

IOWA WEATHER SUMMARY – DECEMBER 2012

General Summary. December temperatures averaged 27.5° or 4.6° above normal while precipitation totaled 1.60 inches or 0.26 inches above normal. This ranks as the 39th warmest and 34th wettest December among 140 years of records.

Temperatures. The month began with exceptionally mild weather as temperatures averaged above normal for 19 of the first twenty days of December, the exception being on the 10th when the season's first subzero temperatures were recorded at a few northwest Iowa locations. Highs reached into the 60s somewhere in the state each of the first four days of the month with 50s or higher on 11 of the first 18 days. Keokuk was the hot spot with a high of 73° on the 3rd. This missed the state record for December, set back on December 6, 1939 at Thurman, by only one degree. Colder weather prevailed late in the month with ten of the final eleven days averaging colder than normal. Spencer reported the lowest temperature with a reading of -9° at midnight on the 31st.

Heating Degree Day Totals. Home heating requirements, as estimated by heating degree day totals, averaged 4% greater than last December but 11% less than normal. Thus far this heating season (since July 1) degree day totals are running 7% more than a year ago but 5% less than normal.

Precipitation. A pair of storms brought most of the month's precipitation and brought an end to a very dry period that saw a statewide average of just 0.19 inches of precipitation for the four and one-half weeks following Veteran's Day. The first event brought rain statewide from late on the 14th to early on the 16th with an average of 0.57 inches falling. The second storm, the afternoon of the 19th to the afternoon of the 20th, brought a blizzard to much of the state but was preceded by unseasonably heavy rainfall near the Illinois border. The greatest snow fell from west central into northeast Iowa with 15.1 inches reported at Strawberry Point, 14.4 inches at Dubuque and 13.8 inches at Johnston. Wind gusts over 50 mph were common on the 20th with a peak gust of 60 mph at Ottumwa. The heavy wet, sticky snow brought down numerous trees and power lines, resulting in tens of thousands of customers losing power. This event brought a statewide average of 0.74 inches of precipitation and 5.8 inches of snowfall. Rainfall prior to the blizzard exceeded two inches in the Muscatine and Quad Cities areas. Monthly precipitation totals varied from 0.72 inches at Sidney to 3.17 inches at Le Claire. The rain from the first December storm, as well as that over southeastern Iowa from the second storm, fell prior to the onset of cold weather. Thus, a large percentage of this rain was able to soak into the ground and provide a much needed boost to soil moisture. The limited amount of data available suggests that the uppermost few inches of soil were frozen by month's end, despite widespread snow cover.

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