

March 2012 Climate Summary - Georgia

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March proved to be a very memorable month with a severe weather outbreak at the onset, elevated pollen counts, and record-setting temperatures. The month began with an intense, spring-like storm system that moved across the southeast producing widespread severe weather. The National Weather Service at Peachtree City determined an EF-3 tornado touchdown in Haralson and Paulding counties, and an EF-1 tornado in Cobb county, both from the same supercell. Atlanta and Athens recorded the greatest 24-hour rainfall totals for the month (2.09 and 1.75 inches, respectively) with this system as it passed through on the 2nd and 3rd. Although additional significant rainfall fell on the 14th and 31st of the month (*Fig. 1*), the overall pattern still remained relatively dry. Precipitation was below average in areas such as Augusta (-1.90) and Macon (-2.71), with a slightly above average monthly total recorded at St. Simons Island (+0.13). Drought conditions persisted through the month, with Extreme (D3) to Exceptional (D4) areas remaining across the majority of Central and Southern Georgia.

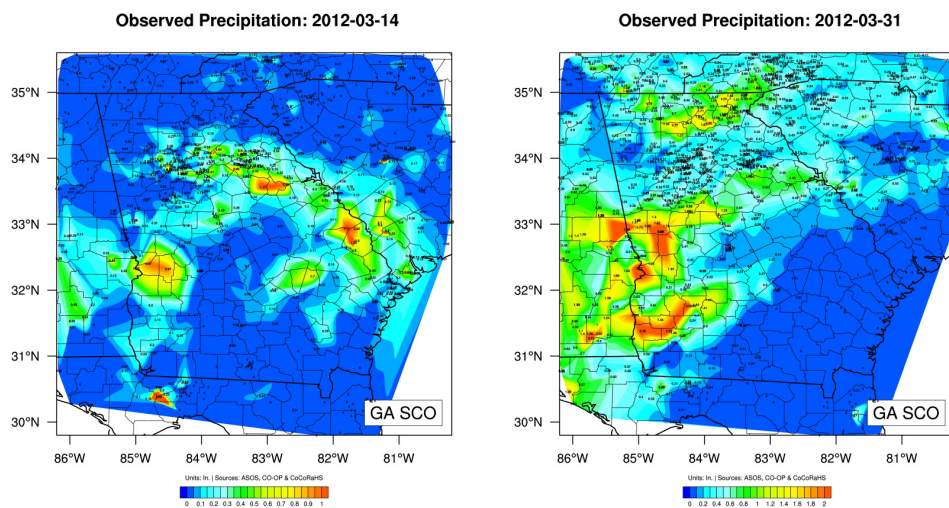


Figure 1 - Composite of observed precipitation totals for 3/14 and 3/31.

The La Nina pattern of warm temperatures seen throughout the winter, continued into March with near summer-like temperatures occurring before the official start of spring. March 2012 recorded the warmest average temperature on record at several official Georgia climate sites, including Atlanta, Athens, and Columbus. *Figure 2* shows the integrated high temperature reports for the 18th, which was one of the warmest days statewide. Several cities also set new March records for consecutive days at or above 80 degrees. The unusually high temperatures in the southeast during March could be partly attributed to a persistent blocking high-pressure system in the Atlantic Ocean. This blocking pattern during March kept the polar jet stream bulged well to our north.

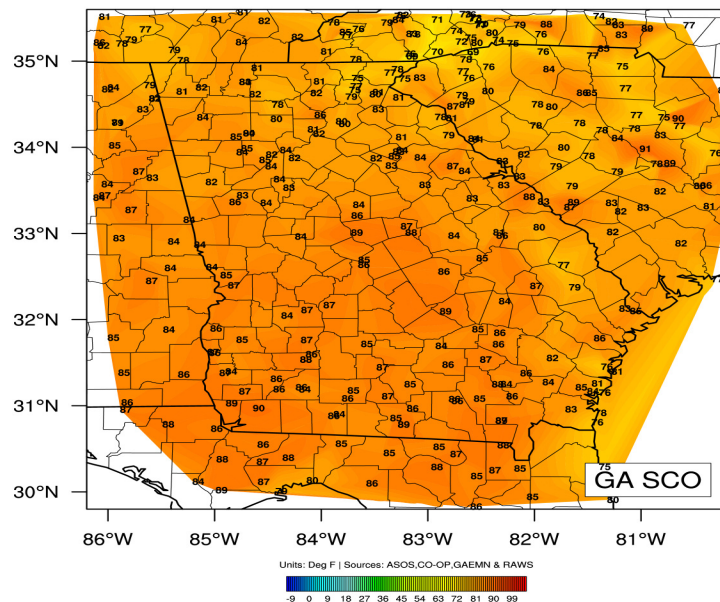


Figure 2 - Integrated high temperatures for 3/18

The mild winter also played a role in the record high pollen counts that were observed in March. The original pollen record for Metro Atlanta, set in 1999, of 6,103 particles per cubic meter was broken on March 19th with a total of 8,164 particles of pollen per cubic meter. The pollen count reached even higher on the 20th at 9,369 particles of pollen per cubic meter.

According to NOAA's Climate Prediction Center, La Nina continued to weaken during March and is expected to return to ENSO-neutral

conditions throughout April. Although La Nina is expected to transition to ENSO-neutral conditions, impacts are expected to persist into the upcoming season. This favors a continuation of above average temperatures and drier than average conditions across the state. The three-month seasonal outlook for April-May-June (*Figure 3*) shows an increased chance of the probability of above-averaged temperatures across the state and equal chance of the probability of above or below normal precipitation.

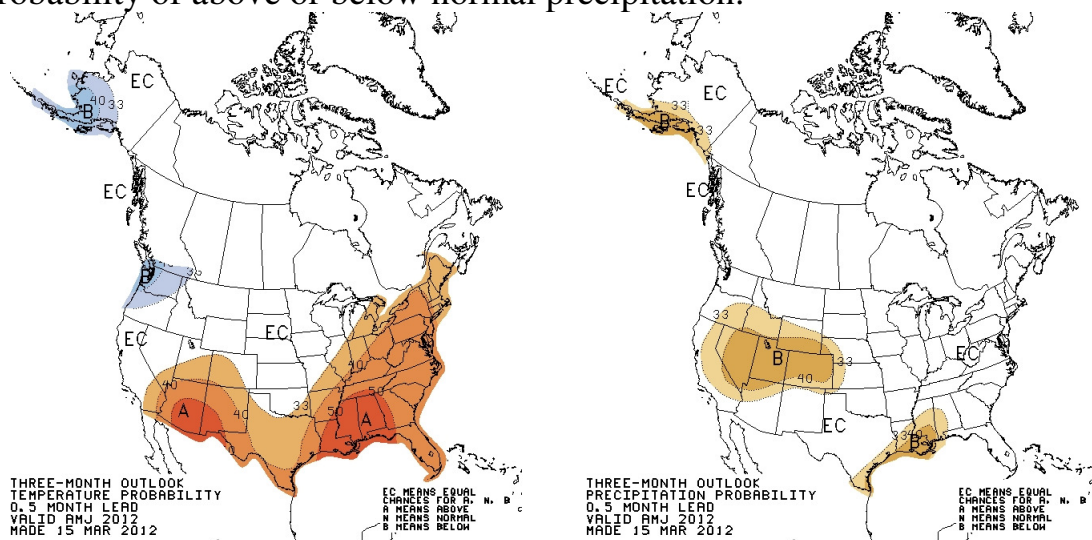


Figure 3 - NOAA 3-month seasonal temperature and precipitation outlook