# October 2026 Climate Summary

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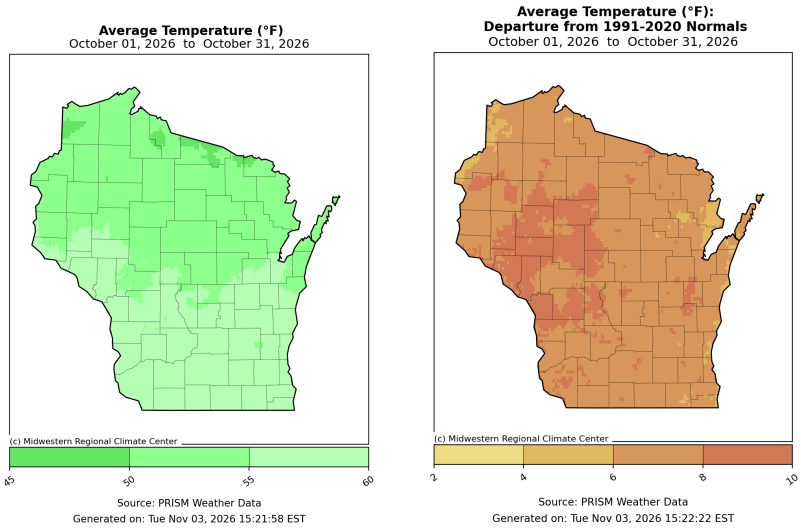
Steve Vavrus, State Climatologist

October was exceptionally warm and abnormally dry as drought deepened in northern Wisconsin and farmers made progress with the harvest.

- Fourth warmest October
- Beneficial rain, lingering deficits
- Exceptional drought expands

## A Toasty October

October was exceptionally warm across Wisconsin, ranking as Wisconsin's fourth-warmest October on record. The statewide average temperature was 54.1 degrees, an astonishing 7.3 degrees above normal (Figures 1 and 2). This makes for the most above-normal month Wisconsin has seen since February 2024, when the state was 12.2 degrees warmer than normal. In fact, this October was even warmer than several *Septembers* on record. The warmth extending back to early summer also made June through October the warmest such period on record.




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Figure 1 (left). October average temperature in degrees Fahrenheit. Average temperatures ranged from 50 to 55 degrees across the northern half of the state and 55 to 60 degrees across the southern half. A few counties in northern Wisconsin averaged 45 to 50 degrees.

Figure 1 (right). October average temperature departure from normal. Much of the state averaged six to eight degrees above normal. The broader west-central region averaged eight to 10 degrees above normal, while parts of far northwestern Wisconsin and near Green Bay and Lake Michigan averaged two to four degrees warmer than normal.

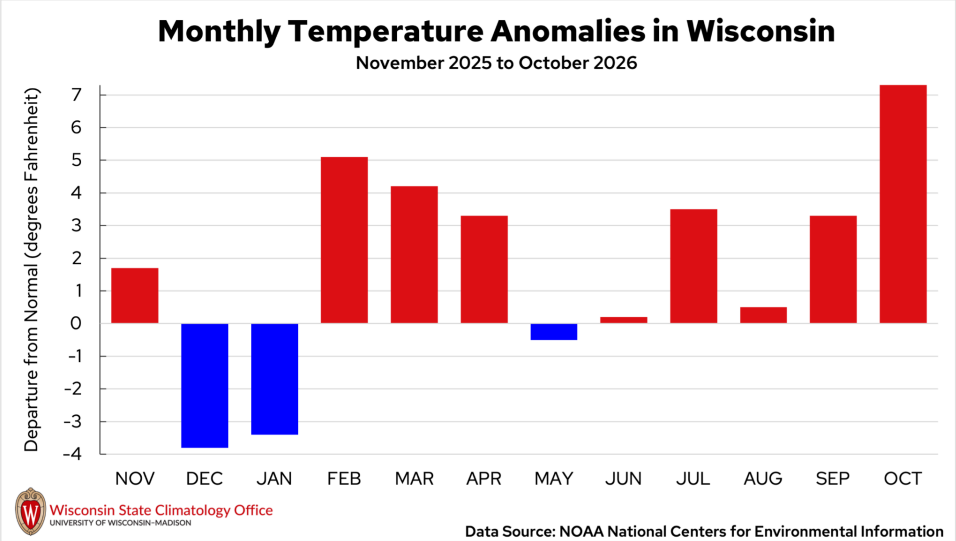



Figure 2. Monthly statewide temperature anomalies in degrees Fahrenheit for Wisconsin between November 2025 and October 2026 compared to the 1991 to 2020 normal. Temperature anomalies are from NOAA's National Centers for Environmental Information.

