

# PRAIRIES and HIGH PLAINS

Weather and Climate Highlights and Impacts, December to February 2026  
Climate Outlook, April to June 2026



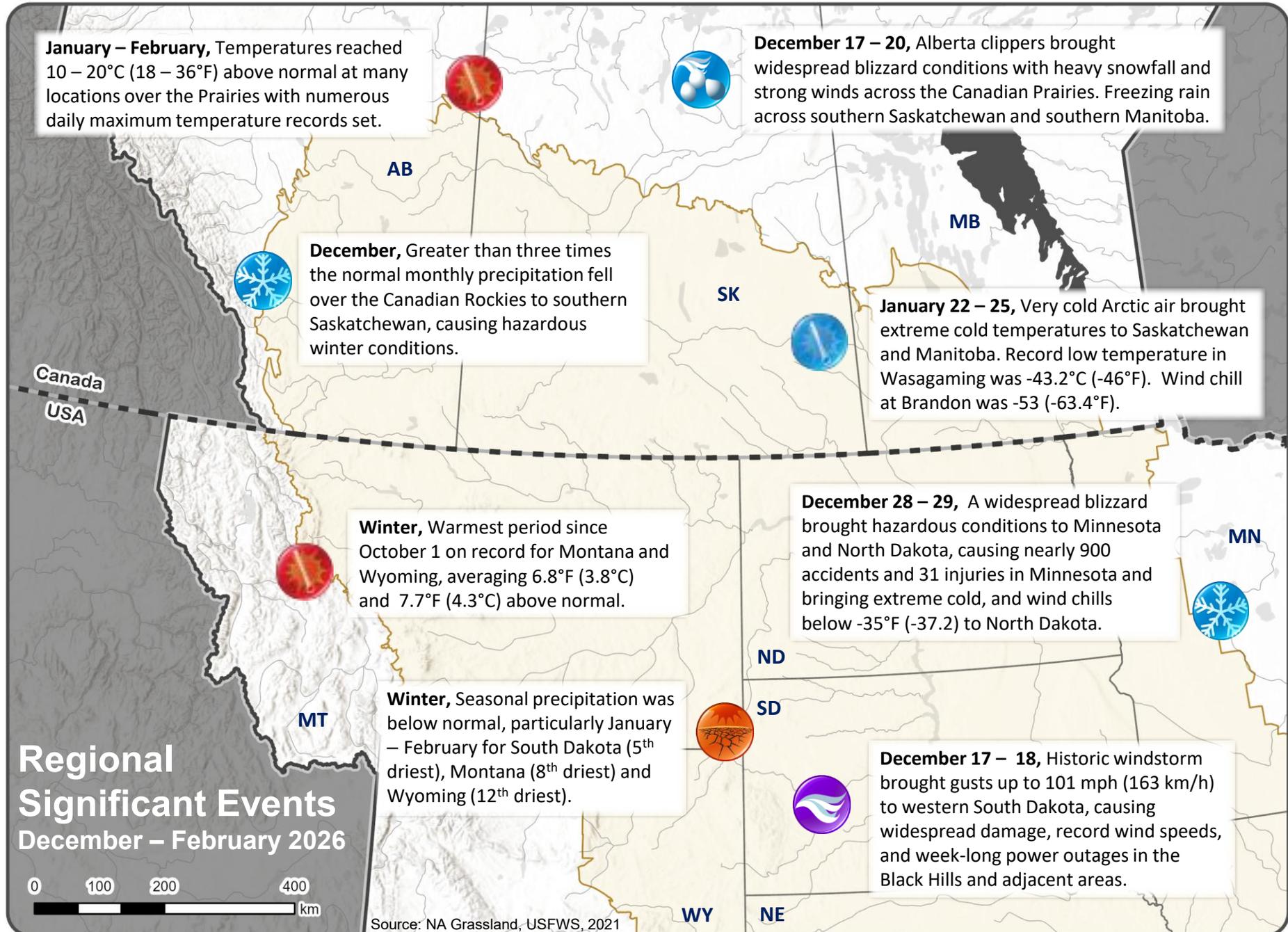
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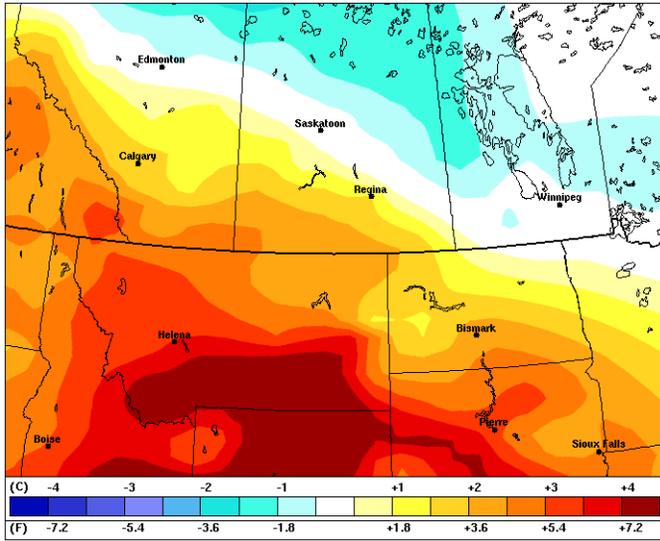


Note: Wind chill is a unitless index in Canada.

