February & Winter 2026 Climate Summary

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After two months of what felt like Wisconsin's most "normal" winter in recent years, February closed out the season with record warmth and spotty snowfall.

- 14th warmest February on record.
- Isolated February precipitation left some wanting.
- Slightly cooler- and drier-than-average winter.

February Warmth Closes Out Winter

February brought a dramatic temperature swing to Wisconsin, starting and ending with chilly conditions but featuring an exceptionally mild stretch mid-month.

The month began with a sharp cold snap, when temperatures dropped to minus 18 degrees Fahrenheit in Big Falls (Rusk County) on February 2, the coldest reading in the state during February.

Just two weeks later, springlike warmth swept across Wisconsin, pushing temperatures into the 60s for some.

On February 16, Milwaukee set a daily record-high temperature of 63 degrees. The previous record was 56 degrees, set in 1921. This was Milwaukee's earliest 60-degree temperature since 2013 (January 29).

In Madison, temperatures reached 64 degrees on February 16, shattering the previous daily record of 57 degrees. A high of 64 is especially notable as Madison typically does not reach that temperature until early May.

The warm spell also produced a streak of six consecutive days with highs at or above 50 degrees in Madison and La Crosse (February 13 through 18). Madison has only

experienced a February warm streak this long once before, in 2017. In La Crosse, it has occurred three other times — 2017, 2000, and 1981 — with the 2000 streak lasting eight days.

The warmest readings of the month reached 66 degrees in Prairie du Chien (Crawford County) on February 16 and Dodgeville (Iowa County) on February 17.

Statewide, February averaged 25 degrees, which is 5.8 degrees above normal. This made it the 14th warmest February on record *and* the warmest monthly temperature anomaly Wisconsin has seen since February 2024 (Figures 1 and 2).

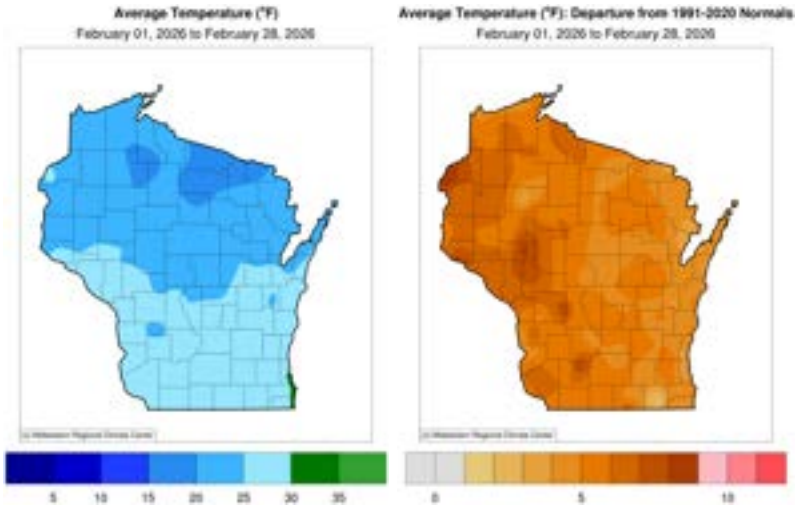

Figure 1 (left). February average temperature in degrees Fahrenheit. Average temperatures ranged from 15 to 20 degrees in north-central Wisconsin, 20 to 25 degrees across most of the northern half of the state, and 25 to 30 degrees across most of the southern half of Wisconsin.

Figure 1 (right). February average temperature departure from normal. The state averaged four to seven degrees warmer than normal, with the western half of the state seeing the largest anomalies.

