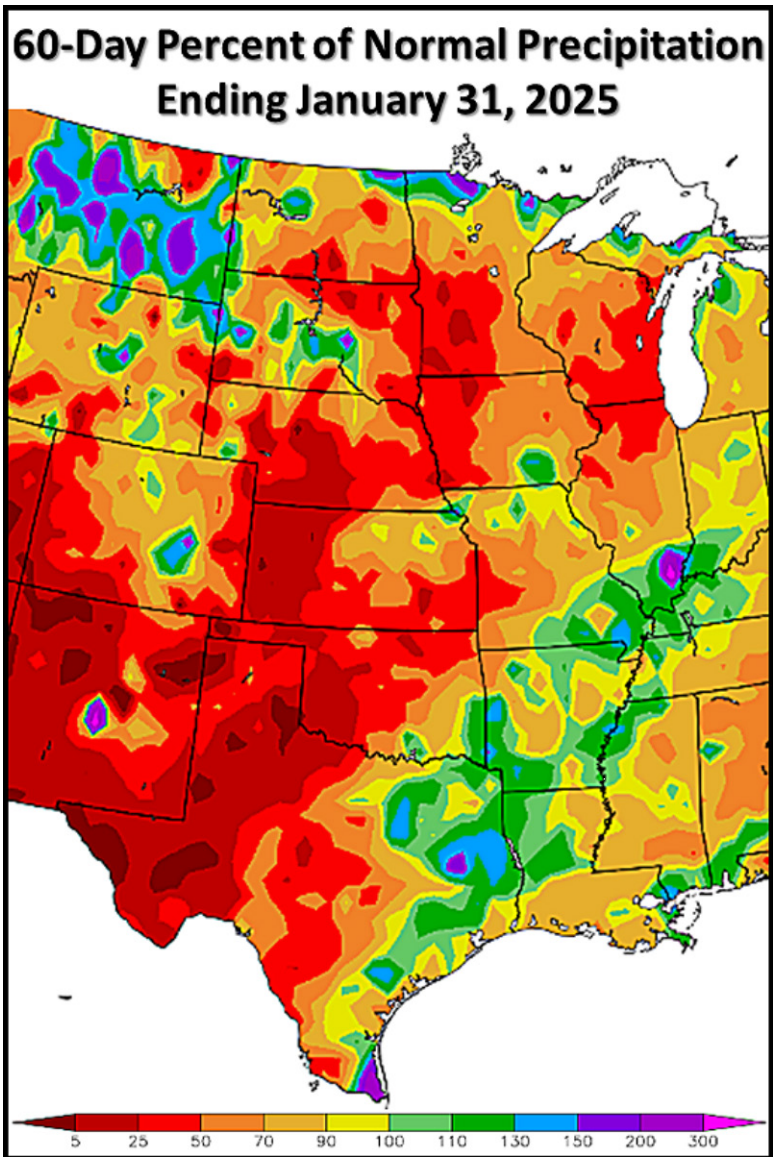
U.S. Hard Red Wheat Needs Cool, Moist Weather To Recover

By Drew Lerner

Kansas City, January 31 (World Weather Inc.) – ***Strongly negative Pacific Decadal Oscillation and La Nina like conditions do not usually provide a good environment for serious precipitation in the central or southwestern Plains during the winter months and that has certainly been the case this winter.*** However, it is extremely important to note that hard red winter wheat areas received significant rain during November that bolstered soil moisture down deep into the ground and led most crops to good establishment. Drying since that time has created some apprehension, but crops have no moisture demand at this time of year. ***Another concern is extreme cold that occurred earlier this month, though if the wheat plant did not die it will have a chance to recover in the spring "if" sufficient rain and mild temperatures are prevalent prior to the warmer days of spring.***