# Regional Climate Overview

December – February 2026

## Departure from Normal Temperature (°C/°F)



Source: ECC Climate Archive and USHCN v 2.5  
Reference period: 1991-2020

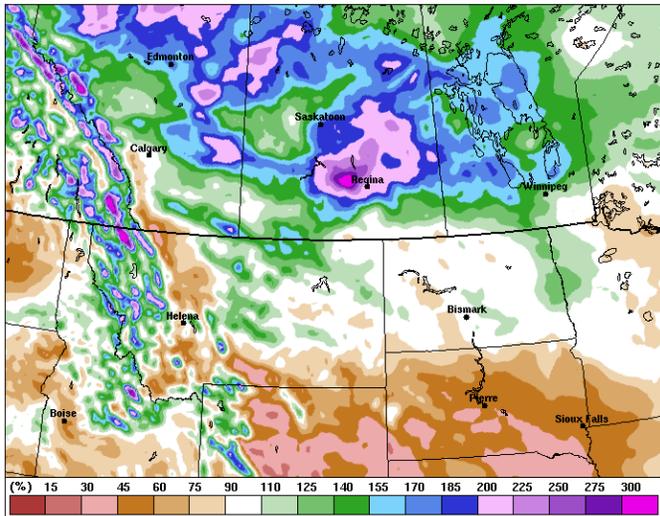
## Temperature

Winter brought warmer than normal temperatures across much of the High Plains and the southern portions of Alberta and Saskatchewan, with warmer conditions becoming more noticeable late in the season. The strongest anomalies were observed across southern Montana, northern Wyoming, and portions of southwestern South Dakota. Regions surrounding central Alberta, central Saskatchewan, and southern Manitoba saw slightly cooler than normal conditions.

## Precipitation

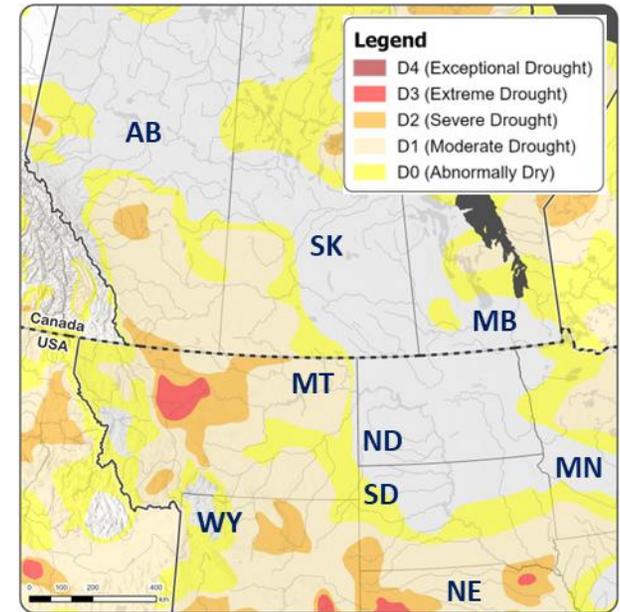
The Prairies and High Plains saw both wet and dry conditions across the region, with the Canadian portion observing precipitation totals above normal due to storms in December and February. Over the U.S. High Plains, seasonal precipitation was near to below normal for the winter which contributed to the snow drought. Overall, the amount of snow on the ground across the Prairies and High Plains remained limited due to very warm temperatures over the season.

## Percent of Normal Precipitation (%)



Source: Canadian Precipitation Analysis (CaPA)  
Reference period: 1991-2020

# Drought Monitor



Source: North American Drought Monitor

## Drought Conditions as of February 28, 2026

The Prairies and High Plains generally went into the winter with minimal drought, except for western Montana and southern Wyoming. As winter continued, Moderate (D1) and Severe (D2) drought conditions expanded throughout the western and southern High Plains and the southern Prairies. In the Canadian Prairies, December recorded above normal precipitation and colder weather, which improved drought conditions. Despite continued above normal precipitation through February, abnormally warm temperatures resulted in significantly reduced snowpack and moisture availability. Large portions of the southwestern Prairies had little to no snow remaining on the landscape at the end of February, resulting in increased drought severity and extent. Warmer than normal temperatures in the northern High Plains had a similar impact; snowpack and soil moisture have been significantly reduced. In the southern High Plains, below normal precipitation and above normal temperatures worsened drought conditions.