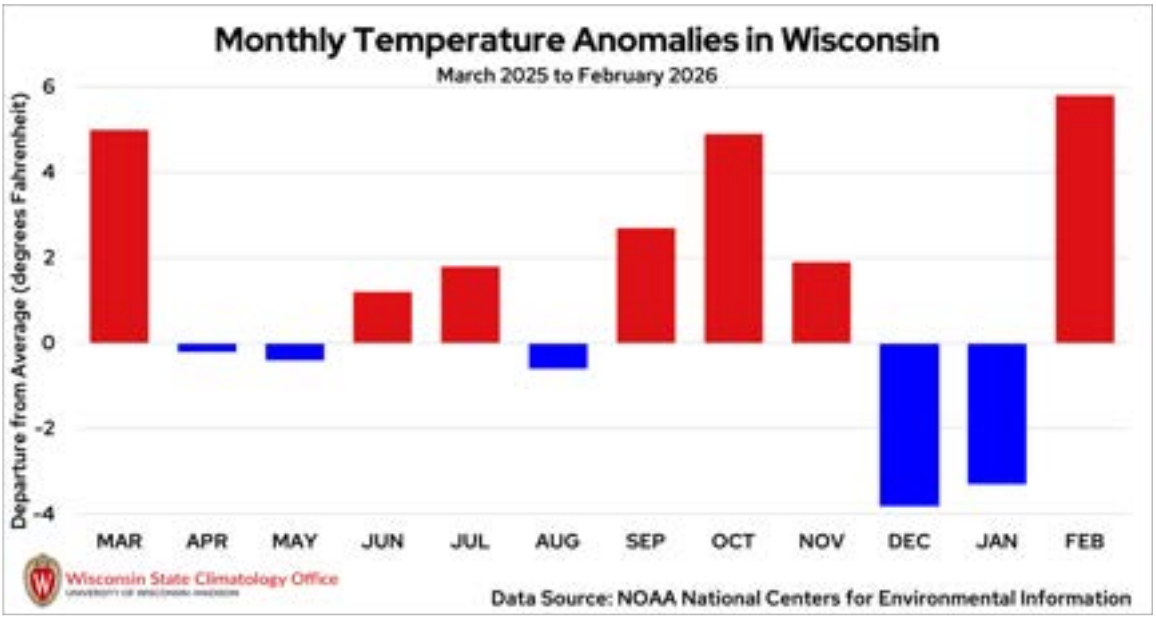

Figure 2. Monthly statewide average temperature anomalies in degrees Fahrenheit for Wisconsin between March 2025 and February 2026 compared to the 1991 to 2020 average. Temperature anomalies are from NOAA's National Centers for Environmental Information.

As a whole, winter ended very close to normal in terms of temperature, though conditions swung dramatically.

December began the season with an intense Arctic blast, producing the state's coldest monthly temperature anomaly since April 2022. January continued the cold trend overall. February then flipped the script, ending the season with unusually warm temperatures.

In the end, winter averaged 18.2 degrees statewide, just 0.3 degrees below normal (Figure 3).

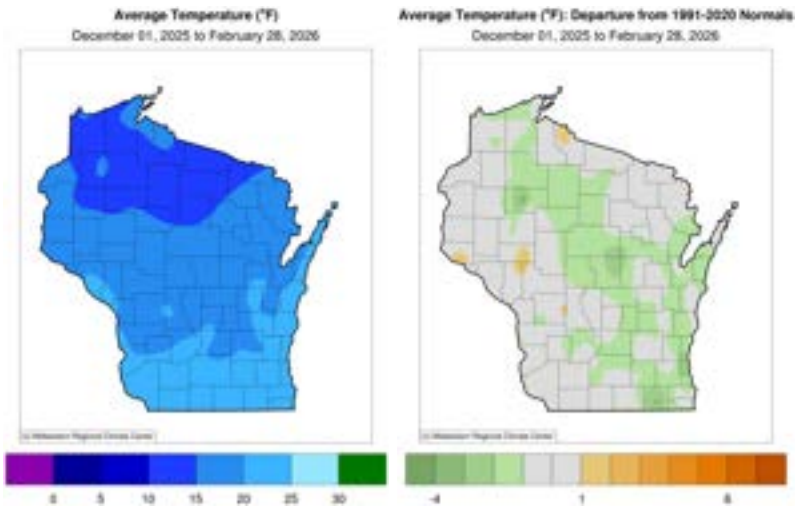

Figure 3 (left). Winter average temperature in degrees Fahrenheit. Average temperatures ranged from 10 to 15 degrees across parts of northern Wisconsin, 15 to 20 degrees for much of central Wisconsin, and 20 to 25 degrees across southern Wisconsin. Along Lake Michigan and the Mississippi River from southwestern to west-central Wisconsin, temperatures also averaged 20 to 25 degrees.

Figure 3 (right). Winter average temperature departure from normal. About half of the state averaged near normal, while mostly the eastern half averaged slightly colder than normal.

Isolated Precipitation

February was remarkably quiet in terms of snow or rainstorms, though the few storms that did occur packed a punch.

Overall, the state averaged 0.92 inches of precipitation, which is 0.22 inches drier than normal. Most of that moisture arrived in two mid-month weather systems.

