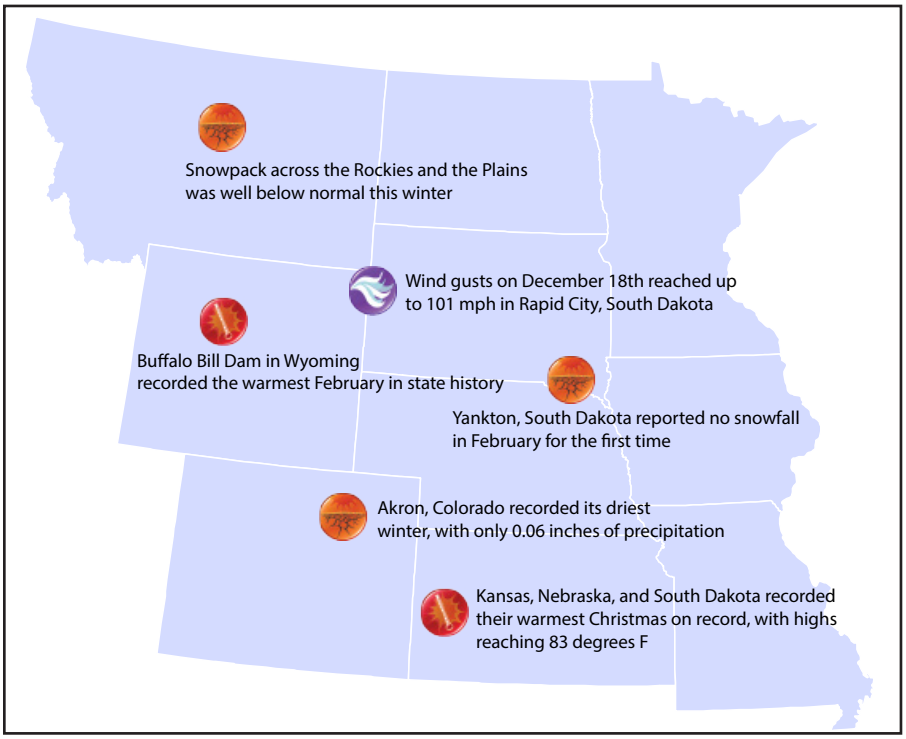
Quarterly Climate Impacts and Outlook

Missouri River Basin

March 2026

Regional – *Significant Events for December 2025 - February 2026*



Highlights for the Basin

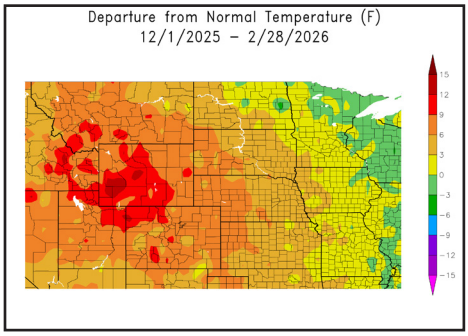
This winter was historically warm, with Colorado and Wyoming observing their warmest winter, while Kansas, Nebraska, and Montana ranked second. Except for Nebraska, which came close, those same states all had a location rank as the all-time warmest winter on record. Throughout the Basin, a total of 96 counties recorded their warmest winter. This was primarily driven by record-high temperatures in the Basin, with maximum temperatures on average close to 10 degrees F above normal this winter.

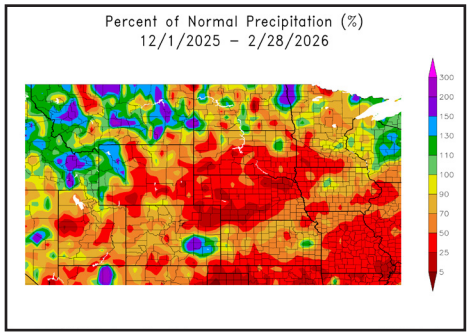
Near the end of the winter months, conditions were optimal for dust storms in eastern Colorado and western Kansas. A significant one occurred on February 17th along I-70 near Oakley, Kansas, which led to multiple injuries and a fatality.

