

January 2026

Precipitation

Much like December, precipitation in January was below normal across all of Kentucky, with the driest conditions along the Ohio River from Paducah to Cincinnati. The first half of the month was warm, with a lonely storm system that brought some rain and showers. A series of arctic fronts during the middle of the month brought below normal temperatures and some light rain and snow. The only major precipitation event occurred on the 24th and 25th which brought heavy snow, ice and rain to the Commonwealth. The highest precipitation amounts were across southern and eastern Kentucky where over 2" inches of precipitation fell, mainly as rain and freezing rain. Further north and west, much of the precipitation fell as ice and snow. Temperatures remained below freezing for the rest of the month, preventing the snow and ice from melting.

Overall, areas along the Ohio River below Cincinnati received less than 50% of normal precipitation, while southern and eastern Kentucky received over 75% of normal precipitation.

As of the January 27th U.S. Drought Monitor, Abnormally Dry (D0) conditions were depicted across much of western Kentucky and in southeastern Kentucky along the Tennessee and Virginia borders.

Preliminary data indicated the state averaged 2.62 inches of precipitation for the month, 1.12 inches below the climatological norm, and ranked as the 24th driest January on record since 1895.

According to the Kentucky Mesonet, Harlan County recorded the highest monthly rainfall at 4.37 inches, while Boone County had the lowest at 1.04 inches.

Table 1. Regional precipitation patterns.

Climate Region	Departure From Normal (inches)					Palmer Drought Severity Index*
	This Month	Past 2 Mos.	Past 3 Mos	Past 6 Mos	Past 12 Mos	
Western	-1.79	-4.89	-6.33	-6.94	7.29	0.68
Central	-1.09	-3.22	-4.06	-4.80	10.91	1.29
Bluegrass	-1.20	-2.53	-2.82	-2.57	8.98	1.46
Eastern	-0.58	-2.62	-2.66	-3.34	5.76	0.22

*4.0 and above (Extremely Moist) -2.0 to -2.9 (Moderate Drought)
 3.0 to 3.9 (Very Moist Spell) -3.0 to -3.9 (Severe Drought)
 2.0 to 2.9 (Unusual Moist Spell) -4.0 or less (Extreme Drought)
 -1.9 to 1.9 (Near Normal)

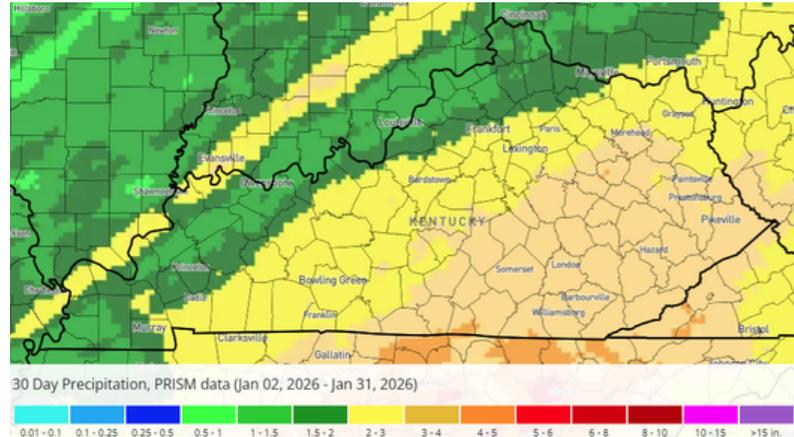


Figure 1. Monthly precipitation map.

