

January 2003 Weather in Review for Oklahoma

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In terms of cold weather, Oklahoma dodged the proverbial bullet during January. While frigid temperatures and a steady procession of snowstorms have paralyzed the country's northeast, Oklahoma has faced only intermittent bouts with the bone-chilling cold. For the most part, the periodic intrusions of arctic air shifted quickly to the northeast, which often left the state with relatively warm temperatures and bright sunshine. Unfortunately, the tranquil weather came with a price, as the shift of the storm systems to the north limited the state's precipitation for the month. Data from the Oklahoma Mesonet indicated that the month was the 2nd-driest and 41st-coolest January the state has experienced since record-keeping began in 1892.

The statewide-averaged temperature finished 0.1 degrees below normal at 36.7 degrees. The month began on an odd note, with light snow falling across northern Oklahoma even as temperatures across the southeast soared into the 60s. A mere two days later, the same areas that had snow experienced the upper 60s. That pattern set the tone for the remainder of the month, as rapidly moving weather systems traveled through the state every few days. An extended cold period did actually occur during the 21st through the 24th when an extremely cold dome of arctic air settled over the state. Another preview of spring soon replaced the single-digit lows and below-zero wind chills, however, when highs once again reached into the 70s on the 28th. The high temperature for the month occurred that day, as Erick reached 79 degrees. Tulsa set a record high of 75 degrees on the 8th, which broke the old record of 71 degrees, set in 1923.

With minimal snowfall and a scant few days with significant rainfall, the statewide-averaged precipitation was a paltry 0.07 inches, 1.39 inches below normal. Only January 1986 was drier with 0.04 inches of precipitation. The 1.39-inch deficit could exacerbate developing drought conditions. The U.S. Drought Monitor has identified that moderate-drought conditions have crept into northeastern and far western portions of the state. Data from the Mesonet's soil moisture network, however, indicate that soil layers down to 75 cm statewide currently are quite moist because of abundant December precipitation. Sallisaw had the greatest precipitation total for January with 0.38 inches. Nineteen of 115 Mesonet stations received no precipitation for the month.

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