

IOWA PRELIMINARY MONTHLY WEATHER SUMMARY – DECEMBER 2011

General Summary. December temperatures averaged 29.8° or 6.9° above normal while precipitation totaled 2.14 inches or 0.80 inch above normal. This ranks as the 19th warmest and 13th wettest December among 139 years of records. This December seemed particularly mild in comparison to the previous four Decembers which were all unusually cold and snowy. The last warmer and less snowy December came in 2006.

Temperatures. Early December weather was mostly on the cold side of normal with temperatures over the first ten days of the month averaging 3.3° below normal. The season's first subzero temperature was reported at Battle Creek and Sibley on the morning of December 2 with -1° readings. Subzero temperatures were also recorded somewhere in the state on the 5th, 6th, 7th, 9th and 10th with Sheldon the cold spot with -19° on the 6th. An earlier -19° temperature has not been seen in Iowa since 1991. However, the early cold was not to last as all of the final 21 days of the month averaged warmer than normal and there were no subzero temperatures for the rest of December. Temperatures reached into the 50s on ten days between the 14th and 31st with Lamoni and Leon soaring to 62° on New Year's Eve.

Heating Degree Day Totals. Home heating requirements, as estimated by heating degree day totals, averaged 17% less than normal and 24% less than last year. Thus far this season (since July 1) totals are running 14% less than normal and 11% less than last season.

Precipitation. Precipitation totals were well above normal for much of Iowa during December thanks largely to three large storm systems. The first event on the 3rd brought a statewide average of 1.5 inches of snow and 0.97 inch of precipitation. Snowfall amounts of 3 to 6 inches were common over the northwest one-third of the state while portions of south central Iowa saw nearly two inches of rain. The next event brought rain statewide on the 13th-14th with an average of 0.76 inch. Heaviest rains with the second storm were over portions of the southeast where more than two inches fell. The final event on the 29th-30th brought an average of 0.32 inch of rain with the greatest amounts over northern Iowa. Winter made a very brief appearance late on New Year's Eve with one to two inches of snow, along with some freezing drizzle, falling over a small area of northern Iowa accompanied by wind gusts of 40 to 50 mph. While there were cold periods with frozen soil it appears that nearly all of the month's precipitation was able to soak into the ground. This was a very welcome development over northwestern Iowa where severe drought conditions are present. Monthly precipitation totals varied from 0.69 inch near Lester in Lyon County to 3.93 inches at Mount Pleasant while snowfall totals varied from only trace amounts (less than one-tenth of an inch) at some central Iowa locations such as Ames, Grundy Center and Toledo to 11.3 inches at Little Sioux.

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