

IOWA MONTHLY WEATHER SUMMARY

March 2002

General Summary. March temperatures averaged 30.6° or 5.1° below normal while precipitation totaled 1.25 inches or 0.94 inch less than normal. This ranks as the 27th coldest and 33rd driest March among 130 years of state records.

Temperatures. The turn toward colder weather that began in late February continued through much of March. In fact, the coldest weather of the winter arrived in early March. Afternoon highs were in the single digits across much of Iowa on the 3rd with a high of only 4° at Britt and Fort Dodge. Temperatures statewide fell below zero on the 3rd-4th with Elkader reporting the winter's lowest temperature with a -18° reading on the morning of the 4th. The first full day of spring brought a continuation of very cold weather with Lake Park reporting a morning low of 6° and an afternoon high of only 13° on the 21st. A strong frontal boundary was in place across the central U.S. for much of the month with this boundary occasionally lifting northward into Iowa. As a result very sharp contrasts in temperatures were frequently seen through the month. Daytime high temperatures on the 5th varied from 30° at Northwood to 68° at Shenandoah and Sidney. On the 8th daytime highs ranged from 24° at Sibley up to 67° at Burlington. Finally, on the 14th several southern Iowa locations set daily high temperatures records with Mount Ayr being the warmest with a 79° maximum. Meanwhile on this same date several northwest Iowa locations warmed to only 31° with freezing rain and snow.

Heating Degree Day Totals. Home heating requirements, as estimated by heating degree day totals, averaged 16% greater than normal but 2% less than last March. Thus far this heating season, heating requirements have averaged 14% less than normal and 22% less than last season at this time.

Precipitation. A pair of strong storm systems early in the month provided near normal precipitation for the first one-half of the month. However, only light precipitation dampened the state during the second half of March. The month opened with a snowstorm on the 1st-2nd with snowfall amounts varying from around two inches in far southern Iowa and in the extreme northwest corner of the state with 4 to 7 inch amounts common across the central third of the state from Onawa to Clinton. The month's largest precipitation event began on the 7th and continued through the 9th. This storm brought ice accumulations of an inch or more to an area centered on Palo Alto and Emmet Counties; rainfall amounts averaging around one-half inch across the southeast half of Iowa with snowfall totals of 4 to 6 inches in far northwest areas of the state. The only significant precipitation event of the second half of the month was restricted to about the southern one-fourth of Iowa on the 24th-25th with 2 to 5 inches of snow reported. Overall monthly precipitation totals were well below normal in a band from Glenwood in southwest Iowa northeastward into central and northeast Iowa. Precipitation amounts were near normal in far southeastern Iowa as well as over portions of northwest Iowa. Monthly precipitation totals ranged from 0.40 inch at Ames to 2.67 inches at Lorimor. Monthly snowfall totals varied from 1.5 inches at Popejoy to 14.9 inches at Little Sioux.