Northwest Florida Water Management District

Hydrologic Conditions Report

April 2026

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Summary

April 2026 was an extremely dry month characterized by much-below-normal precipitation and above-normal temperatures (averaging around 69.2 degrees Fahrenheit). The ongoing cumulative rainfall deficit worsened and continued to contribute to declining surface water and groundwater levels across the Panhandle.

Drought conditions worsened rapidly during April 2026 with regions categorized as extreme drought (D3) or exceptional drought (D4) expanding further west on a weekly basis without appreciable rainfall. At the end of April 2026, 30% of the District was classified as in extreme drought and 53% was classified as being in exceptional drought. However, rainfall received in early May exceeded expected forecasts and helped to keep drought category lines stable between the U.S. Drought Monitor map that was released for data up to April 28, 2026, and the map released for data up to May 5, 2026. According to the U.S. Seasonal Drought Monitor, drought conditions are expected to improve between May 1 and July 31, 2026, as the Panhandle moves into its summer wet season.

Rainfall

In April 2026, an average of 1.03 inches of precipitation was recorded across the Panhandle. This amount was 3.76 inches (129%) below the District normal precipitation for the month of April, which is 4.79 inches (**Table 1; Figures 1 – 8)**. Normal precipitation is defined as average monthly precipitation for the 30-year reference period (1991-2020).

The most significant rain event for the month of April 2026 occurred on April 4-6, 2026, when a cold front brought 0.25 to 1.00 inch of rain to the western and north-central regions of the Panhandle. Only small amounts of rain less than 0.25 inches made it to the eastern regions of the District. Higher amounts exceeding 2.50 inches were observed in localized areas of Okaloosa County. Pensacola, Niceville, and Marianna received most of their monthly rainfall from this event with measured totals of 0.51, 0.52, and 0.80 inches observed, respectively.

The entire Panhandle received below-normal rainfall for the month of April 2026. As of May 1, 2026, the District-wide average rainfall deficit for the previous 365 days was 14.78 inches. The first week of May 2026 brought significant and much needed rainfall to the District when a cold front moved through the Panhandle May 2-3, 2026. As a result of the cold front, the District received generally 2.25-2.75 inches of rain with higher amounts exceeding 3.50 inches being observed in localized areas of Walton and Liberty Counties. This rain event reduced the 365-day District-wide average rainfall deficit by 1.16 inches as of May 4, 2026 (**Table 2**).

Table 1: April 2026 rainfall compared to 30-year normal monthly rainfall for Tallahassee, Marianna, Niceville, and Pensacola

Station	April Normal Rainfall (1991 to 2020)	April 2026 Observed Rainfall	Percent Difference
Tallahassee Regional Airport	3.53	0.41	-158%
Marianna Regional Airport	3.72	0.91	-121%
Niceville, FL	5.99	0.95	-145%
Pensacola Regional Airport	5.52	1.11	-133%

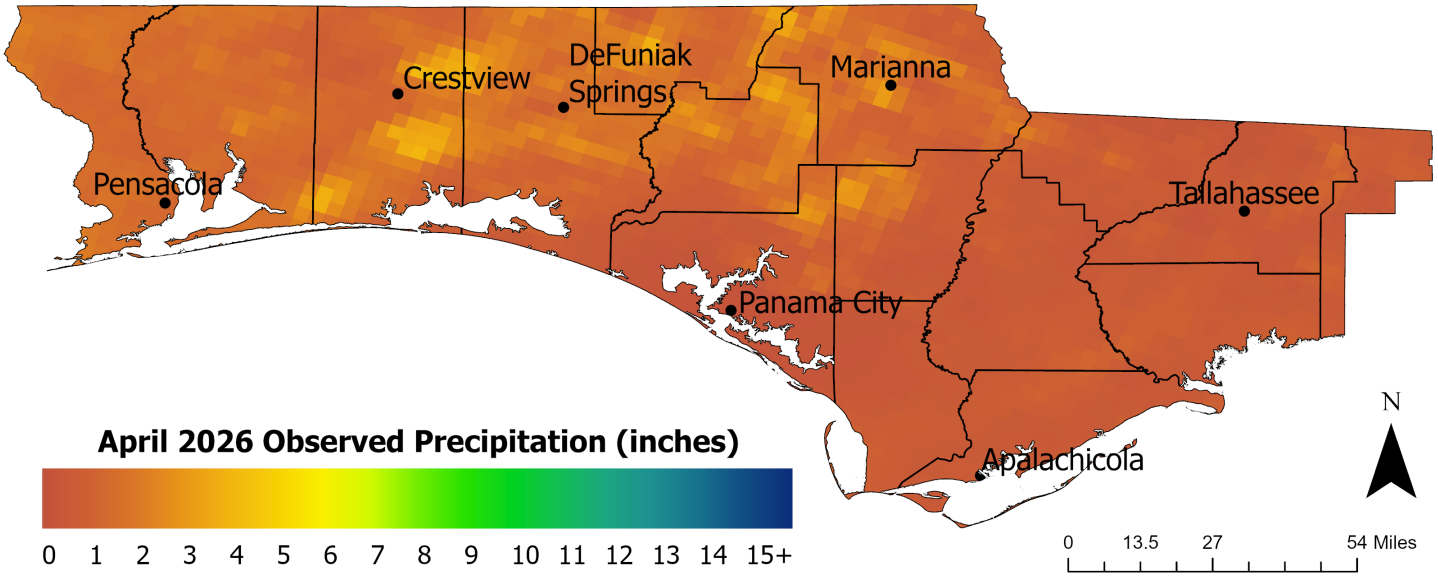
Source: https://www.weather.gov/wrh/Climate?wfo=tae
https://www.weather.gov/wrh/Climate?wfo=mob

Table 2: County-averaged rainfall deficit comparison before and after the May 2-3, 2026 rain event

County	365-day Departure-from-Normal Rainfall (inches) as of May 4, 2026	365-day Departure-from-Normal Rainfall (inches) as of May 1, 2026	Difference
Bay	-14.03	-15.17	-1.14
Calhoun	-17.19	-18.65	-1.46
Escambia	-11.60	-11.51	+0.09
Franklin	-10.13	-10.96	-0.83
Gadsden	-15.29	-17.62	-2.33
Gulf	-11.79	-12.99	-1.20
Holmes	-15.64	-17.68	-2.04
Jackson	-15.82	-18.09	-2.27
Jefferson	-16.81	-17.50	-0.69
Leon	-16.09	-17.49	-1.40
Liberty	-10.61	-12.54	-1.93
Okaloosa	-12.56	-13.61	-1.05
Santa Rosa	-13.04	-12.85	+0.19
Wakulla	-9.64	-10.63	-0.99
Walton	-13.29	-14.97	-1.68
Washington	-13.65	-15.28	-1.63

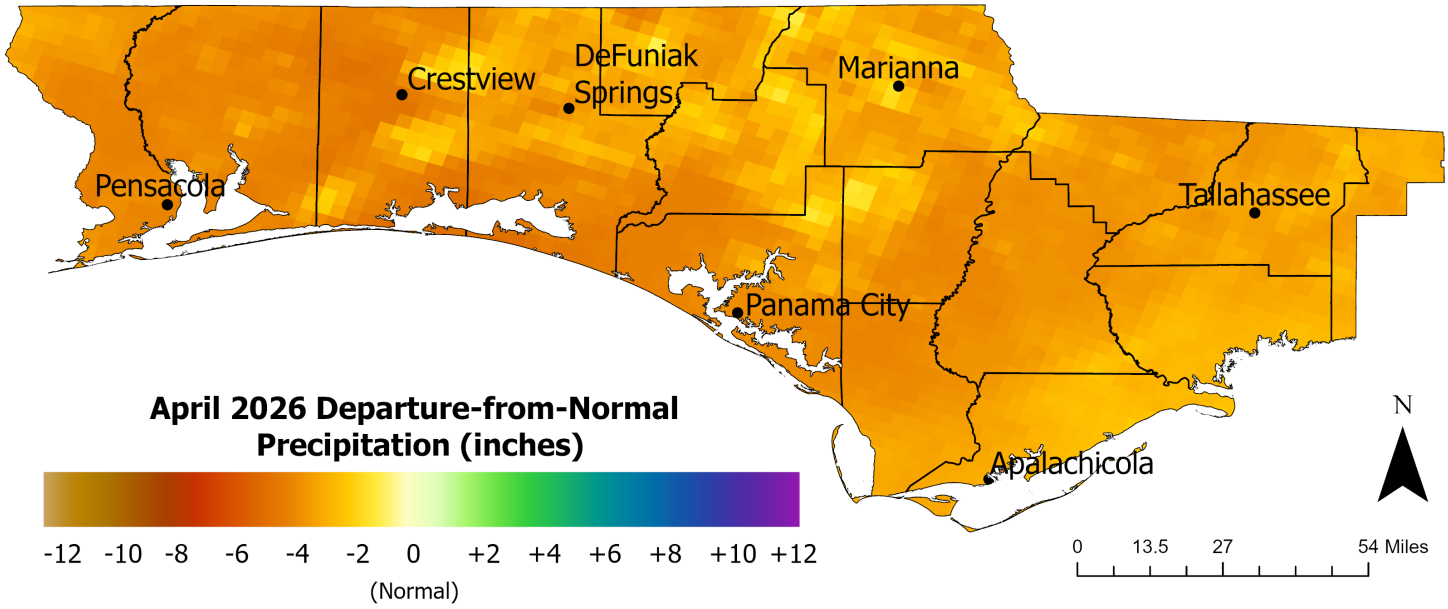
* Please note that a negative difference refers to a decrease in the deficit and a positive difference refers to an increase in the deficit between May 1 and May 4, 2026

Figure 1: District-wide April 2026 observed rainfall



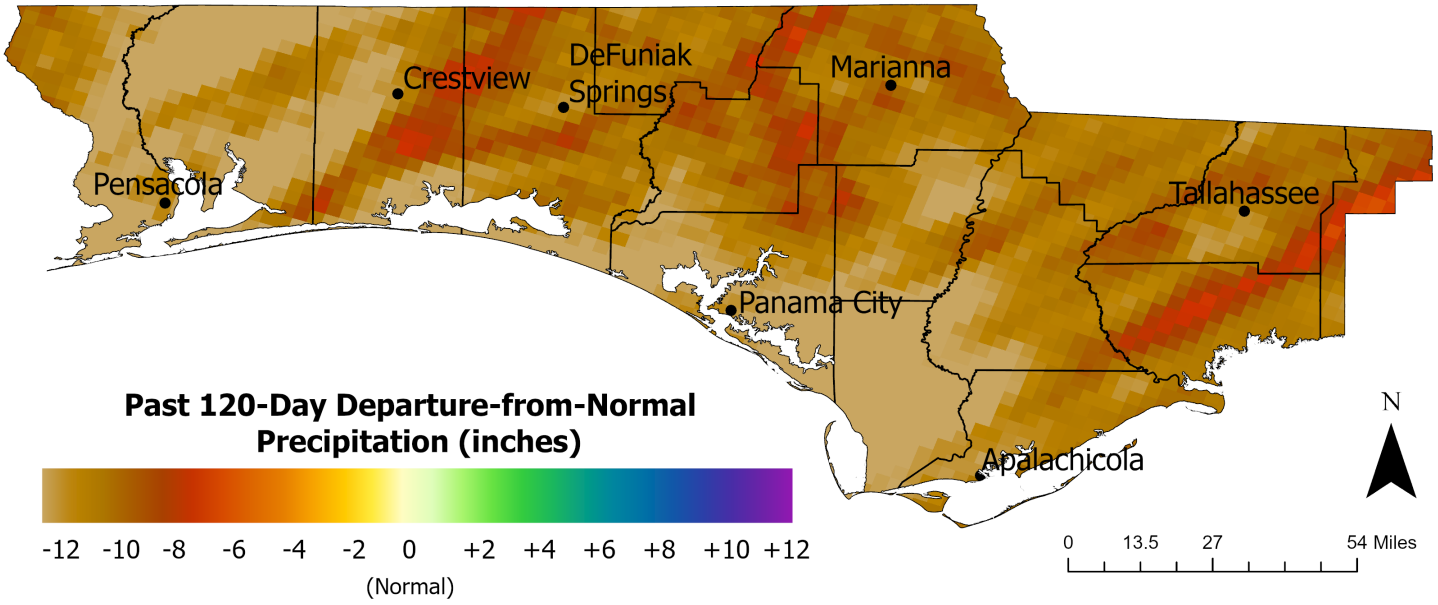
Source: *https://water.noaa.gov/resources/downloads/precip/stageIV/*