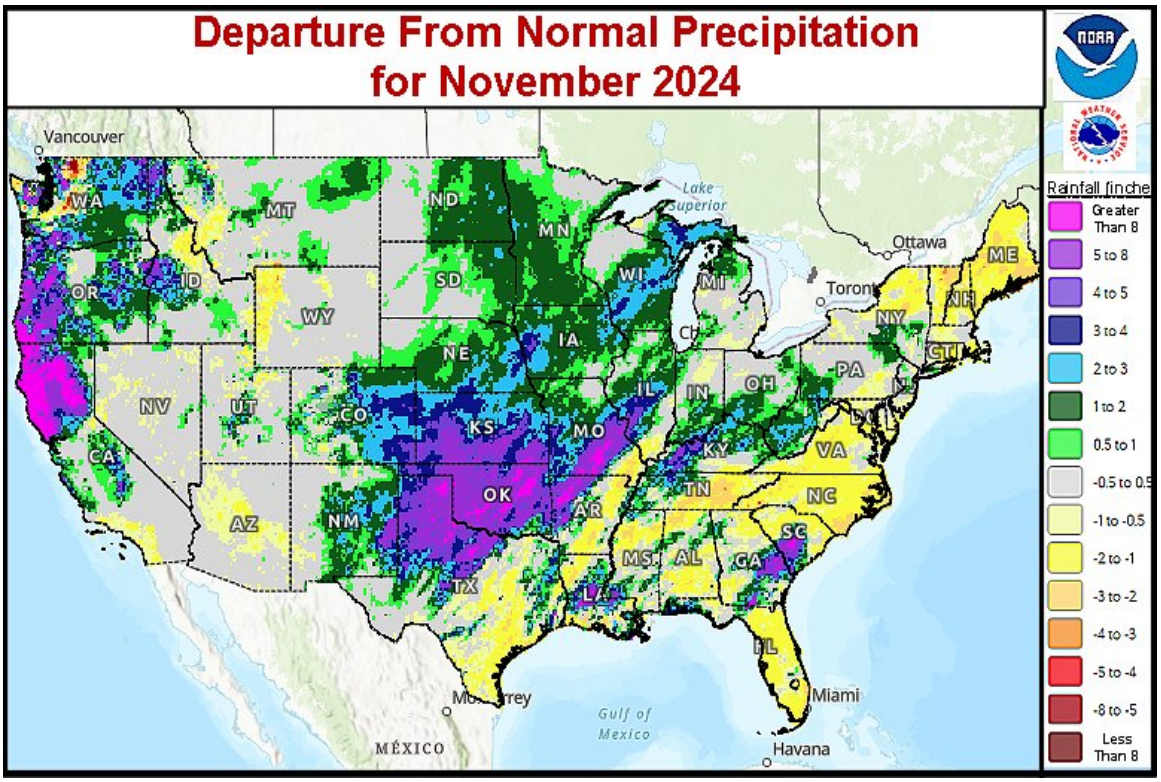


Precipitation in the most recent 60-day period ending January 31 in the central United States has been well below normal and that has raised a considerable amount of concern over long term weather for the spring and early summer. Dryness has been substantial in the upper Midwest and most of the central and southwestern Plains. Many areas have reported less than half of normal precipitation especially in hard red winter wheat production areas.

Dryness in the central United States can be largely attributed to the combined impact of strongly negative Pacific Decadal Oscillation (PDO) and the weak La Nina event that is under way. The drier bias has made many producers and traders nervous in recent weeks especially with the bitter cold event that took place earlier this month while snow cover was at a minimum.

One of the most misleading parts of the dry bias is that the drier conditions have occurred in the middle of

winter when precipitation is not usually very great and (more importantly) the precipitation comes after an unusually wet month of November. The November moisture surpluses were substantial and actually helped get this year's winter wheat well established prior to dormancy. The dryness that has prevailed since that time has been of interest, but it probably does not mean very much since crop moisture demand is normally quite low at this time of year.

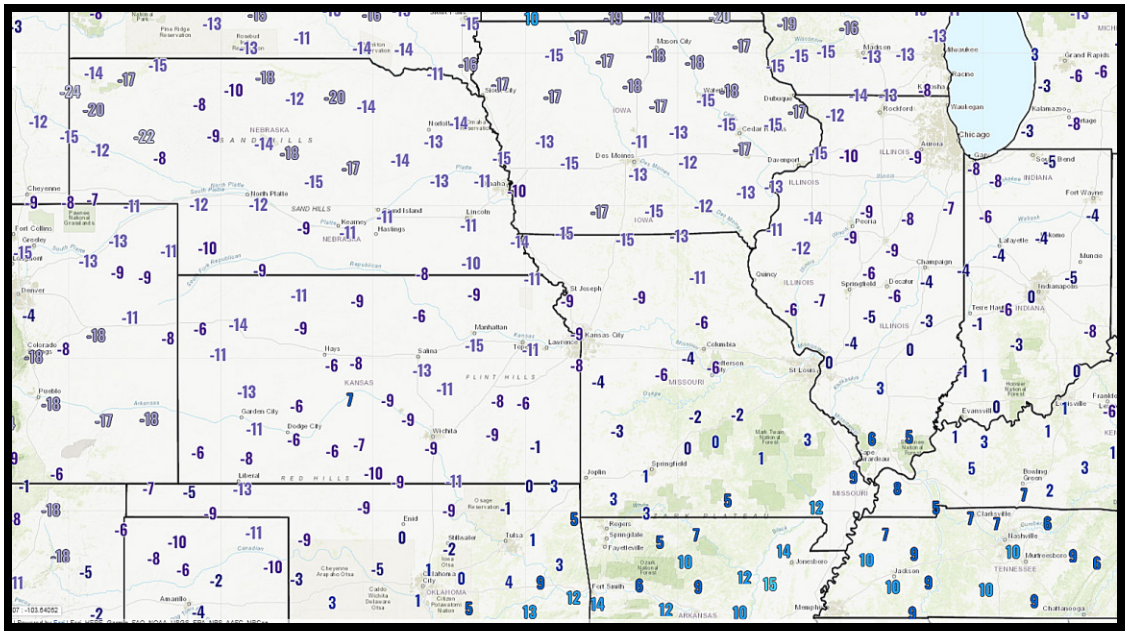


Winter crops in the central and southwestern Plains will need to have some timely rain or snow events as spring approaches to replenish the topsoil with moisture. A single precipitation event could easily accomplish the task of restoring favorable soil moisture to the region. ***With that said, though, the trend will not likely change much over the next few weeks with continued below normal precipitation in the west-central and southwestern Plains and possibly in the upper Midwest as well.***