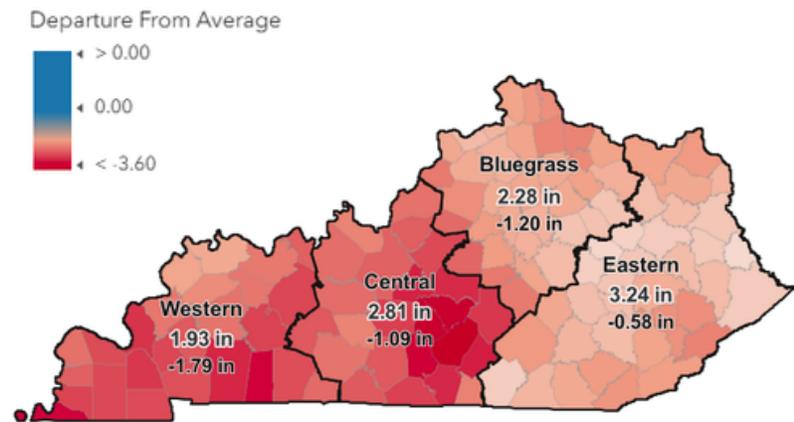
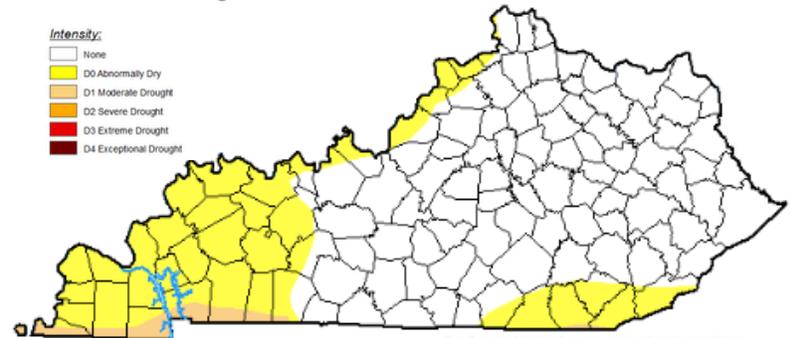


Figure 2. Departure from normal precipitation by county and climate division.

U.S. Drought Monitor Kentucky

January 27, 2026
(Released Thursday, Jan. 29, 2026)
Valid 7 a.m. EST



The Drought Monitor focuses on broad-scale conditions. Local conditions may vary. For more information on the Drought Monitor, go to <https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/About.aspx>

Author:
Richard Tinker
CPC/NOAA/NWS/CEP



droughtmonitor.unl.edu

Figure 3. Current US Drought Monitor Map.

January 2026

Streamflow

Streamflow in January started the month below normal across the Commonwealth due to below normal precipitation in December. Flows did spike the last week of the month in areas that received liquid precipitation. Flows remained below normal in areas that received mainly sleet and snow. By the end of the month, multiple USGS gage stations were impacted by ice and no longer providing accurate data.

Flows have been impacted by the extreme cold during the second half of the month. Not only due to snow and ice that has yet to melt but also flow into streams being locked up as ice.

Despite the below normal flows, there are no concerns. Average flows this time of year are significantly higher than they are in summer and fall. So, while flows are below normal, there is no shortage of water in the Commonwealth's streams and rivers. Flows should improve once temperatures warm.

Table 2. Mean Stream Discharge select stream gages.

River and Location	Drainage Area (mi ²)	7 Day		28 Day	
		Average Flow (cfs)	% of Normal*	Average Flow (cfs)	% of Normal*
Levisa Fork at Pikeville	2,144	1547	113	677	49
Little Sandy River near Grayson	400	635	136	277	58
Licking River at Blue Lick Springs	1,785	2926	117	1428	56.0
North Fork Kentucky River at Jackson	1,101	2510	193	923	70
Kentucky River at Lock 10	2,950	1,939	32	2,654	44
Cumberland River at Cumberland Falls	1,977	6,358	204	2,737	85
Beaver Creek near Monticello	43	59.0	113	27.0	50
Beech Fork at Bardstown	669	663	71	367	38
Barren River at Bowling Green	1,849	2,575	104	1,420	56
Green River at Calhoun	7,566	6,842	65	3,986	37
Russell Creek near Columbia	188	486	178	192	68
Rolling Fork near Boston	1299	1461	84	747	42
Bayou De Chien near Clinton	69	28	29	29	29
Ohio River at Greenup Dam	62,000	47,250	56	61,655	71
Ohio River at Cannelton Dam	97,000	75,671	59	84,492	65
Mississippi River @ Thebes, IL	713,200	85,743	35	103,325	43

