

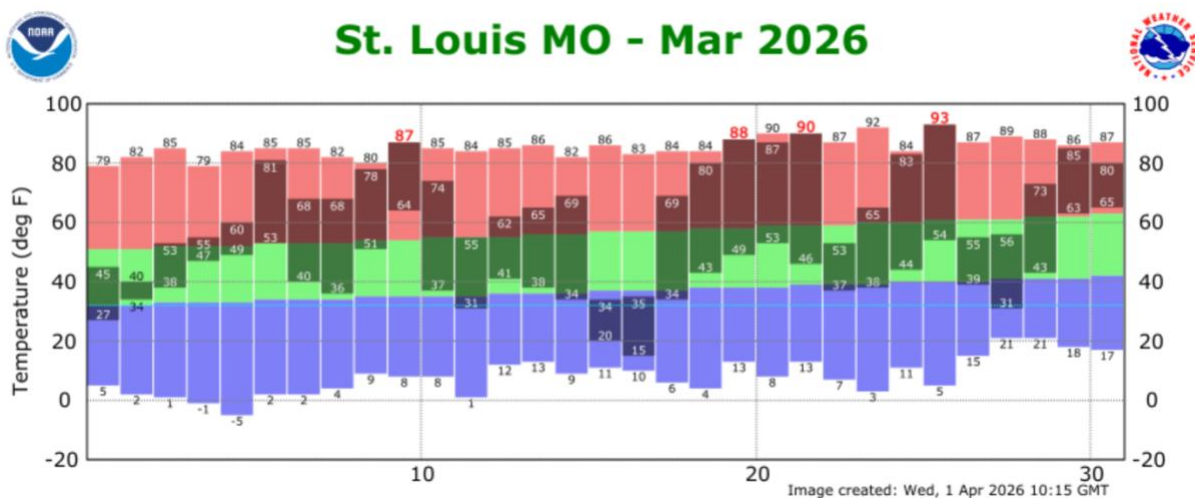
# It feels like “Déjà vu all over again”

## March torched a heat record set in 2012 – is another drought coming?

David I Gustafson, Ph.D., St. Louis, MO  
April 22, 2026

I’m not a native of St. Louis (which means you need not ask me where I went to high school!), but I am a huge fan of the city’s numerous famous native sons and daughters. Near the top of that list is Yogi Berra, who had a spectacular career as catcher for the NY Yankees, but his more famous claim to fame was for his ‘[Yogi-isms](#)’ – sayings like “when you come to a fork in the road, take it” or (about a local restaurant) “nobody goes there anymore, it’s too crowded.” But in 1961, after Mickey Mantle and Roger Maris hit back-to-back home runs as they were both chasing Babe Ruth’s record, Yogi reportedly quipped, “It’s like déjà vu all over again.”

