



WAYPOINTS

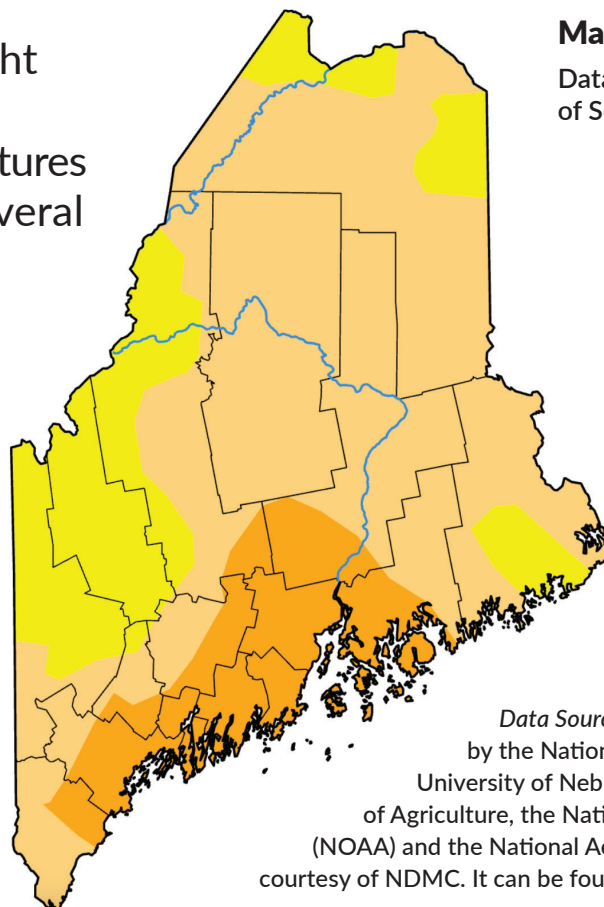
INFORMING THE FUTURE OF MAINE'S COAST AND ISLANDS

Waypoints is part of Island Institute's effort to gather data and share stories that spur action and provide decision-making support to community leaders. Like the waypoints on a journey or map, thoughtful interpretations of data and science provide navigation points toward community-led solutions.

Drought

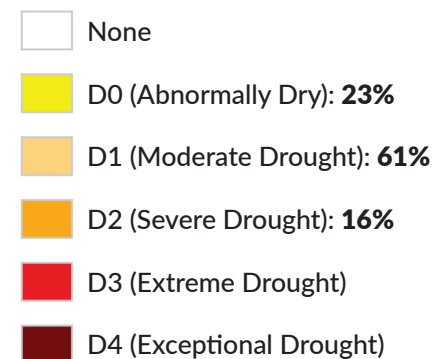
Maine has been experiencing drought since the summer of 2025, and this summer, with above average temperatures and below average precipitation, several coastal Maine counties moved from moderate to severe drought.

As of September, moderate or worse drought now affects **90% of Maine residents.**



Maine Drought Status

Data valid from U.S. Drought Monitor as of September 8, 2026



Data Source: The U.S. Drought Monitor is jointly produced by the National Drought Mitigation Center (NDMC) at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the United States Department of Agriculture, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. Map courtesy of NDMC. It can be found at: droughtmonitor.unl.edu

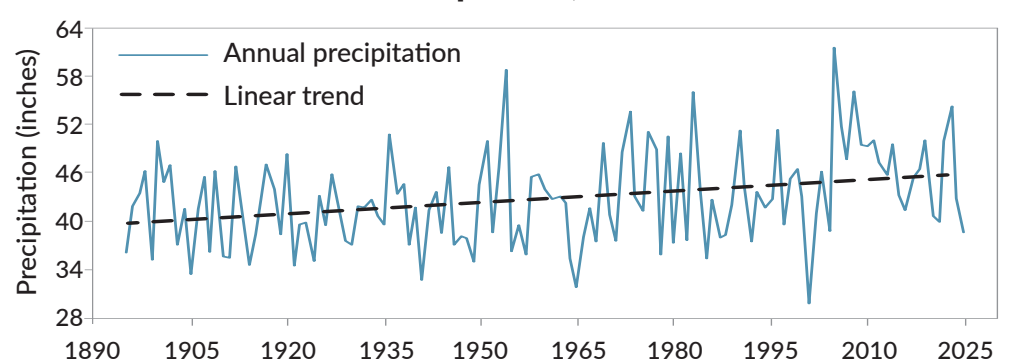
PRECIPITATION TRENDS

Over the long-term, Maine has received more annual precipitation, but climate change is causing more extreme weather events. When comparing recent annual precipitation to a century ago, Maine receives about 6 inches more per year on average, and heavy precipitation has become more common. Overall since the 1950s, we now see 2-3 more days per year with over 1 inch of precipitation and 1-2 more days with 2 inches or more.

