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State of the Climate National Overview February 2012

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration National Climatic Data Center

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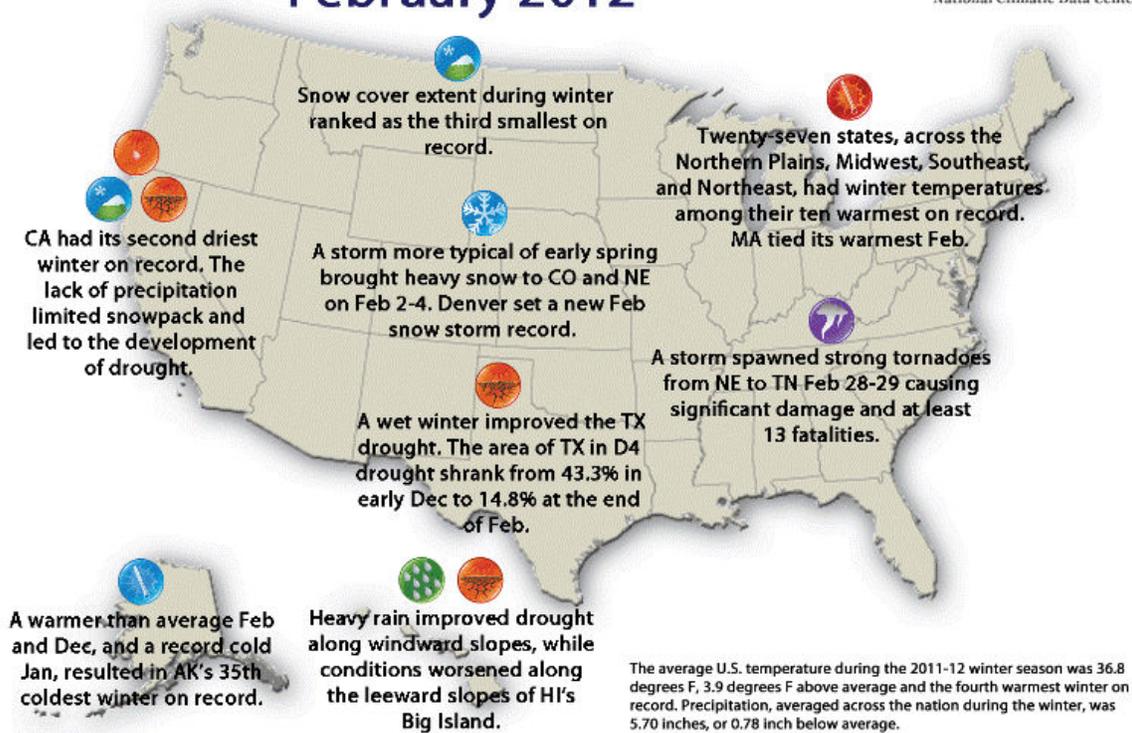
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National Overview:

Significant Events for Winter and February 2012



Climate Highlights — Winter Season (December 2011-February 2012)

- **Warmer-than-average temperatures** dominated the northern and eastern regions of the country in December, January and February, leading to the **fourth warmest winter** on record for the contiguous United States. The winter season was also **drier than average** for the Lower 48, with **dry conditions** experienced across the West and the Southeast but **wetter-than-average conditions** in the Central and Southern Plains and parts of the Ohio Valley.
- The average contiguous U.S. temperature during the **December-February** period was 36.8 degrees F, 3.9 degrees F above the 1901-2000 long-term average — the **warmest since 2000**. The **precipitation** averaged across the nation was 5.70 inches, 0.78 inch below the long-term average.
- **Warmer-than-average temperatures** were widespread with **twenty-seven states** in the Northern Plains, Midwest, Southeast and Northeast having winter temperatures ranked among their ten warmest. Only **New Mexico** had winter temperatures below its 20th century average.
- **Statewide precipitation totals** were mixed during the winter season. The western states were particularly dry with **California** having its second driest winter on record, at 7.82 inches below average. **Montana** was eighth driest, and **Oregon** and **Idaho** were both tenth driest for the season. **Drier-than-average conditions** were also present across the Northern Plains, Southwest, Southeast, and Northeast. **Above-average precipitation** occurred in the central United States, from the Ohio Valley into the Southern Plains.

