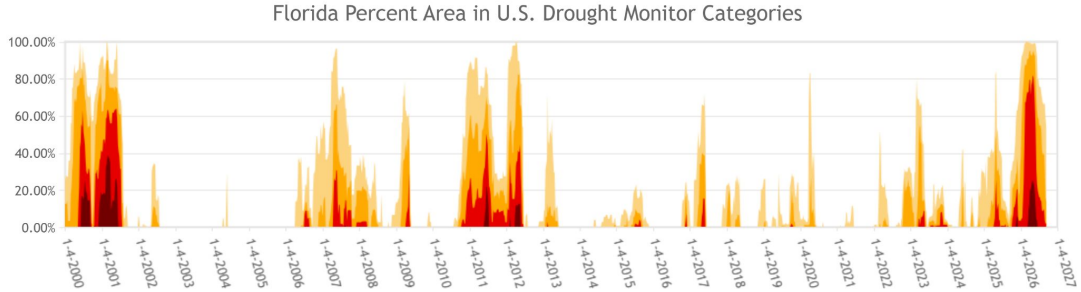
A Perspective on this Drought

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 reached the intensity and duration experienced in the 2000/2001 drought.
- This is the most impactful drought within the NWS Tampa Bay area since 2012.
- This was the first time since the drought monitor began in 2000 that the **entire** State of Florida was D1 (Moderate drought) or worse.





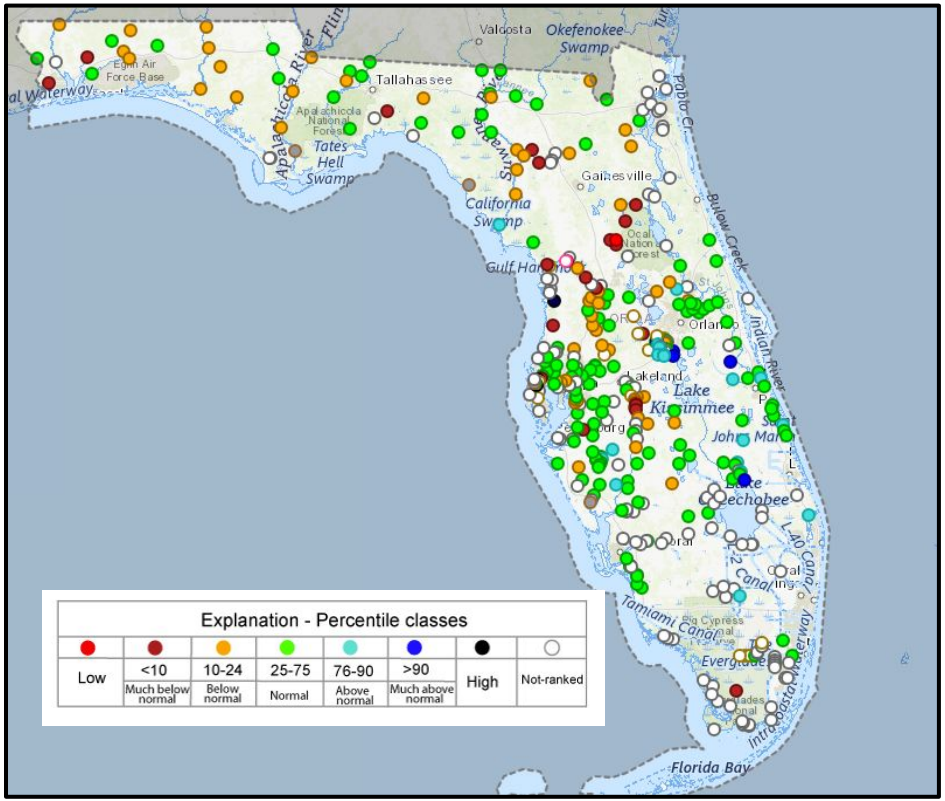
Graphs Courtesy of the U.S. Drought Monitor website
Time series depiction of D1, D2, D3, and D4 drought across the NWS Tampa Bay forecast area by percentage (top). State of Florida Time Series of D1, D2, D3, and D4 drought by percentage (bottom). Records go back to 2000.