Over the short term, Maine has been drying up. 2023 was an extremely wet year, but total annual precipitation in Maine has declined since then. Precipitation over the last year is 9-14 inches below normal across most of southern, coastal and eastern Maine, and as much as 17.6 inches below normal Downeast.

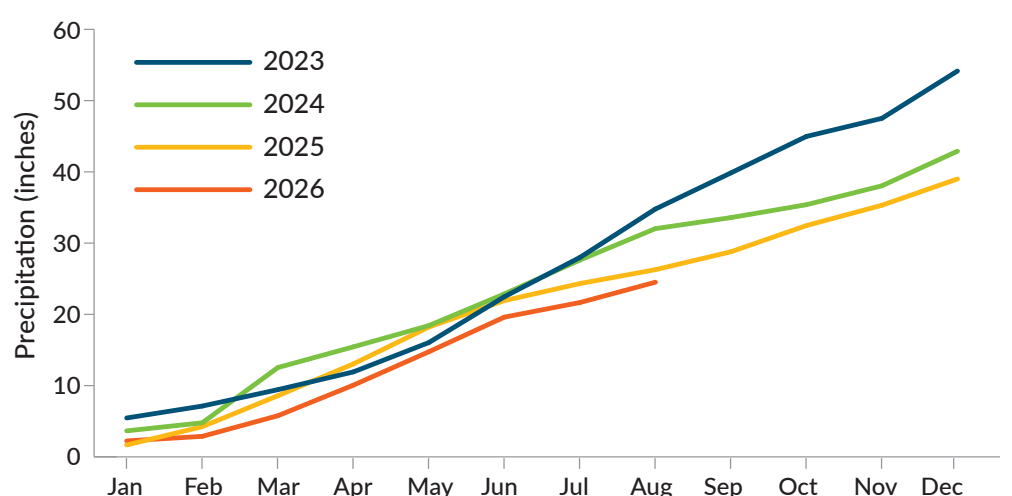
The Portland Climate Station reported 0.63 inches of precipitation for July, making it the **2nd driest July** on record dating back to 1871.

Maine Statewide Annual Precipitation, 1895-2025



Data Source: NOAA National Centers for Environmental Information (NCEI, 2026).

Maine Statewide Annual Precipitation, 2023-2026



Data Source: NOAA NCEI, Climate at a Glance: Statewide Time Series, published August 2026.

IMPACTS

Streamflows, lake levels, and seasonal wetlands are below normal or worse across the state. Groundwater recharge continues to lag, with dry wells being reported. Farmers are needing to expand irrigation due to reduced soil moisture, pasture growth has stalled in many areas, and severe dryness is triggering premature leaf drop in some maples and wild apple trees.

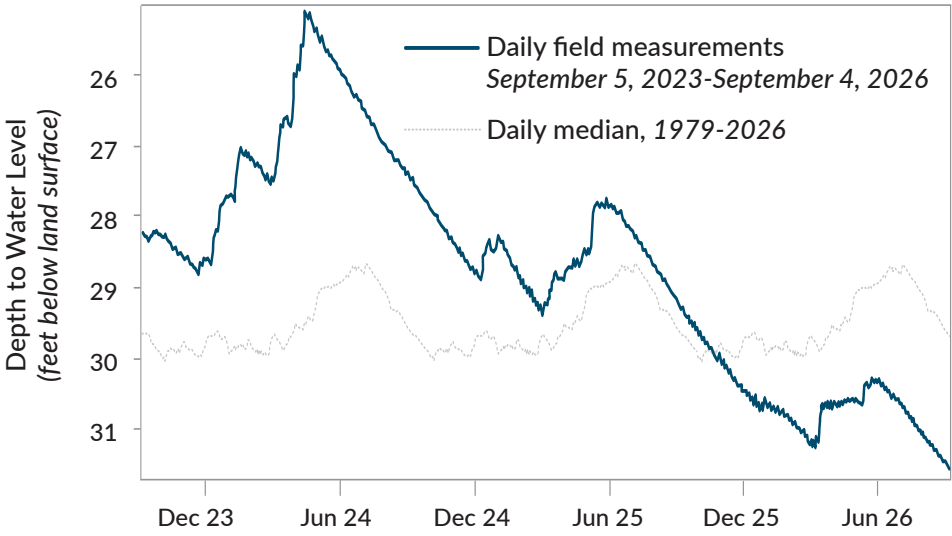
Groundwater

Groundwater is one of the slowest indicators to respond to and recover from drought. The rapid onset of drought in August 2025 drove groundwater in parts of Maine to record lows, and rainfall deficits in July and August 2026 continue to result in much-below-normal groundwater conditions.

More than half the state relies on private wells as of 2023.