Figure 2: District-wide April 2026 precipitation departure from normal



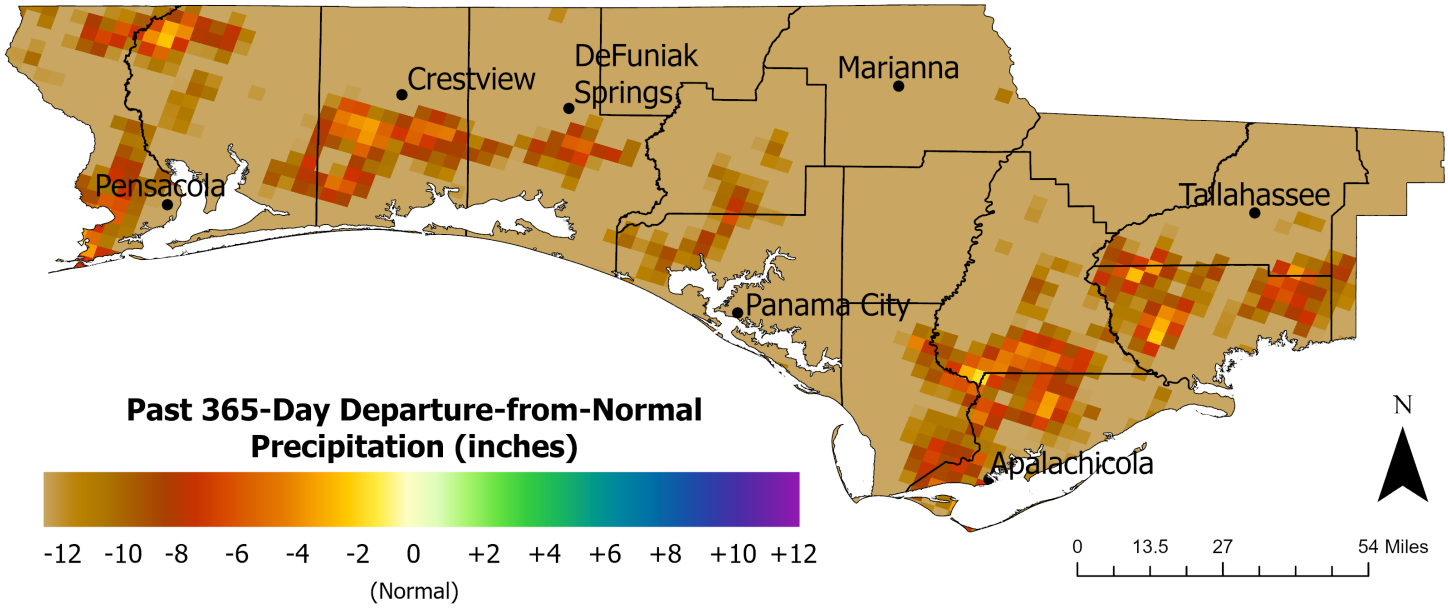
Source: *https://water.noaa.gov/resources/downloads/precip/stageIV/*

Figure 3: District-wide precipitation departure from normal for the previous 120 days



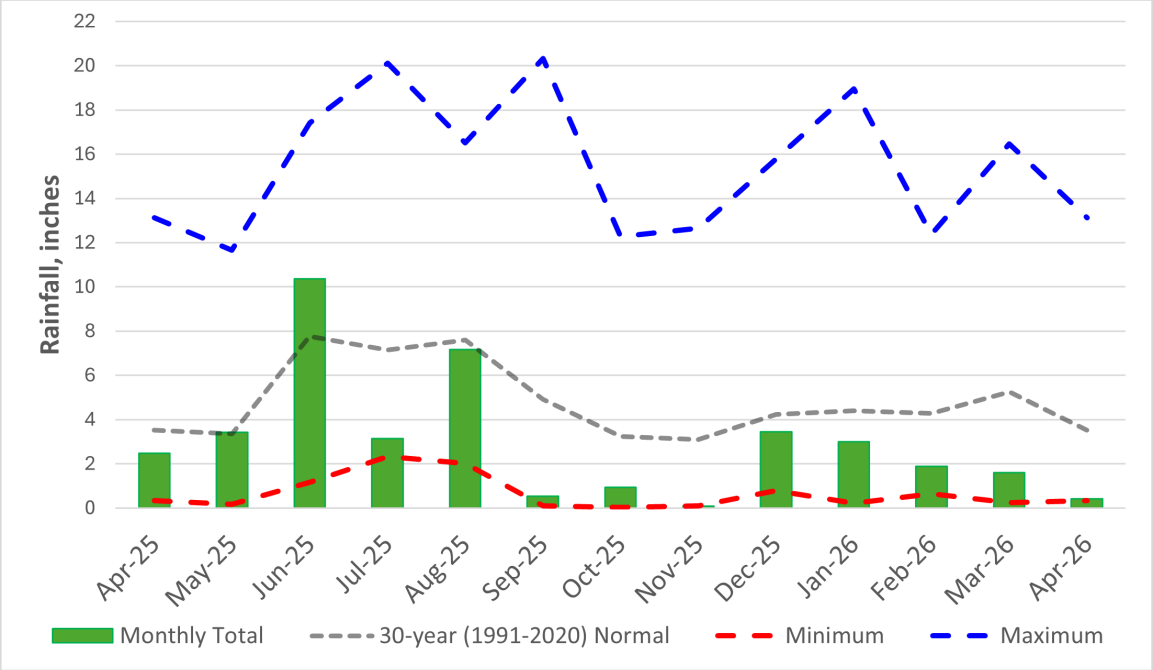
Source: https://water.noaa.gov/resources/downloads/precip/stageIV/

Figure 4: District-wide precipitation departure from normal for the previous 365 days



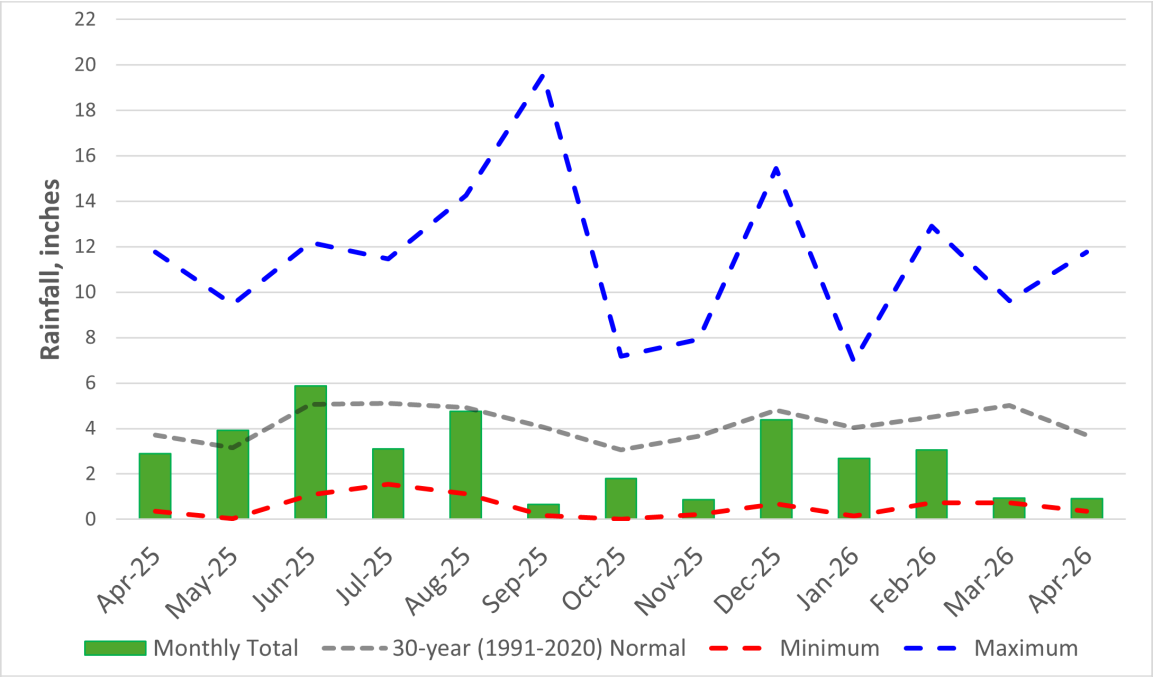
Source: https://water.noaa.gov/resources/downloads/precip/stageIV/

Figure 5: Observed rainfall at Tallahassee Regional Airport for the past 13 months compared to the 30-year normal, minimum, and maximum precipitation for each month



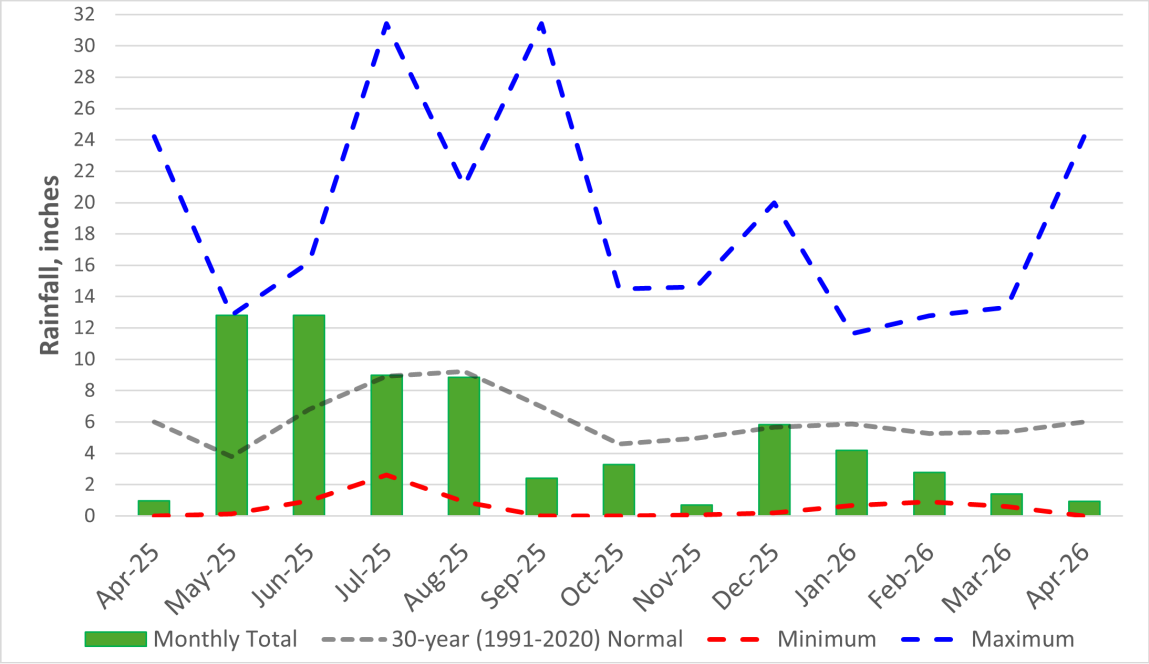
Source: https://www.weather.gov/wrh/Climate?wfo=tae