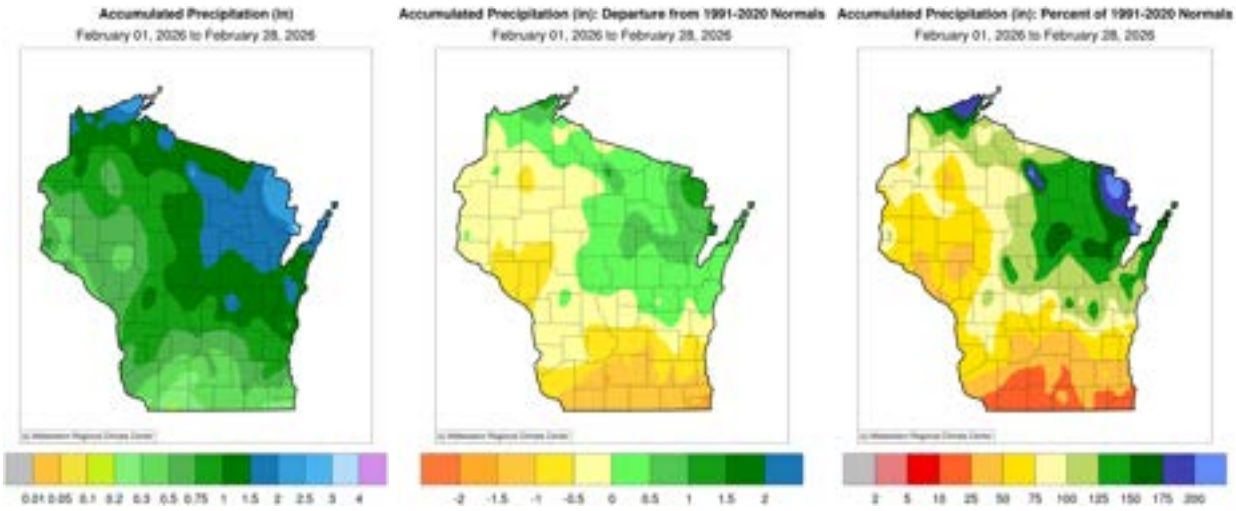

Figure 4 (left). February accumulated total precipitation in inches. Much of northeast Wisconsin received 1.5 to two inches while southern counties received less than a half inch.

Figure 4 (middle). February precipitation departure from average, where the southern region fell short by more than an inch.

Figure 4 (right). February precipitation percent of normal, highlighting the stark difference between northeast and southern Wisconsin. Portions of Marinette and Florence counties received 200 percent of normal February precipitation, while counties along the southern stateline received only 10 to 25 percent.

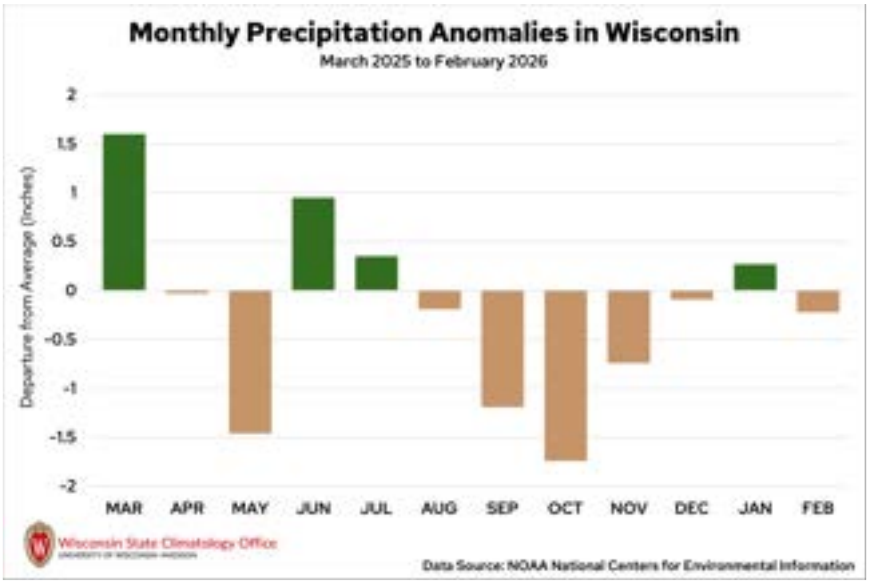

Figure 5. Monthly statewide average precipitation anomalies in inches for Wisconsin between March 2025 and February 2026 compared to the 1991 to 2020 average. Precipitation anomalies are from NOAA's National Centers for Environmental Information.

On February 17 to 18, the northern side of a storm brought blizzard conditions to northwestern Wisconsin. Meanwhile, the warmer southern side of the storm brought rain and rumbles of thunder to parts of southern and eastern Wisconsin. Small, pea-sized hail was even reported in Portage County.