* Base Period 1980-2023

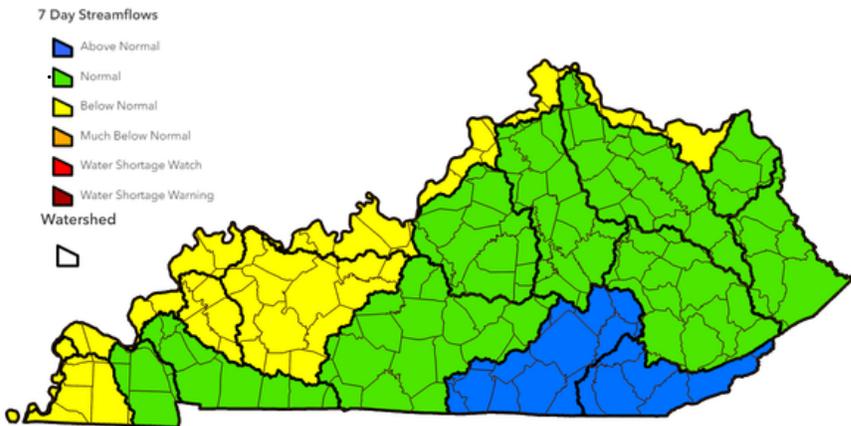


Figure 5. Average streamflow by watershed over the past 7-days (January 25-31).

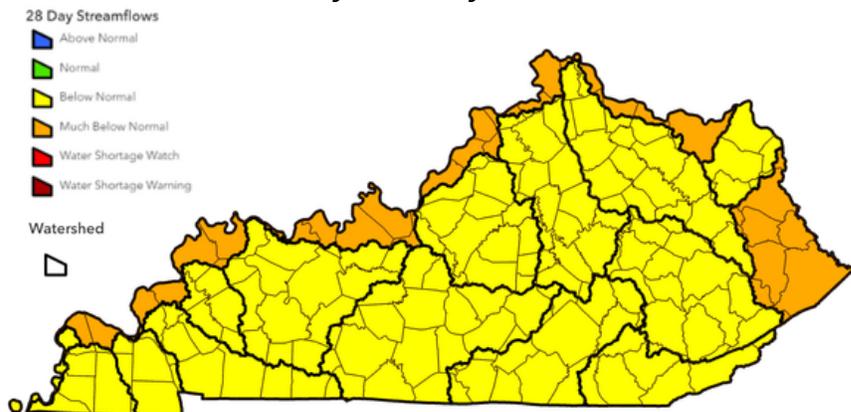
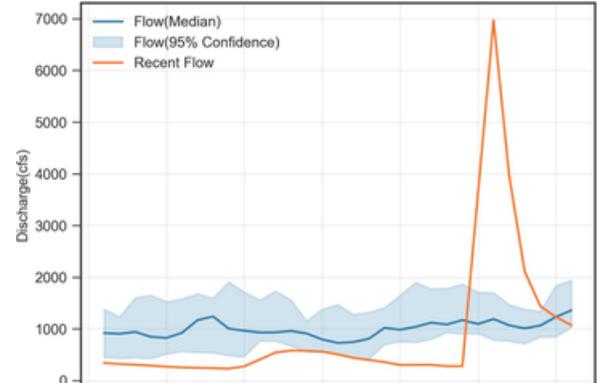
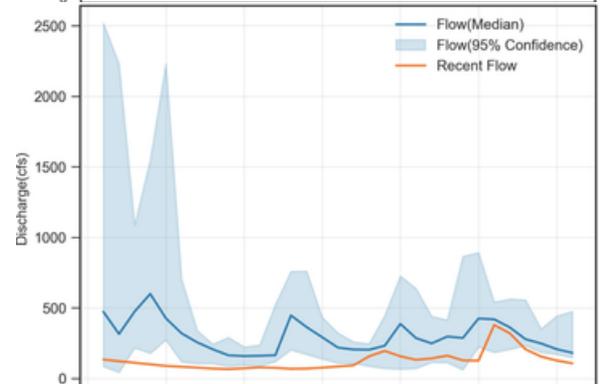


Figure 6. Average streamflow by watershed over the past 28-days (January 4-31).