Figure 6: Observed rainfall at Marianna Regional Airport for the past 13 months compared to the 30-year normal, minimum, and maximum precipitation for each month



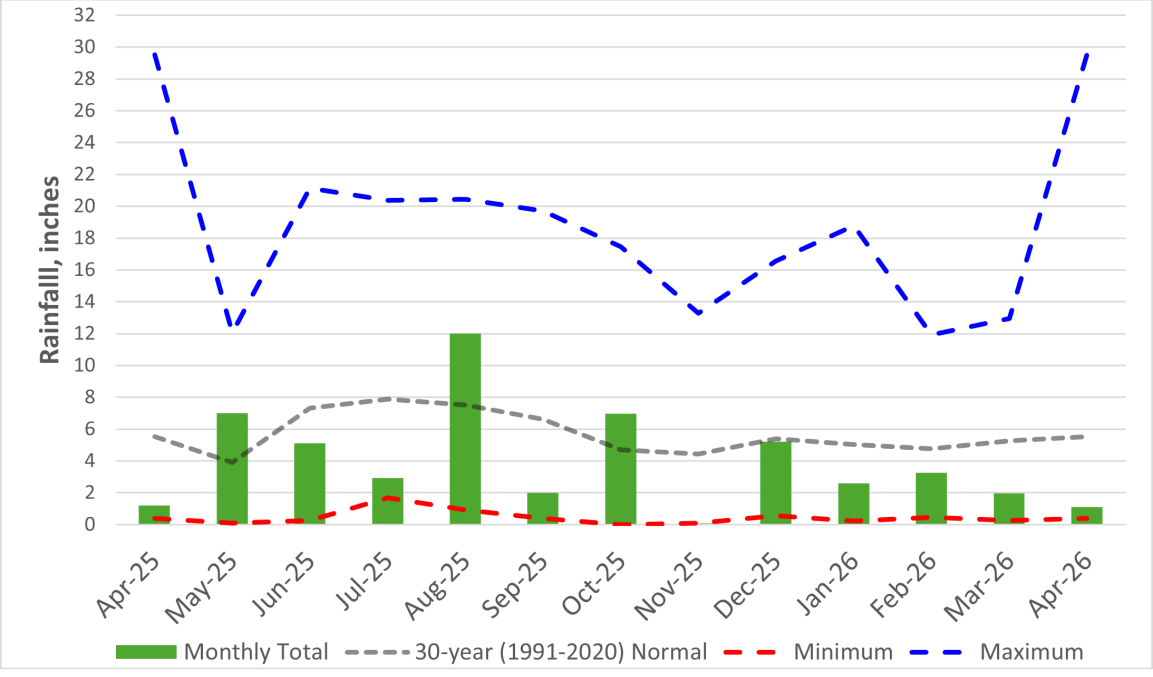
Source: https://www.weather.gov/wrh/Climate?wfo=tae

Figure 7: Observed rainfall in Niceville for the past 13 months compared to the 30-year normal, minimum, and maximum precipitation for each month



Source: https://www.weather.gov/wrh/Climate?wfo=mob

Figure 8: Observed rainfall at Pensacola Regional Airport for the past 13 months compared to the 30-year normal, minimum, and maximum precipitation for each month



Source: https://www.weather.gov/wrh/Climate?wfo=mob

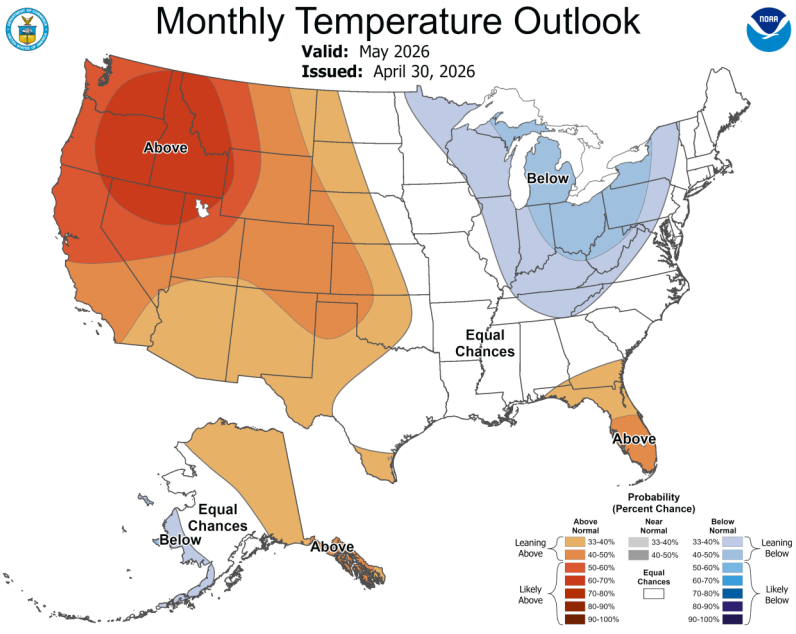
Climate Outlook

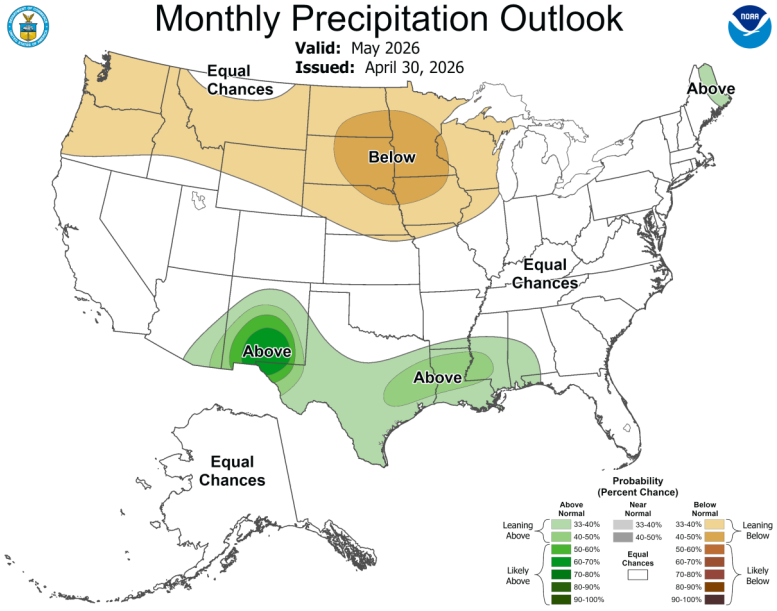
According to NOAA's Climate Prediction Center, the forecast issued April 30, 2026, for May 2026 showed a likely chance for above-normal temperatures in the eastern and central portions of the District and equal chances for above-, below-, or near-normal temperatures in the western portion of the Panhandle. The precipitation outlook showed a slight chance of above-normal rainfall in the western portion of the District and equal chances for above-, below-, or near-normal rainfall in the eastern portion (**Figure 9**).

As of May 4, 2026, ENSO-neutral conditions were present and are favored to last through May-June 2026 (80% chance). Between May and July 2026, El Niño is favored to emerge and will likely last at least through the end of 2026. In the summertime, El Niño is associated with quieter Atlantic Hurricane seasons due to increased vertical wind shear that hinders the development of tropical cyclones.

Source: https://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/products/predictions/30day/
https://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/products/analysis_monitoring/lanina/enso_evolution-status-fcsts-web.pdf

Figure 9: May 2026 Temperature and Precipitation Outlooks for the United States



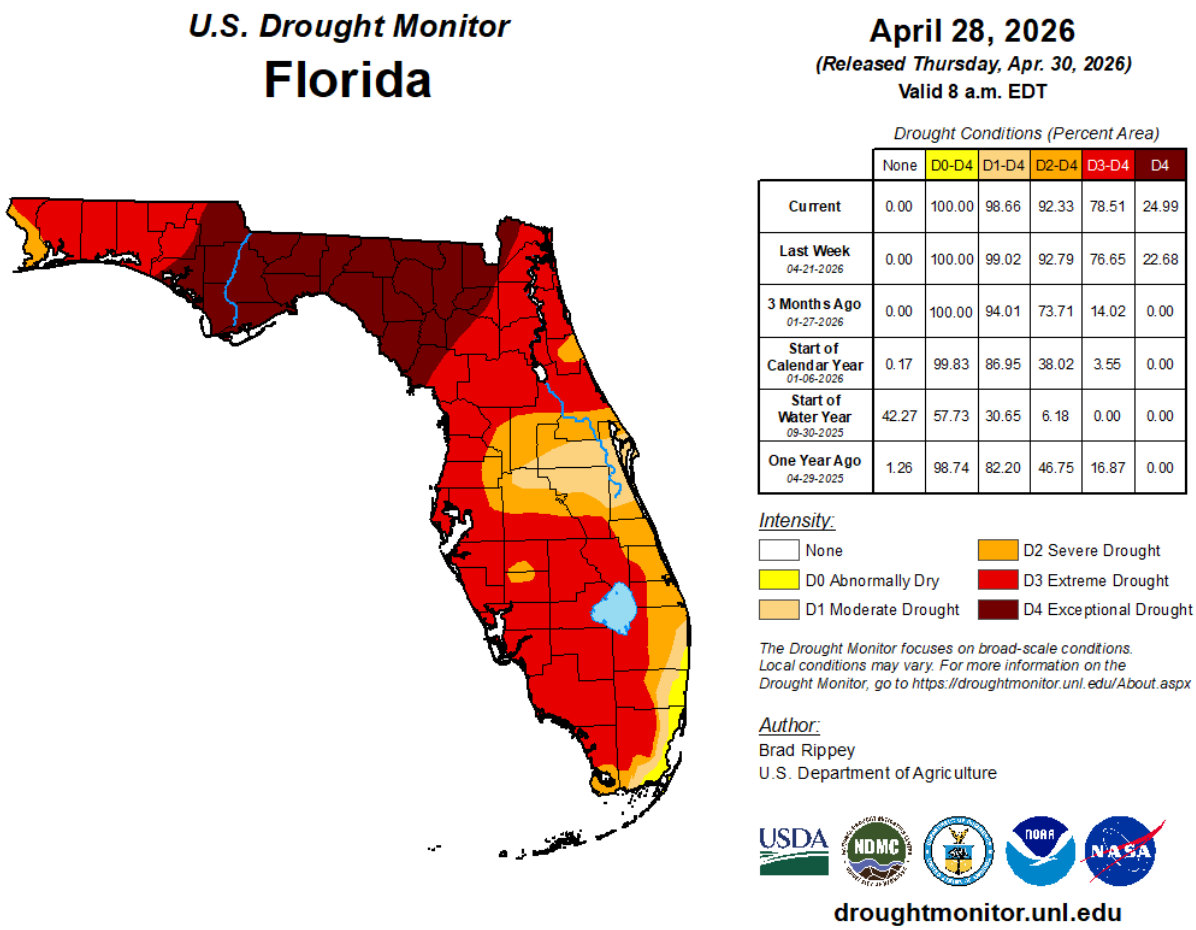


Drought Conditions

Drought continued to worsen throughout April 2026 with the areas of extreme drought (D3) and exceptional drought (D4) conditions expanding further west in the District. The U.S. Drought Monitor report released for April 28, 2026, showed most of the District under severe, extreme, or exceptional drought conditions (**Figure 10**). This is due to the District receiving below-normal rainfall for every month since September 2025 except for December 2025 when near-normal precipitation was received.