Regional – *Climate Overview for December 2025 - February 2026*

Temperature and Precipitation Anomalies

Departure from Normal Temperature (°F) (left) and Percent of Normal Precipitation (right) for Winter 2025-2026



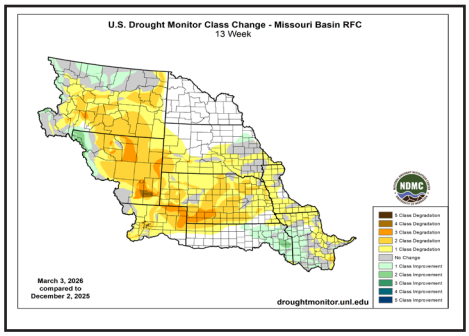


Temperatures have been exceptionally warm these past few months, with the basin recording its second-warmest winter. The western half of the region was abnormally warm in December, with 79 counties breaking their record for the month. January was above normal, but not record-breaking, before a return to record warmth in February.

Precipitation was predominantly below normal this winter, aside from a few areas that did receive some snow. December had both sides of the coin, with record to near-record wetness in Montana and North Dakota, while Kansas had record dryness. January brought some precipitation to the southern portions of the basin, while February was generally dry except for a few places.

Changes in Drought Conditions

Dec. 2, 2025 to March 3, 2026



The map above shows the areas of increasing (yellow shading) and decreasing (green shading) categories of drought. Due to the overall lack of snowfall, drought expanded and intensified significantly this winter. Eastern Wyoming experienced the most significant changes, with up to four classes of degradation. In Nebraska, drought intensified at a near record rate this winter.

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Regional – *Impacts for December 2025 - February 2026*

Wildfires

The warm and dry conditions this winter led to a rash of wildfires in February. On the 17th, the Ranger Road fire traveled 65 miles from Oklahoma into Kansas. Nearly 300,000 acres burned, and 11,000 people were evacuated, including several towns in Kansas. A few days later in Colorado, a vehicle crash caused several thousand acres to burn and the town of Padroni to be evacuated.

Water Resources

Snowpack across the Missouri River Basin was at 77 percent of normal at the end of winter, the lowest since 2013. Water supply is a concern in the coming months, with runoff expected to be 91 percent of average and reservoirs are below normal. Soil moisture is also well below normal across the central portions of the basin, particularly in Nebraska.

Recreation

The overall lack of snow and warmer temperatures greatly disrupted wintertime activities. In the Black Hills and Wyoming, events were cancelled, and the local economy has been impacted due to the lack of snow. Across the northern states, numerous people have fallen through thin lake ice due to warmer temperatures, and there was one fatality in Montana.

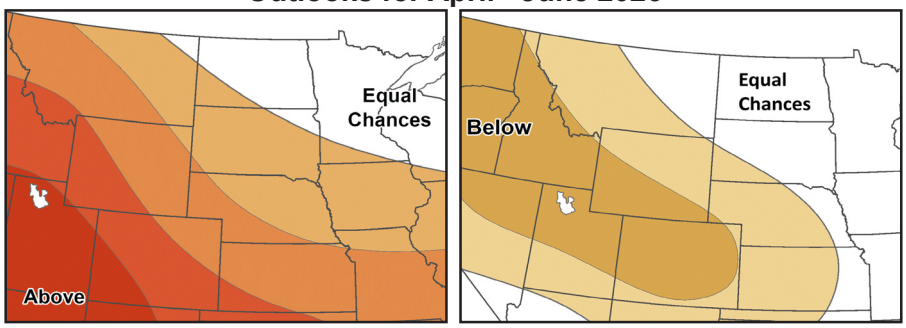
Above: Mesonet damaged by wildfires near Ashland, Kansas, credit Jake Thompson (left); Snapped tree in South Dakota due to high winds, credit Custer County Sheriff (center); Migrating snow geese along I-29, credit Doug Kluck (right)

Regional – *Outlook for April - June 2026*

Temperature

Precipitation

Outlooks for April - June 2026



EC: Equal chances of above, near, or below normal

A: Above normal, B: Below normal

According to NOAA's Climate Prediction Center, the outlook for the upcoming season indicates increased chances of above-normal temperatures across most of the Basin. Increased chances of below-normal precipitation are present across Colorado, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, and Wyoming. The majority of the Dakotas have equal chances of above, below, and near-normal precipitation.

La Niña influences will end this spring, and ENSO-neutral conditions will be present until a shift to El Niño in the summer. The wildfire potential will remain elevated this spring with the continuation of a warmer and drier pattern, while the risk of floods is lower.

MO River Basin Partners

- High Plains Regional Climate Center
- National Drought Mitigation Center
- National Integrated Drought Information System
- National Centers for Environmental Information
- National Weather Service- Central Region
- NOAA Climate Prediction Center
- NWS Missouri Basin River Forecast Center
- American Association of State Climatologists
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
- USDA Northern Plains Climate Hub
- Bureau of Indian Affairs – Great Plains Region

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