- The warm and dry conditions during the 2011/12 winter season limited snowfall for many locations. According to data from the [Rutgers Global Snow Lab](#), snow cover extent during winter was approximately 237,000 square miles below the 1981-2010 average — the [third smallest winter snow](#) cover footprint in the 46-year satellite record. Snowpack was particularly limited across parts of the West, where parts of California, Nevada, and Arizona had snowpack less than half of average. A list of seasonal snow observations for select cities can be found in the February [monthly snow report](#).
- For the winter period, [NOAA's U.S. Climate Extremes Index](#), an index that tracks the highest 10 percent and lowest 10 percent of extremes in temperature, precipitation, drought and tropical cyclones, was the [ninth highest value](#) in the 102-year period of record, with nearly one-third of the nation experiencing climate extremes as defined by this index. The elevated value was largely driven by extremes in warm daily [maximum](#) and [minimum](#) temperatures across the [Southeast](#), [Upper Midwest](#), and [Ohio Valley](#).
- Despite having a record cold January, Alaska had a seasonally-averaged temperature at 1.4 degrees F below average, ranking as the 35th coldest winter in the 94-year record for the state. A warmer-than-average December and February balanced the very cold January temperatures, resulting in a winter temperature nearer the long-term average.
- [A list of select Winter and February temperature and precipitation records can be found here.](#)

Climate Highlights — February

- During February, the contiguous United States experienced [above-average temperatures](#) with a national average temperature of 38.3 degrees F. This was 3.6 degrees F above average, making it the 17th warmest February on record.
- [Much-above-average temperatures](#) were present across the Great Lakes, Mid-Atlantic, and Northeast during February. The [Massachusetts](#) statewide average temperature tied with 1998 as the warmest February on record at 7.9 degrees F above average. In total, [12 states](#) had February temperatures ranking among their ten warmest.
- [Precipitation totals](#) were mixed during February, resulting in a [nationally-averaged precipitation](#) total 0.25 inch below the long-term average of 2.02 inches.
- [Dry conditions](#) were present across the West, Southeast, and Midwest. The [Northeast](#) was particularly dry, where [New York](#), [Vermont](#), [New Hampshire](#), [Massachusetts](#), [Connecticut](#), [Rhode Island](#), and [New Jersey](#) each had a top ten dry February. In contrast, [South Dakota](#), [Nebraska](#), [Kansas](#), and [Louisiana](#) had February precipitation totals among their ten wettest.
- According to the [U.S. Drought Monitor](#), as of February 28th, about 39 percent of the contiguous United States was experiencing drought conditions, a slight increase compared to the beginning of the month. However, the percent area experiencing the worst category of drought, called [D4 or exceptional drought](#), shrank from 3.2 percent

to 2.5 percent. Drought conditions generally improved across the Southern Plains where there has been above-average precipitation for several months. Drought conditions deteriorated across parts of the Southeast and the West, which had been drier than average.

- According to data from the [Rutgers Global Snow Lab](#), the monthly snow cover extent across the contiguous United States was approximately 1.0 million square miles, which was 139,200 square miles [below the 1981-2010 average](#). The small monthly snow cover extent emerges despite [several large winter storms](#) which impacted the Rockies and Northern Plains during the month.
- According to preliminary data from [NOAA's Storm Prediction Center](#), there were 57 tornado reports during February, nearly twice the average number of tornadoes for the month. Most of the tornadoes occurred on the 28th and 29th, when a strong storm system spawned several strong tornadoes from Nebraska to Tennessee, causing an estimated 13 fatalities.

Alaska Temperature and Precipitation:

- [Alaska](#) had its 16th warmest February since records began in 1918, with a temperature 6.5°F (3.6°C) above the 1971–2000 average.
- [Alaska](#) had its 35th coldest winter season (December 2011-February 2012) on record, with a temperature 1.4°F (0.8°C) below the 1971–2000 average.
- [Alaska](#) had its 22nd coldest January-February period on record, with a temperature 3.8°F (2.1°C) below the 1971–2000 average.
- [Alaska](#) had its 24th wettest February since records began in 1918, with an anomaly that was 47.9 percent above the 1971–2000 average.
- [Alaska](#) had its 12th wettest winter season (December 2011-February 2012) on record, with an anomaly that was 42.6 percent above the 1971–2000 average.
- [Alaska](#) had its 32nd wettest January-February period on record, with an anomaly that was 19.3 percent above the 1971–2000 average.

