Spring Weather Review

Highlights: Much-needed rain arrived across much of the Corn Belt (except southwestern areas) in May, boosting topsoil moisture for summer crop establishment and easing long-term drought. In contrast, areas from eastern Louisiana to the southern Atlantic Coast endured further drought intensification. Unfavorably dry conditions also persisted from the southern Rockies to western and southern Texas, while wet weather affected the Northeast.

Spring temperatures averaged above normal nearly nationwide, despite cool weather in the East during April. March-May readings ranged from 1 to 5°F above normal in the Plains and Corn Belt, and were as much as 3°F above normal in the Southeast. In the Southwest, where persistently warm conditions prevailed, temperatures averaged up to 6°F above normal. The warmth accelerated crop development across the country, but left some areas vulnerable to occasional cold snaps, including the interior Southeast on April 5 and 9 and the central High Plains on May 13.

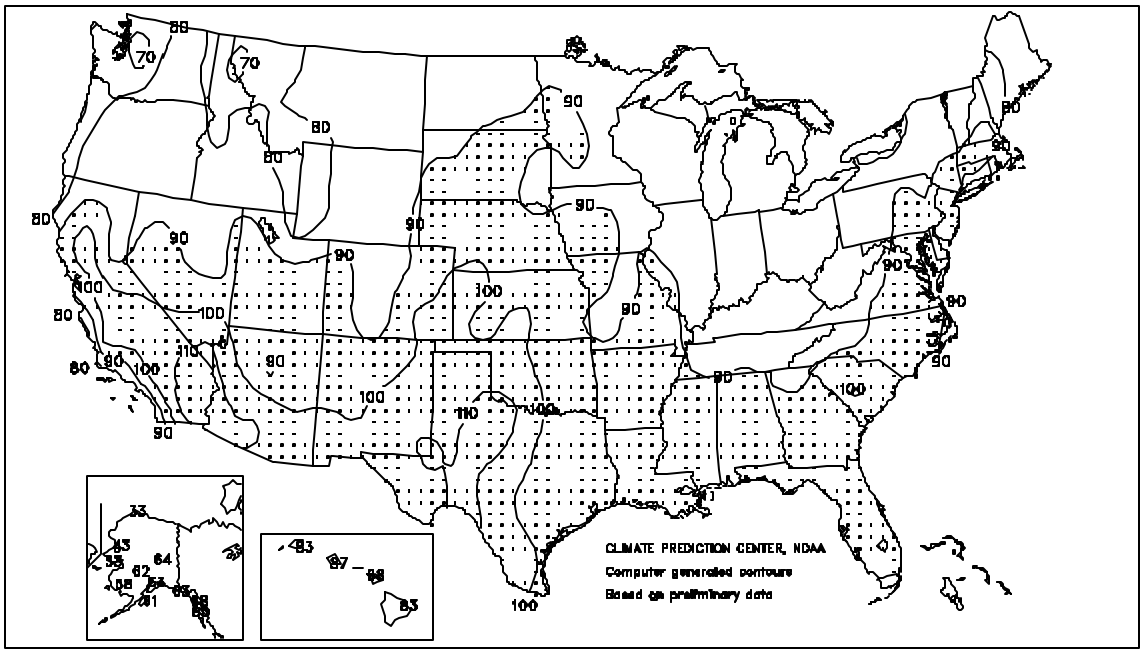
March: An active storm track brought frequent, generally beneficial precipitation to key hard red winter wheat areas of the central and southern Plains. The precipitation arrived too late on the southern High Plains to provide significant relief to dryland winter wheat, but boosted summer crop pre-planting moisture. Meanwhile, areas from eastern Texas into the Southeast received frequent showers, benefiting pastures and newly planted summer crops, but failing to significantly dent long-term drought. Rainfall intensified in late March across the South, causing fieldwork delays. Farther north, occasional light precipitation dampened soft red winter wheat areas of the southern and eastern Corn Belt. Across the remainder of the Corn Belt, mostly dry weather left topsoil moisture limited and caused further long-term drought intensification. California's 9-week wet spell ended in early March, followed by mild, favorably dry weather that permitted an acceleration of spring fieldwork. Near- to above-normal temperatures prevailed nationwide for the fifth consecutive month, spurring winter wheat to break dormancy across the North and promoting rapid crop development elsewhere. Temperatures averaged 3 to 11°F above normal east of the Rockies, except in a few areas from the central and southern Plains into the Southeast. Readings averaged within 3°F of normal in most areas from the West Coast to the Rockies.

April: Much-needed rain boosted topsoil moisture in the eastern Corn Belt, but dryness continued to intensify in western areas. Meanwhile, heavy rainfall eased or erased drought from eastern Texas to the interior Southeast, but long-term moisture deficits continued to mount across the lower Southeast. Variable amounts of rain fell on the Plains, maintaining generally favorable topsoil moisture levels in key winter wheat areas. In contrast, most of southern and western Texas remained extremely dry. Following beneficial March precipitation, dry weather returned to the Southwest. Farther west, mid-month storminess elevated monthly precipitation totals well above normal in much of California and the Northwest. The month's most significant cold snaps caused only localized damage to winter wheat, fruit-tree blooms, and emerging summer crops, affecting the central Plains on April 4, 8, and 16, and the Southeast on April 5 and 9. Cooler-than-normal weather prevailed across the eastern half of the Nation, ending a 5-month warm spell. Monthly temperatures averaged as much as 4°F below normal in the Southeast, but ranged from 2 to 8°F above normal in the Southwest.

May: Heavy rainfall soaked the northern Corn Belt, easing or eliminating long-term drought, while dryness persisted in the southwestern Corn Belt. Mostly dry weather, accompanied by occasional extreme heat, stressed dryland crops and increased irrigation requirements in the Southwest, Southeast, and central and southern Plains. In the latter region, the heat and dryness accelerated winter wheat maturation and initial wheat harvesting. Meanwhile, late-month precipitation aided drought-stressed small grains on the northern Plains. Heavy rainfall slowed fieldwork and crop development in the Northeast, but provided significant long-term drought relief in the western Gulf Coast region. In northern and central California, favorably warm, dry weather followed scattered early- to mid-month showers. The month's most significant freeze affected the central High Plains on May 13, adversely affecting heading winter wheat. Nevertheless, below-normal monthly temperatures were confined to northern New England (as much as 3°F below normal). A late-month heat wave gripped areas from the Southwest to the central and southern Plains, propelling monthly temperatures 2 to 7°F above normal. Elsewhere, monthly readings ranged from 2 to 5°F above normal in the Southeast and 1 to 3°F above normal in the Corn Belt.

Extreme Maximum Temperature (°F)

MAR – MAY 2000



A late-spring heat wave set more than three dozen May high-temperature records from the Southwest to the central and southern Plains. On May 24, highs soared to 110°F in Carlsbad, NM, 112°F in Frederick, OK, and 113°F at Dyess Air Force Base near Abilene, TX. Five days later in Colorado, spring temperature records were eclipsed by 6°F in Grand Junction (101°F) and Durango (98°F). Extreme heat also periodically overspread the Southeast, where Columbia, SC (101°F on May 25) just missed their spring record (102°F on May 23, 1941).