Wausau measured 0.62 inches of rain from the event, breaking the city's previous February 18 record of 0.60 inches from 1961. Snow totals in the western counties were between two and five inches for most, though some communities closer to Lake Superior reported a foot of fresh snow.

The second storm arrived the next night, February 19, and once again featured a sharp cutoff between rain and snow. Warm temperatures from Madison to Green Bay allowed for rain or a wintry mix, while cooler temperatures from La Crosse to Wausau allowed for snowfall.

A narrow band of heavy snow brought over a half-foot of snow to areas near La Crosse, with portions of Monroe County reporting 12 inches.

Southern Wisconsin severely lacked snowfall throughout February, with many areas reporting less than 10 percent of normal monthly snow (Figure 6). A thin band of snow brought some in the region their only snowfall of the month on February 28. Totals of six inches were seen in parts of Crawford and Vernon counties, while only two to three inches fell from Madison to Milwaukee.

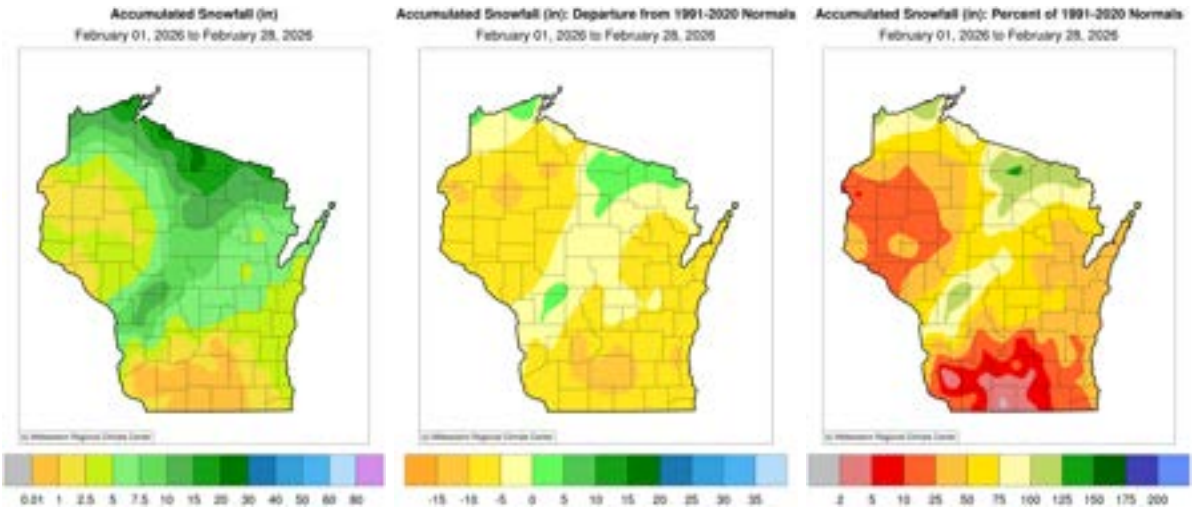

Figure 6 (left). February total accumulated snowfall in inches, where the far northern counties received more than 10 inches. Portions of western and southern Wisconsin received fewer than three inches.

Figure 6 (middle). February accumulated snowfall departure from normal. Deficits of five to 10 inches were seen throughout much of the state.

Figure 6 (right). February accumulated snowfall percent of normal, showcasing the significant snow drought in southern Wisconsin. Green County received only five percent of the normal February snowfall, with a portion of the county receiving only two percent. Only isolated pockets of the state saw more than 100 percent of the monthly normal snowfall.

The winter season was less snowy than typical across Wisconsin, with average statewide snowfall of 29.2 inches, 8.1 inches drier than normal. Many areas received only 50 to 75 percent of normal winter snowfall, while some pockets of southern Wisconsin saw even less. (Figure 7).