For additional details about recent temperatures and precipitation across the U.S., see the [Regional Highlights](#) section below and visit the [Climate Summary page](#). For information on local temperature and precipitation records during the month, please visit NCDC's [Records page](#). For details and graphics on weather *events* across the U.S. and the globe please visit [NCDC's Global Hazards page](#).

Regional Highlights:

These regional summaries were provided by the six [Regional Climate Centers](#) and reflect conditions in their respective regions. These six regions differ spatially from the [nine climatic regions of the National Climatic Data Center](#).

[Northeast](#) | [Midwest](#) | [Southeast](#) | [High Plains](#) | [Southern](#) | [Western](#)

Northeast Region: *(Information provided by the [Northeast Regional Climate Center](#))*

- February was the eleventh month in a row that Northeast temperatures averaged

above normal and the fourth consecutive month that each of the states in the region posted warmer than normal temperature averages. February's average temperature was 31.6 degrees F (-0.2 degrees C). This was 5.2 degrees F (2.9 degrees C) warmer than normal and 6.0 degrees (3.3 degrees C) warmer than February 2011. It was the warmest February in the Northeast since 1998 and the fourth warmest since 1895. Massachusetts tied with 1998 for its warmest February in 118 years, Connecticut and New Jersey had their second warmest, and New York, Pennsylvania and Vermont tallied their third warmest February since 1895. State departures ranged from +3.6 degrees F (+2.0 degrees C) in Maine to +7.1 degrees F (+3.9 degrees C) in Vermont. Three stations in the New York City metropolitan region: Central Park, JFK Airport, and LaGuardia Airport; and Bridgeport, CT saw their warmest February on record. With an average temperature of 31.3 degrees F (-0.4 degrees C) it was the third warmest winter (December-February) since 1896 in the Northeast. Temperature averages in each of the states in the region fell within the second to sixth warmest in 117 years. Two locations, Bridgeport, CT and Dulles Airport, VA saw their warmest winter on record; many other cities in the Northeast were within the top ten warmest on record. The Northeast's winter temperature departure was +5.1 degrees F (+2.8 degrees C). State departures ranged from +4.1 degrees F (+2.3 degrees C) in Maryland to +6.5 degrees F (+3.6 degrees C) in Vermont.

- The Northeast averaged well below normal precipitation totals in February. In fact, it was the sixth driest February since 1895 and the driest February since 1987. The region's average of 1.51 inches (38.4 mm) was 56 percent of normal. The "wettest" state was Delaware, where the total of 2.89 inches (73.4 mm) was 96 percent of that state's normal amount. Massachusetts and Rhode Island were the dry states in the region, each averaging 31 percent of normal. New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont had their fourth driest February in 118 years; Connecticut, Massachusetts and New York saw their 5th driest. The Northeast and each of the states averaged below normal precipitation during the winter of 2011-12. The region averaged 8.33 inches (211.6 mm), which was 90 percent of normal. State departures ranged from 74 percent of normal in Connecticut to 99 percent of normal in Pennsylvania.
- Above normal temperatures and below normal precipitation throughout the winter months were both a blessing and a curse, depending on the industry. Less snow meant less money spent clearing it off roads. As of early February, Rochester, NY had spent \$1.1 million less on snow removal expenditures than during the same period last winter. On the flip side, ski slopes throughout the Northeast saw fewer visitors compared to last winter. By mid-February, three of New York's state run ski resorts saw about 100,000 fewer visitors than the year before. This resulted in a revenue decline of 11 percent at Gore and Whiteface Mountains in the Adirondacks, and 38 percent decline at Belleayre Mountain in the Catskills. In addition, sales of ski and snowboard gear and clothing in the Northeast were down 12 percent through January, according to the SnowSports Industries of America and the Leisure Trends Group.

For more information, please go to the [Northeast Regional Climate Center Home Page](#).

Midwest Region: *(Information provided by the [Midwest Regional Climate Center](#))*

- February temperatures were above normal for the Midwest. The upper Midwest had temperatures ranging from 5 to 8 degrees F (3 to 4 degrees C) above normal for the month. The rest of the region ranged from 2 to 5 degrees F (1 to 3 degrees C) above

normal with a small area of west central Iowa close to normal. Daily temperature records in February followed a pattern similar to the previous two months with far more record highs (465) than record lows (4). The winter season, December through February was warm across the Midwest after four straight below average winters. Temperature departures for the season were similar to the departures for February.

