



National Oceanic and Atmospheric
Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce

Record number of billion-dollar disasters struck U.S. in 2020

Nation saw its 5th-warmest year on record

Climate Satellites | climate reports temperature rankings

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It was an extraordinary year for weather and climate events in the U.S.: The nation endured an unprecedented 22 billion-dollar disasters in 2020.

A record number of named tropical storms formed in the Atlantic, with a record 12 making landfall. The nation also had its most active wildfire year on record due to very dry conditions in the West and unusually warm temperatures that gripped much of the country.

Here's a recap of the climate and extreme weather events across the U.S. in 2020, according to scientists at [NOAA's National Centers for Environmental Information](#).

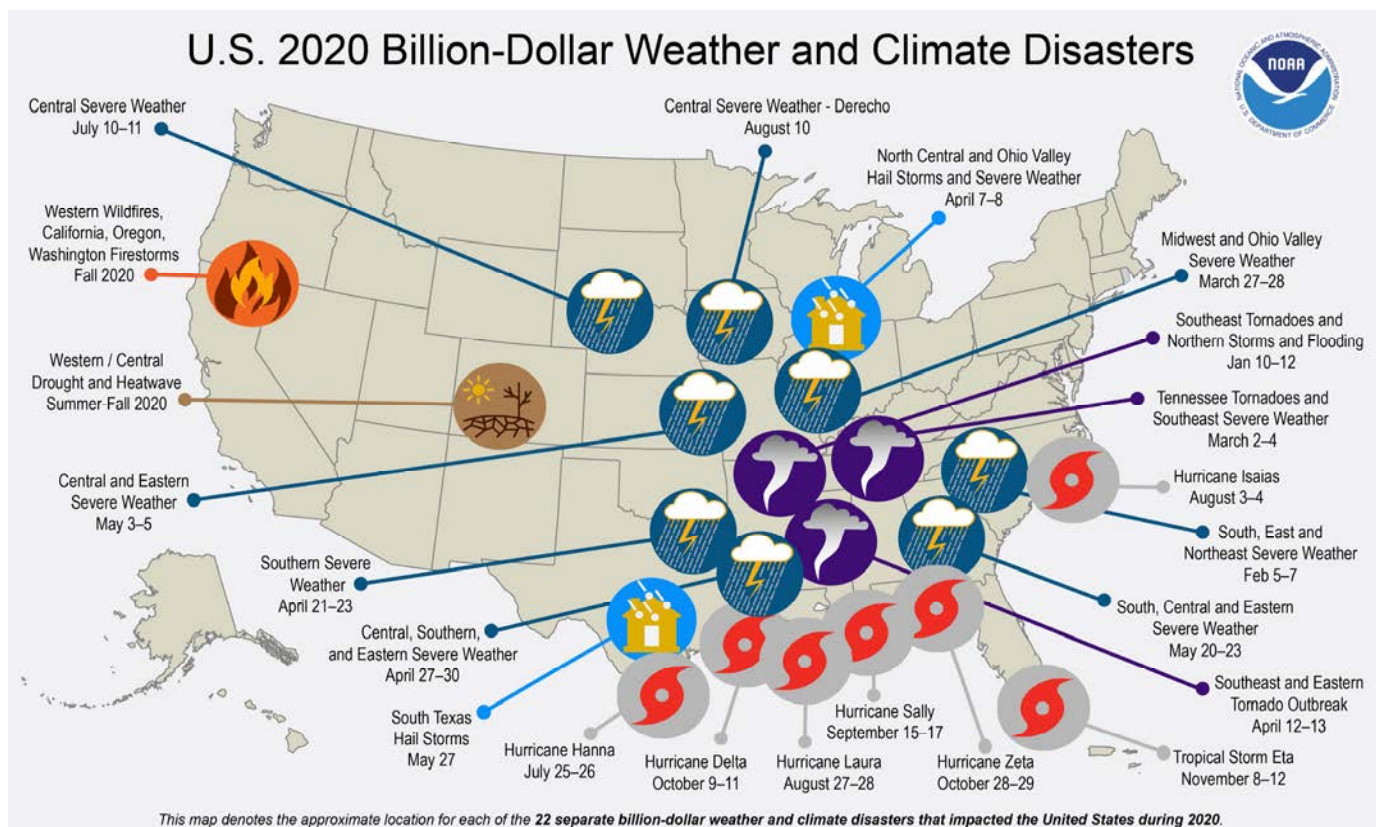
Climate by the numbers

Billion-dollar disasters in 2020

Last year, the U.S. experienced a record-smashing 22 weather and climate disasters that killed at least 262 people and injured scores more:

- 1 wildfire event (Western wildfires focused across California, Colorado, Oregon and Washington);
- 1 drought and heatwave event (summer/fall across Western and Central U.S.);
- 3 tornado outbreaks (including the Nashville tornado and Easter outbreak);
- 7 tropical cyclones (Hanna, Isaias, Laura, Sally, Delta, Zeta and Eta); and
- 10 severe weather events (including the Midwest derecho and Texas hail storms)

Damages from these disasters exceeded \$1 billion each and totaled approximately \$95 billion for all 22 events.