North Fork Kentucky River at Jackson, January 2026



Stoner Creek at Paris, January 2026



Rolling Fork near Boston, January 2026

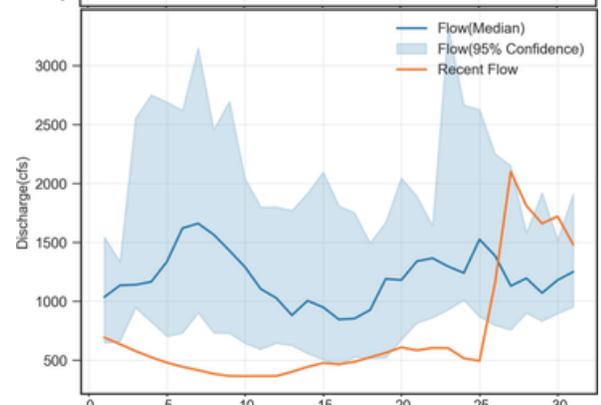


Figure 7. Streamflows compared to median flows for the month.

January 2026

Reservoir Storage

Reservoir storage for water supply lakes remain normal for the entire state.

We are in the time of year when reservoirs typically recharge, as inflow increases and outpaces withdrawals and evaporation. The drier conditions combined with the below freezing temperatures have likely limited this recharge. However, the recharge stage should continue until late spring and into summer, leaving plenty of time for reservoirs to return to normal pool.

There are no concerns with reservoir water supplies and none are expected to develop at this time.

Groundwater

General Statement: Kentucky is a geologically, and hydrogeologically, diverse state. Groundwater data is limited in availability and where available may only be applicable to the immediate area given regional geologic variability. Local conditions may not be accurately reflected by the reference locations selected and local rainfall and surface water conditions may provide additional or more representative information. Current data is compared to a 30-year reference period (1980 – 2010) or the longest available period of continuous data.

Inner Bluegrass: Flow at Royal Springs (Scott Co.) was below the reference median for most of the month of January. Peak flow occurred early in the month then remained around 10cfs with lowest flow close to 5cfs on January 13th. Consistent low temperatures, little rainfall, and snow have limited recharge. Groundwater levels are expected to rise as snow cover melts.

Jackson Purchase: Water levels in the Viola Well (Graves Co.) remained around the reference median across the month and only fell below over the final few days. This likely represents a seasonal low but given the historical rise in groundwater levels observed may be particularly low for current conditions. As temperatures rise and recharge is no longer limited, groundwater levels are expected to rise.

Middlesboro: Water levels within the Middlesboro well (Bell Co.) varied in response to precipitation across the month. However, levels remained below the reference median and only rose to meet the reference level at the end of the month. Overall, levels were below the monthly normal but are expected to rise as winter ends.

Additional data can be found at:

<https://www.uky.edu/KGS/water/water-groundwater-monitoring.php>

Figure 8. Locations of reference reservoirs across the state. Status of reservoir levels indicated by color.

