

March Weather Wrap

By Bill Kappel

To say it was a warm and dry March may be a bit of an understatement. March 2012 will go down as one of the driest and warmest months of March in at least the last hundred years around the region. And after a snowy and cold February, these conditions really supplied quite a contrast.

For the month, temperatures were almost 7° F above normal and precipitation totaled only a little over a tenth of an inch, less than 10 percent of normal. On top of this is the fact that March is normally one of our wetter winter months (just behind April) and the moisture normally received during the month is very important for a healthy start to the growing season. So let's hope April continues the trend we've seen since last fall where we seem to have a pattern change every 30 days or so that results in above-normal moisture and below-normal temperatures.

Warm and dry conditions affected most of Colorado during March. For example, Denver had its second warmest March since 1873 (1910 still holds the record) and its driest March since 1872 (previously 1908). Colorado Springs didn't do much better, also coming in with its warmest March on record (previously 1910) and sixth driest March on record.

March started off with spring-like snow over the first two days. A cold front moved through during the late morning of the 1st, and clouds thickened during the day. Snow began to fall off and on from mid-afternoon through evening. Most of us picked up 1 to 3 inches of new snow. Conditions were quiet through late the next morning, but the stronger March sunshine combined with cold air aloft to produce convective snowfall, some of which were heavy, during the afternoon and early evening of the 2nd. These produced another quick half inch to inch of new snow.

Cold air also continued to filter into the region, and as skies cleared that evening, the fresh snow on the ground caused temperatures to rapidly tumble. Some of the colder areas around the region dropped below zero late that evening and the next morning. But, as is often the case in March, temperatures were able to quickly warm once the sun returned, melting the snow. Highs reached well into the 50s on the 4th and 5th, and when combined with gusty winds, much of the snowpack disappeared around the region.

The first full week of March was mild and breezy, as we just missed out on a significant snowfall. Temperatures reached well into the upper 50s to start the week, as mostly sunny skies and breezy conditions helped temperatures warm. This was ahead of a storm that was moving into the desert Southwest. This storm then moved into New Mexico, about a hundred miles too far south to bring us any snow.

Temperatures did cool to normal levels, with highs holding in the 40s from the 7th through the 9th. Areas of low clouds and fog affected us at times and helped produce a few flurries. This storm continued to slowly spin to our south over the next few days, as it was cut off from the main flow. As it finally began to depart the region, a few bands of clouds moved through and produced a quick snow shower during the morning of the 11th. Temperatures quickly warmed behind the departing storm, reaching well into the 50s that afternoon.

The week of the 12th was warm, windy, and dry across the region. Temperatures were above normal every day, reaching well into the 60s most afternoons. Winds gusted well into the 30 to 40 mph range on the 12th and 13th, helping to dry the landscape. Mild and quieter conditions under plenty of sunshine settled in for the 13th through the 15th. Then southwesterly winds kicked up again on the 16th and temperatures soared to near record levels, reaching the upper 60s, with some of the lower elevations around the region touching the low 70s. Not bad for the last week of winter. It was another warm and dry week around the region with record highs set on several afternoons.

We did have a brief break in the pattern on the 19th and the 20th, as temperatures stayed at or slightly below average both days. Areas of low clouds and fog on the morning of the 20th produced a few flurries as well. But this was short-lived as the storm responsible for this brief intrusion of cooler air moved too far south to do us much good. Instead, high pressure quickly built into the region from the west. Temperatures warmed under sunny skies from the 50s to the 60s as we headed into the first days of spring.

Then, as the area of high pressure continued to move off to the east, strong southwesterly winds began to kick in. This allowed temperatures to really soar, as the downslope component of the winds helped to aid an al-

ready mild air mass. Highs touched the low 70s for some of us on the 23rd, the first time we reached the levels since last October. Temperatures stayed in the upper 60s and low 70s through the weekend, reaching daily record highs at several locations along the Front Range.

The remnant snow also quickly melted as the desiccating winds came during the afternoons and quickly dried out the dead vegetation. High fire dangers were the norm and will be until we get our next heavy wet snow (which will happen at some point yet this spring) or we begin to "green up" the vegetation. There was no change in the patterns through the end of the month, as temperatures stayed at or above record levels through the 31st.

A look ahead

April is known for a wide range of weather conditions in the region and is on average our snowiest month of the year. We can see 70° temperatures one afternoon and a blizzard the next. Several recent years have seen over 50 inches of snow accumulate during the month. It also melts very quickly, often adding very beneficial moisture to the soil and helping the vegetation that is just getting started. We can hope this year will bring abundant moisture to make up for some of the dry conditions we experienced last month.

March 2012 Weather Statistics

Average High	57.6° (+7.7°)
100-year return frequency value	max 57.9° min 38.0°
Average Low	26.1° (+5.2°)
100-year return frequency value	max 27.0° min 12.0°
Highest Temperature	73° on the 31st
Lowest Temperature	-1° on the 2nd
Monthly Precipitation	0.13"
	(-1.73", 93% below normal)
100-year return frequency value	max 4.29" min 0.22"
Monthly Snowfall	3.0"
	(-20.2", 87% below normal)
Season to Date Snow	88.4"
	(-5.6", 6% below normal)
	(the snow season is from July 1 to June 30)
Season to Date Precip.	15.00" (+0.74", 5% above normal)
	(the precip season is from July 1 to June 30)
Heating Degree Days	718 (-193)
Cooling Degree Days	0

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Letters to Our Community

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View of enrollment trends "misleading"

Ana Konduris, president of Direction 38!, gives a very misleading picture of student enrollment trends in District 38 in her letter to Our Community News ("District 38 must retain more students," March 3).

First, Ms. Konduris focuses on only one detail of the enrollment picture when she points out that fewer

students "choice-in" to District 38 schools than "choice-out." But this statistic does not measure all aspects of the choice issue. For example, it does not measure the number of families who choice-in to D-38 by choosing to move to the community. For most families, the quality of the school district is a factor in their choice of where to live. And in fact, between 2004 and 2011, overall enrollment in D-38 schools increased, even though some families elected to send their children out of the district.

During that same time period, enrollment in District 12, to which Ms. Konduris compares District 38 unfavorably in her letter, grew by a smaller percentage than did enrollment in D-38, even though D-12 posted a higher choice-in number. So it would seem that choosing-in/choicing-out is not a very complete measurement of the district's ability to attract students, or of the broader choices families make about where to educate their children.

Ms. Konduris describes Directions 38! as a grassroots organization, but in fact, the group has only four members, according to one local media report. Their website says their goal is to provide an "additional source of information" about District 38, but the information they provide typically is chosen to undermine the incumbent school board and show the district in the poorest light possible. Their real goal is to create dissatisfaction

with public education in D-38, although on the whole the district is quite successful, with the top remediation rate for a public school district in Colorado. A favorable remediation rate means high school graduates are ready for college, with little need for remedial coursework first.



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