Quarterly Climate Impacts and Outlook

Midwest Region

June 2026

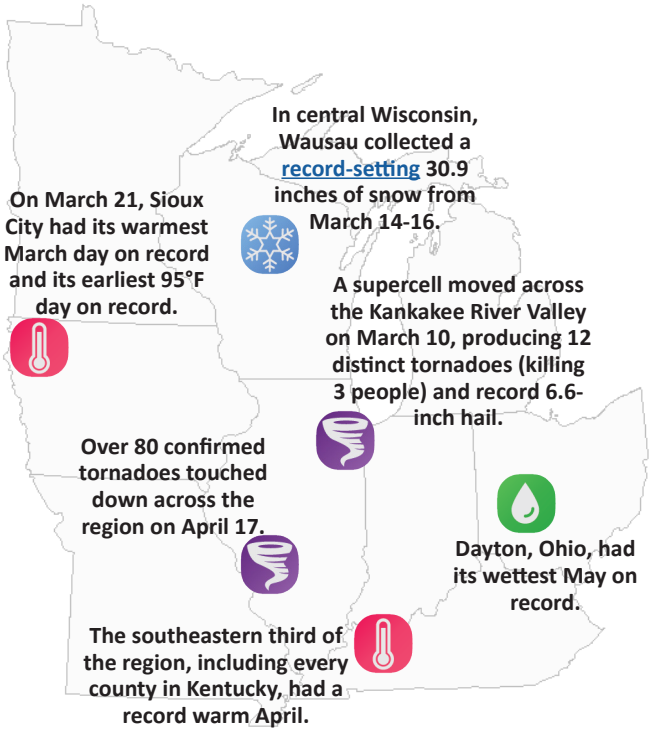
Midwest Significant Events – *March - May 2026*

Spring began with an active pattern that persisted across most of the region in March and April. Severe weather on March 10 spawned at least 23 tornadoes and large hail across the central Midwest from Kansas City to western Michigan. A large storm system traversed the Midwest March 14-17, bringing 1 to 4 feet of snow and 40 to 70 mph winds across the north and at least 30 confirmed tornadoes across the south. Severe weather was widespread on 8 April days, and at least 65 April tornadoes were confirmed in Illinois. Giant hail was reported over a 100-mile swath in southern Missouri on April 28, damaging thousands of homes, vehicles, and utility lines.

Unusual warmth was notable in March and April across most of the region, but especially the lower Midwest. Columbia, Missouri, had a record-setting 10 days in March with temperatures at or above 80°F.

Dozens of counties across Wisconsin and Michigan had their wettest April on record, and 20 northern Michigan counties had their wettest spring even with very dry conditions in May.

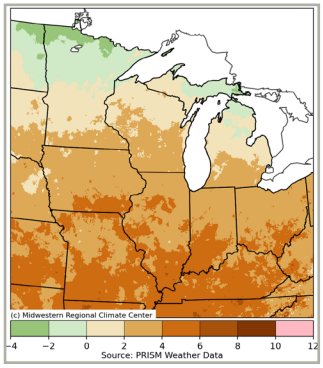
May was less active across the central and upper Midwest. Conversely, rainfall was more active across the Ohio River Valley, bringing some drought relief to Kentucky.



Regional Climate Overview – *March - May 2026*

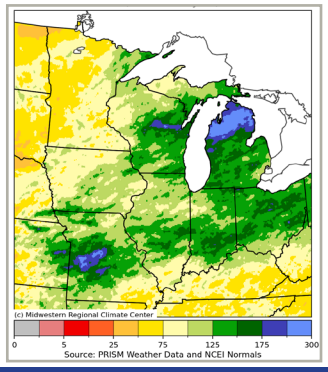
Spring Temperature

Departure from Normal (°F)



Spring Precipitation

% of Normal



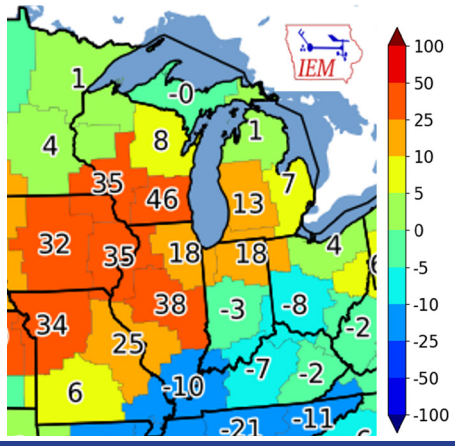
The Midwest had its 7th warmest spring on record. Kentucky and Missouri had their 2nd warmest spring. Spring temperatures were above normal across most of the Midwest, with near-normal conditions in the far upper Midwest (top-left map). This general north-to-south pattern was persistent in March and April. The Midwest had its 4th warmest March-April on record. Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, and Ohio had their warmest April on record. May was distinctly different, with temperatures near normal in the west and slightly below normal in the east.