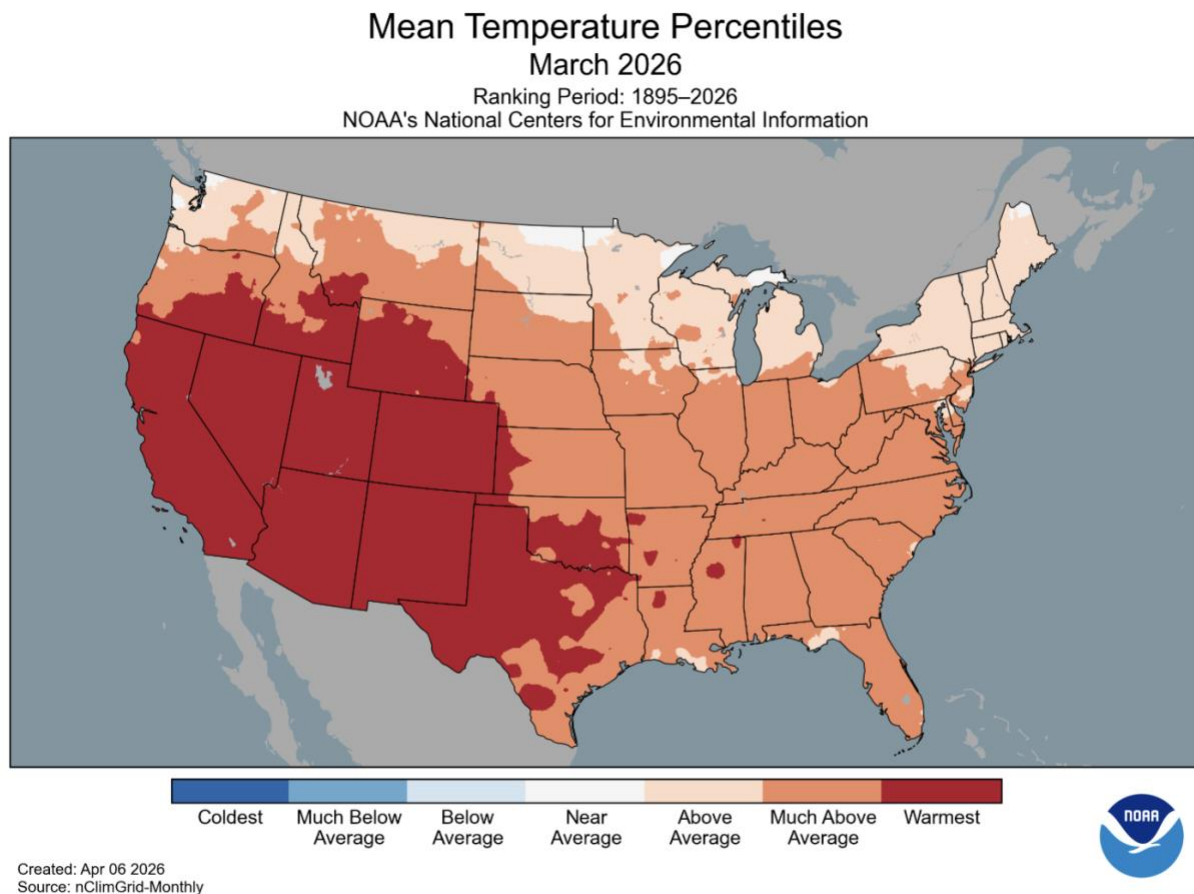
That quote came to mind in a rather disturbing way as I pondered the [March 2026 temperature and precipitation analysis](#) from NOAA’s National Center for Environmental Information. I knew from first-hand experience that it had felt very unusually summerlike here in St. Louis (see **Figure 1**). It was the same eerie feeling that I had in March 2012, just ahead of the devastating hot drought that the Midwest experienced that year. It seemed ‘spooky hot’ back in March 2012 – just as it has seemed this spring – only more so.



**Figure 1.** Observed temperatures in St. Louis during March 2026. Records were set on four days, three of which were the earliest in the year it had ever been that hot. Source: [NWS](#).

And indeed, according to NOAA, the heat record topped in March 2026 by CONUS (the Lower 48 states) was a record set in March 2012. And it wasn’t just broken by a little bit. The temperature anomaly was 9.4°F above the 20<sup>th</sup>-century average, making March 2026 the warmest March in the 132-year record. It’s also the first time **any** month’s average has exceeded 9°F above that baseline. At the county level, more than 500 counties recorded their warmest March on record (see **Figure 2**). It has also been a period of sustained warmth, with the April 2025–March 2026 period being the warmest 12-month span ever recorded for CONUS.

“Déjà vu all over again”?