# Regional Impacts

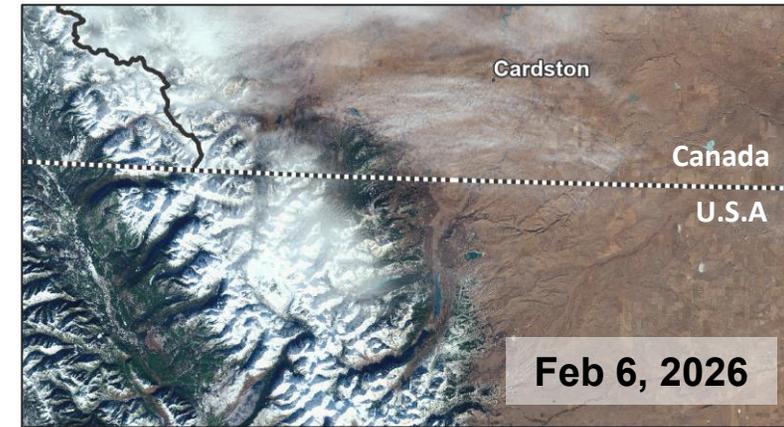
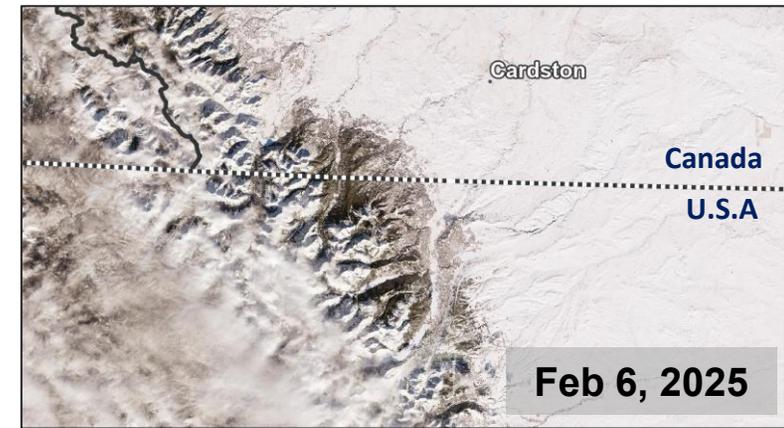
## December – February 2026



### Snowpack Nonexistent Across Most of the High Plains

**Location:** Prairies and High Plains

December began with lots of precipitation across Wyoming and Montana, experiencing their 8<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> wettest Decembers on record, respectively. Due to near-record warmth, ample snow fell at higher elevations, but rain fell at lower and mid-elevations. In January, a stark pattern shift occurred. Temperatures continued to be much above normal, but many states, South Dakota, Nebraska, Wyoming, and Montana, experienced less than 50% of normal precipitation. The snow cover gained in early winter was lost. Into February, the unseasonable warmth and dryness continued. Wyoming and Montana went on to experience their 12<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> driest January – February on record. South Dakota experienced its 5<sup>th</sup> driest January – February on record. The significant snow accumulation months of December, January, and February for the High Plains saw record breaking warmth, dryness, and high winds. As a result of these conditions, high evaporative demand (the thirst of the atmosphere) led to unseasonable drying of the landscape across large portions of the High Plains. During a period where soil moisture tends to hold steady with frozen soils and protected by a blanket of snow, moisture has been lost from the ground, resulting in a net loss for much of the region. These conditions have resulted in [historic and near-historic low soil moisture](#) for portions of South Dakota, Nebraska, and Wyoming.

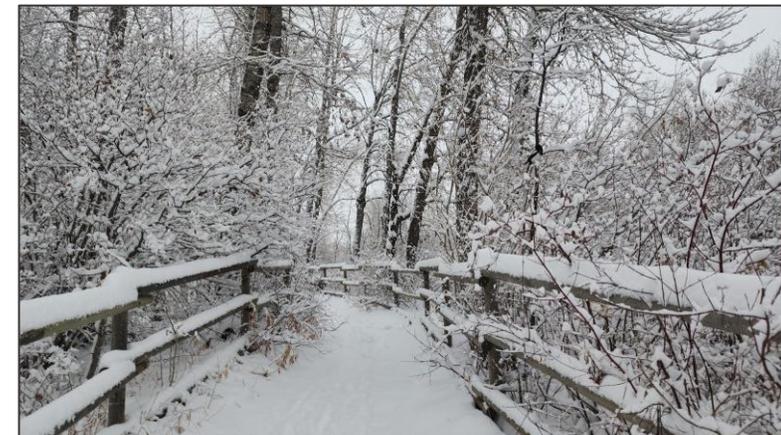


Winter snow cover in the Rocky Mountains near the Canada-U.S. border.  
Source: ESA Sentinel-2