According to the U.S. Monthly Drought Outlook for May 2026, drought conditions are expected to persist. This is likely a result of the majority equal chances for above-, below-, or near-normal rainfall forecast for the District (**Figure 9**). According to the U.S. Seasonal Drought Outlook, drought conditions are expected to remain but improve between May 1 and July 31, 2026. This is likely due to the expected increased rain amounts the Panhandle typically receives during the summertime as a result of the sea breeze circulation that drives the near-daily afternoon thunderstorms.

Figure 10: Florida Drought Conditions on April 28, 2026



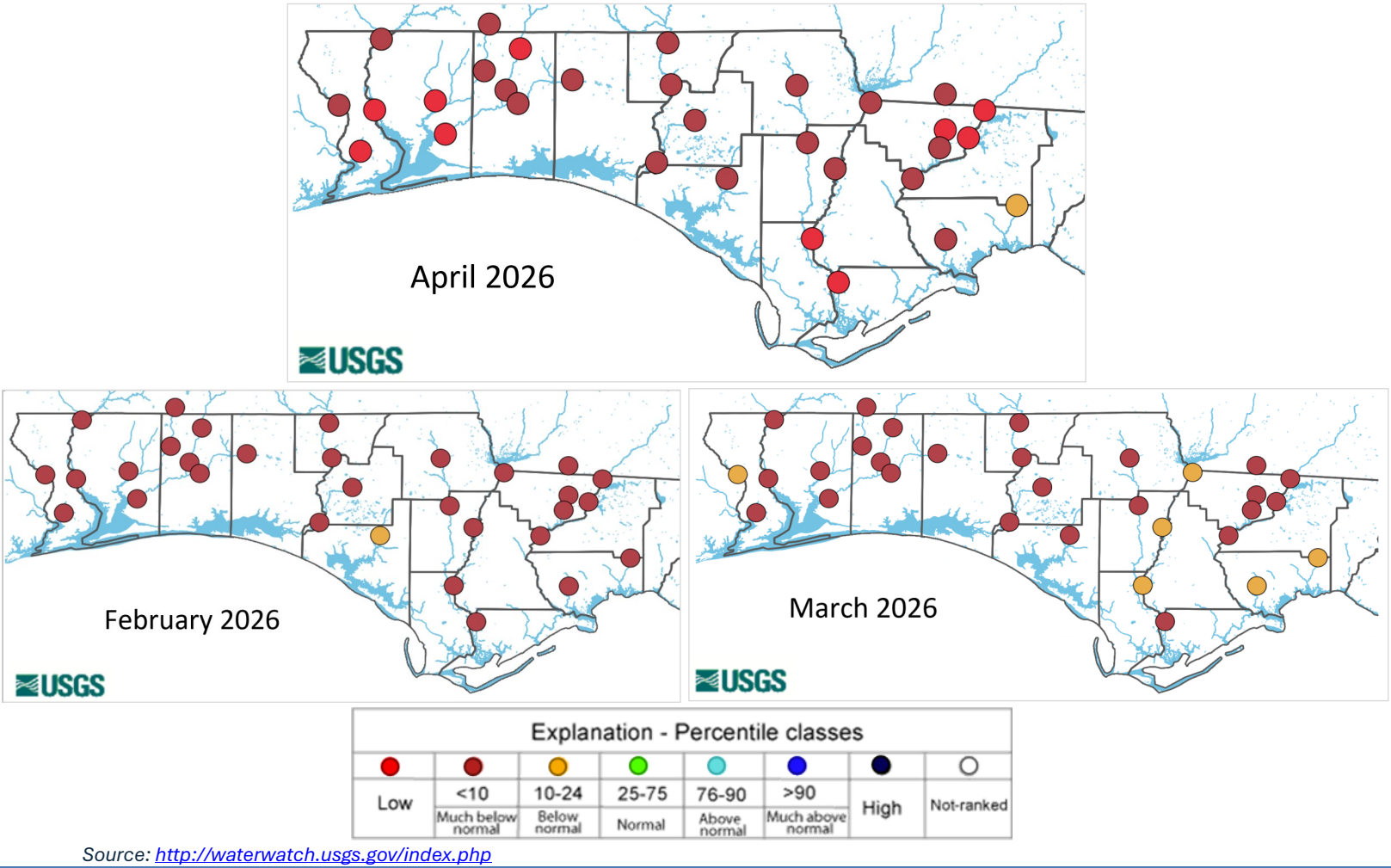
Source: https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/CurrentMap/StateDroughtMonitor.aspx?FL

Surface Water

Streamflows. During April 2026, of 27 stations, one streamflow station recorded below-normal flows, 18 stations recorded much-below-normal flows, and eight stations recorded "low" flows on average for the month. A classification of "low" refers to flows at a particular station being the lowest on record for the specified time period, the month of April in this case. No stations recorded flows within normal ranges for a majority of time during April 2026 (**Figures 11 – 17**). This is a result of the ongoing rainfall deficit and drought conditions. Stations along the Apalachicola River were not included in the analysis because its flows are more indicative of conditions in Georgia and Alabama due to it being dam-controlled at its headwaters.

All streamflow stations with depicted time-series plots, except for the St. Marks River near Newport station, recorded mostly period-of-record minimum flows that were much-below-normal or "low" for the month of April 2026 (**Figures 12 – 17**). Only the St. Marks River near Newport station recorded flows classified as below-normal (**Figure 11 & 12**), which was the highest average flow percentile classification observed through the month out of the 27 stations.

Figure 11: Northwest Florida February to April 2026 monthly streamflow percentiles



Source: http://waterwatch.usgs.gov/index.php

Figure 12: Daily streamflows and percentile ranges for USGS station 02326900 St. Marks River Near Newport, Florida

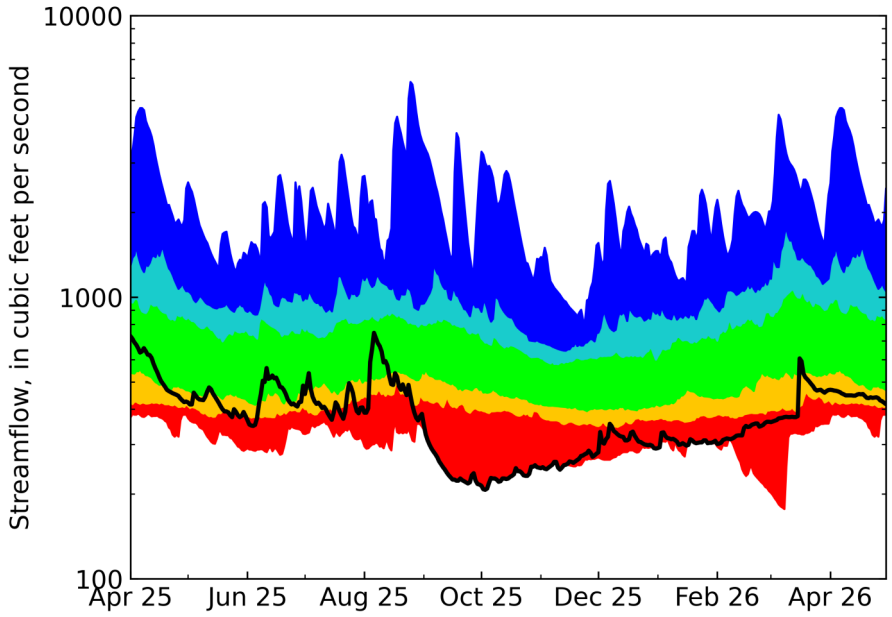


Figure 13: Daily streamflows and percentile ranges for USGS Station 02329000 Ochlockonee River Near Havana, Florida

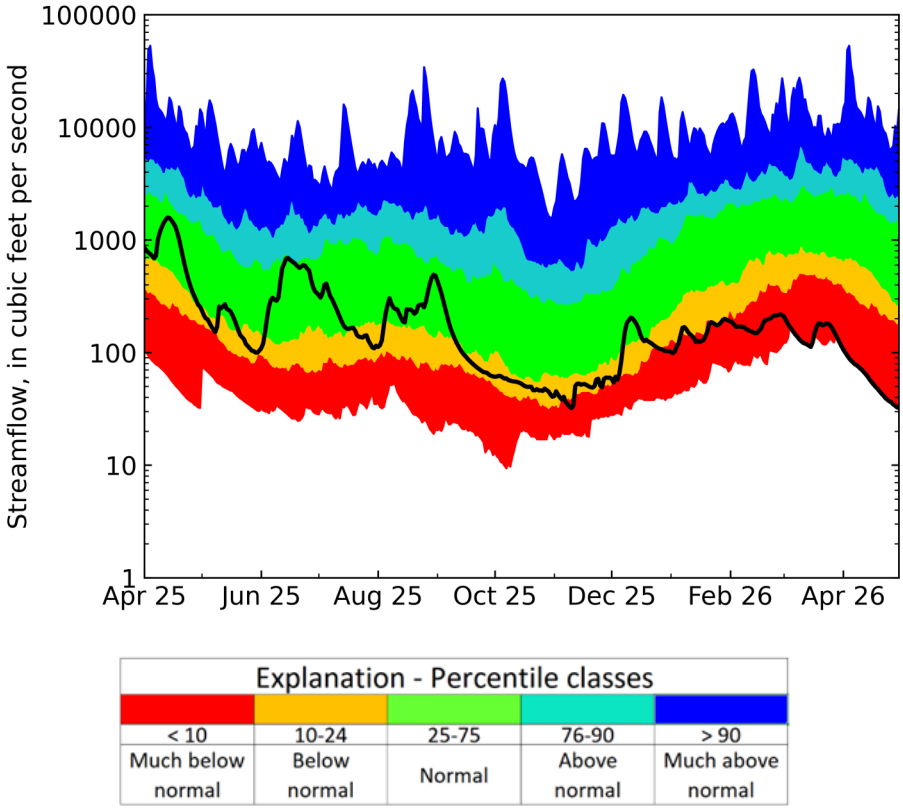


Figure 14: Daily streamflows and percentile ranges for USGS Station 02358700 Apalachicola River Near Blountstown, Florida