- February precipitation totals were below normal for most of the region with above normal totals limited to western Missouri and Iowa, northwest Wisconsin, and southern Minnesota. Much of the area in Severe Drought in southern Minnesota and northwest Iowa picked up two to three times normal precipitation in February. However longer term deficits still remain in those areas. In the Ohio River watershed, precipitation totals were less than 75% of normal in February following a very wet 2011 in the area. Winter, December to February, precipitation totals in the Midwest were largely between 75% and 125% of normal. Winter totals failed to reach 75% of normal in northern Minnesota and topped 125% of normal in parts of Ohio, northwest Missouri, western Iowa, and southwest Minnesota. Above normal February snow fell in western Iowa, northern and central Minnesota, and northern Wisconsin. Some of those locations reached typical winter snow totals with the February snows. The remainder of the Midwest was mostly below normal for both monthly and the seasonal snowfall.
- Thin ice was to blame for a death in Black Hawk County, Iowa on the first of the month. A man fishing on George Wyth Lake fell through thin ice and drowned. Thin ice also led to many other incidents on lakes in Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin and many lakes had limited access due to dangerous conditions.
- Deadly tornadic storms erupted on February 29th. The storms, extending from late the previous night into the early afternoon, affected the southern extent of the region including parts of Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, and Ohio. Four of the early morning storms were deadly. Three separate twisters in Missouri killed one person each followed by an EF4 tornado that hit Harrisburg, Illinois killing six more people. Dozens of large hail and damaging wind reports were also noted across the five-state region.
- The system that brought severe convective weather to the southern Midwest also brought heavy snow to more northerly regions on the 28th and 29th. The storm tracked across central Minnesota and northern Wisconsin dropping 6 to 20 inches (15 to 50 cm) of snow. The heavy, wet snow caused thousands to lose power, schools to close, and many roads to become nearly impassable.
- Many cities in the upper Midwest recorded winter temperatures ranking among the 10 warmest on record. Saint Cloud, Minnesota tied for its warmest winter in 118 years at 23.4 degrees F (-5 degrees C) and Fargo, North Dakota, just across the river from Moorhead, Minnesota, recorded its warmest winter in 130 years at 22.1 degrees F (-6 degrees C). Grand Rapids, Michigan, Green Bay, Wisconsin, and Grand Forks, North Dakota all ranked as the second warmest winter while Rockford, Illinois ranked as the third warmest.

For details on the weather and climate events of the Midwest, see the weekly summaries in the [MRCC Midwest Climate Watch page](#).

Southeast Region: *(Information provided by the [Southeast Regional Climate Center](#))*

- Mean temperatures were above normal across the Southeast in February. The greatest departures were found across Virginia, Alabama, and the northern half of Florida, where monthly temperatures were 4 to 5 degrees F (2.2 to 2.8 degrees C) above average. It was the 4th warmest February for the Washington D.C. area in a record extending back to 1872. Temperatures across much of the Carolinas, Georgia, and southern Florida were 2 to 3 degrees F (1.1 to 1.6 degrees C) above average, while monthly temperatures were near normal across Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Cold air overspread much of the Southeast between the 12th and 14th of the month, with subfreezing temperatures reported as far south as Orlando, FL. In contrast, unusually warm weather dominated the Southeast during the last week of February, as daily maximum temperatures reached as high as 80 degrees F (26.7 degrees C) across parts of eastern Virginia between the 23rd and 25th of the month. Both Norfolk, VA and Savannah, GA recorded all-time February daily maximum temperature records of 82 degrees F (27.8 degrees C) and 86 degrees F (30 degrees C), respectively, on the 24th of the month. Melbourne, FL reached 90 degrees F (32.2 degrees C) on the 25th, a record maximum temperature for that day.
- Monthly precipitation totals were below average across most of the Southeast in February. The driest locations were found across northwest South Carolina and parts of the Florida Peninsula, where monthly precipitation totals were less than 25 percent of normal. February 7th marked the end of a 41-day stretch with no measurable precipitation in Melbourne, FL, the second longest dry spell ever at that location (the record is 46 days from 1968 to 1969). Vero Beach, FL also ended its second longest dry spell ever of 39 days on the 4th of the month (the record is 41 days in 1970). The lack of precipitation was evident across meteorological winter as well. In particular, Augusta, GA recorded only 3.8 inches (96.5 mm) of precipitation from December through February, making it the third driest winter in a record extending back to 1874. The wettest locations in February were found across the northern Gulf Coast, western and eastern sections of Virginia, south Florida, and the northern slopes of Puerto Rico, where monthly precipitation totals were as much as 200 percent of normal. A subtropical disturbance originating over the Yucatan Peninsula combined with a stalled frontal boundary to produce widespread rainfall totals of 3 to 4 inches (76.2 to 101.6 mm) across much of south Florida between the 6th and 8th of the month. Key West, FL recorded its wettest day on record for the month of February with 4.34 inches (110.2 mm) of rainfall on the 5th. A low pressure system tracking along the Gulf Coast dumped up to 7 inches (177.8 mm) of rainfall along the Florida Panhandle between the 18th and 20th of the month with localized flooding reported near the city of Pensacola. This system also produced widespread snowfall across the northern tier of the region. Between 5 and 9 inches (127 and 229 mm) of snow was recorded across western and central portions of Virginia as well as along the higher elevations of the Southern Appalachians. Several other locations across central Virginia recorded between 3 and 5 inches (76.2 and 127 mm) of snowfall, while many locations across central North Carolina and eastern Virginia recorded between 1 and 3 inches (25.4 and 76.2 mm). Trace amounts of snowfall were also reported across western North Carolina and in the Washington D.C. area on the 8th of the month. On the 11th and 12th of the month, up to 7 inches (177.8 mm) of snow was reported across western North Carolina, while trace amounts of snow were reported along the coastal plain.
- There were 169 reports of severe weather across the Southeast in February, including 6 confirmed tornadoes. On the 22nd of the month, an EF-1 tornado touched down in

