

May 2026

Precipitation

After six straight months of below normal precipitation, rainfall in Kentucky during the month of May averaged above normal. The wettest locations were in west central and northern Kentucky. A few areas did average below normal for the month, including south central and eastern Kentucky, along with a few areas along the Ohio River in western Kentucky.

The Commonwealth averaged 5.34 inches of precipitation for the month of May, 1.00 inch above normal. It was the 39th wettest May on record. For the spring, March through May, Kentucky averaged 11.36 inches, the 38th driest on record. Going back to the beginning of the drought in November, an average of 20.47 inches of precipitation fell, the 5th driest on record. While the precipitation was beneficial, considerably more is needed to end the current drought.

Most of the precipitation in May fell during the last 10 days of the months when a front stalled across the state, bringing several days of rain and storms. As of the June 2nd U.S. Drought Monitor, 69% of Kentucky remained in drought and over 23% remained in at least Severe Drought (D2). Extreme Drought (D3) is still present in small areas centered around Casey County, Whitley County, and Logan and Todd counties.

According to the Kentucky Mesonet, Bullitt County recorded the highest monthly rainfall at 9.16 inches, while Daviess County had the lowest at 1.95 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	0.47	-1.13	-2.50	-10.49	-10.44	-3.41
Central	1.05	-0.89	-3.05	-8.63	-8.43	-2.27
Bluegrass	1.68	0.52	-0.07	-4.74	-4.07	-1.21
Eastern	0.62	-1.33	-3.33	-7.12	-7.10	-2.43

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

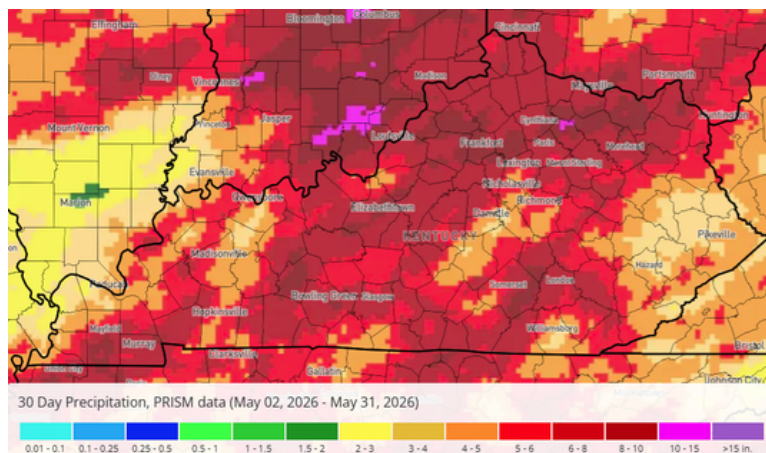


Figure 1. Monthly precipitation map.

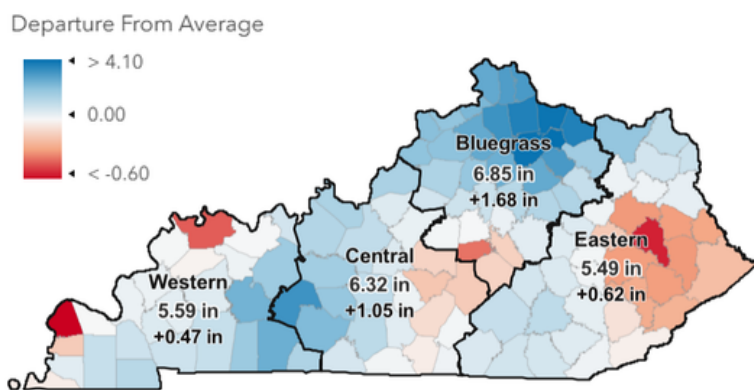


Figure 2. Departure from normal precipitation by county and climate division.