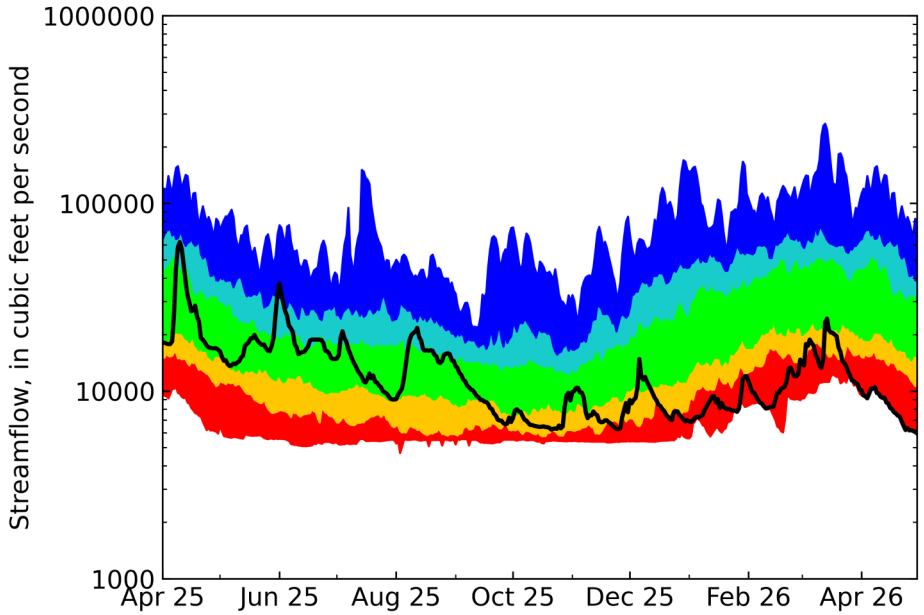
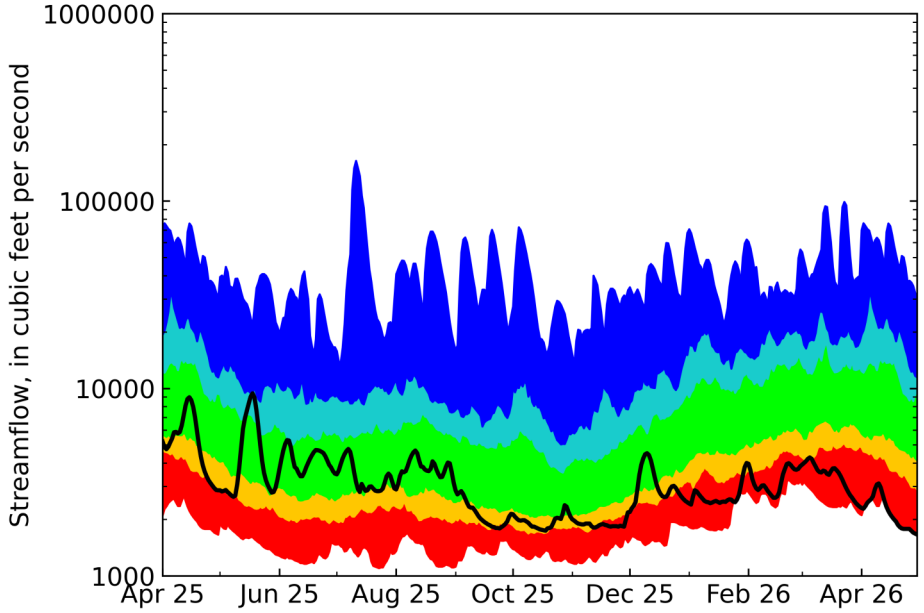


Figure 15: Daily streamflows and percentile ranges for USGS Station 02366500 Choctawhatchee River Near Bruce, Florida



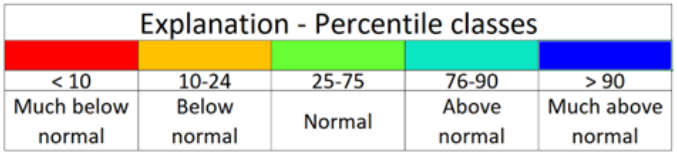


Figure 16: Daily streamflows and percentile ranges for USGS Station 02370000 Blackwater River Near Baker, Florida

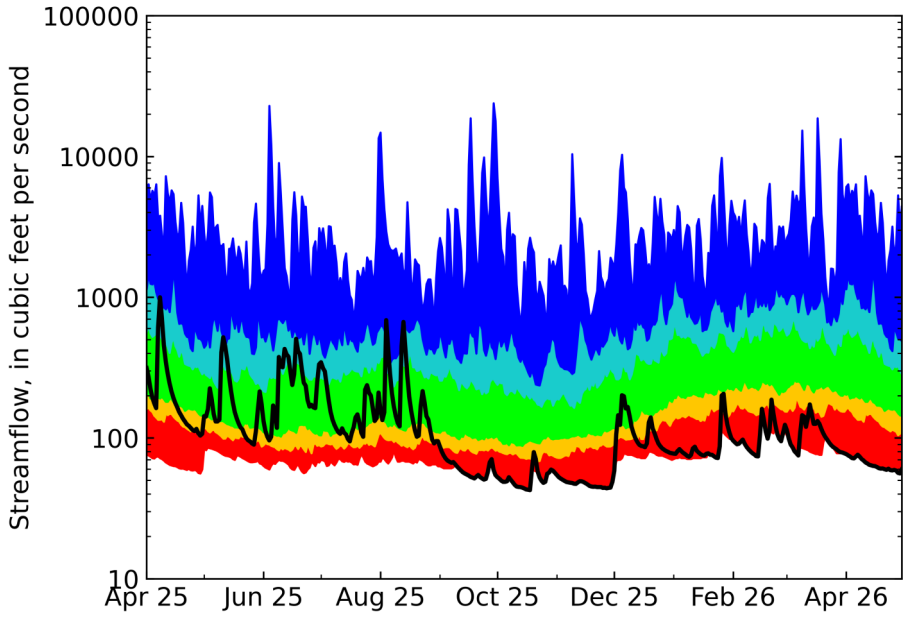
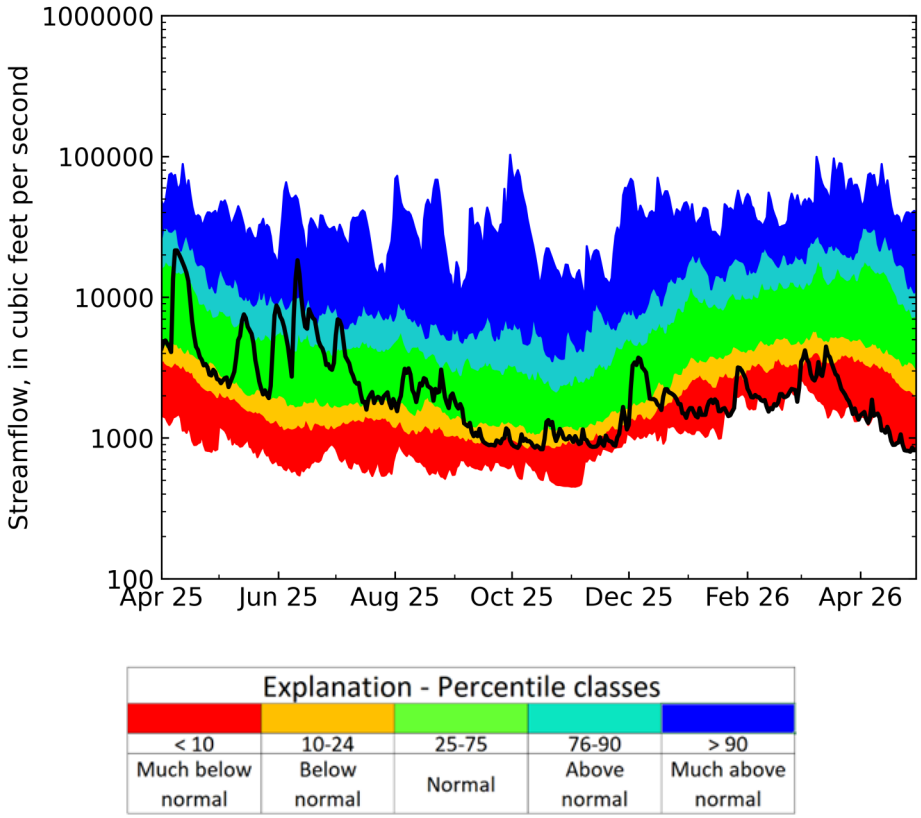


Figure 17: Daily streamflows and percentile ranges for USGS Station 02375500 Escambia River Near Century, Florida



Lake Levels. Water levels at Lake Jackson in Leon County declined 0.49 feet during the month of April 2026. Lake Jackson ended the month with a stage level of 77.25 feet, NAVD 1988, which makes the stage level within a foot of the period of record minimum stage level of 76.74 feet, NAVD 1988 (**Figure 18**). The long-term (January 29, 2003, to April 30, 2026) average stage level for Lake Jackson is 80.82 feet, NAVD 1988, and the full pool level is 85.74 feet, NAVD 1988. Late in November 2025, much of Lake Jackson drained into Porter Sink for the first time since 2021. Porter Sink stops draining and will be covered in water again when there is enough rainfall to fill the aquifer below the lake.

At Piney Lake in southern Washington County, water levels were below the elevation of the water level sensor for most of January 2026 and all of February through April 2026. The water level sensor is out of the water when the lake drops below 46.88 feet, NAVD 1988 (**Figure 19**). When the water levels at Piney Lake drop below 51.42 feet, NAVD 1988, the lake separates into two distinct "lobes." Based on the lake level data collected at Piney Lake since 2022, the lake has likely been continuously separated since December 15, 2023.

In the Econfina Creek Water Management Area in Bay and Washington counties, several recreational lakes and nearly all the ponds have begun to go dry. Porter Lake and the Whitewater lakes have very low levels with portions of the lakes now dry. Ponds like Gap Pond, Hammock Pond, Gully Pond, and Hamlin Pond have all gone dry or are nearly dry. Some of the deeper ponds such as Lake Merial, White Western, and Crystal Lake that have direct flow from the Floridan aquifer have low levels but are not completely dry.