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

Hydrologic Conditions and Impacts

USGS Streamflow Map for Florida

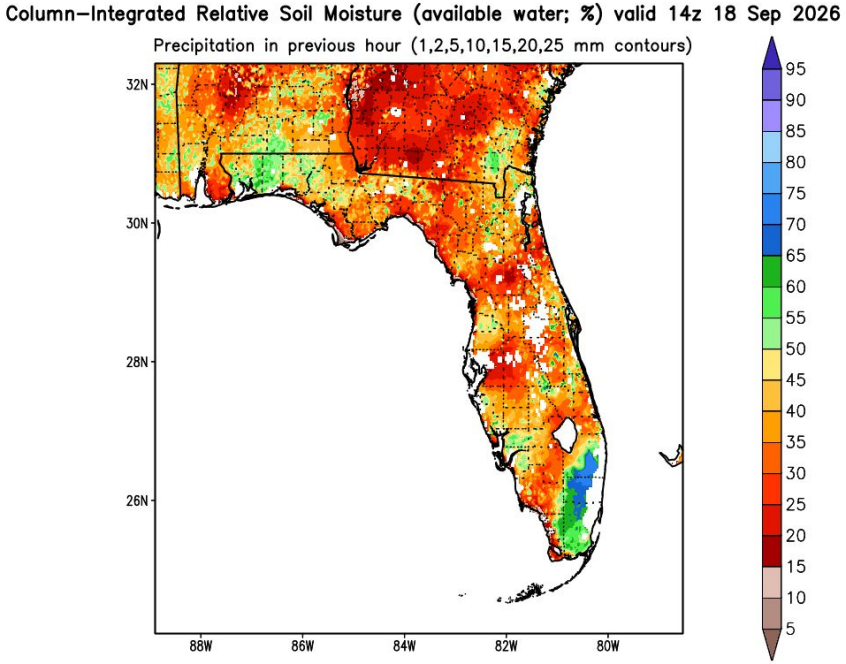
- In areas where there has been good rainfall coverage this week, streamflows are near normal.
- However, rainfall has not been uniform everywhere; in areas that have not seen as much rain, streamflows remain below normal. This remains especially true in the Withlacoochee and Upper Peace River Basins, as well as some streams near the coast from Tampa Bay northward.
- Streamflows are likely to remain the same or rise some over the next week as additional rainfall is forecast across the area.

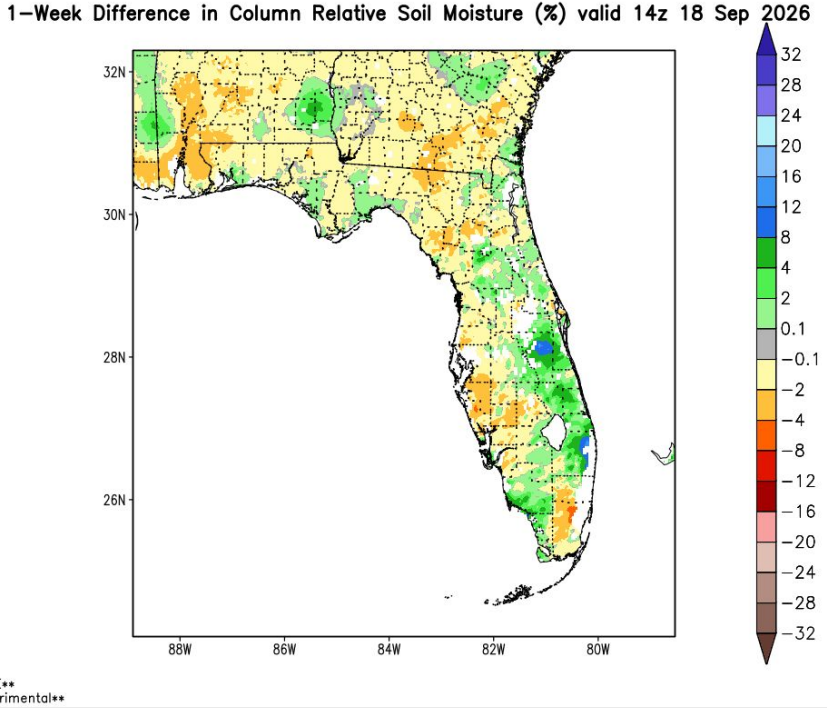


Agricultural Impacts

[2025 Florida Crop Report]

With a few drier days this week, soil moisture has begun to decline again in many areas.