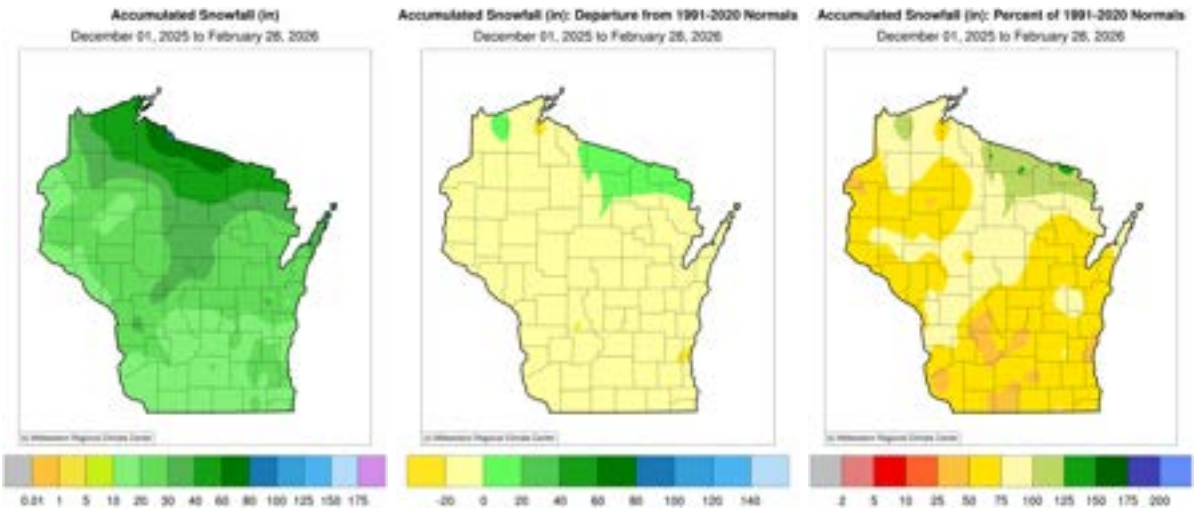

Figure 7 (left). Total winter accumulated snowfall in inches. Portions of Ashland, Iron, and Vilas counties received between 60 and 80 inches of snow, while southern Wisconsin saw less than 30 inches.

Figure 7 (middle). Winter accumulated snowfall departure from normal, where widespread departures of zero to 20 inches were seen across the state.

Figure 7 (right). Winter accumulated snowfall percent of normal. Much of southern and northwestern Wisconsin received only 50 to 75 percent of normal winter snowfall.

In terms of overall winter precipitation, Wisconsin was slightly drier than average by 0.1 inches, with a statewide average of 3.8 inches. The central and northeast regions of the

state were wetter than average by one to two inches, while the southern counties came up short by the same amount (Figure 8).

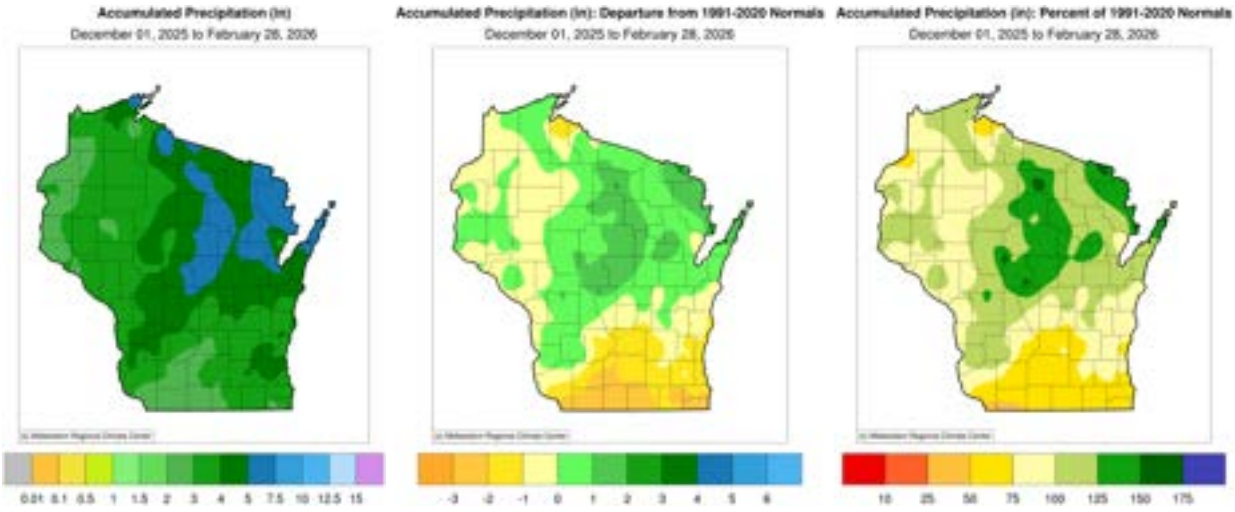

Figure 8 (left). Winter accumulated total precipitation in inches, showing the highest seasonal precipitation totals over five inches in parts of northcentral and northeastern Wisconsin.