Unusually warm daytime temperatures were a major contributor to October's exceptional warmth. High temperatures averaged eight to 10 degrees above normal across much of the state, with parts of northwestern Wisconsin over 10 degrees warmer than normal.

There were an impressive number of days with high temperatures reaching at least 60 degrees. Green Bay recorded 24 such days, tying for its third-highest October total on record, while Milwaukee had 26, its second-highest total.

An intense stretch of heat between October 10 and 12 brought numerous daily temperature records across the state, including a high of 89 degrees in Ashland (Ashland County) on October 10 and 88 degrees in Eau Claire on October 11.

For reference, the normal high temperature in Eau Claire on October 11 is 61 degrees.

Wisconsin even squeezed out one more 90-degree reading at a Wisconet station in River Falls, which recorded 90 degrees on October 11. This was the warmest temperature anywhere in the state all month, and likely the final 90-degree reading of 2026, capping off a remarkably normal year for extreme heat (Table 1).

| Location | Number of 90-Degree Days in 2026 (through October) | 1991-2020 Normal Number of 90-Degree Days per Year (entire year) |
|---|---|---|
| **La Crosse** | 14 | 17 |
| **Eau Claire** | 11 | 10 |
| **Madison** | 10 | 9 |
| **Milwaukee** | 9 | 9 |
| **Wausau** | 7 | 5 |
| **Green Bay** | 6 | 6 |
| **6 City Average** | 9.5 | 9 |

Table 1. The number of days with a high temperature of 90 degrees or warmer at Wisconsin's six first-order stations this year through October 31, 2026, compared to the 1991 to 2020 normal for an entire year.

Nighttime temperatures were unseasonably warm, too, ranging from one to 12 degrees above normal across the state. Anomalies were greatest in west-central Wisconsin and smallest in far northwestern and northeastern Wisconsin.

Several locations also broke daily records for their warmest minimum temperatures on October 12, including 68 degrees in La Crosse and 63 degrees in Madison.

Then, a mid-month cooldown brought frost and the coldest temperature of the month – a chilly 20 degrees the morning of October 17 in Merrill (Lincoln County). The first fall 32-degree freeze struck Wausau on the 16th and Green Bay and Madison on the 17th. Eau Claire had already recorded its first freeze earlier in the month on the 5th. All four cities saw a later-than-average first fall freeze.

Temperatures rebounded into the 70s across much of the state during the final week of October, with additional daily high-temperature records set. Ashland tied their record high of 79 degrees on October 24. On October 28, Green Bay rose to 73 degrees and Madison to 74, both beating out records previously set in the 1940s.

By Halloween, temperatures settled closer to normal as ghouls and goblins roamed the streets in search of sweet treats.

## Bouts of Beneficial Rain Still Fell Short

October left a lot to be desired in terms of precipitation, as the majority of the state fell short of normal. Central and northern Wisconsin saw deficits of one to two inches, with some locations receiving less than half of the monthly normal (Figure 3). The statewide average total was 2.11 inches, falling 0.9 inches below average (Figure 4). This is the fourth consecutive drier-than-average October for the Badger State.