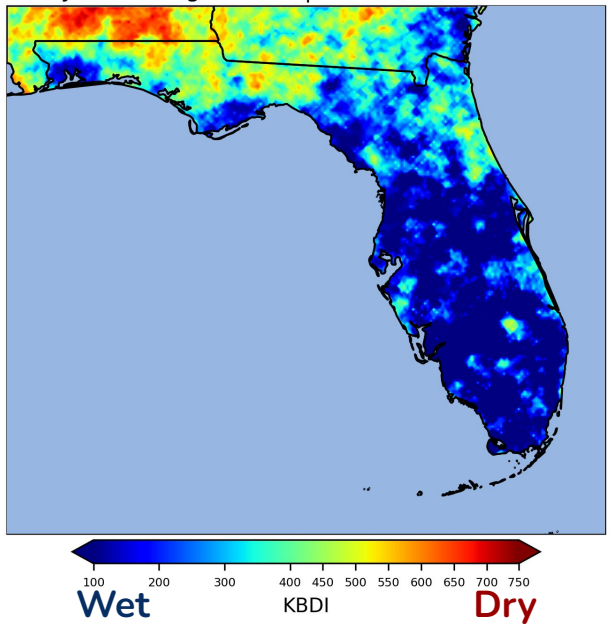


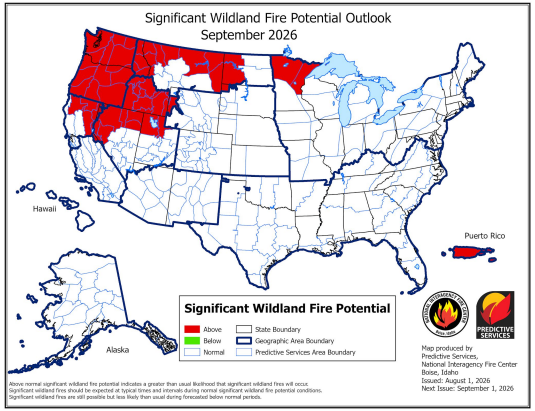
Fire Hazard Impacts

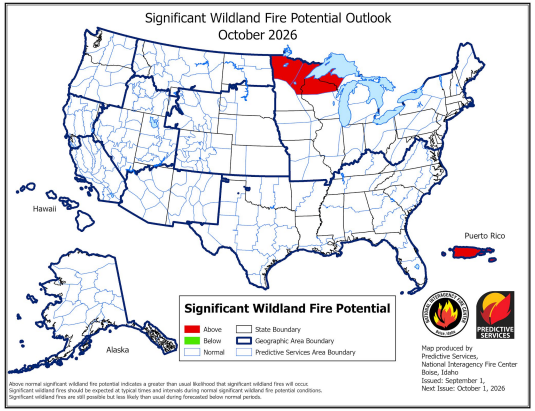
Link to [Wildfire Potential Outlooks from the National Interagency Coordination Center.]

- Despite some drying, the Keetch-Byram Drought Index (KBDI) has remained low across much of the area thanks to the rainfall over the last few weeks.
- The Significant Wildland Fire Potential Outlook for the September and October depicts near normal fire activity across the area.

Keetch-Byram Drought Index | Thu 09/17/26, 02:00 PM EDT





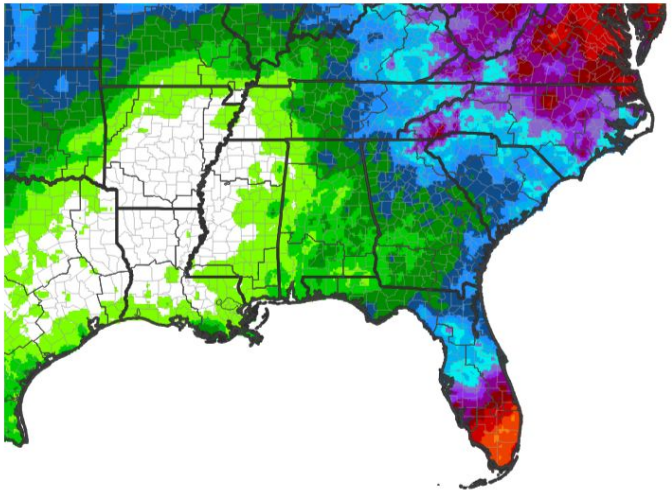


Precipitation Outlook

7-Day and 8-14 Day Precipitation Outlooks

- Scattered showers and thunderstorms are forecast each day over the next week with above normal rainfall expected across the area over the next two weeks as the rainy season continues.
- This should favor continued improvement.