U.S. Drought Monitor
Kentucky

June 2, 2026
(Released Thursday, Jun. 4, 2026)
Valid 8 a.m. EDT

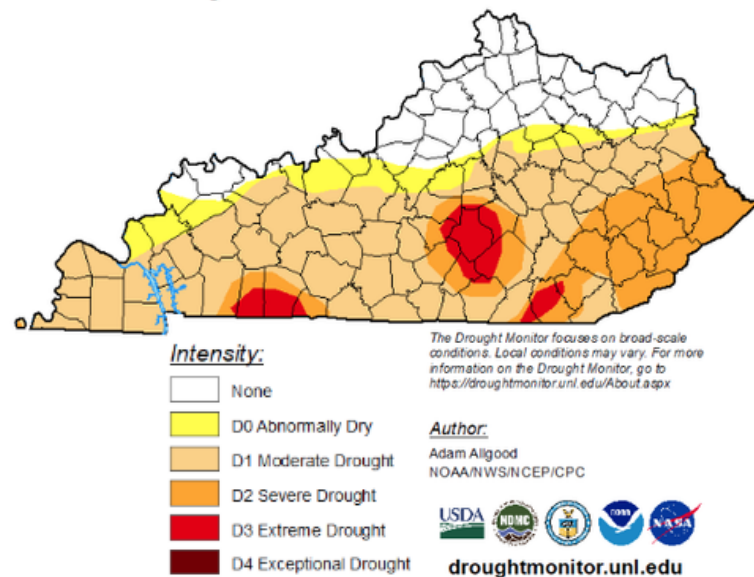


Figure 3. Current US Drought Monitor Map.

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Streamflow

Streamflow in May started the month well below normal as the state started the month in hydrologic drought. With the exception of a few short spikes in flow during precipitation events, flows remained below normal for the first two-thirds of May, with many flows below the 95% confidence threshold. The widespread precipitation during the last part of May resulted in a spike in streamflows across the state. While some streams were at or above flood stage, others peaked barely above normal.

Despite the spike in flows, much of the Commonwealth remains in hydrologic drought due to historically dry conditions this winter and spring. There are no immediate concerns, as average flows this time of year are elevated. However, with groundwater reserves that supply much of baseflow during the summer and fall not being replenished this year, the Commonwealth's streams and rivers will be vulnerable to even mild drought conditions throughout the remainder of the year.

The Division of Water's Water Supply Section will continue to monitor conditions closely.

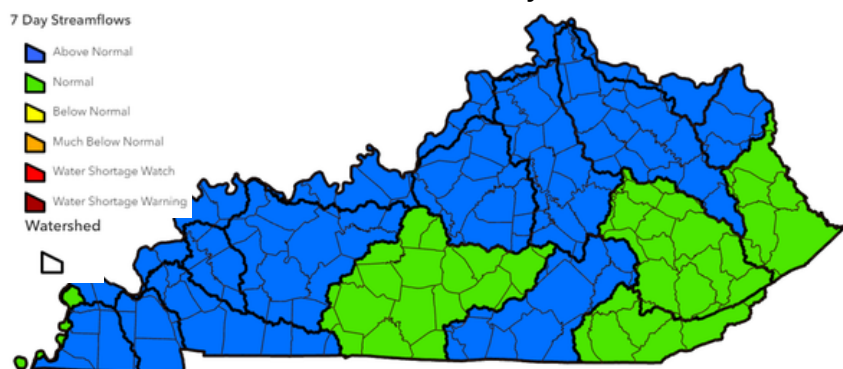


Figure 5. Average streamflow by watershed over the past 7-days (May 25-31).

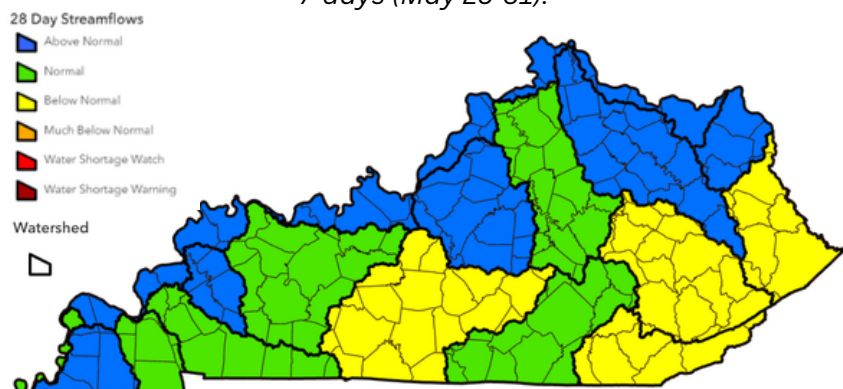


Figure 6. Average streamflow by watershed over the past 28-days (May 4-31).