Spring precipitation was near to above normal for much of the region, except the far southeast and far northwest (bottom-left map). This general pattern persisted in March and April. Wisconsin and Michigan had their wettest April on record, while the Midwest collectively ranked 3rd wettest. The precipitation pattern in May was distinctly different. Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan had their 4th, 8th, and 9th driest May on record, respectively.

Tornado activity was above normal for spring, with at least 305 confirmed touch-downs across the Midwest, which was over twice the average. Illinois was particularly hard hit, with 102 confirmed spring tornadoes (three times the average). Missouri had a near-record number of hail reports.

Spring Tornado Warnings

Departure from Average (count)
Period of record: 2002-2026



Contact: Melissa Widhalm (mwidhalm@purdue.edu)

Regional Impacts – *March - May 2026*

Agriculture

Plants grew quickly due to early-season warming. The lower Midwest had record early wheat growth and harvest. Early growth put plants at risk for freeze damage in April and May. Several freeze events led to replant of early season crops. A mid-spring cool down slowed crop development and green-up across the eastern Midwest.

In Michigan, which produces three-quarters of the U.S. tart cherry crop, production was down 24% from 2025. In Wisconsin, some fruit blossoms and garden plants were nipped by the frost, and tart cherry losses were 40-50%. In Minnesota, some estimates suggested 30-40% apple yield loss for some areas. In central Kentucky, May frost injured late-planted corn.

Freeze injury (frost rings) on the calyx end of fruit (Credit: UW Extension)

Flooded soils resulted in crop damage and replanting across southern Indiana and parts of Missouri in May.

Heavy Rain and Flooding

Heavy rainfall over deep snowpack in April resulted in weeks of widespread flooding across lower Michigan. Flood waters washed away roads and damaged homes in the north. Further south, the Muskegon River crested at record levels, prompting evacuations and damaging infrastructure. In northeast Wisconsin, historic flooding affected the Wolf River basin. Grundy County (north-central Missouri) picked up 8.8 inches of rain on May 17 causing flash flooding, water rescues, and roadway damage. In southern Iowa, Mount Ayr had two +5-inch rain events over 3 days in May.

Flooding in Shiocton, WI (Credit: Outagamie EM)

May Dryness

Following an extremely wet April, the upper Midwest rapidly turned dry in May, causing stressed lawns and gardens, poor pasture conditions, low soil moisture, and low reservoir and stock ponds in Minnesota and Wisconsin. Northern Illinois also had rapid drying that reduced plant growth, stressed trees, and increased water demand.

Regional Outlook – *July - September 2026*

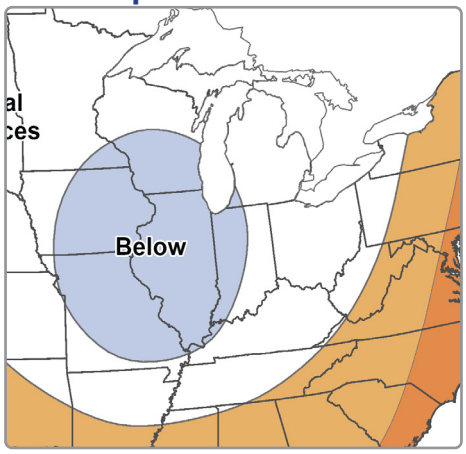
NOAA forecasters are predicting a slight chance of below-normal temperatures in the central Midwest, with equal chances of above-, below-, or near-normal temperatures around the perimeter of the region. The precipitation outlook shows a slight chance of below-normal precipitation in upper Midwest and equal chances of above-, below-, or near-normal precipitation across the lower Midwest.

Drought is expected persist and expand in the northern half of Minnesota and improve in Missouri and Kentucky.

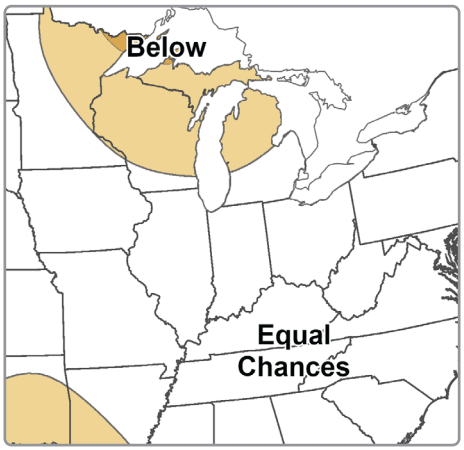
El Niño conditions have developed and an Advisory has been issued. El Niño conditions are forecast to strengthen. Based on past strong El Niños, the risk of extended extreme heat may be lower than usual across the Midwest.

If cooler conditions prevail there may be delayed crop development by late summer and early fall in the upper Midwest and eastern half of the region.

Temperature Outlook



Precipitation Outlook



Midwest Partners

- Midwestern Regional Climate Center
- American Association of State Climatologists
- National Integrated Drought Information System
- USDA Midwest Climate Hub
- National Drought Mitigation Center
- NWS Climate Prediction Center
- NWS Central Region Headquarters
- North Central River Forecast Center
- Ohio River Forecast Center
- National Centers for Enviro. Info

Contact: Melissa Widhalm (mwidhalm@purdue.edu)