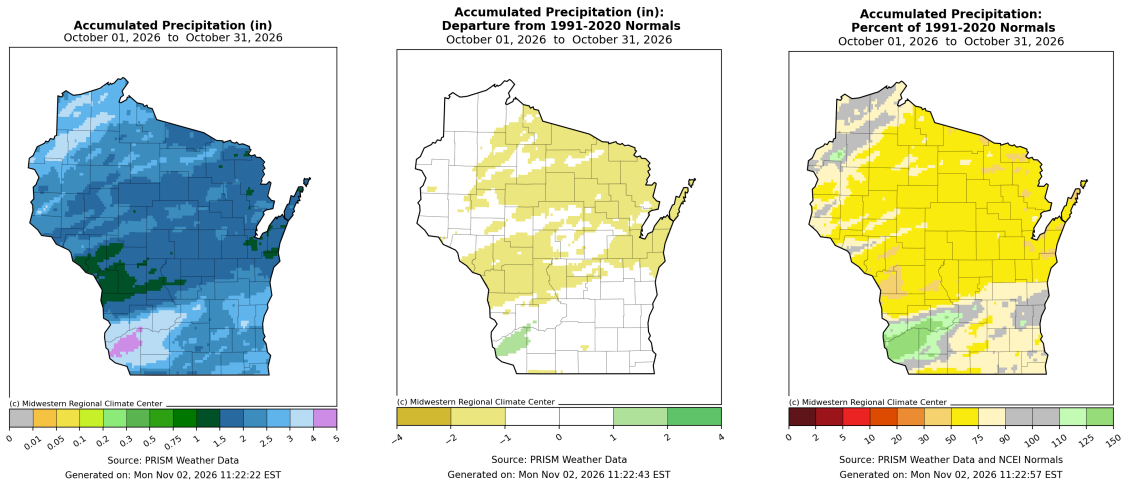



Figure 3 (left). October accumulated total precipitation in inches, where most of the state received between 1.5 and three inches of rain. Parts of Grant County reported over four inches of rain, while just to the north, much of La Crosse County received less than 1.5 inches.

Figure 3 (middle). October precipitation departure from normal, showing one- to two-inch deficits across the central, northern, and northeastern regions. Much of the northwest and southern counties received near-normal precipitation.

Figure 3 (right). October precipitation percent of normal, where much of Wisconsin received between 50 and 75 percent of normal. A small portion of the southwest saw up to 150 percent of normal rainfall.

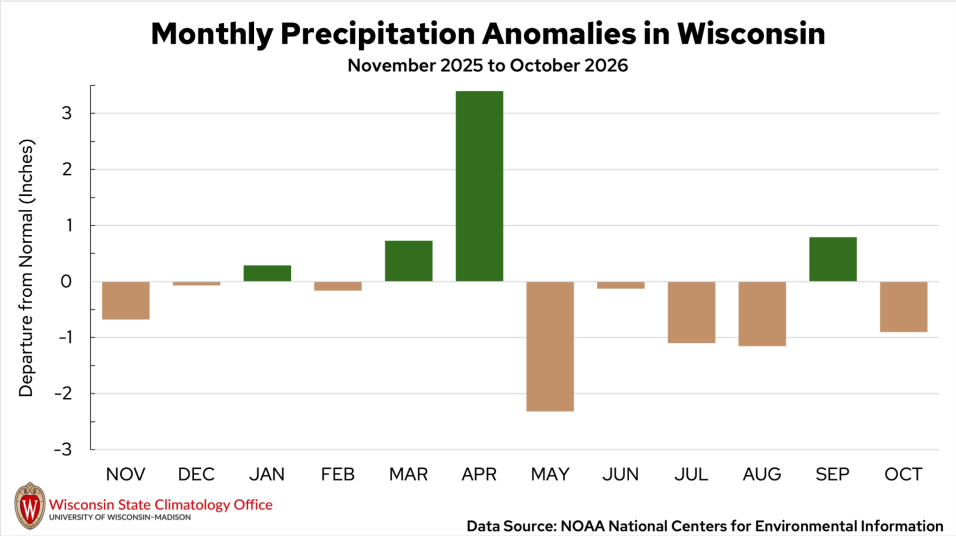



Figure 4. Monthly statewide average precipitation anomalies in inches for Wisconsin between November 2025 and October 2026 compared to the 1991 to 2020 normal. Precipitation anomalies are from NOAA's National Centers for Environmental Information.

Soaking rain fell on southern and central Wisconsin on the first of the month, leaving the northern region high and dry. Numerous totals across Grant, Crawford and Richland counties exceeded two inches. Prairie du Chien (Crawford County) measured 2.34 inches, the highest 24-hour rain total in the state for the month.

Small rain systems sprinkled a few tenths of an inch across the state through the following weeks, but many places remained dry until mid-month.

A strong cold front swept through on October 15 and 16, bringing steady rain to nearly the entire state. Widespread totals ranged from a half inch to an inch, with many central counties reporting higher amounts. Northern Wisconsin finally got its share of rain, and many cities saw their largest rainfall since early summer. Minocqua (Oneida County) reported 1.20 inches of rain on the 16th, the town's largest rainfall since June 9.

The weather turned soggy again during the final week of the month, as a slow-moving low-pressure system shifted through the region. Scattered rain showers brought anywhere from a quarter-inch to an inch of rain to the northern half of the state from October 26 through 28. The west saw the highest totals, with parts of Douglas,

Burnette, Washburn, and Polk counties reporting 1.5 to two inches of rain. The most drought-stricken areas of the north received upwards of 0.5 inches.

As of the end of October, no measurable snow (0.1" or more) had fallen anywhere across the state – another indicator of the unseasonably warm conditions. While not much, the state averages 0.7 inches of snow in October.