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	454	55	343	38
Little Sandy River near Grayson	400	1437	544	512	173
Licking River at Blue Lick Springs	1,785	6861	425	2529	143
North Fork Kentucky River at Jackson	1,101	845	121	488	63
Kentucky River at Lock 10	2,950	5,710	199	2,318	73
Cumberland River at Cumberland Falls	1,977	1,953	101	880	43
Beaver Creek near Monticello	43	52	180	24	78
Beech Fork at Bardstown	669	3562	576	1158	177
Barren River at Bowling Green	1,849	1,046	54	499	25
Green River at Calhoun	7,566	15,838	223	5,614	74
Tradewater River at Olney	255	1053	588	377	195
Clarks River at Almo	134	1053	588	377	195
Bayou De Chien near Clinton	69	357	474	148	188
Ohio River at Greenup Dam	62,000	190,250	347	104,017	175
Ohio River at Cannelton Dam	97,000	265,875	325	153,111	170
Mississippi River @ Thebes, IL	713,200	325,375	148	346,448	148

* Base Period 1980-2023

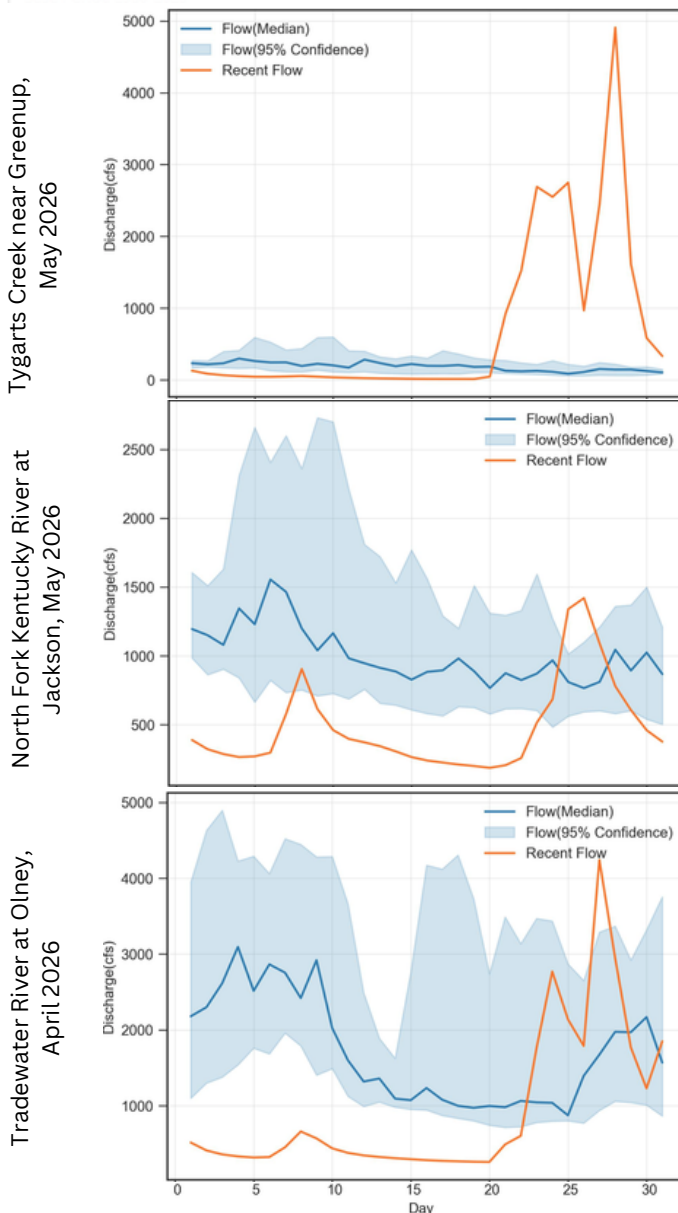


Figure 7. Streamflows compared to median flows for the month.

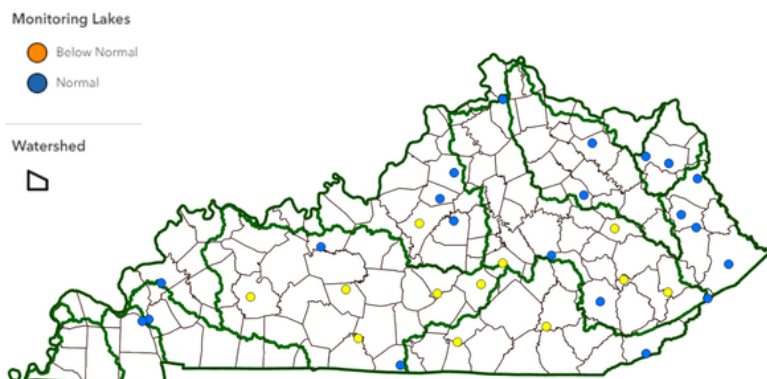
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Reservoir Storage

While precipitation this month helped several US Army Corp of Engineers (USACE) reservoirs reach summer pool, multiple water supply lakes and USACE reservoirs are below normal after failing to return to normal pool over the winter and spring due to below normal precipitation. Sympson Lake (Bardstown) has artificially been lowered so repairs can be made to the dam.

