After a cooler-than-normal August, Nebraska ended September on the warm side overall. Temperatures were warmest in the eastern half of the state with monthly departures up to 3°F or greater. The statewide average temperature of 65.1°F was 2.2°F above the 30-year average and ranked in the top third warmest Septembers. There were some cool spots in areas of the southern and northern panhandle, however, with monthly temperatures about a degree cooler than normal. A few locations in western Nebraska reached the freezing point during September. The furthest east was the Nebraska Mesonet site in the sandhills near Whitman and occurred on Sept. 6. A hard freeze of 28°F was reported at a few locations in the northern panhandle. The freeze was isolated and elevation driven, not a widespread event. Around mid-September is typically the time at which the first fall frosts and freezes typically begin to occur.

The month was not without warmth. The Nebraska Mesonet station 4 miles northeast of McCook reported a high of 102°F on the afternoon of Sept. 3. More than a dozen locations reached triple digit heat during the month, which was concentrated in the western half of the state.

Temperatures under bare ground gradually declined with seasonally cooling air temperatures. By month’s end, soil temperatures were in the 50s in the west and 60s in the east.

Precipitation

The statewide average precipitation was above normal for the month with pockets of below normal in eastern and western Nebraska. Rain totaled 2.61 inches for the statewide average, which ranks in the top third wettest Septembers and 0.44 inches above the 30-year average. Portions of the west-central and central parts of the state received more than 3 inches above normal for September. Monthly totals in these areas were in the 4-inch range. A few locations in central Nebraska received more than 6 inches of rain for the month. Another swath of heavier precipitation was in southeast to east-central Nebraska. Areas that missed out include extreme southeast Nebraska, portions of east central, and from Lake McConaughy westward.

Crops

According to the National Agricultural Statistics Service, as of Oct. 1 the completed corn (12 percent) and soybean (19 percent) harvests were both below last year as well as the respective 5-year averages. Wheat planting (70 percent) and emergence (42 percent) were also below last year and the 5-year average. The late-month wetness was a factor in
getting into fields.

Drought

At the start of September, abnormal dryness (D0) covered about 31 percent of the state and moderate drought (D1) was found in about 6 percent of Nebraska. Thanks to above-average rainfall amounts in certain areas, abnormal dryness was removed for a large area of the state during the month. West central, north central, a pocket north of Omaha and a small area in the southeast all showed improvements, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor. By month’s end, moderate drought conditions covered a little less than 4 percent of the state and 10 percent was in abnormal dryness.

Outlook

In mid-September, NOAA issued a La Nina watch. There is an increasing chance (55 percent) that these conditions will develop during the October through February timeframe. Following on, however, the probability shifts to neutral conditions in the equatorial Pacific. The Climate Prediction Center’s seasonal outlook for October through December is calling for an increased probability of above-normal temperatures for most all of the U.S. The precipitation outlook is illustrating a tilt in the odds toward dryness in the southeast U.S. with the swath reaching into extreme southeast Nebraska. The rest of the state is in a category of equal chances of above-, near-, or below-normal precipitation. To our west and north, there is an increased chance for wetness in the upcoming season.