### Blizzard Disrupts Prairie Provinces

**Location:** Prairies and High Plains

During mid-December 2025, two powerful [Alberta Clippers](#) developed over the Canadian Prairies and moved southeastward, bringing severe winter weather across both Canada and the U.S. As the system intensified over Saskatchewan, it produced heavy snow, strong winds, and [blizzard-like conditions](#) across all three Prairie provinces, leading to extremely hazardous travel conditions. The widespread event led to numerous highway closures, multiple [vehicle collisions](#), flight disruptions, and impactful power outages. The strong low-pressure system moved into northern Minnesota, creating wind gusts exceeding 60 mph (96 km/h) and near-zero visibility in many open areas, and where [Fergus Falls recorded eight straight hours of gusts at or above 45 mph](#) (72 km/h), peaking at 62 mph (100 km/h). This 2025-2026 winter in Minnesota has been dominated by prevailing winds coming from the northwest, leading to a large number of fast-moving winter weather systems. As of March 13, 2026, the state has already seen [31 clippers](#) this season.



Heavy snowfall in Calgary.  
Photo Credit: Kyle Brittain

# Temperature and Precipitation Outlook

April – June 2026

The temperature outlook for summer from both the [American](#) and [Canadian](#) models indicate above normal temperatures are likely. The greatest chance for above normal temperatures is over the southwestern part of the domain. The precipitation outlook suggests equal chance of above or below precipitation across the area, except for western Montana and Wyoming, where drier than normal conditions are expected. Along the Canadian Rockies there is a signal for above normal precipitation.

## Fall 2025 Weather & Climate Highlights Summary and Impacts

Aurora Borealis at Timber Lake, South Dakota on November 11, 2025.

Photo Credit: [South Dakota Mesonet](#), South Dakota State University.



It was a record warm fall across the Prairies and the High Plains in 2025. Many locations in the Prairies finished the season with their first warmest fall on record, such as Edmonton at 7.3°C (45.1°F) and La Ronge at 5.4°C (41.7°F). Likewise, Montana, Wyoming and the Dakotas experienced their second warmest fall season as well, with 35 counties in the region having their warmest fall on record. These records were primarily driven by warm nighttime temperatures. There was a persistent warmth across the whole region until the end of November, when a quick flip to cold temperatures brought freezing rain and snowstorms to the region. While the Prairies and High Plains experienced typical fall weather events overall, it also experienced impactful winter storms over both the Canadian Thanksgiving weekend (October 11 – 14, 2025) and the American Thanksgiving weekend (November 27 – 30, 2025) where freezing rain, snow, and strong wind conditions disrupted travel on roads and airports. Precipitation over the season was a tale of both wet and dry. Alberta and southwest Saskatchewan were very dry, while parts of Manitoba, Montana, Wyoming, and the Dakotas saw above normal precipitation. Following a very wet August, the dry conditions were favorable for agriculture. Despite the warmth, a large part of the High Plains is not in drought. More importantly, in terms of drought conditions, northern Montana saw drought degradation up to four classes in the north-central part of the state.

## PRAIRIES and HIGH PLAINS

### Contacts and Partners

- **Environment and Climate Change Canada**  
[www.canada.ca/en/services/environment](http://www.canada.ca/en/services/environment)
- **Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada**  
[www.agr.gc.ca/drought](http://www.agr.gc.ca/drought)
- **National Drought Mitigation Center**  
<http://drought.unl.edu/>
- **NOAA NIDIS**  
[www.drought.gov](http://www.drought.gov)
- **US State Climatologist**  
<https://stateclimate.org/>
- **NOAA NCEI**  
[www.ncei.noaa.gov](http://www.ncei.noaa.gov)
- **USDA Climate Hubs**  
[www.climatehubs.usda.gov](http://www.climatehubs.usda.gov)
- **NOAA NWS Climate Prediction Center**  
[www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov](http://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov)
- **High Plains Regional Climate Center**  
[www.hprcc.unl.edu](http://www.hprcc.unl.edu)
- **NOAA NWS Missouri Basin River Forecast Center**  
[www.weather.gov/mbrfc](http://www.weather.gov/mbrfc)
- **USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service**  
[www.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov)



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