Floyd County, GA near the town of Rome. Damage from this storm was estimated at \$1.6 million. One woman died from a heart attack when the tornado lifted the roof off of her house. The remaining tornadoes occurred as part of a small outbreak on the 24th of the month. The strongest tornado was an EF-2 that tracked approximately 25 miles (40.2 km) southwest of Columbia, SC across Aiken County. In Colleton County, SC, an EF-1 tornado snapped trees and power lines and damaged or destroyed several structures in the town of Islandton. In Sumter County, SC, an EF-0 touched down near the town of Pinewood. This storm was accompanied by golf ball-sized hail and wind gusts as high as 80 mph (35.8 m/s). In Colquitt County, GA, an EF-0 was reported near the town of Omega. Numerous trees were snapped with roof damage to several barns and at least one house. Lastly, an EF-0 was reported in Mathews County, VA with downed trees and damage to several structures.

- The continued lack of precipitation across much of the Southeast contributed to further intensification of drought conditions in February. In particular, the area of exceptional drought (D4) expanded across southern Georgia and parts of the Florida Panhandle by the middle of the month. By the end of the month, nearly 75 percent of the region was classified in drought (D0 or greater), with over 25 percent experiencing extreme or exceptional drought conditions (D3 and D4). Water restrictions remained in place across many parts of the region as groundwater levels continued to drop. The dry conditions also contributed to several wildfires across Florida, some of which forced home evacuations and the temporary closure of major roadways. The frost and freeze conditions in the middle of the month damaged fruit crops across southern Georgia and interior portions of Florida. Some blueberry farmers in Georgia reported potential losses of up to 70 percent. The generally mild winter did contribute to some financial savings. According to the Georgia State Department of Transportation, only about \$50,000 has been spent on winter weather infrastructure this season, substantially less than the over \$4 million spent over the previous two winters combined. However, the warm weather also caused many flowers and trees to begin blooming, leaving them susceptible to a March freeze but also creating concern of a long and possibly severe pollen season. Ticks and mosquitoes were also been reported in Georgia, including the earliest siting of the Lone Star tick on the 11th of the month.

For more information, please go to the [Southeast Regional Climate Center Home Page](#).