Figure 8 (middle). Winter precipitation departure from average, highlighting the significant dryness across the southern counties. Counties along the southern stateline fell short of seasonal averages by two to three inches.

Figure 8 (right). Winter precipitation percent of normal, marking the stark difference between northcentral and southern Wisconsin. Small pockets of over 150 percent of normal precipitation were seen in Oneida, Florence, and Wood counties.

Large differences are seen between overall season snowfall and season precipitation, spotlighting a number of events where rain fell rather than snow. Wisconsin has seen an increase in the number of rainy winter days since 1950 (Figure 9). This winter, rain fell on 8.6 days averaged across the state's first-order stations.

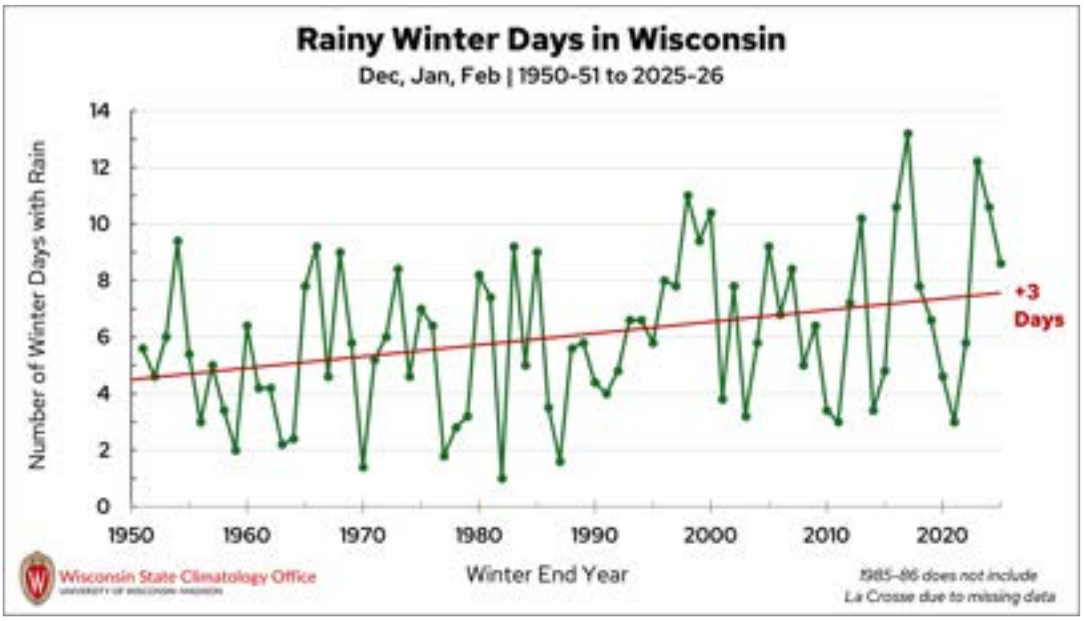

Figure 9. The average number of rainy days each winter across Wisconsin's six first-order stations from 1950 to 2025, with an observed average increase of three days per winter.

Gradual Drought Improvements

While February's spotty precipitation didn't do much to improve Wisconsin's drought conditions, it was just enough to keep conditions from worsening. Heavy rain on February 18 in northeast Wisconsin eliminated severe drought (D2) and diminished the coverage of moderate drought (D1) in the region.

Despite an overall drier-than-average winter season, drought conditions greatly improved in the state between December 1 and February 28 (Figure 10). West central and southeastern counties saw improvements in abnormally dry conditions, and areas of severe drought (D2) shrank in northern Wisconsin.