**Drought Continued to Deepen**

Despite some bursts of rain during the month, drought continued to expand through northern Wisconsin. The U.S. Drought Monitor on October 6 already reflected the state's largest exceptional drought (D4) since records began in 2000. By the end of the month, exceptional drought had spread farther east into Vilas and northern Oneida County (Figure 5). Minimal change was seen through the rest of the northern and central regions.

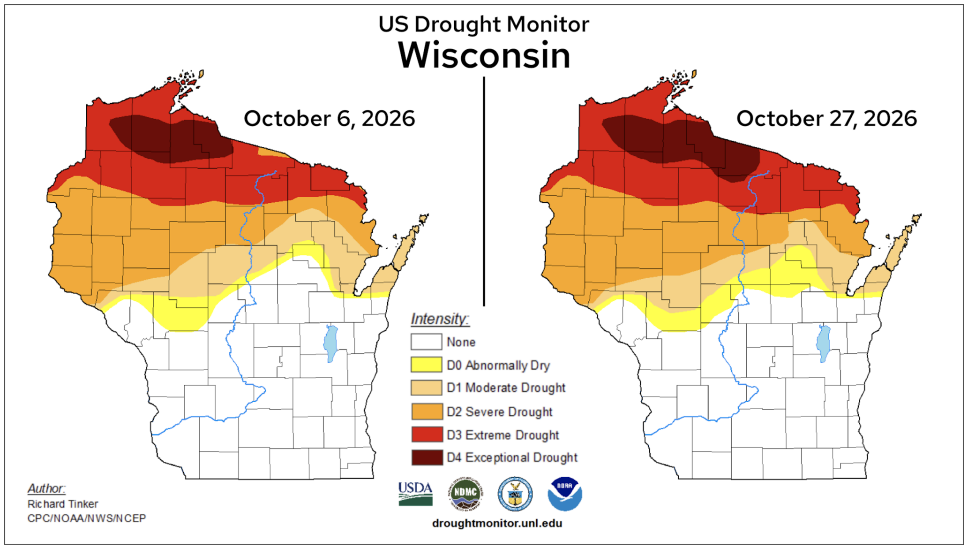



Figure 5. U.S. Drought Monitor conditions in Wisconsin as of October 6 and 27, 2026, showing the gradual spread of exceptional drought in the north.

After more than six weeks of exceptional drought, impacts in the region have been compounding. The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) reported the Rainbow Flowage in Oneida County is nine feet lower than normal, creating challenges for fishers. The Wisconsin River in particular has become low, causing the Wisconsin Valley

Improvement Company, which manages the reservoir systems, to significantly reduce flow from the river (Image 1). These managers are also creating plans to conserve water levels ahead of the winter season.



Image 1. Low water levels on the Wisconsin River near Eagle River in early October. Photo taken by Gary Ridderbusch.

On land, residents continue to report cracked soil, low feed quality for livestock, and minimal regrowth in pastures.

Dry fields during the harvest led to a high number of wildfires, especially in the northern and central regions of the state. In October, 161 wildfires burned nearly 140 acres in Wisconsin, many of which were sparked by equipment or debris burning. By comparison, only 65 wildfires burned during October 2025, but 197 burned in 2024 when drought covered the entire state.

Drought, combined with unseasonal warmth, put exceptional stress on the trees in northern and parts of central Wisconsin. Warm, dry conditions caused some trees to change leaf color early or drop their leaves altogether. The DNR noted large groups of young aspen trees had dropped their leaves by early September in some north-central counties. This limited the duration and quality of fall color spectating for Wisconsinites.

Despite the deepening drought in the north, the state's Drought Severity and Coverage Index has generally decreased since mid-September but remains high (Figure 6). The

decline is because wet conditions have resolved any remaining dryness through the southern half of the state, shrinking drought's overall coverage.

