

July was a hot one, but here's what NOAA sees ahead for the US

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Many of our American readers don't need a news article to tell them it has been hot. California is going through a horrific stretch of heat, wildfires, and rolling blackouts. Hopefully, none of you were in Death Valley to see an unspeakable record 130°F mark set last Sunday, so your eyebrows are merely raised and not singed. Beyond the West, portions of the Northeast just experienced weeks of unrelenting hot weather. Nevertheless, NOAA's monthly summary and outlook could give you a bigger picture of what the weather's like outside your neck of the woods.

Globally, July tied 2016 for the second warmest July on record (2019 being first). It was also the second warmest for North America, though it clocks in slightly lower at 11th warmest for the Contiguous US. Temperatures were near average in the Pacific Northwest and some Central Plains states but quite warm in the Southwest and extremely warm in the Northeast.

Of 35 weather station sites with the longest records in the Northeast, July was the hottest month *period* at 11 of them. At seven sites, including Baltimore, DC, and Philadelphia, July also set a record for the most number of days hitting

90°F—that happened 28 times in DC, for example.

Looking from January through July, 2020 is the second warmest year on record for the globe so far. At this point, it's extremely likely to end up either number 1 or number 2 at the end of the year. NOAA currently gives it about a 37 percent chance of setting a new record, although two other groups have those odds at about 70 percent.

As for precipitation, the story in the US was mixed. A number of states in the middle third of the US saw above average rainfall while much of the West was dry. Nevada had its 11th driest July on record, Arizona had its sixth driest, and California had its 16th driest—helping set the stage for the current fires.

Over a third of the US is currently in drought, with the worst of it stretching from Texas clear to Oregon. Outside of that region, Iowa is in a drought—with farms hammered by damaging winds in a recent derecho storm, to boot—and the Northeast is also experiencing a drought. July's rainfall was slightly better for many areas of the Northeast, but the warmth combined with well-below-average rainfall in May and June has kept things dry.

- Several Mid-Atlantic and Northeastern states had their warmest July on record.
- Only the middle third of the country saw above average rainfall in July.
- July was particularly dry in the Southwest.
- In the last month, the area under drought ticked up from 33% to 37%.

Turning to the coming weeks and months, the all-important temperature patterns in the Pacific Ocean have turned interesting. After a protracted run of neutral conditions in between an El Niño and La Niña, upwelling colder water has

come to the surface in the eastern equatorial Pacific, meaning it's starting to look a lot like a La Niña. NOAA's forecast is now a La Niña watch, with about 60 percent odds that things go that way this fall and winter. That can have a big impact on US weather patterns, and as we noted recently, it was a factor in updating the outlook for an active Atlantic hurricane season.

NOAA produces one-month and three-month weather outlooks based on factors like that, as well as long-term trends and model simulations. These models indicate that for September, the West, Northeast, and Florida are all likely to see above average temperatures. Alaska is, too, for the predictable reason that sea ice is forming later in the year than it used to. Unfortunately, the dry Intermountain West can expect more below-average rain. Parts of the Southeast, on the other hand, are teed-up for above average rain, largely because of the active hurricane season.

- Here is where the odds lean above average for September temperatures.
- Odds of extra rain in the coastal Southeast are up in an active hurricane season.
- The precipitation outlook shifts slightly into October and November.
- The outlook through November is... warm.
- Good news for drought in a few spots, but not for most of the West.

Looking through November, the story isn't much different. Everything tilts toward above average temperatures, though odds are weakest from the Pacific Northwest into the Midwest, where a La Niña could send a little cooler weather. The precipitation outlook is also similar, with perhaps a little relief in Arizona and New Mexico, but with stronger odds of dry weather extending into Oklahoma.

That means drought conditions are expected to persist or worsen across the Southwest, while improvement is expected in parts of the Pacific Northwest, Iowa, and the Northeast.

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