7-Day Quantitative Precipitation Forecast for September 18, 2026–September 25, 2026



Predicted Inches of Precipitation

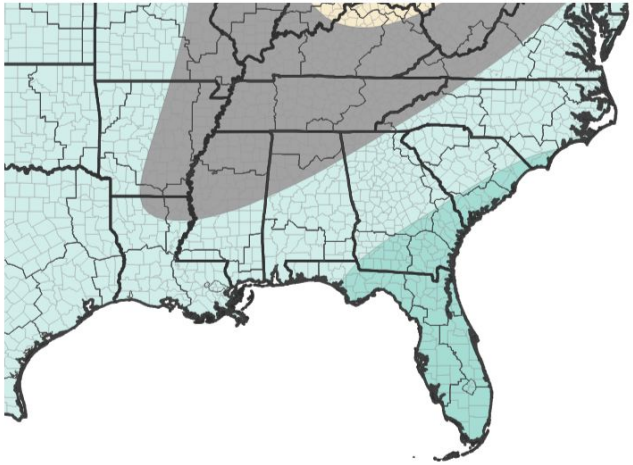
0 0.01 0.1 0.25 0.5 0.75 1 1.25 1.5 1.75

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: 09/18/26

8–14 Day Precipitation Outlook for September 25, 2026–October 1, 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: 09/17/26

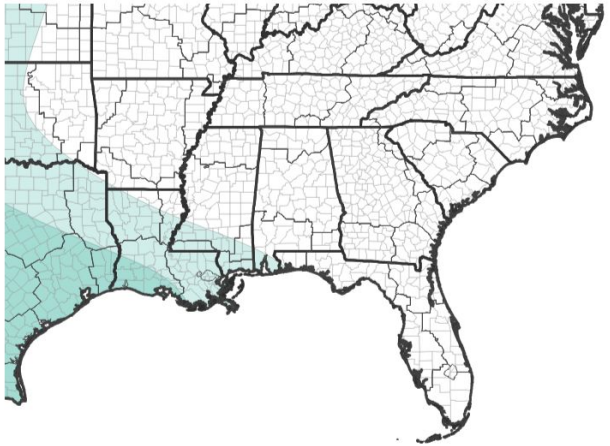
Long-Range Outlooks

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

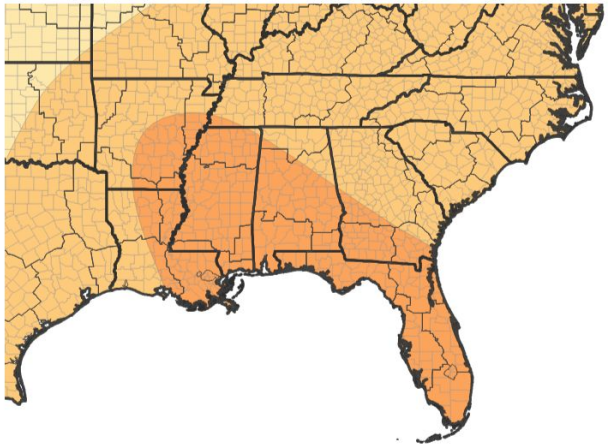
- The outlook for October suggests near normal precip across the Florida peninsula.
- Temperatures are favored to remain above normal.
- This suggests that drought conditions may linger and/or get worse again.

Normals	October	
	Temp	Rain
Brooksville	73.1°	2.79"
Tampa	77.4°	2.34"
Lakeland	76.4°	3.04"
Sarasota	77.3°	2.76"
Punta Gorda	77.2°	3.02"
Fort Myers	78.0°	3.08"

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



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



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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: 09/17/26