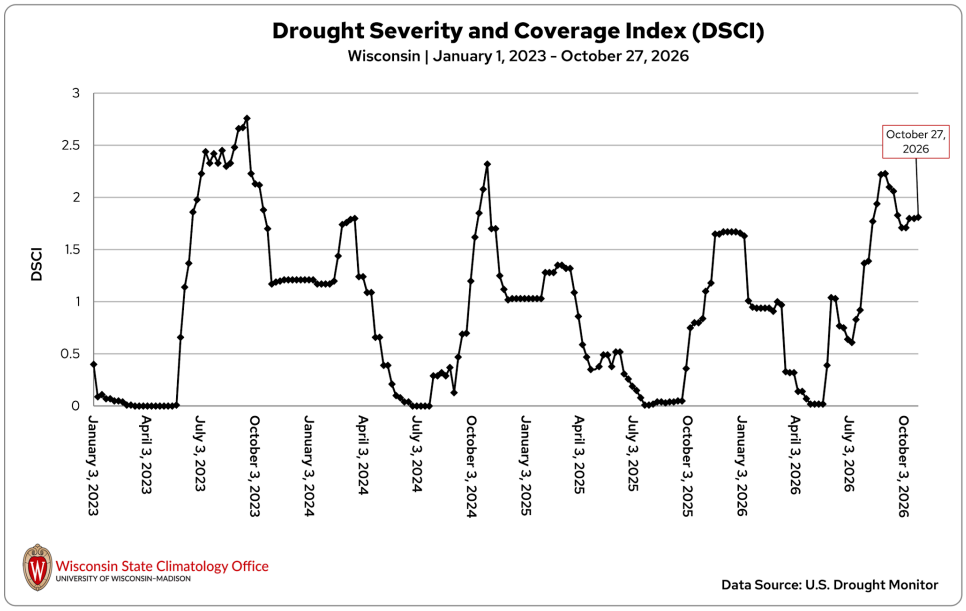



Figure 6. The Drought Severity and Coverage Index (DSCI) for Wisconsin from January 1, 2023, through October 27, 2026. Statistics come from the U.S. Drought Monitor.

## Harvest Progress Amid Varying Conditions

The mix of wet and dry periods throughout October influenced fieldwork and harvest progress. Spurts of rain delayed fieldwork, but stretches of dry weather allowed harvest to move quickly, especially soybeans.

By late October, soybean harvest was nearly 90 percent complete statewide, though some grain quality issues were reported due to too much moisture from bouts of rainfall. Meanwhile, corn harvest for grain was nearly 50 percent complete, roughly on par with the five-year average for this time of year.

With the ongoing drought in the north, livestock producers continued to seek additional hay and grazing opportunities as dryness continued to take a toll on pasture conditions and forage availability. Despite the dryness and uncertainty about sufficient soil moisture, producers continued to plant winter wheat, with about 90 percent planted by the end of the month.

Alfalfa yields also suffered due to the persistent dryness, though reduced yields do not necessarily mean the crop is a total loss.

As cranberry growers completed harvest, some marshes got by with few disruptions while others were forced to slow or adjust operations to manage limited water for harvesting and frost protection. At least one marsh in northern Wisconsin was unable to harvest due to insufficient water.

Potatoes, pumpkins, and apples also held on through October, despite dry conditions throughout the growing season. Some producers reported impacts, such as smaller apples.

The unusually warm conditions, including warmer-than-average nighttime temperatures, may have also influenced vegetation, as some southern Wisconsin residents reported gardens still producing and flowers still blooming well into October.

### Climate Ed-ucation

During one of the most powerful El Niño events on record, winter weather was nearly nonexistent in Wisconsin. Read more about this historic winter of 1877-78, The Year Without a Winter.

### Climate Stats by Division

| | Temperature (degrees Fahrenheit) October 2026 | | Liquid-Equivalent Precipitation (inches) October 2026 | | Liquid-Equivalent Precipitation (inches) November 1, 2025 – October 31, 2026 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Division** | **Avg** | **Dept** | **Avg** | **Dept** | **Avg** | **Dept** |
| **Northwest** | 52.2 | 7.3 | 2.42 | -0.75 | 26.08 | -6.46 |
| **North Central** | 51.7 | 7.4 | 1.94 | -1.33 | 29.67 | -3.70 |
| **Northeast** | 51.9 | 6.7 | 1.84 | -1.30 | 31.96 | -0.09 |
| **West Central** | 55.5 | 8.0 | 1.71 | -1.06 | 31.63 | -3.23 |
| **Central** | 55.2 | 7.6 | 1.91 | -0.87 | 36.94 | 2.98 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **East Central** | 55.0 | 6.7 | 2.01 | -0.94 | 35.85 | 3.17 |
| **Southwest** | 56.5 | 7.3 | 2.61 | -0.23 | 39.90 | 2.27 |
| **South Central** | 57.1 | 7.4 | 2.31 | -0.57 | 37.07 | 0.38 |
| **Southeast** | 56.8 | 6.6 | 2.42 | -0.49 | 39.52 | 4.19 |
| **State** | 54.1 | 7.3 | 2.11 | -0.90 | 32.87 | -1.18 |

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

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

Table 4. October climate statistics by Wisconsin's climate division, including average temperature in degrees Fahrenheit, and liquid-equivalent precipitation (rain plus melted snow) 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 temperature and precipitation statistics come from NOAA's National Centers for Environmental Information Climate at a Glance Tool.

*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 by phone (608-263-2374).*