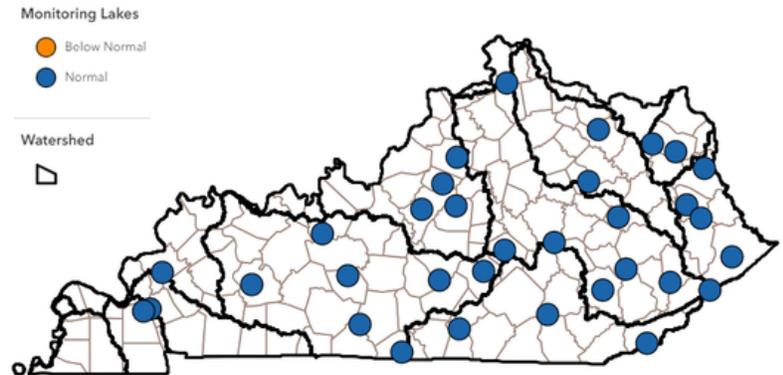
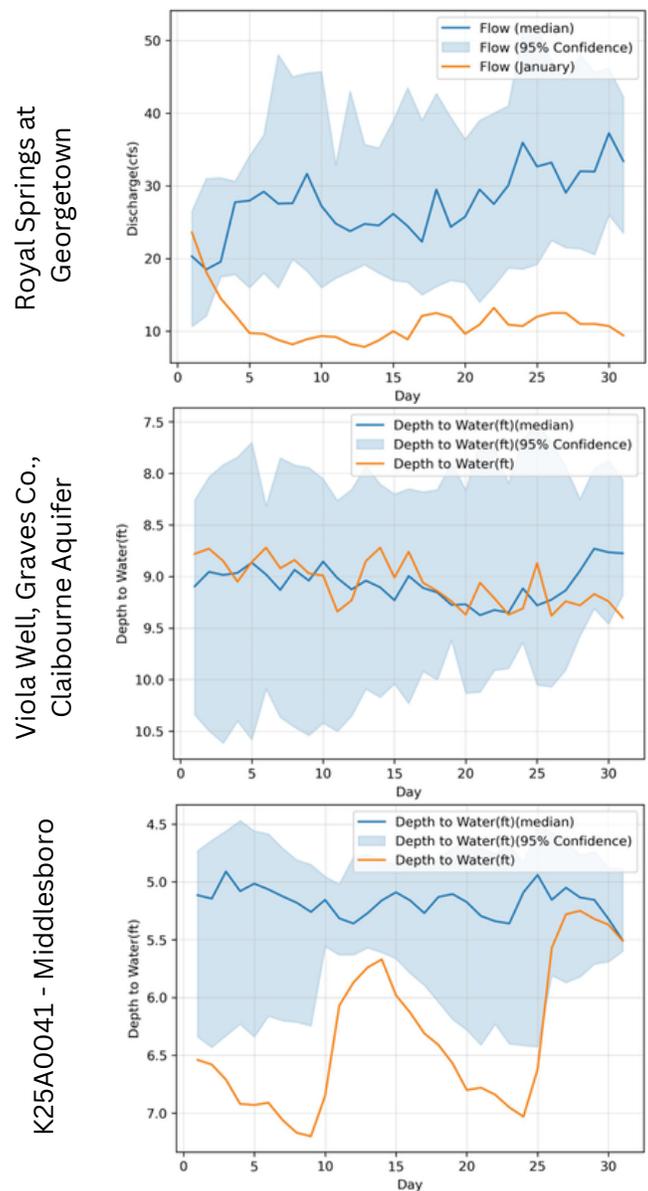


Figure 9. Groundwater observations compared to normal for the month.



January 2026

Forecast

The Climate Prediction Center (CPC) is currently predicting equal chances for above or below normal precipitation for Kentucky during February. The seasonal forecast (February through April) is for above normal chances for above normal precipitation for all of Kentucky. Short term forecasts suggest the extreme cold will remain for the beginning of the month before warmer weather returns, along with chances for precipitation.

La Nina conditions in the Pacific Ocean are waning and expected to transition to neutral conditions over the next month or so.

The current U.S. Monthly Drought Outlook shows drought conditions are not expected to develop in Kentucky during February.

Note: these forecasts do not provide the quantity above or below normal, just the probability it will occur.