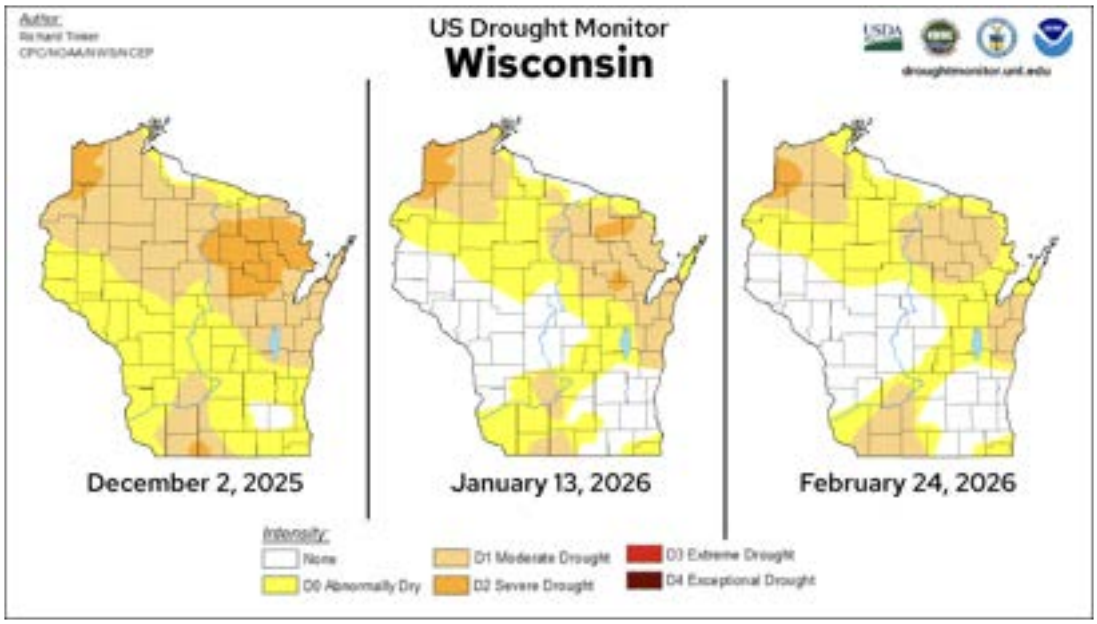

Figure 10. U.S. Drought Monitor conditions in Wisconsin as of December 2, 2025; January 13, 2026; and February 24, 2026. A large reduction in abnormally dry conditions and moderate drought (D1) was observed through the winter season.

Wisconsin's Drought Severity and Coverage Index (DSCI) improved from 1.67 in early December to 0.91 in late February (Figure 11). Although this is the lowest end-of-winter DSCI for the state in the last two years, more than a quarter of Wisconsin remains in drought as the spring growing season approaches.

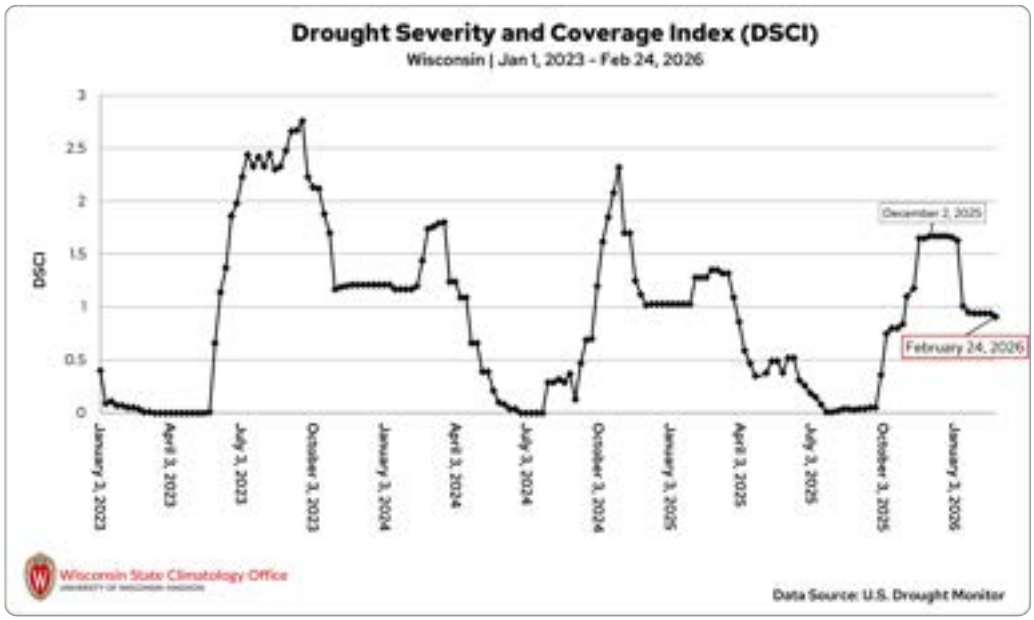

Figure 11. The Drought Severity and Coverage Index (DSCI) for Wisconsin from January 1, 2023, through February 24, 2026. A significant decrease in DSCI was seen through the winter season, particularly during January. Statistics come from the U.S. Drought Monitor.

Lake Ice

Winter's up and down temperatures were reflected in lake ice coverage on both the local and Great lakes. Ice cover was slow to build on Lake Superior through December, but January's cold resulted in a large increase in ice that lasted through mid-February (Figure 12). In fact, conditions along the shoreline were deemed safe enough for the Apostle Islands ice caves to open for the first time since 2015. Conditions were short-lived, though, as strong winds broke up the ice the day after the caves opened.