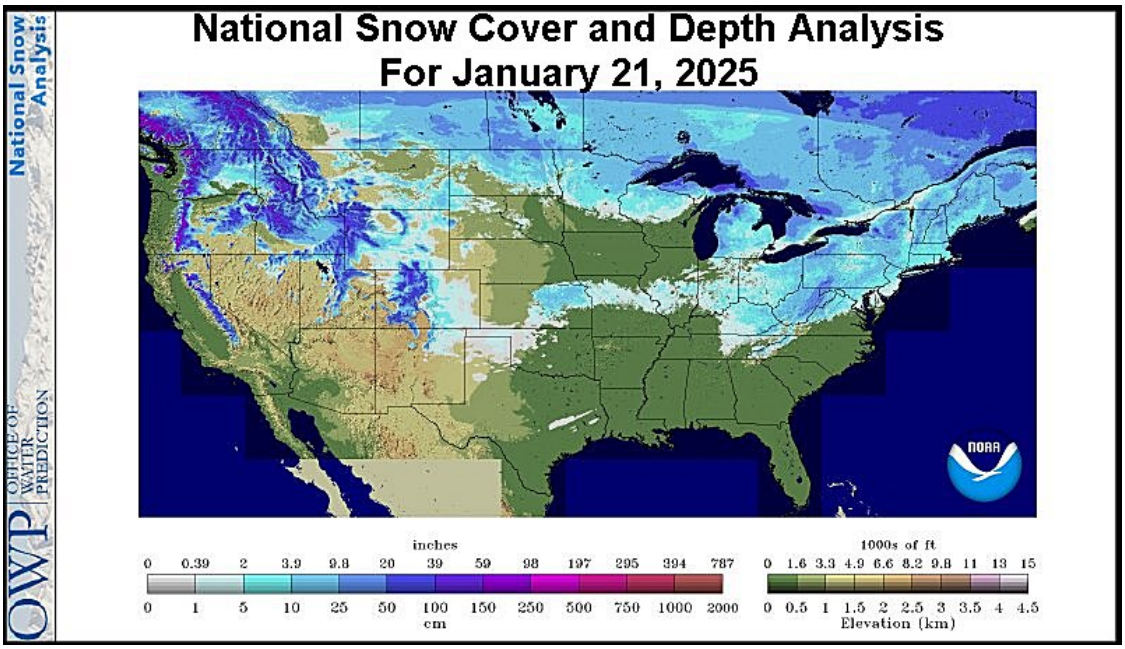
Temperatures will bounce around quite a bit in the next few weeks. Some warmer temperatures at times may raise evaporation rates and further raise the need for returning precipitation. The warmth might also stimulate some early season crop development, but not prior to March and more likely in April. There will be a few bouts of colder biased weather as well and that should keep crops from awakening from dormancy with a strong moisture demand.

Spring weather will be of great importance, not just to restore topsoil moisture, but to help damaged winter crops recover as much of their production potential as possible. Wheat damage likely occurred during the extreme cold of mid-January when there was no snow on the ground. Temperatures during that period of time were in the negative teens and negative single digits in many wheat production areas in the central Plains. Such conditions

can cause significant crop damage especially if the crops was not adequately hardened before the bitter cold arrived.



LOWEST TEMPERATUERS ON JANUARY 21, 2025 IN FAHRENHEIT



World Weather, Inc. does not believe there will be much winterkill resulting from the very cold and snow free conditions that occurred earlier this month. However, plant injury may be significant in some areas. Wheat is a smart plant and knows when it has sustained significant damage. The crop can and will set new tillers and induce new root development in the spring if temperatures are mild and conditions are moist for a few weeks before a more aggressive period of crop development begins. The implications of

this is that the crop will have a chance to recover from its damage, but much of that potential for recovery will be wrapped up in the spring weather pattern.

Weak La Nina conditions will prevail through the next few weeks with a second peak in its development expected by mid-month February. After that, the event is expected to slowly diminish into spring. If the dry bias remains until April some of the damage that may have occurred from the January freeze will not be recoverable, but if there are a few bouts of precipitation and no excessive heat the crop could recover nicely.

Both negative PDO and La Nina do not favor precipitation during the winter or spring. The both features are expected to weaken, but they probably will not completely dissipate and that does raise a little concern about the potential for getting sufficient moisture into the region. As stated above, though, it will only take one significant storm system to adequately recharge the soil with moisture for plant improvements and production recovery. Or there could be a succession of weak weather systems that could also provide a proper environment for recovery.

The bottom line ***is that there is reason for concern over the future production of hard red winter wheat n the United States, but be careful not to write off too much of the crop too soon. There is potential for improvement, though much of that potential will be hinged on La Nina and PDO both of which may make the needed moisture a little more challenging to develop than in most late winter and spring seasons.***