Figure 18: Daily water levels at Lake Jackson at Miller Landing, Leon County

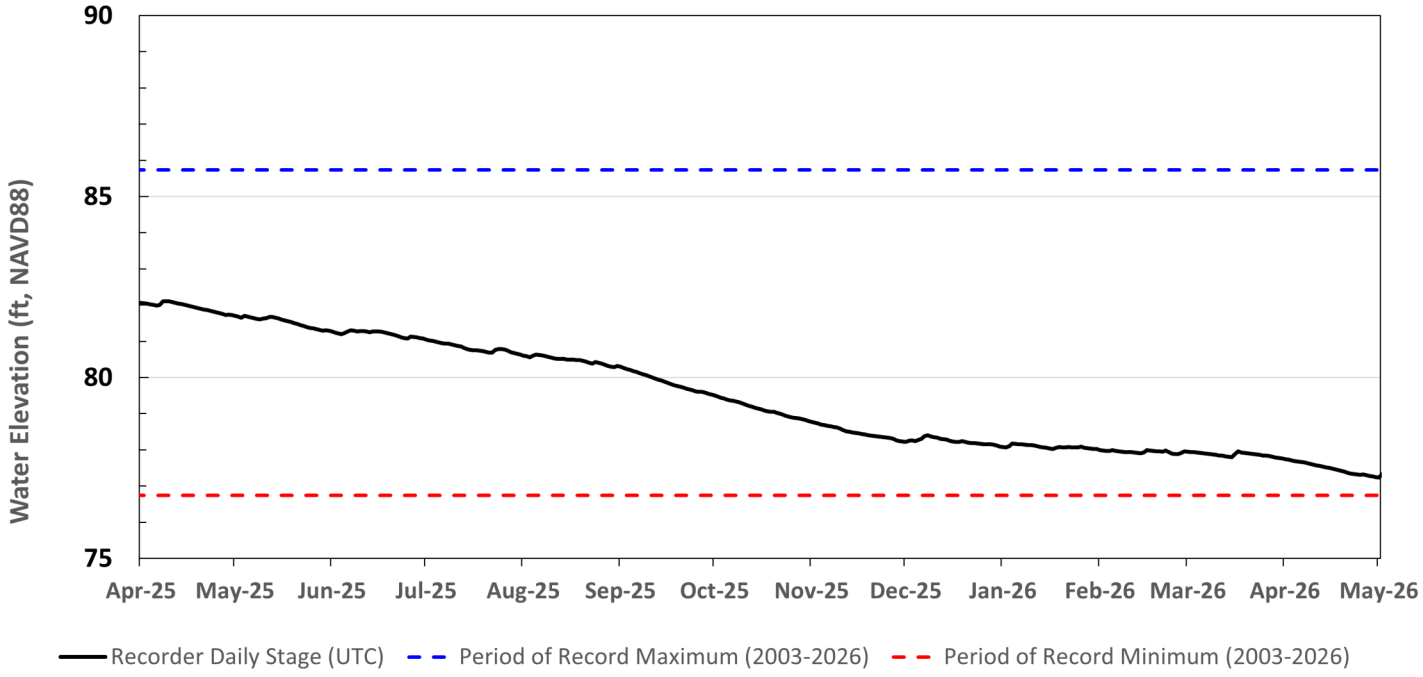
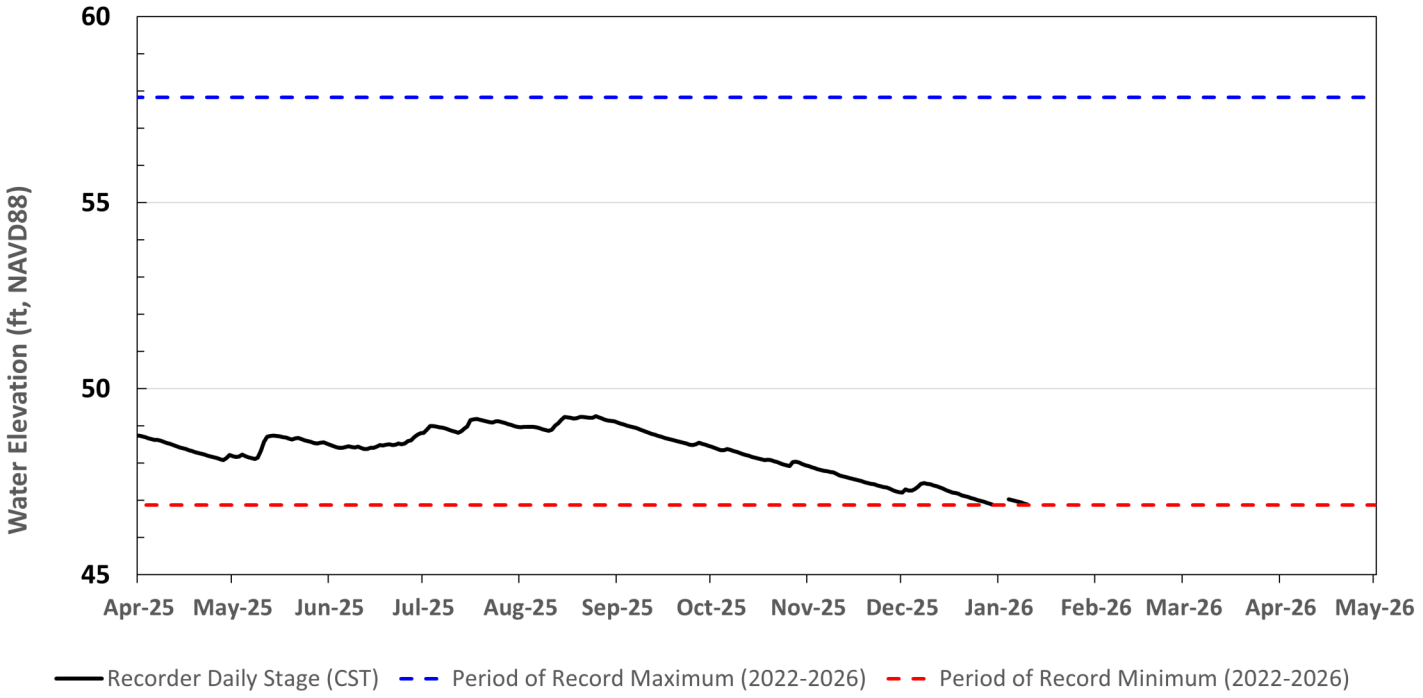


Figure 19: Daily water levels at Piney Lake, Washington County



Spring Flows

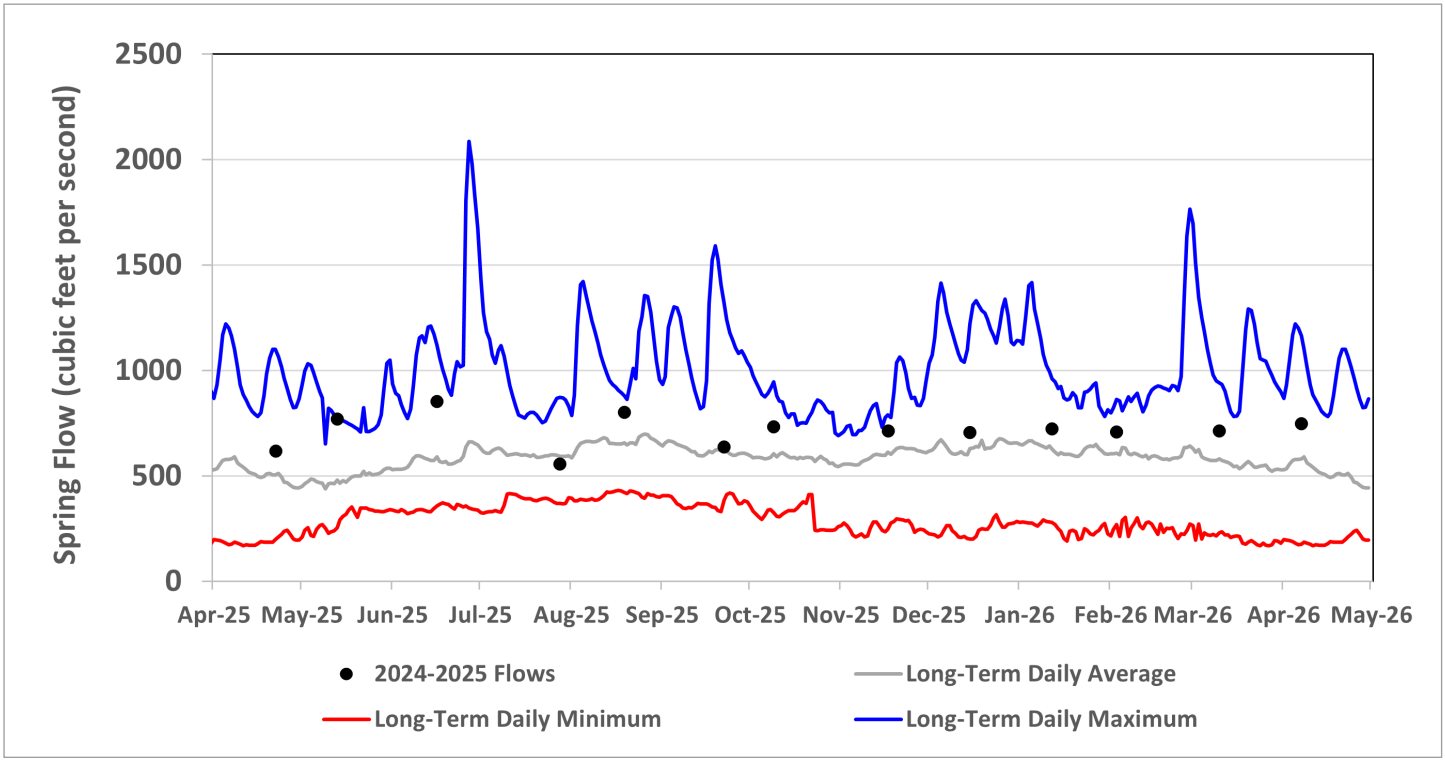
Wakulla and Sally Ward Spring System. Flow from Wakulla Spring remained generally stable among the six monthly measurements taken between November 2025 and April 2026. The most recent flow measurement for Wakulla Spring was 748 cubic feet per second (cfs), on April 7, 2026 (**Figure 20**). This measurement was 231 cfs higher than the long-term (October 23, 2004, to April 7, 2026) average flow for the month of April of 517 cfs.

Flow at Sally Ward Spring remained generally stable among the six monthly measurements taken between November 2025 and April 2026. The most recent flow measurement for Sally Ward was 23.7 cfs on April 7, 2026. This measurement was 2.4 cfs higher than the long-term (November 1, 2004, to April 7, 2025) average flow for the month of April of 21.3 cfs.

The minimum flow established for the combined Wakulla and Sally Ward Spring System under Florida Administrative Code chapter 40A-8.041 continues to be met. The long-term (October 23, 2004, through April 7, 2026) average flows for the Wakulla and Sally Ward springs are 589 cfs and 24.2 cfs, respectively. The combined long-term spring flow for both systems is 613.2 cfs, which exceeds the established minimum flow of 538 cfs by 75.2 cfs.

Figure 20: Wakulla Spring flows

Data from October 1, 2023, through April 7, 2026, represent discrete measurements. Daily statistics are based on the October 23, 2004, through April 7, 2026, period of record.

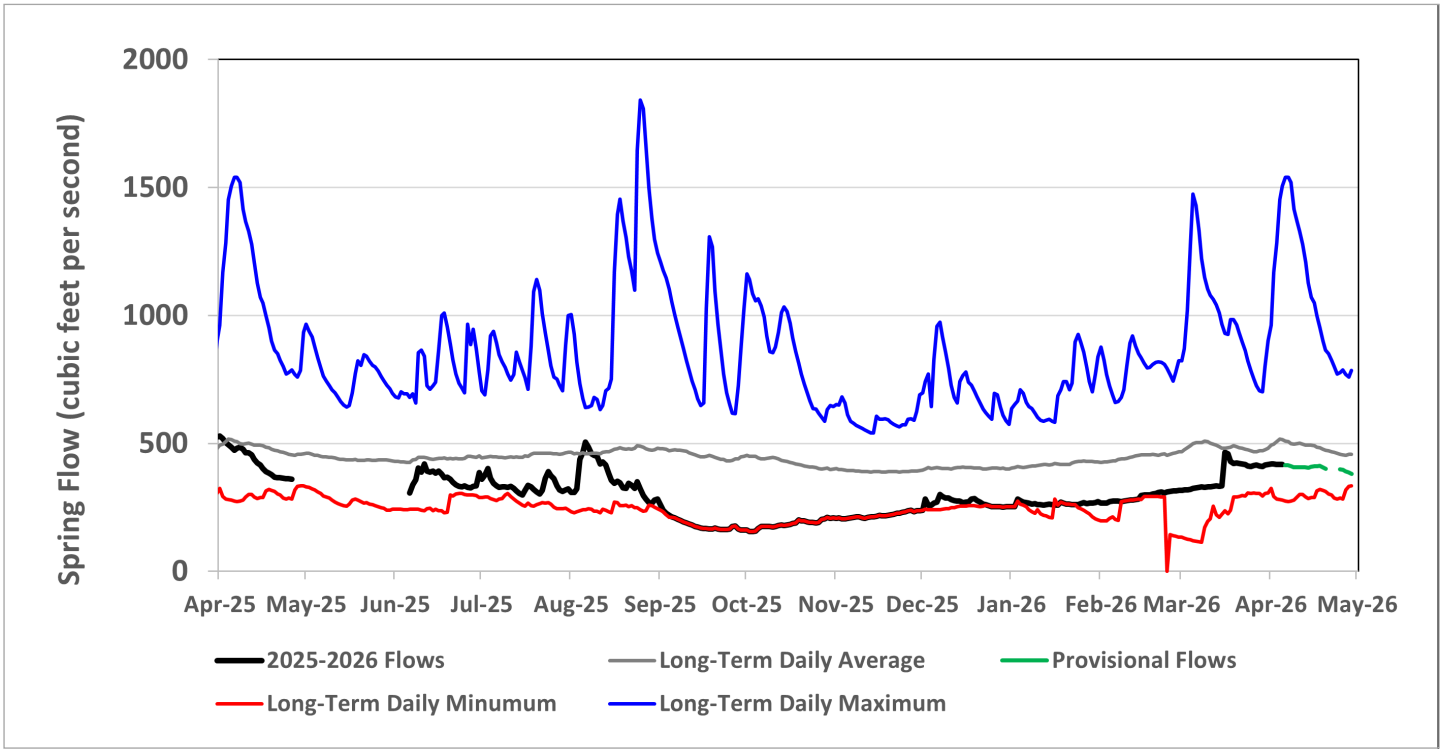


St. Marks River Rise. The mean daily spring flow for April 2026 at the St. Marks River Rise was 407 cfs, based on the available USGS provisional data which extends through April 30, 2026 (**Figure 21**). This was below the long-term (October 1, 1956, through April 30, 2026) average flow for the month of April of 485 cfs.

