

IOWA MONTHLY WEATHER SUMMARY – MARCH 2011

General Summary. Iowa temperatures averaged 34.6° or 1.3° below normal while precipitation averaged 1.53 inches or 0.62 inches below normal. This ranks as the 55th driest and 67th warmest March among 139 years of records.

Temperatures. Temperatures were highly variable during the month as is typical for this time of year as the weather transitions from winter to spring. A very mild period prevailed from the 14th through the 22nd but was followed by nine consecutive colder than normal days to finish out the month. Sibley recorded the March's lowest temperature with a low of -5° on the 2nd while Shenandoah and Sidney tied for the highest temperatures with 81° readings on the 22nd.

Heating Degree Day Totals. Home heating requirements, as estimated by heating degree day totals, averaged 12% more than last year and the 4% more than normal. Degree day totals for the entire heating season (since July 1, 2010) are running 3% less than one year ago and 3% more than normal.

Precipitation. Precipitation was fairly evenly distributed throughout the month and was generally greater than normal over the northeast one-third of Iowa and well below normal over the western third of the state. Monthly totals varied from only 0.37 inches at Battle Creek (Ida County) to 3.45 inches at Lansing (Allamakee County). About half of the month's precipitation came in two storms. The first storm, on the 8th-9th, started with rain statewide but transitioned to snow over the northwestern two-thirds of Iowa. Greatest snow amounts of three to five inches fell over north central and northeast Iowa while rain totals locally exceeded an inch over the southeast. The second event on the 22nd-23rd brought thunderstorms and rainfall statewide with rain amounts up to two inches over parts of north central Iowa. Snowfall averaged 3.3 inches or 1.4 inches less than normal to rank as the 41st least snowy March among 124 years of records.

Severe Weather. A sure sign of spring has been the more frequent development of thunderstorms in Iowa this past month with activity on the 4th, 17th, 20th, 21st and 22nd. Severe storms were widespread on the afternoon and evening of the 22nd with the National Weather Service reporting eight tornadoes in Iowa. The strongest of these storms was an EF-2 storm in northern Madison County. Large hail was also reported from 26 counties, mostly in southwestern Iowa, on the 22nd. Last year Iowa's first tornado of the season didn't arrive until June 1 which was the state's latest start to the tornado season since 1978. However, March tornadoes account for 4% of Iowa's historical tornado occurrences with tornadoes occurring in 15 of the past 33 Marchs.

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