We are in the time of year when recharge for small reservoirs typically begins to slow as inflow decreases and is outpaced by withdrawals and evaporation. Above normal precipitation is needed over the next couple months to help slow the drawdown on the small reservoirs that are already below normal.

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



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.

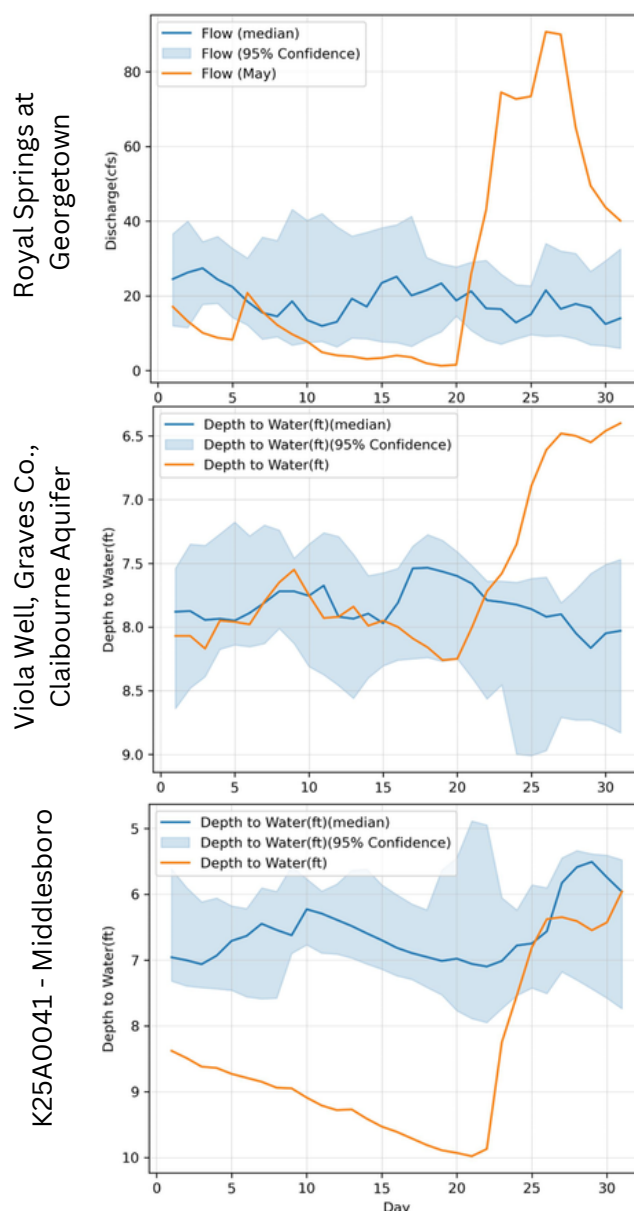
Inner Bluegrass: Flow at Royal Springs (Scott Co.) remained below the reference across May until rising to a peak on May 26th of 84 CFS. Across the summer, flow should vary around 20 CFS pending rainfall conditions but continuing below average rainfall could put flow at 10 CFS or less outside of response to rainfall events. To date for the year, total flow from the spring remains below expectations as a result of below average rainfall.

Jackson Purchase: Water levels in the Viola Well (Graves Co.) varied around the historical median until rising in response to rainfall in the last weeks of May. As water levels have been trending up historically, current levels around the historical expectation point to lower water levels than in recent years. Groundwater levels are expected to begin falling towards a seasonal low in the fall in response to increasing irrigation and evapotranspiration across the summer.

Middlesboro: Water levels within the Middlesboro well (Bell Co.) stayed below the monthly normal for most of May. Late May rainfall led to an increase in water levels to the reference median by the end of the month.

Additional data can be found at:
<https://www.uky.edu/KGS/water/water-groundwater-monitoring.php>

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



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Forecast

The Climate Prediction Center (CPC) is currently predicting equal chances for above or below normal precipitation during June and for June through August for the entire Commonwealth. Short-term forecasts show the potential for at least the first half of June to have above normal precipitation.

The current U.S. Monthly Drought Outlook shows drought persisting during the month of June for Kentucky. This could change if above normal precipitation falls during June.