U.S. Monthly Drought Outlook Drought Tendency During the Valid Period

Valid for February 2026
Released January 31, 2026

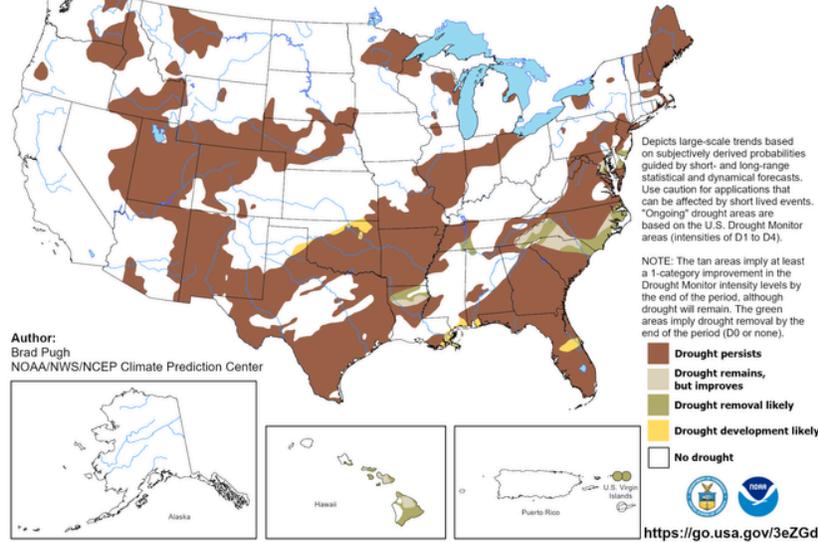


Figure 10. Monthly drought outlook.

Monthly Precipitation Outlook

Valid: February 2026
Issued: January 31, 2026

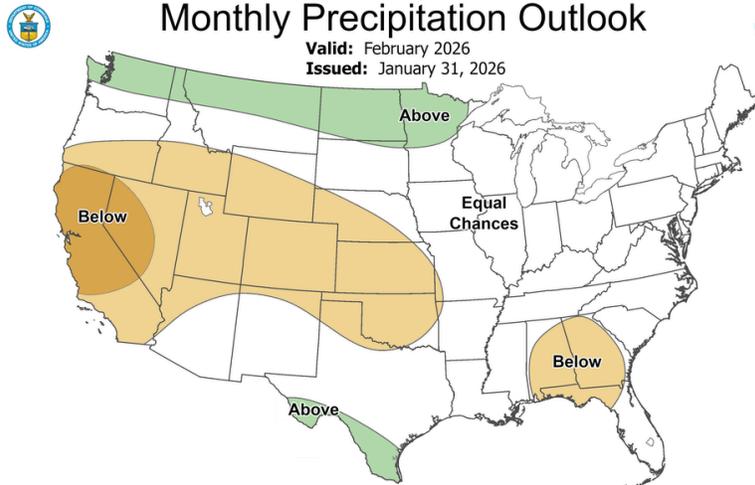
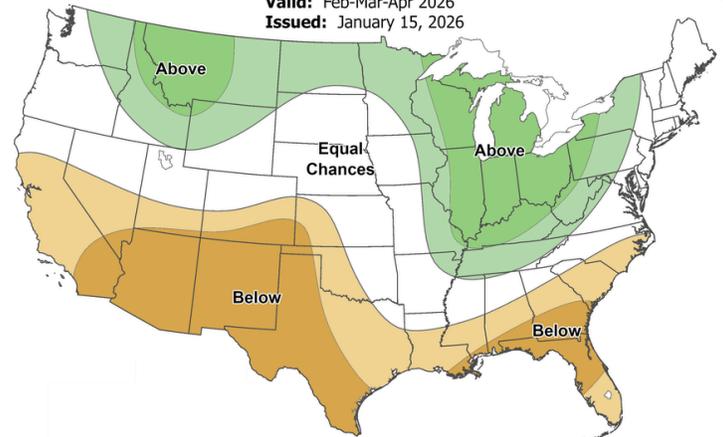


Figure 11. Monthly and seasonal precipitation outlooks.

Seasonal Precipitation Outlook

Valid: Feb-Mar-Apr 2026
Issued: January 15, 2026



Contact Us

Kentucky Division of Water
Water Supply Section
300 Sower Blvd
Frankfort, KY 40601
502-564-3410
water@ky.gov

Report Drought Conditions



Acknowledgments

Precipitation Data:

U.S. Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Centers for Environmental Information; Kentucky Mesonet; Midwest Regional Climate Center; Southern Regional Climate Center.

Streamflow Data:

U.S. Geological Survey, Water Resources Division.

Reservoir Data:

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Huntington, Louisville, and Nashville Districts; Kentucky Division of Water, Water Supply Section.

Forecast Data:

U.S. Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Climate Prediction Center.