

An Uncommon July Brings Drought Relief

August 1, 2013

It was not the wettest July on record in Oklahoma, at least not on a statewide basis. That mark belongs to 1950's statewide average of 9.26 inches. Nor was it the coolest. That title is held by 1906's statewide average of 75.9 degrees. Nevertheless, this July will be remembered as one of the wettest and mildest in recent memory, especially compared to the blast furnace versions of the last few summers. It featured a July 4th holiday with highs in the 80s and lows in the 50s, and enough rain to kick drought to the curb across much of the state. According to preliminary data from the Oklahoma Mesonet, July's statewide average precipitation total was 5.11 inches, a surplus of 2.37 inches and ranked as the 15th wettest since records began in 1895. The statewide average temperature was a very pleasant 79.6 degrees, 2 degrees below normal and the 28th coolest July on record. The highest temperature recorded during the month was 107 degrees at Alva, Buffalo and Freedom on the ninth, and again at Grandfield on the 11th. The lowest temperature reported was an unseasonably chilly 49 degrees at Seiling on July 2.

While nearly all areas of the state received beneficial rain, a wide discrepancy existed between locations. The Mesonet's Kingfisher site led the state with 10.99 inches of rainfall during July while Goodwell brought up the rear at 1.02 inches. Oklahoma City's total of 9.84 inches, 6.91 inches above normal, ranked this July as its second wettest on record, bested only by 1996's 11.9 inches. That also keeps Oklahoma City on pace to have its wettest calendar year on record with a January-July total of 41.69 inches, more than 3 inches ahead of 2007's total of 38.15 inches over the same period. The calendar year record for Oklahoma City currently stands at 56.95 inches from that same year of 2007. Records for Oklahoma City date back to 1891. On the other side of the moisture spectrum, the Mesonet site at Goodwell has recorded a meager 5.2 inches of rain since the first of the year. That's the third driest January-July for that area since 1910. Not surprisingly, 2011 earned the driest mark for Goodwell with 1.73 inches.

The latest U.S. Drought Monitor report reflects the abundant July rainfall, especially across the eastern two-thirds of the state. Only 1.4 percent of the state is labeled within exceptional drought. That is a reduction from 8.7 percent at the end of June. Over 62 percent of the state is now drought free, primarily from central through eastern Oklahoma. Only 41 percent of the state was free from drought at the end of May, according to the Drought Monitor. The entire state was labeled in some intensity of drought at the beginning of the year, including 37 percent of the state in the exceptional category. The far western edge, including the Panhandle, remains in drought categorized as being at least in the extreme category. The Drought Monitor's intensity scale slides from moderate-severe-extreme-exceptional, with exceptional being the worst category.

The monthly outlooks for August from the National Weather Service's Climate Prediction Center indicate an increased chance for above normal temperatures across southwestern Oklahoma and the Panhandle, but no indications of above-, below- or near-normal precipitation across the state. The U.S. Monthly Drought Outlook for August has drought improving across the northwestern quarter of the state, along with the Panhandle areas of Oklahoma and Texas. Drought is expected to persist across southwestern Oklahoma. No development of drought is expected across the eastern two-thirds of the state through the end of August.

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