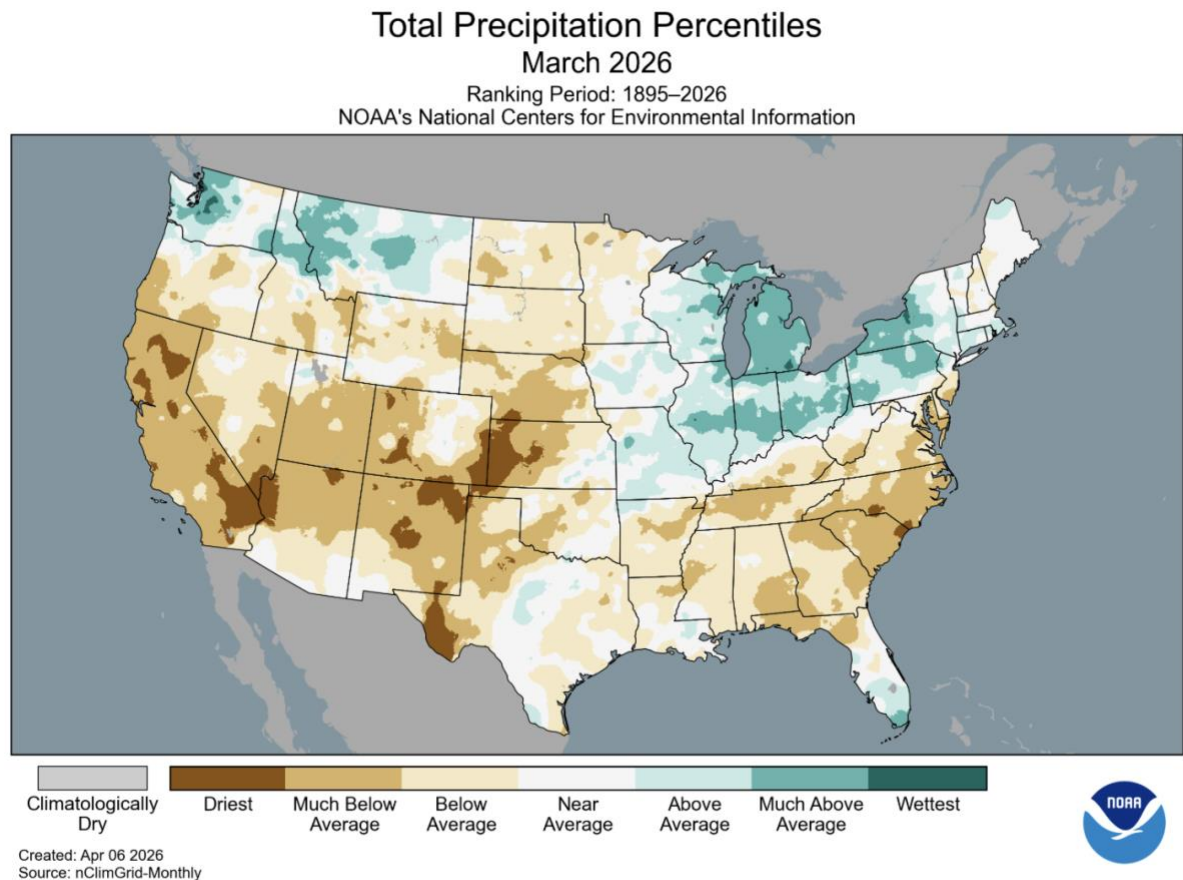
March 2026 U.S. Mean Temperature Percentiles Map.

**Figure 2.** Nearly everyone experienced March temperatures at least much above average.

But in addition to the record heat, the country has also been exceptionally dry. The January-March period was the driest on record for CONUS, breaking a record set in 1910. March precipitation was much below average across much of the West, Southwest, portions of the Plains, Deep South and Southeast (see **Figure 3**). In contrast, above-average precipitation totals fell across parts of the Northwest and northern Rockies, as well as across the Upper Midwest and Great Lakes region.

Nine states ranked among their 10 driest Marches. California received less than 0.25” of precipitation statewide – less than 10% of its 20<sup>th</sup>-century average and the lowest March total ever recorded. Colorado and New Mexico each tied their second driest March on record, while North and South Carolina each experienced one of their five driest Marches. Simultaneously hot and dry conditions affected 12 states, where much-above-average temperatures occurred alongside much-below-average precipitation, with potential impacts on snowpack and water resources in the coming months. California exemplified these extremes, recording both its warmest and driest March on record.

“Déjà vu all over again”?



March 2026 U.S. Total Precipitation Percentiles.