High Plains Region: *(Information provided by the [High Plains Regional Climate Center](#))*

- February 2012 was generally warmer and wetter than normal across the High Plains Region. While average temperatures were above normal for much of the Region, areas of central Colorado, western Nebraska, and southern and west-central Wyoming had below normal temperatures. The largest temperature departures occurred in east-central Colorado and south-central Wyoming where temperature departures were up to 8.0 degrees F (4.4 degrees C) below normal. However, it was especially warm, yet again, across the northern part of the Region where temperature departures ranged from 6.0-10.0 degrees F (3.3-5.6 degrees C) above normal. Although the warmer than normal temperatures did not lead to any new February records, the continued warmth throughout this winter caused many locations in North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas to rank in the top 10 warmest winters on record. Topeka, Kansas had its 2nd warmest winter (December, January, and February) with an average temperature of 37.6 degrees F (3.1 degrees C). The record

of 38.6 degrees F (3.7 degrees C) occurred in the winter of 1991-1992 (period of record 1887-2012). Fargo, North Dakota had its warmest winter on record with an average temperature of 22.1 degrees F (-5.5 degrees C). The old record of 22.0 degrees F (-5.6 degrees C) occurred in the 1986-1987 winter season (period of record 1881-2012).

- February was an active month across the High Plains Region. The majority of the Region was wet this month; however, there were some drier areas as well. The driest portions of the Region, where precipitation was less than 25 percent of normal, included northern North Dakota and western South Dakota. Large areas of the Region had precipitation totals which were 200-400 percent of normal, including eastern Kansas, central and eastern Nebraska, eastern South Dakota, central and eastern Wyoming, and northern Colorado. By the month's end, several locations in Colorado, Kansas, and Nebraska ranked in the top 10 wettest Februaries on record. For instance, Akron 4E, Colorado, located in the northwestern part of the state, had its wettest February on record with 1.53 inches (39 mm) of liquid equivalent precipitation (period of record 1893-2012). The old record occurred in 1987 with 1.47 inches (37 mm) of precipitation. Because February precipitation is typically light, this seemingly small amount of precipitation at Akron 4E was actually 392 percent of normal precipitation. Further east, Wichita, Kansas had its 4th wettest February on record with 3.57 inches (91 mm) of precipitation (period of record 1888-2012). The wettest February occurred in 1915 with 4.61 inches (117 mm) of precipitation. Most of Wichita's monthly precipitation fell in one day. On February 3rd, 2.86 inches (72 mm) of rain fell and set two new records for Wichita a new daily precipitation record for February 3rd and a new record for the highest one-day precipitation total for February. Many storm systems moved through parts of the Region this February; however two systems one at the beginning and one at the end of the month were quite notable. After a warm and dry start to the year, February kicked off with a strong winter storm which affected Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, and Wyoming. The system brought a combination of rain, snow, and even some thundersnow. By the end of the storm, a large swath of 6.0-12.0 inches (15-30 cm) of snow blanketed an area stretching from eastern Colorado and Wyoming into northern Kansas, and much of Nebraska. The heavy, wet snow caused numerous power outages, travel delays, and significant tree damage. In addition, this snowfall set many new daily records. For example, Lincoln, Nebraska received 11.1 inches (28 cm) of snow which beat the old daily record for February 4th by 5.4 inches (14 cm)! The old record of 5.7 inches (14 cm) occurred in 1971 (period of record for snowfall 1948-2012). Interestingly, this snowfall total was also the 4th highest 1-day snowfall total for any day for Lincoln. The end of the month was also an active period. On February 28th, an intense low pressure system brought heavy snow to South Dakota, southern North Dakota, and northern Nebraska, and severe weather to Kansas and central Nebraska. Snow totals of 4.0-12.0 inches (10-30 cm) were reported across South Dakota and up to 9.0 inches (23 cm) of snow fell across southern North Dakota. This same storm brought severe weather, including tornadoes, hail, and high winds to areas to the south. A total of 8 tornadoes were reported in Kansas and Nebraska. According to the National Weather Service in Topeka, Kansas an EF2 tornado (wind speeds of 111-135 mph or 179-217 km/h) caused significant damage to buildings, including an apartment complex and a church, in Harveyville, Kansas which is located in the northeastern part of the state. While most of the severe weather was confined to Kansas, the first tornadoes to ever be reported in Nebraska in February also occurred. According to the National Weather Service in North Platte, Nebraska, an EF0 tornado (wind speeds of 65-85 mph or

105-137 km/h) was confirmed 21 miles northeast of North Platte, Nebraska or 9 miles west southwest of the small town of Gandy, Nebraska. A little later that day, another EF0 tornado occurred near Greeley, Nebraska.