A map of the United States plotted with the locations and dates for the record-breaking 22 billion-dollar weather and climate disasters that struck the country in 2020. (See article text and NCEI report link for details about each event.) (NOAA NCEI)

The seven billion-dollar tropical cyclones were the most in one year since NOAA started keeping track of billion-dollar disasters in 1980. The extremely active 2020 Atlantic hurricane season produced an unprecedented 30 named storms, with 12 making landfall in the continental U.S. The combined cost of the seven tropical systems was approximately \$40.1 billion, more than 42% of the total U.S. billion-dollar disaster price tag in 2020.

Last year was also the most active wildfire year on record across the West. The three largest wildfires in Colorado history occurred during 2020, with California recording five of the six largest wildfires in its history. Across the U.S., wildfires burned nearly 10.3 million acres during 2020, exceeding the 2000-2010 average by 51%. This was the largest acreage consumed in the U.S. since at least 2000.

Since 1980, the U.S. has sustained 285 separate billion-dollar weather and climate disasters that have exceeded \$1.875 trillion in total damages to date.

U.S. Selected Significant Climate Anomalies and Events for 2020



Coldest winter (Dec–Feb) since 1999. Coldest year since 2012. The lowest known mean sea level pressure on record for AK was observed at Shemya on Dec 31 — 924.8 mb (27.31 in.).



CONUS drought coverage expanded throughout much of 2020 with a minimum extent of 9.6% occurring on Feb 18 and maximum coverage of about 50% on Dec 22. Drought conditions expanded or intensified across much of the western U.S. and southern to central High Plains throughout 2020. D3 and D4 drought coverage in Dec was the largest CONUS extent since Aug 2012.



It was the most-active wildfire year on record across the West. The 3 largest wildfires in CO history and 5 of the 6 largest wildfires in CA history occurred during 2020.



Aug 10 severe weather, associated with a derecho, stretched from SD to OH with most damaging impacts across IA. This was one of the costliest weather disasters across the U.S. in 2020.



Overnight EF-3 and EF-4 tornadoes on Mar 2–3 caused more than \$1 billion in damage and multiple fatalities across the greater-Nashville metro area.



The Death Valley temperature observation of 130°F on Aug 16 was the hottest CONUS temperature in 2020 and 3rd-warmest temperature on record for any month across CONUS.



More than 140 tornadoes were reported during the Apr 12–13 tornado outbreak from TX to MD. This multi-billion dollar disaster was associated with the most fatalities during a tornado outbreak since Apr 2014.



Warmest year on record for Kahului and Hilo.



12 named U.S. landfalling tropical cyclones occurred during 2020, breaking the annual record of 9 landfalls set in 1916. It was the most-active North Atlantic hurricane season on record.



Drought was most notable across Puerto Rico in Jun and Jul, affecting over half the island.

2020 was the 5th-warmest year on record; the average U.S. temperature was 54.4°F, 2.4°F above average. 2020 U.S. precipitation average was 30.28 in., 0.34 in. above average, ranking in the middle third of the historical record.

Please Note: Material provided in this map was compiled from NOAA's State of the Climate Reports. For more information please visit: <http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/sotc>

A map of the United States plotted with significant climate events that occurred in 2020. Please see article text below as well as the full climate report highlights at <http://bit.ly/USClimate202012>.

Full-year 2020

The average temperature across the contiguous U.S. in 2020 was 54.4 degrees F (2.4 degrees above the 20th century average), making 2020 the fifth warmest year on record. All five-warmest years in the U.S. have occurred since 2012, according to NOAA scientists from NOAA's National Centers for Environmental Information.

Ten states across the Southwest, Southeast and East Coast had their second-warmest year on record. There were no areas of below-average annual temperatures observed across the Lower 48 states during 2020. In Alaska, despite temperatures running 1.5 degrees F above the long-term average, the state saw its coldest year since 2012.

Precipitation across the contiguous U.S. totaled 30.28 inches (0.34 of an inch above average), which placed 2020 in the middle third of the 126-year climate record.

Nevada and Utah ranked driest on record, with Arizona and Colorado ranking second driest. On the flip side, North Carolina recorded its second-wettest year, with Virginia seeing its third wettest.

According to the U.S. Drought Monitor, 2020 ended with extreme and exceptional drought conditions enveloping about 22% of the contiguous U.S. — the largest expanse since August 2012.

More > Find NOAA's climate reports and download the images from the [NCEI climate monitoring website](#).

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