**Figure 3.** Both the Southwest and the Southeast were especially dry in March.

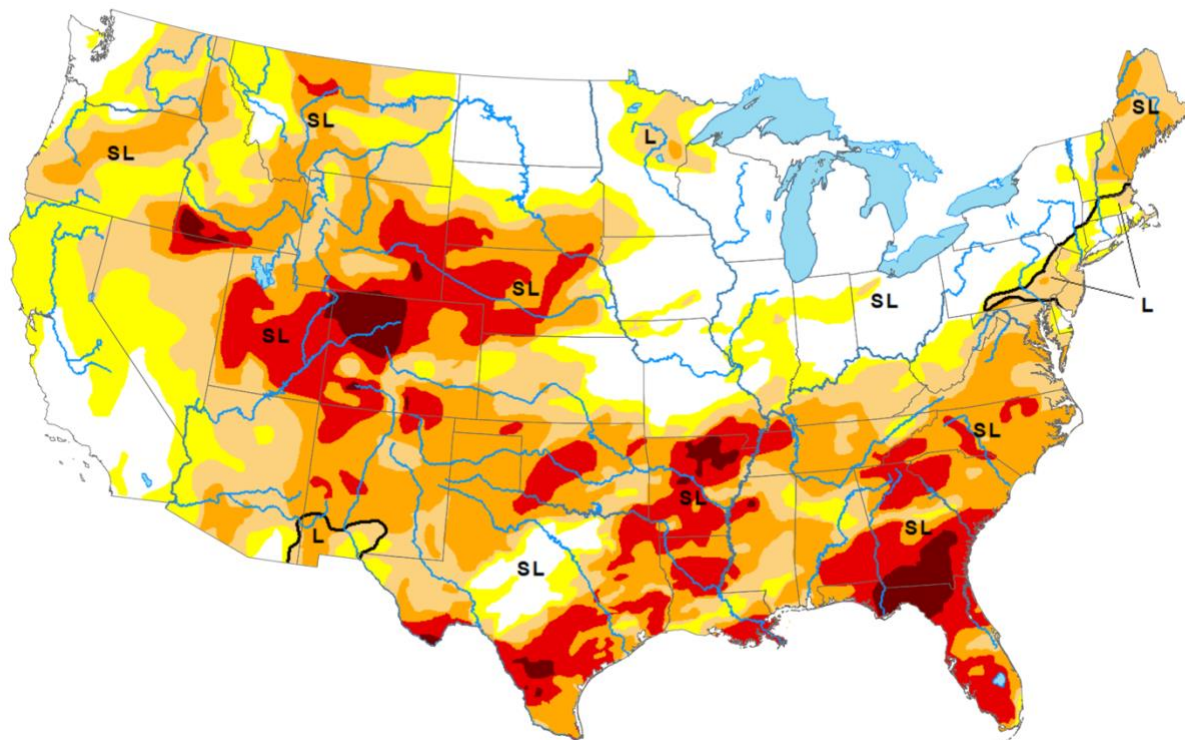
And although drought has not yet arrived in the Midwest, the [latest drought monitor map](#) (see **Figure 4**) shows us literally surrounded by encroaching drought from every direction. These are updated weekly, with the next one due out tomorrow. I will be watching.

About 61% of the CONUS is now in drought, an increase of more than 10% from late February. Drought conditions persisted or intensified across much of the interior West, the Plains, Mississippi Valley, South and Southeast, with notable degradation across the Rockies and central Plains. In contrast, drought contracted or eased across portions of the Midwest, Great Lakes and Northeast. Drought is expected to persist and expand across much of the interior West, Southwest, Rockies and High Plains, as well as parts of the South, Southeast and Mid-Atlantic.

I certainly hope that we don't have a drought to rival the one suffered by the Midwest in 2012, but it sure feels like one may be on the way. That major drought year (2012) hit US corn and soybean farmers really hard. They have already been having a rough time of it, dealing with skyrocketing fuel and fertilizer prices and major market disruptions. Another drought is the last thing they need.

“Déjà vu all over again”?

Data valid: April 14, 2026



**Figure 4.** Current drought monitor map shows the Midwest surrounded by encroaching drought.

The only ‘silver lining’ (and it’s a major stretch to call it that), is that farmers who have been employing [resilience-building practices](#) (like cover crops and conservation tillage) are likely to have more favorable results than neighbors who don’t make these long-term investments in soil health. Such practices help soils retain more soil moisture deeper in the profile, allowing crops in such fields to better withstand drought – if it comes.

With the [expanding prevalence of available remote sensing imagery](#), we’re likely to see vivid visual examples of the significant resilience advantage (as expressed by preserved yield) that these practices can bring. Perhaps those images will help boost levels of adoption, [which continue to lag below where they need to be](#). But it would be a bitter price to pay, nonetheless. Let’s hope it won’t be as bad as 2012. That was brutal!