- There were a few changes to the U.S. Drought Monitor this month. Luckily, most of the changes were improvements. Heavy precipitation led to a downgrade of some of the extreme drought conditions (D3) in south-central Kansas. Additionally, abnormally dry conditions (D0) in north-central and southeast Nebraska were also eliminated due to the precipitation from the early February winter storm. By the end of the month, because of ongoing dryness, D0 expanded into south-central South Dakota and severe drought conditions (D2) expanded slightly in eastern South Dakota. Other areas of the High Plains Region remained largely unchanged. According to the U.S. Seasonal Drought Outlook, all drought conditions in the Region are expected to persist through May, except for east-central Kansas, where conditions are expected to improve somewhat. Additionally, drought conditions are expected to develop in western Colorado and the Dakotas.

For more information, please go to the [High Plains Regional Climate Center Home Page](#).

Southern Region: *(Information provided by the [Southern Regional Climate Center](#))*

- Temperatures in the Southern Region did not vary much spatially in the month of February, and with the exception of north western Texas and western Oklahoma, the region experienced a generally warmer than normal month. For Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee, mean daily temperatures averaged approximately 2 to 4 degrees F (1.11 to 2.22 degrees C) above normal, with some areas as high as 4 to 6 degrees F (2.22 to 3.33 degrees C) above normal. Arkansas averaged 46.80 degrees F (9.22 degrees C), while Louisiana, Mississippi, and Oklahoma recorded state average temperatures of 56.00 degrees F (13.33 degrees C) , 51.60 degrees F (10.89 degrees C) and 43.30 degrees F (6.28 degrees C), respectively. In Texas and Oklahoma, most stations averaged between 2 degrees F (1.11 degrees C) below normal and 2 degrees F (1.11 degrees C) above normal. The state average temperature for Texas was 51.50 degrees F (10.83 degrees C), while Tennessee averaged 44.30 degrees F (6.83 degrees C). For both Louisiana and Arkansas, it was the twenty-fourth warmest February on record (1895-2012). All other state rankings fell in the middle two quartiles.
- Precipitation varied spatially during the month of February. It was a wetter than normal month for much of the coastal part of the Southern Region, but also in northern Oklahoma. Elsewhere it was generally a drier than normal month. In northern Oklahoma, stations averaged up to three times the normal precipitation for the month. This equated to approximately 2 to 5 inches (50.8 to 127 mm) of precipitation. Similar values were also observed in southern Texas. Louisiana had their ninth wettest February on record (1895-2012) with a state average precipitation of 7.68 inches (195.07 mm). The wettest portions of the bayou state included the central parishes where stations reported in excess of ten inches (254.00 mm) of total precipitation. The driest areas of the region include much of Tennessee, the western panhandle of Texas, and southern Oklahoma. In these areas, precipitation averaged less than half of normal. The remaining state average precipitation totals are as follows: Texas averaged 2.27 inches (57.66 mm), Tennessee averaged 2.97 inches (75.44 mm),

Oklahoma averaged 1.86 inches (47.24 mm), Mississippi average 5.05 inches (128.27 mm) and Arkansas averaged 3.09 inches (78.49 mm). The state rankings for these values all fell in the middle two quartiles.

- Drought conditions in the Southern Region improved from the previous month. Heavy precipitation totals in southern Texas and Louisiana have resulted in a significant reduction in extreme drought conditions. Last month, approximately 35 percent of the region was in extreme drought or worse. By February 28, 2012, this value has shrunk to just 23.33 percent. Much of eastern Texas is now in moderate to severe drought, while much of Louisiana, with the exception of the south east, is now drought free. Conditions in Oklahoma remained fairly static, and Arkansas, Mississippi and Tennessee are relatively drought free.
- There was not much in the way of severe weather for the Southern Region this month. There were only a small handful of twisters that occurred over the course of the month, and no major outbreaks to report. Damages reported were generally restricted to downed trees and power lines.

For more information, please go to the [Southern Regional Climate Center Home Page](#).

Western Region: *(Information provided by the [Western Regional Climate Center](#))*