The current 30-year moving average spring flow for the St. Marks River Rise based on the most recent approved USGS data (November 15, 1993, through February 24, 2026) is 418 cfs. If the provisional data from February 24, 2026, through April 30, 2026, are included, the 30-year moving average spring flow for the St. Marks River Rise is 418 cfs. The established minimum flow for the St. Marks River Rise is 419 cfs. Whether using the most recent approved USGS data or the provisional data, the 30-year moving average flow was 1 cfs below the established minimum flow.

Available groundwater pumping data in Florida suggests that pumping rates have been relatively stable for the last five years and therefore do not appear to indicate that St. Marks River Rise low flows are due to pumping. Extremely low rainfall accumulations are the most likely explanation for the low flow conditions at the St. Marks River Rise. Available rainfall data indicates that recent antecedent rainfall totals are among the lowest values recorded in the region. The status of the St. Marks River Rise will continue to be evaluated as additional data become available.

Figure 21: Spring flows for the St. Marks River Rise

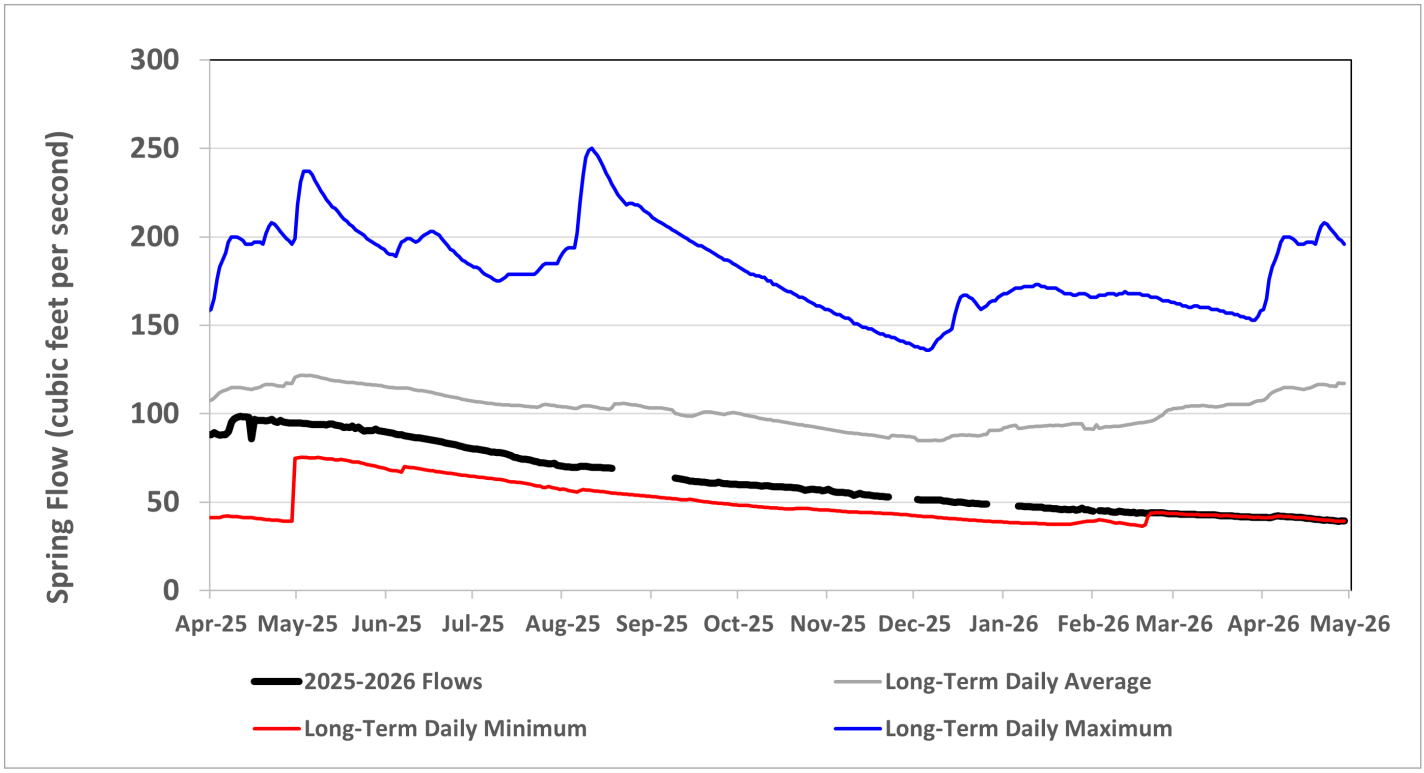


Jackson Blue Spring. Daily flows at Jackson Blue Spring during the month of April 2026 averaged 41.0 cfs. This was below the long-term average flow of 114.7 cfs for the month of April, based on the January 1, 2005, through April 29, 2026, period of record. Flows from Jackson Blue Spring have been below the long-term daily average flow since January 2025 and have been record low since late February 2026 (Figure 22).

A minimum flow of 92.2 cfs was formally adopted on April 28, 2026, for Jackson Blue Spring based on the 30-year moving median discharge. Since there has not yet been 30 years of data collection at Jackson Blue, the minimum flow is compared to the median discharge between January 1, 2005, and April 29, 2026. The long-term (January 1, 2005, through April 29, 2026) median flow from Jackson Blue Spring was 97 cfs, which exceeds the established minimum flow of 92.2 cfs by 4.5 cfs.

Figure 22: Spring flows for Jackson Blue Spring

Data represents daily averages. Long-term flows represent the daily average between January 1, 2005, and April 29, 2026.

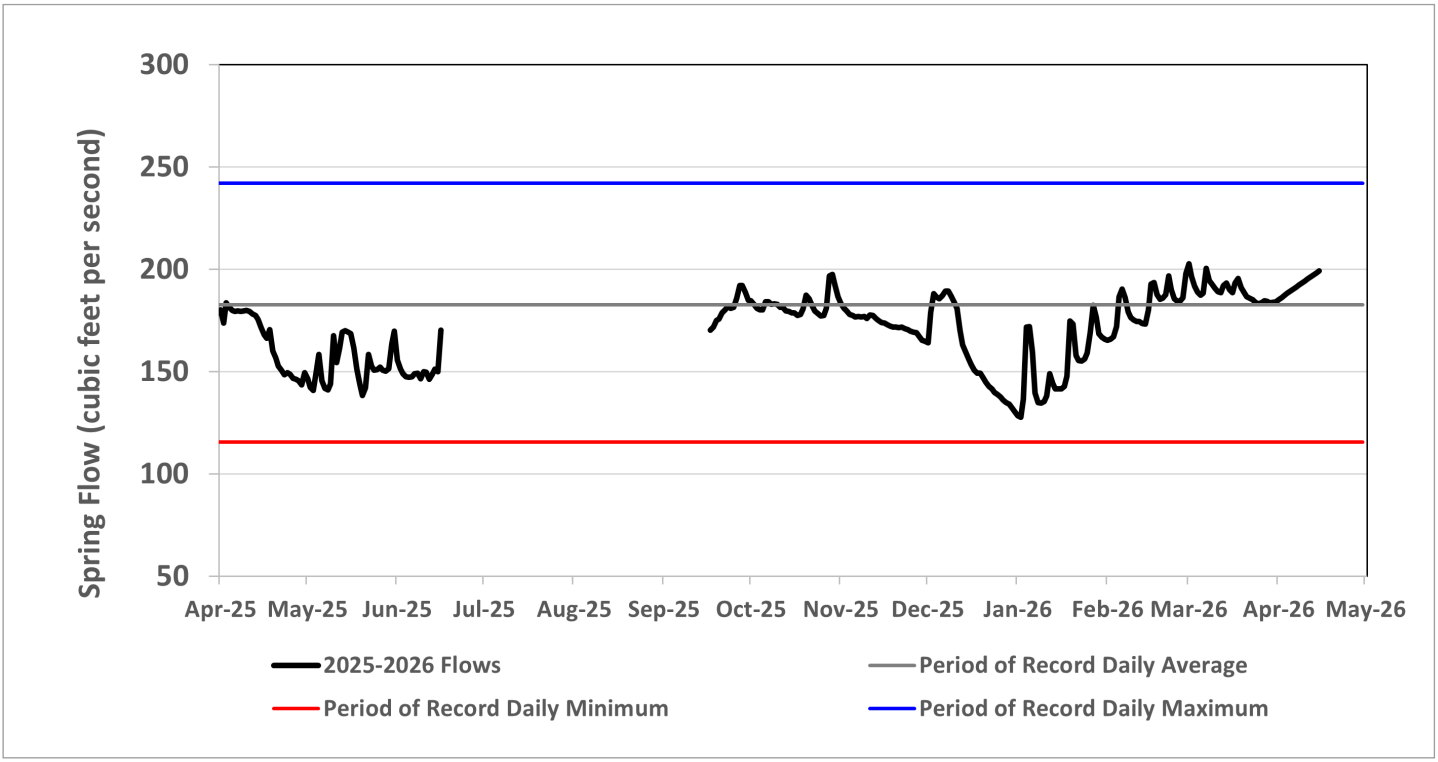


Gainer Spring Group. During April 2026 (April 1 through 15, 2026), the average flow from the Gainer Spring Group was 192 cfs (Figure 23). The record period (October 28, 2019, through April 15, 2026) average monthly spring flow for the month of April is 167 cfs. It should be noted that there is a relatively brief period of record for this system, and spring flows among the highest and lowest on record are to be expected.

Throughout the time-series, there are several drops and recoveries in the spring flow. This is caused by Econfina Creek spiking in stage adjacent to the spring group after rain events. The extra pressure exerted on the groundwater by the higher surface water level in the stream slows flow from the spring group. Since Econfina Creek does not tend to stay high for long after the conclusion of a rain event as the stage level quickly drops, the flow from the spring group recovers since there is less head pressure from the stream.