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: 09/17/26

Long-Range Outlooks

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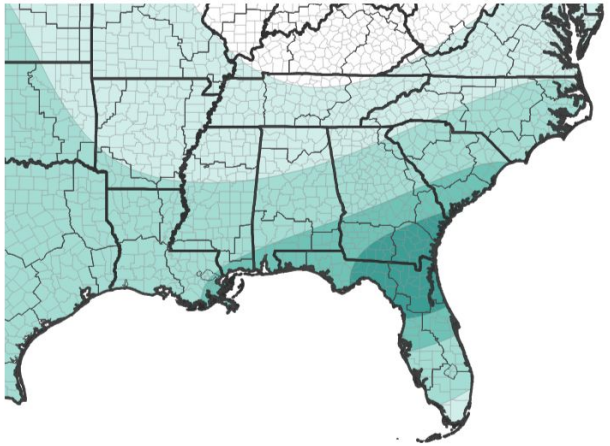
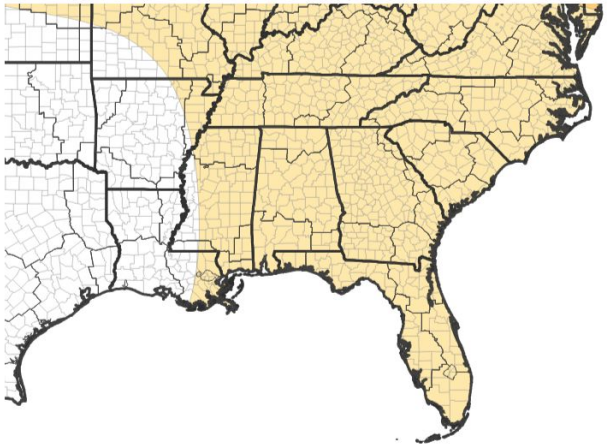
- The outlook for October through December calls for a 40-70% chance of above normal rainfall, with a 33-40% chance of above normal temperatures.

Normals	October		November		December	
	Temp	Rain	Temp	Rain	Temp	Rain
Brooksville	73.1°	2.79"	65.1°	1.59"	60.3°	2.56"
Tampa	77.4°	2.34"	69.8°	1.40"	64.9°	2.56"
Lakeland	76.4°	3.04"	69.2°	1.93"	64.8°	2.61"
Sarasota	77.3°	2.76"	70.1°	1.81"	65.2°	2.33"
Punta Gorda	77.2°	3.02"	70.2°	2.12"	65.8°	1.99"
Fort Myers	78.0°	3.08"	71.5°	1.78"	67.3°	1.90"

Seasonal (3-Month) Precipitation Outlook for October 1, 2026–December 31, 2026



Seasonal (3-Month) Temperature Outlook for October 1, 2026–December 31, 2026



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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: 09/17/26

Probability of Below-Normal Temperatures

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

Probability of Above-Normal Temperatures

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Probability of Near-Normal Temperatures

33% 40% 50%

Source(s): Climate Prediction Center; image courtesy of Drought.gov Last Updated: 09/17/26

Drought Outlook

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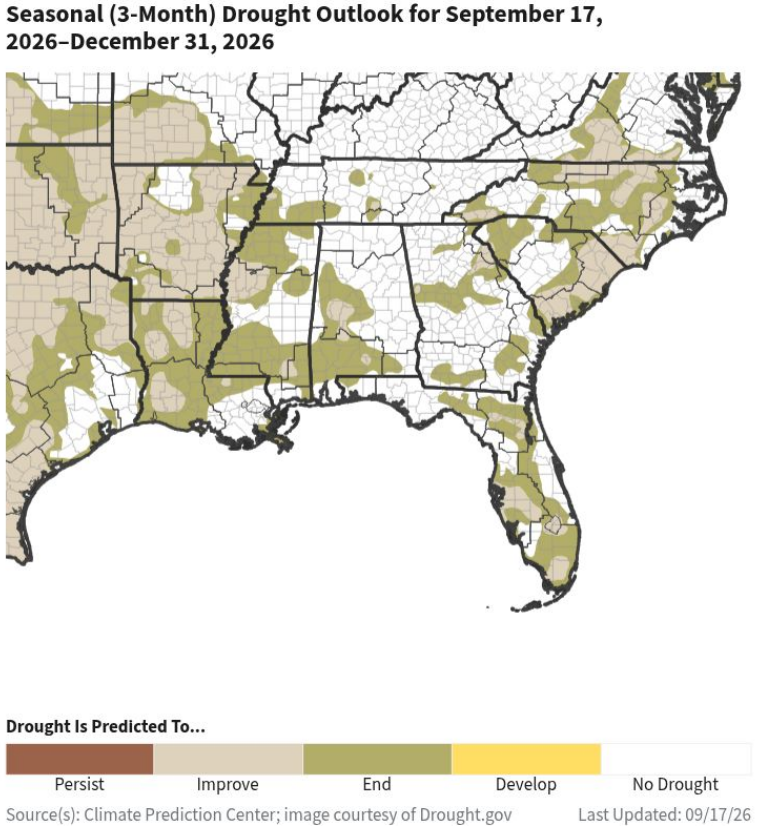
- Given the prediction for near to above normal rainfall in the months ahead, drought is expected to improve across the region over the next three months - if not end altogether.



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