- Weak upper level ridging over the West this month was interrupted by several weak to moderate storm events. By the final leap day, monthly average temperatures at most locations were within 2 degrees F (1 C) of their February normals. Among the generally seasonal temperatures this month were several warm days of note. Death Valley, California hit 91 degrees F (32.7 C) on February 23. The first normal occurrence of 90 degrees F (32.2 C) or better at this location is March 12, and temperatures greater than 90 F (32.2 C) in February have only occurred 12 times at this location since records began in 1911. The San Francisco Bay Area also recorded several record highs over this two-day period with temperatures in the mid-to-high 70's (24-26 C). A less extreme warm outbreak occurred in the same region February 9 and 10. Most of Montana also saw large positive departures from normal the first and third weeks of the month. Cold systems passing through the second and last weeks of the month brought average daily temperatures of 6 to 8 degrees F (3-4 C) below normal into the region, moderating Montana's otherwise strongly positive February temperature departure from normal.
- Precipitation was scarce for much of the West this month. Prior to storm activity over the last four days of the month, only eastern Colorado, Wyoming, and scattered locations in the Pacific and Inland Northwest were at normal or above normal precipitation levels. Several locations in Colorado and Wyoming experienced precipitation over 300% of average for February. Julesberg, located in the far northeastern corner of Colorado, received 1.4 in (35.6 mm) of precipitation, making for the wettest February on its record dating back to 1893. Gillette, Wyoming also experienced its wettest February on record with a total of 1.56 in (39.6 mm). Records at this location began in 1902.
- A series of storms February 26-29 brought further rain and snowfall to locations with already above average precipitation totals for the month in Wyoming, western Colorado, and portions of Montana. The end of February storm brought measurable precipitation to Northern California, Northern Nevada, Oregon, and Washington, but

was not sufficient to bring monthly totals up to normal. The Southwest remained near dry through this event, with Phoenix tying its driest year-to-date on record with only trace precipitation recorded for February. Central California also experienced low precipitation totals; many locations saw 1% or less of average rainfall. Santa Barbara COOP station recorded only 0.07 in (1.78 mm), tying for the 14th driest February on a 116-year record at that location. The lack of rainfall this month allowed drought to persist in the Southwest and further develop in the Northwest.

- One of the most notable climate features this month is the distinct lack of snowpack in the Sierra. As of March 1st, snow water equivalents for the Northern, Central, and Southern Sierra regions were at 38%, 32%, and 34% of normal for the date, respectively. Both the Northern and Central regions gained 4% of this total on the 29th; the Central Sierra did not break 30% of normal until the 29th. In terms of current snow water content percent of April 1 average, the Central Sierra just edged up to meet the driest year on record (1977) on February 29, while the Northern and Southern sections are holding only slightly above the 1977 percentages. In contrast, all of Colorado's 8 major basins had received at least 78% of normal to-date snow water equivalent by March 1, though all were still below 90% of normal.
- February 13: Death Valley, California Dust Storm: Gusty winds behind a passing cold front initiated a 1000-2000 ft (300-600 m) deep dust storm in Death Valley National Park in Southern California. Park rangers remarked it was the fastest moving dust storm they have observed in the last 20 years.
- February 21-22: High Winds in Rocky Mountain Front Range: Wind gusts of 60-90 mph (95-145 kph) occurred along areas of the Rockies Front Range. The winds downed power lines, leaving nearly 45,000 in central Colorado without power. Two wildfires also occurred in conjunction with the wind event. Three to five wind events of this sort are typical in this region each year.
- February 25-26: Kauai, Hawaii Precipitation Event: Mt. Waialeale, Kauai received 7.52 in (191 mm) on February 26, an impressive portion of its February average of 24.63 in (626 mm). Lihue, Kauai received 6.39 in (162 mm) setting a daily record and also the record for the wettest February day at that location, previously 5.4 in (137 mm) on February 28, 1954. Hilo on the island of Hawaii also received significant rainfall. The islands have seen increasing drought for the past few months, so this heavy precipitation event provided welcome relief to dry conditions.
- February 28-29: High Wind Event: A passing cold front and downslope flow brought prolonged high winds to many locations in the West. Wind gusts at Virginia Peak, Nevada reached 110 mph (177 kph). At Squaw Valley Ski Resort, winds reached 98 mph (158 kph). In California's Owens Valley peak gusts hit 79 mph. Further north, a 78 mph (125 kph) gust was recorded near Cheyenne, Wyoming.

For more information, please go to the [Western Regional Climate Center Home Page](#).

See [NCDC's Monthly Records web-page](#) for weather and climate records for the most recent month. For additional national, regional, and statewide data and graphics from 1895-present, for any period, please visit the [Climate at a Glance](#) page.

PLEASE NOTE: All of the temperature and precipitation [ranks](#) and values are based on preliminary data.

The ranks will change when the final data are processed, but will not be replaced on these pages. Graphics based on final data are provided on the [Temperature and Precipitation Maps](#) page and the [Climate at a Glance](#) page as they become available.

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