Figure 12. Ice coverage on Lake Michigan from December 1, 2025 through February 28, 2026 compared to historical average. Coverage was above-average from mid-January to mid-February, peaking at a maximum of 36.7 percent on January 31. Data from NOAA's CoastWatch Great Lakes Regional Node.

Figure 12 (continued). Ice coverage on Lake Superior from December 1, 2025 through February 28, 2026 compared to historical average. Coverage was above-average from late-January to mid-February, peaking at a maximum of 53.4 percent on February 14. Data from NOAA's CoastWatch Great Lakes Regional Node.

Local lakes may have also been slow to freeze, as Lake Mendota in Madison was, but ice thickened quickly. February's warmth threatened ice cover on smaller lakes. Madison's

local lakes remained frozen through February, though small areas of open water had emerged on all three lakes by February 20.

Climate Corner

Though Wisconsin is known as America's Dairyland, some corners of the state boast their ranking in a different industry: maple syrup production. Wisconsin is now the country's third-largest syrup producer, creating a crop valued at $15 million per year.

The weather leading up to and during maple tapping season can determine how successful the harvest will be. Learn more about how weather drives the maple tapping season, Wisconsin's history with maple syrup, and what our future climate could mean for producers in this month's Climate Ed-ucation blog.

Climate Stats by Division

Temperature (degrees Fahrenheit)

	February 2026	
Division	**Avg**	**Dept**
Northwest	22.4	6.2
North Central	21.7	5.6
Northeast	23.3	5.4
West Central	25.5	6.2
Central	26.2	5.9
East Central	26.8	5.5
Southwest	28.4	6.0
South Central	28.8	5.8

Record Coolest
Bottom 1/10
Bottom 1/3
Normal
Top 1/3
Top 1/10
Record Warmest

Southeast	29.5	5.3
State	25.0	5.8

Liquid-Equivalent Precipitation (inches)

	February 2026		Since Nov. 1, 2025	
Division	**Avg**	**Dept**	**Avg**	**Dept**
Northwest	0.70	-0.28	4.22	-0.87
North Central	1.16	0.06	5.97	0.20
Northeast	1.48	0.40	6.05	0.22
West Central	0.64	-0.42	4.67	-0.61
Central	1.08	-0.01	5.37	-0.36
East Central	1.35	0.18	5.44	-0.96
Southwest	0.63	-0.65	4.70	-1.60
South Central	0.49	-0.94	4.36	-2.48
Southeast	0.54	-1.02	5.12	-2.22
State	0.92	-0.22	5.10	-0.76

Record Driest
Bottom 1/10
Bottom 1/3
Normal
Top 1/3
Top 1/10
Record Wettest

Snowfall (inches)

	February 2026	
Division	**Avg**	**Dept**

Below Normal
Normal
Above Normal

Northwest	7.8	-3.8
North Central	12.0	-2.5
Northeast	7.8	-3.8
West Central	5.1	-5.0
Central	7.2	-3.3
East Central	4.9	-6.2
Southwest	2.8	-7.1
South Central	1.0	-9.4
Southeast	2.7	-8.0
State	6.8	-4.7

Table 1. February climate statistics by Wisconsin's climate division, including average temperature in degrees Fahrenheit, liquid-equivalent precipitation (rain plus melted snow) in inches, and snowfall in inches. "Avg" indicates the observed average. "Dept" indicates the departure from the 1991 to 2020 normal. Positive departures reflect above-normal conditions, while negative departures mean below-normal conditions. The shading for temperature and liquid-equivalent precipitation depicts the rank from coolest to warmest and driest to wettest, respectively, for the entire period of record (1895 to 2026). The shading for snowfall depicts whether snowfall was above or below normal and is not based on rankings. The temperature and precipitation statistics come from NOAA's National Centers for Environmental Information Climate at a Glance Tool. The snowfall statistics come from the State Climatology Office's statewide and divisional 12-month averages.

Monthly, seasonal, and annual temperature and precipitation values and rankings published in this report are from NOAA's National Centers for Environmental Information at the time of posting this climate summary. Values and rankings can change after publishing our climate summaries. To check the most recent values and rankings, visit NOAA's National Centers for Environmental Information Climate at a Glance Tool.

This report is a product of the Wisconsin State Climatology Office. For questions and comments, please contact us by email (stclim@aos.wisc.edu) or phone (608-263-2374).