

IOWA PRELIMINARY MONTHLY WEATHER SUMMARY – MARCH 2009

General Summary. March temperatures averaged 37.7° or 1.7° above normal while precipitation totaled 3.04 inches or 0.83 inches greater than normal. This ranks as the 43rd warmest and 21st wettest March among 137 years of state records.

Temperatures. As has been the case for each of the past four months there were many wide extremes in temperature across Iowa during March. There were three periods of cold weather during the month. Temperatures were below normal from the 1st through the 3rd with lows down to -7° at Little Sioux on the morning of the 1st. Cold weather also prevailed from the 10th to the 13th with Sibley reporting a low of -7° on the morning of the 11th. Finally, cold weather returned late in the month from the 25th to the 29th with Sibley recording a low of 14° on the morning of the 27th. In between these cold extremes the temperature soared to 79° at Bedford and Shenandoah on afternoon of the 5th. However, Leon was the hot spot for the month with an 81° maximum on the afternoon of the 17th. Temperatures failed to reach 80° anywhere in Iowa until April 21 of last year.

Heating Degree Day Totals. Home heating requirements, as estimated by heating degree day totals, averaged 17% less than last March and 7% less than normal. Heating degree day totals so far this season (since July 1, 2008) are running 3% less than last season and the same as normal. However, prices for natural gas are considerably lower this season compared to last year, thus many consumers have seen much lower heating bills compared to one year ago.

Precipitation. There were two wet periods during March that accounted for most of the month's precipitation total. A pair of storm systems on the 7th-8th and 9th-10th brought a statewide average of 1.81 inches of precipitation. Most of this precipitation fell in the form of rain with greatest amounts over southeastern Iowa where two to three inch totals were common. The second major storm system dropped an average of 1.04 inches of rain over Iowa from the 22nd to the 24th. Heaviest rains fell over a wide band roughly along Interstate 35 through central sections of the state where one to two inch totals were common. Fortunately, these two wet episodes were preceded by an extended period of mostly dry weather. Thus, while flooding was widespread with both events impacts were mostly minor. March precipitation was the third highest of record for the south central and southeast climate districts, but was below normal over northern and western Iowa. Preliminary monthly precipitation totals vary from only 0.66 inches at Cresco to 6.18 inches at Burlington. Indianola recorded their wettest March ever among 123 years of record with 6.06 inches (old record 5.23 in 1951). A final storm system on the 28th brought the largest snow event of the month with one to two inches of snow common across the southeast one-half of the state. There were a few localized bands of heavier snowfall with 3 to 7 inches reported across Linn County. Very little snow fell during the month over northwestern Iowa. The statewide average snowfall was 1.4 inches or 3.4 inches less than normal. This was Iowa's least snowy March since 1997 and ranks 15th least snow for the month among 122 years of records.

Severe Weather. Large hail was reported from several far southeast Iowa locations on the 7th while severe storms were reported from 16 western Iowa counties on the 23rd. The season's first five tornadoes were reported across southwestern Iowa on the evening of the 23rd with an F-2 rated storm near Missouri Valley.

Outlook. April frequently has been a wetter than normal month across Iowa during years with a La Niña event in place, such as is the case now. Current shorter range outlooks from the National Weather Service favor a rather cold and wet first week to week and one-half of the month.

Harry J. Hillaker, State Climatologist
Iowa Dept. of Agriculture & Land Stewardship
Wallace State Office Bldg.
Des Moines, IA 50319
Telephone: (515) 281-8981
E-mail: Harry.Hillaker@IowaAgriculture.gov