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 June 2026
Released May 31, 2026

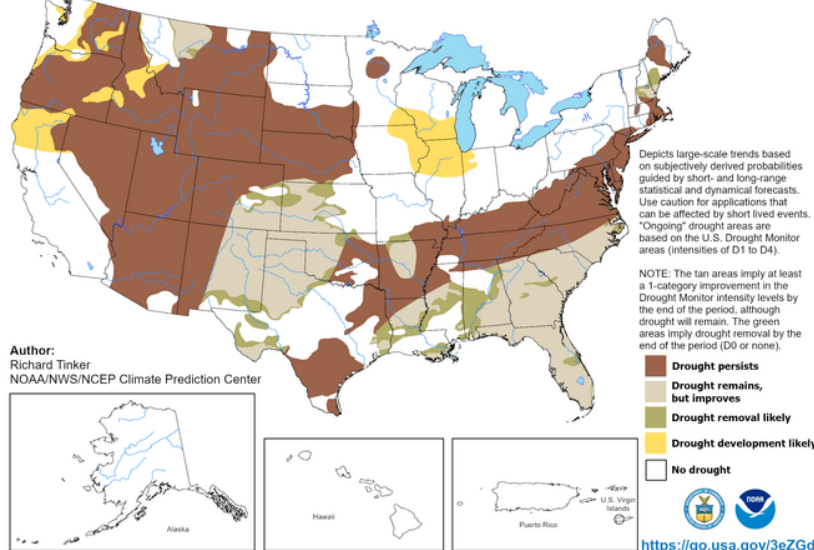


Figure 10. Monthly drought outlook.

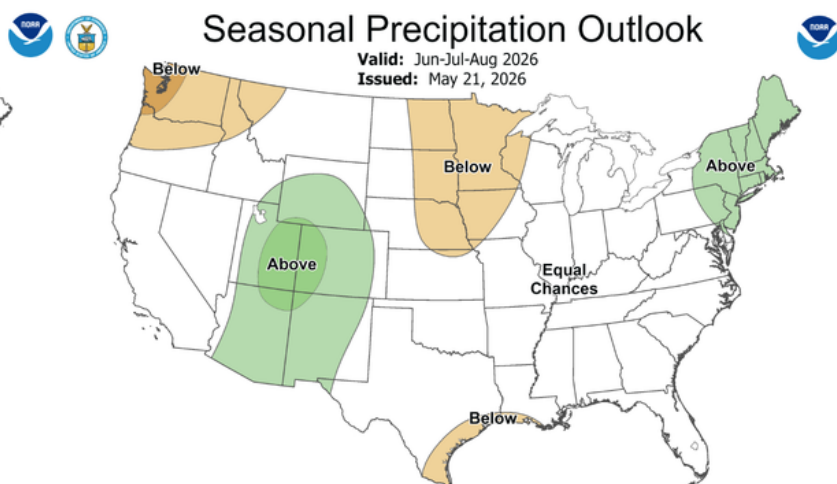
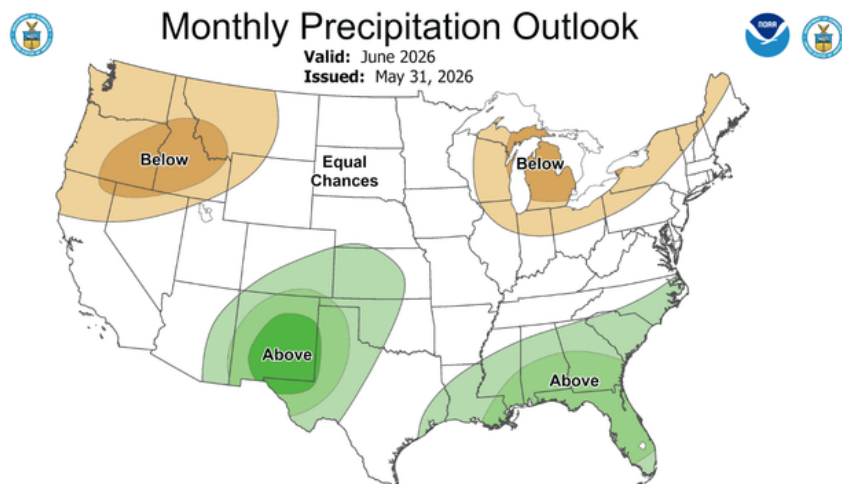


Figure 11. Monthly and seasonal precipitation outlooks.

Contact Us

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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.