Quarterly Climate Impacts and Outlook

Midwest Region

March 2026

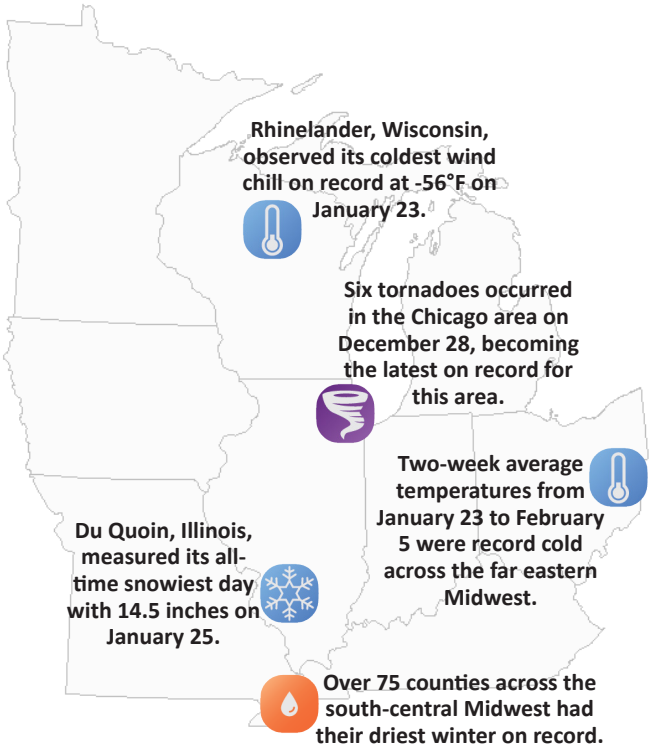
Midwest Significant Events – *December 2025 - February 2026*

December started chilly, but a mid-month thaw melted away November's snowpack across much of the region. A strong system traversed the Midwest December 28-29, bringing blizzard conditions to the north and tornadoes to the south.

Early January warmth was widespread but short-lived. A large-scale pattern shift mid-month ushered in frigid air and gusty winds across the region, which persisted for a couple of weeks. A powerful winter storm crossed the lower Midwest January 24-26, dropping 8 to 18 inches of snow along an axis from southwest Missouri to northeast Ohio and blanketing Kentucky with 0.25 to 1 inch of freezing rain. Air temperatures reached -30°F to -40°F in the north and -10°F to -20°F in the south.

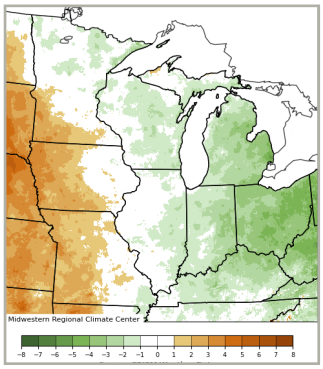
An active pattern of clipper systems and lake-effect snow continued across the far upper Midwest in February, adding to near-record winter precipitation and snowfall, and above-normal winter snowpack, especially across Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

Low pressure moved across the upper Midwest February 17-21, bringing feet of snow to northeast Minnesota while pulling warm air into the central Midwest. A dozen tornadoes touched down in Illinois and Indiana on February 19.

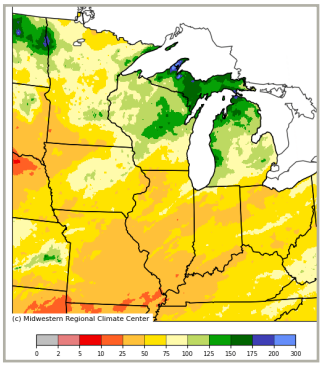


Regional Climate Overview – *December 2025 - February 2026*

Winter Temperature
Departure from Normal (°F)



Winter Precipitation
% of Normal

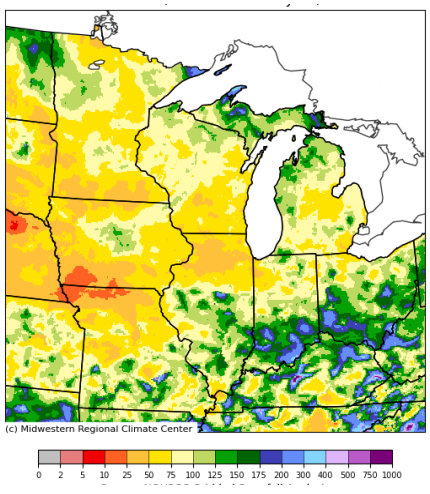


Winter (Dec to Feb) temperatures ranged from above to below normal from west to east across the Midwest (top-left map). This general west-to-east pattern persisted across all three winter months. February temperatures were notably warm in the western half of the region. Missouri had it 9th and Iowa had its 11th warmest February since 1895.

The Midwest had its 7th driest winter (Dec to Feb) on record, with region wide precipitation just 61 percent of normal. Precipitation was above normal around the central and western Great Lakes and below normal across the lower half of the Midwest (bottom-left map). This general pattern of wetter in the north and drier in the south persisted across all winter months. Winter precipitation was ranked 2nd driest in Missouri, 4th driest in Illinois and Kentucky, and 6th driest in Indiana and Ohio.