Wells across Maine are significantly below average. Groundwater gauge data at multiple locations are reporting conditions at or near record lows. The Brunswick groundwater monitoring station, the longest standing station (dating back to 1958), is doing relatively well compared to other USGS stations in Maine, yet it has been below mean monthly levels since November 2025.

Groundwater Conditions at Brunswick Monitoring Station



Data Source: ME-CW26 Brunswick, Maine, USGS (data from spring/summer 2026 may be provisional)

Soil Moisture

Near-surface soil moisture (top ~4 inches) is very dry and deep soil dryness (down to ~39 inches) has worsened over the summer. Soil particles this dry have reduced “wet-ability” and begin to repel water, reducing infiltration. In these dry soil conditions, intense storms can be less effective for aquifer recharge than stratiform rain events, as the heavy rains create more runoff than infiltration.

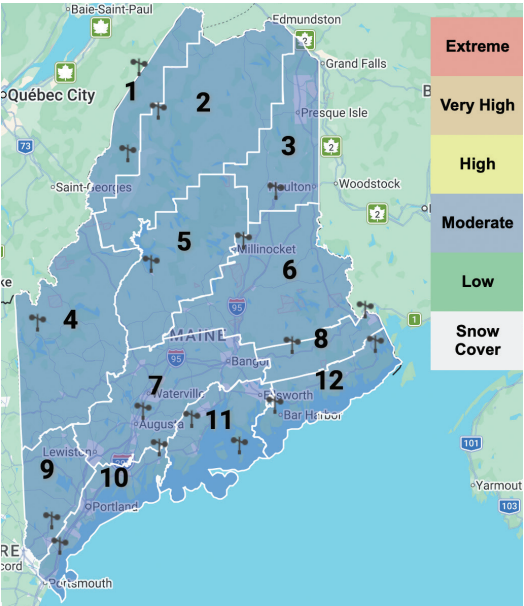
Wildfire Risk

As of September 8, over 81% of the continental U.S. was abnormally dry with 59% experiencing drought conditions.

Wildfire risk in Maine is low compared to the national average, but drought does increase risk. In 2026, Maine has been experiencing normal to slightly elevated fire activity, with an uptick starting in August. Last year brought the most active August on record, but improvements in detection and suppression have led to a 97% decrease in area burned since the early 1900s.

AIR QUALITY: Maine experiences adverse effects from wildfires burning elsewhere. In mid-July smoke plumes from Canadian wildfires led to declines in air quality in Maine.

Fire Danger as of 9/15/26



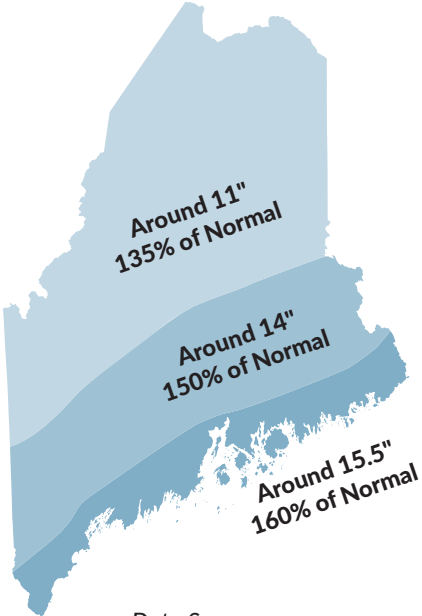
Data Source: Maine Forest Service Wildfire Danger Report, mainefireweather.org

OUTLOOK

Without persistent, widespread soaking rains, the standard late-summer/fall seasonal groundwater drawdown will cause drought conditions to persist or expand. NOAA’s Climate Prediction Center’s season outlook for Sept-Nov. 2026 slightly favors below-normal precipitation and above-normal temperatures, not the 15+ inches of rain needed along the coast to end the drought in the next two months.

A very strong El Niño event is predicted for fall and winter 2026-27. El Niño’s influence on the northeast has historically led to warmer, wetter winters, which could help with drought recovery, particularly along the coast and in central Maine where the shallow ground frost would aid groundwater recharge.

Precipitation needed to end drought conditions in two months



Data Source: NOAA’s NWS Caribou Office, as of Sept. 3

Stay Informed

Follow the University of Maine’s “Maine Mesonet” project, a network of 26 new weather stations currently being installed across Maine’s 16 counties, prioritizing agricultural hubs.

The Maine Drought Task Force is initiated by the Maine Emergency Management Agency and the U.S. Geological Survey when abnormally dry conditions in Maine escalate. The task force was reactivated in September 2026, and reported on drought conditions, reservoir levels, precipitation, temperature forecasts, drinking water impacts and environmental and agricultural impacts.

Latest online resources from the task force: www.maine.gov/mema/hazards/drought-task-force

Report a dry well here: maine-dry-well-survey-maine.hub.arcgis.com