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Late heat, dramatic wet-dry swings marked BG weather in 2019

By CAROLINE EGGERS ceggers@bgdailynews.com

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Cracked and peeling soil due to the drought on Monday, September 30, 2019, at Grant's Farm Produce. (Austin Anthony/photo@bgdailynews.com)

Austin Anthony/

Although there were instances of thunder, tornadoes and flooding, Bowling Green in 2019 was overall pretty unremarkable when it came to the flashy forms of severe weather.

What was extreme, however, was the rainfall, a statewide “flash drought” and a late streak of 90-plus-degree weather.

Over the course of the city’s sixth-wettest year on record, residents experienced rapid rainfall in 24 hours, days of endless sprinkling, an abrupt development of drought and then record-setting rainfall again.

Bowling Green received a total of 62.1 inches of precipitation, up from last year’s 54.93 inches and more than 12 inches above normal. The city ultimately had 22 days with at least an inch of rain within 24 hours, which tied the second-highest number recorded.

February was the second-wettest (and 10th-hottest), June was the eighth-wettest and October was the eighth-wettest. But the city also experienced its fourth-driest and fourth-hottest September on record during a statewide flash drought.

“The faucet was shut off and the oven was turned on, and we dried out completely,” said Dr. Stuart Foster, state climatologist and director of the Kentucky Mesonet. It ultimately became Kentucky’s driest and second hottest September on record.

But then, both the city’s and state’s dry conditions flipped.

“Just as remarkable as the rapid onset of that drought was the return to the wet pattern that was prevalent before that,” Foster said. “It was just an unusual swing from one extreme to another and then right back to where it was.”

Bowling Green's temperatures weren't quite as wild, but there were some extremes and new records.

The city saw 77 days above 90 degrees during the year. That's the most days above 90 degrees since 1954, but far from the record of 107 days in 1921. And it's mostly thanks to the late additions of hot days. After August ended, Bowling Green experienced a record-breaking 26 days above 90 degrees. There were just 46 days of above-90 temperatures from June through August.

During the extended summer, there were 55 nights with low temperatures above 70 degrees. That's not quite as high as 2018's 74 hot nights, but still significantly above the long-term average of about 30 days. This pattern is linked to climate change and urban, heat-trapping activity.

"While not as bad as 2018, we continued that pattern of more warm summer nights," Foster said. "When we look at temperature trends, that's what stands out in terms of climate change."

And those warm nights are often what people remember: After experiencing hot, humid days and not receiving a break from it at night, people can feel agitated and trapped.

Following the hot, dry September and record-setting heat in early October (up to 98 degrees Oct. 2), the city experienced one of the coolest Novembers in recent history while setting at least seven weather

records, including record snowfall Nov. 11-12 and a new daily rainfall record Nov. 30.

“We had a very abbreviated fall,” Foster said.

And following the cool November, the city experienced its 10th warmest December on record.

In 2020, there will likely be more extremes of precipitation and heat.

January is expected to be warmer and wetter than normal, according to the most recent 30-day outlook from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

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