Snowfall was near or above normal across the far lower Midwest and downwind of Lakes Superior and Michigan and below normal in the central and northwest portions of the region (bottom-right map). In the north, repeated lake-effect snow throughout winter contributed to high seasonal snowfall totals, whereas above-normal snowfall in the south was driven by just a few high-impact events in December and January. Across the lower Midwest, snowpack had low moisture content and did not persist, providing little to no drought relief.

Winter Snowfall
Percent of average



Contact: Melissa Widhalm (mwidhalm@purdue.edu)

Regional Impacts – *December 2025 - February 2026*

Winter Storms

The winter storm from January 24-26 brought deep snow, freezing rain, and dangerous wind chills across the lower Midwest. Frigid air rendered road pretreatments ineffective, prolonging poor road conditions after the storm passed. Schools across Kentucky were closed all week due to dangerous roadways and power outages. Southern Indiana and southern Illinois schools were closed for about 2 to 4 days following the storm. At least 22 storm-related fatalities occurred in Kentucky and 13 fatalities in Indiana.

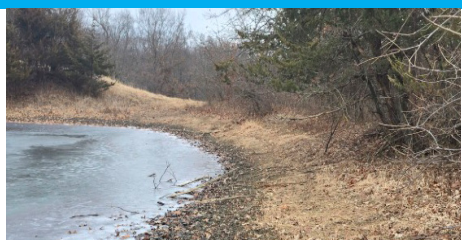
Ice accumulation in Scottsville, KY on Jan 25, 2026 (Credit: K. Keown)

Tourism and Recreation

Despite reduced seasonal snow totals, northern Wisconsin had ideal conditions for snowmobiling and cross-country skiing for most of January and February. Conditions were favorable for ice fishing in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Ohio. Warm February temperatures brought an early end to Iowa's ice fishing, and low winter snow reduced recreation in western Iowa. Henry County, in east-central Indiana, had an excellent maple syrup season, with sap flowing for most of February.

Drought

Drought severity intensified and coverage expanded in winter--which is unusual--across Missouri, Illinois, northern Indiana, and northwest Ohio. In February, the City of Sullivan, Illinois, declared a water emergency. Bloomington, Illinois, implemented additional water restrictions in response to declining lake levels. Major rivers were at near-record low stage nearly all winter.



Low pond in southeast Iowa on Feb 15, 2026 (Credit: NDMC/CMOR)

February Blizzard

The combination of steep terrain and extreme snow totals from Feb 17-19, resulted in snow removal delays up to 5 days in northeast Minnesota, which is unusual in an area accustomed to high snowfall. Hovland's 3-day snow total reached 40.4 inches, becoming the state's second largest storm total on record.

Regional Outlook – *April - June 2026*

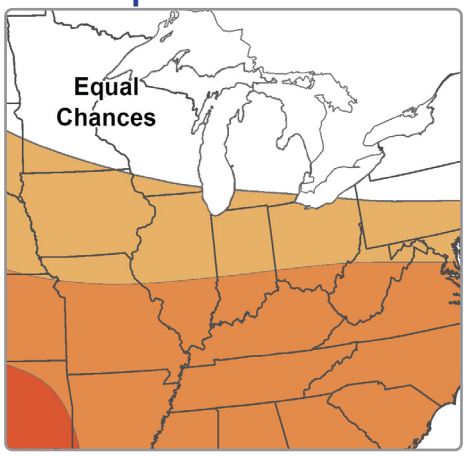
NOAA forecasters are predicting equal chances of above-, below-, or near-normal temperatures across the upper Midwest with chances for above-normal temperatures increasing further south. The precipitation outlook shows a slight chance of above-normal precipitation in Michigan and Ohio while the rest of the Midwest has equal chances of above-, below-, or near-normal precipitation.

Drought is expected to remain but improve for most of the region.

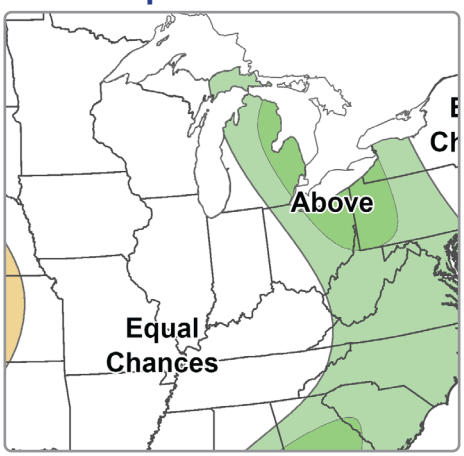
The spring flood outlook suggests an above-normal flood risk for Michigan's Upper Peninsula due to significant snowpack. The spring flood risk throughout the Mississippi basin ranges from near normal to below normal, with near-normal spring flood risk in the Ohio River basin.

An El Niño Watch has been issued, with a 62% chance El Niño conditions will emerge in mid-2026.

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)