Figure 23: Gainer Spring Group flows

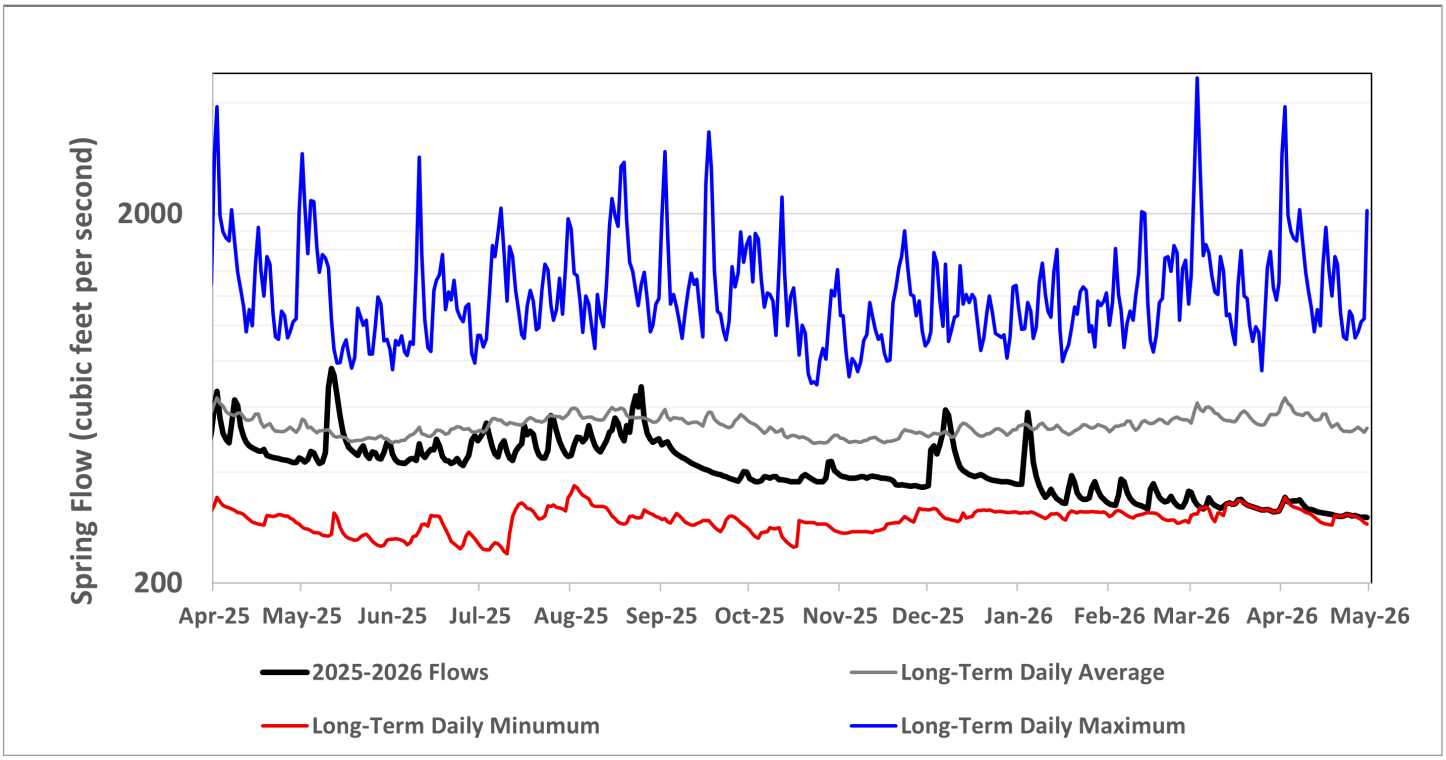
Data represents daily averages. Streamflow statistics are not shown due to the relatively short period of daily data.



Middle Econfina Creek. The mean daily flow for April 2026 at Middle Econfina Creek was 315 cfs, based on the available USGS provisional data which extends through April 30, 2026 (**Figure 24**). This was below the long-term (October 1, 1935, through April 30, 2026) average flow for the month of April of 556 cfs. The current 30-year moving average flow for Middle Econfina Creek based on the most recent approved USGS data (October 1, 1935, through December 15, 2025) is 517 cfs. If the provisional data from December 4, 2024, through April 30, 2026, is used, the 30-year moving average flow for Middle Econfina Creek is 514 cfs.

A minimum flow of 486 cfs was formally adopted on June 29, 2025, for Middle Econfina Creek, which includes the Gainer, Sylvan, and Williford spring groups. Whether using the approved or provisional data, the 30-year moving average flow exceeded the established minimum flow for Middle Econfina Creek by 31 cfs and 28 cfs, respectively.

Figure 24: Spring flows for Middle Econfina Creek (Econfina @ Bennett)



Aquifer Levels

In the middle of April 2026, of a total of fourteen Floridan aquifer monitor wells, four wells were classified as having groundwater levels within normal ranges, three were classified as below-normal, and seven were classified as much-below-normal (**Figures 25 - 31**). With minimal rainfall observed during the month, most Floridan aquifer monitor wells with sufficient long-term data to calculate percentiles continued to decline through April 2026. Aquifer levels at many wells are within a foot of their period of record minimum values. The Pittman VISA Floridan monitor well (NWFID 5266) in eastern Jackson County remained classified as much-below-normal as groundwater levels continued to decline (**Figure 28**). At the USGS-422A Near Greenhead Floridan monitor well (NWFID 3216) in southeastern Washington County, groundwater levels declined enough to be considered below-normal by the end of January 2026 for the first time since June 2013. Groundwater levels at Jackson Still upper Floridan aquifer monitor well (NWFID 5417) in northern Walton County and Sand Hill upper Floridan aquifer monitor well (NWFID 5597) in northwestern Okaloosa County continued to decline and remained classified as much-below-normal. Both wells are at period of record low groundwater levels.

Of five sand-and-gravel aquifer monitor wells with sufficient long-term data to calculate percentiles, three had groundwater levels within normal ranges and two had much-below-normal water levels. In general, water levels had lower percentiles towards the Florida-Georgia border while stations towards the Gulf coast had percentiles within normal ranges. The Allen Tower Deep monitor well (NWFID 5401) had water levels classified as within normal ranges in mid-December 2025 but has since dropped into much-below-normal ranges. Water levels at Weller Ave Deep monitor well (NWFID 1382) in southern Escambia County declined into normal ranges (**Figure 31**). The Oak Grove Deep monitor well (NWFID 5479) continued to record below normal groundwater levels, as it has for several months (**Figure 25**).

Figure 25: Monitor wells and aquifer level percentiles for mid-April 2026
Percentile class rankings are based on each well's period of record. All wells have a minimum of 20 years of data.

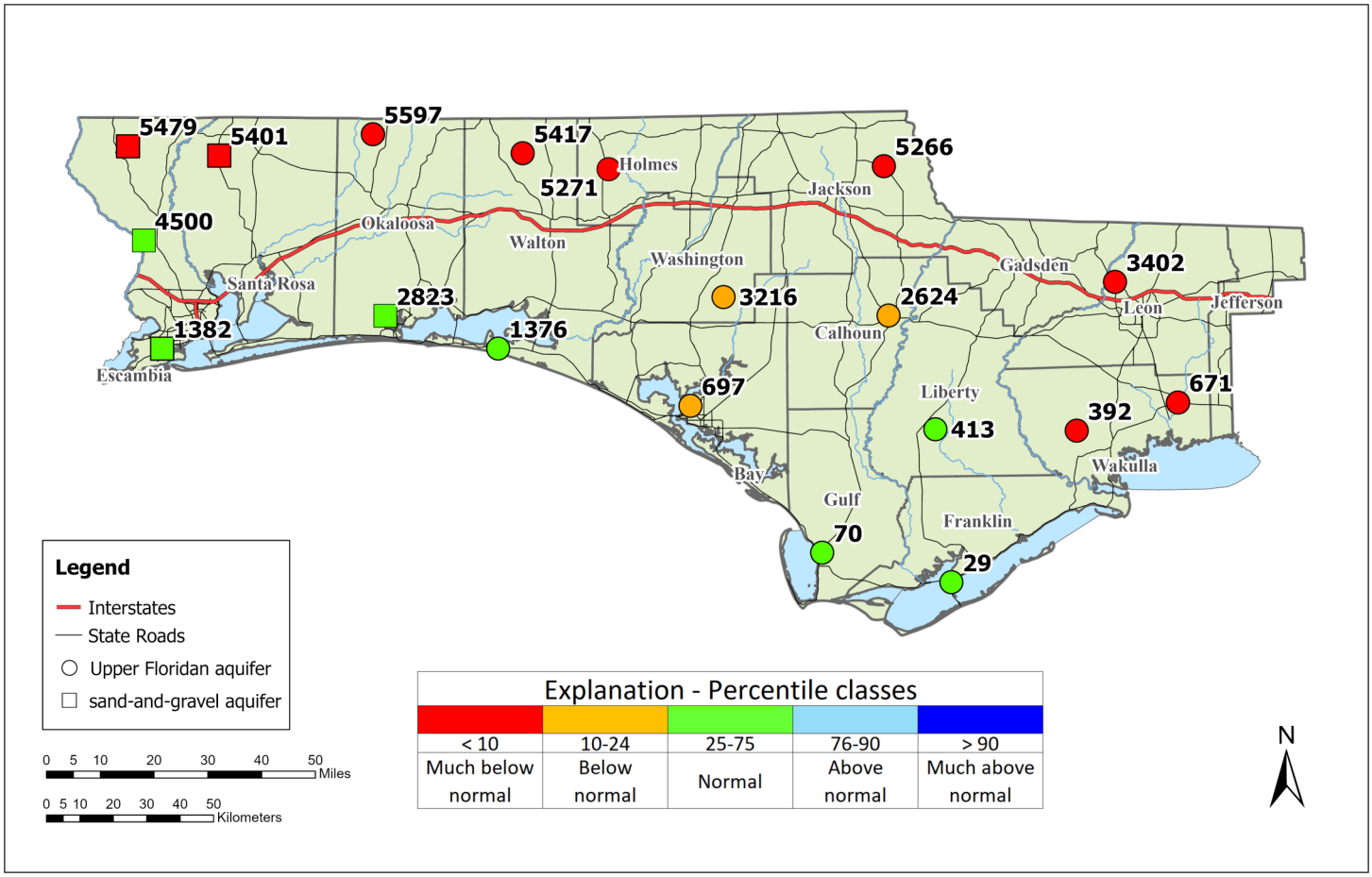


Figure 26: Daily upper Floridan aquifer levels at USGS-Lake Jackson well (NWFID 3402), Leon County

Land surface elevation is 121.40 ft, NAVD 88

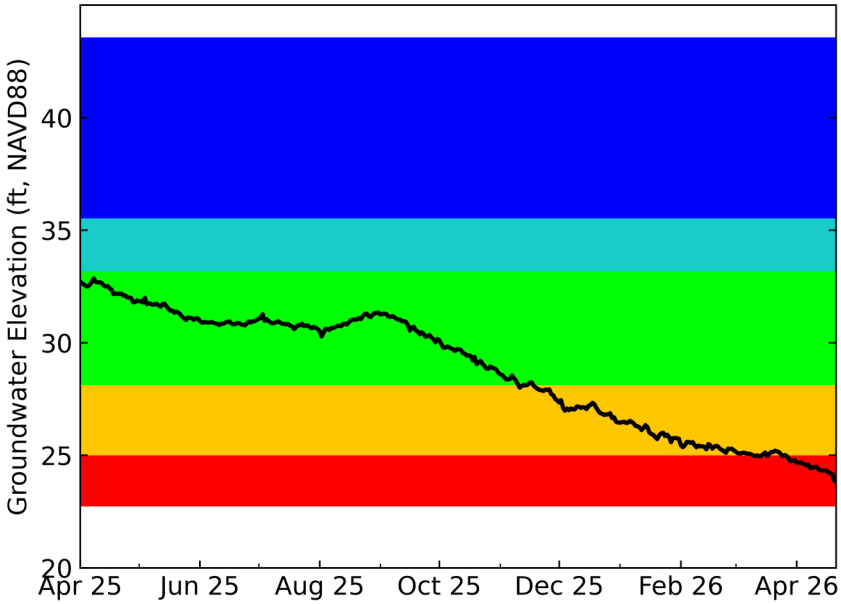
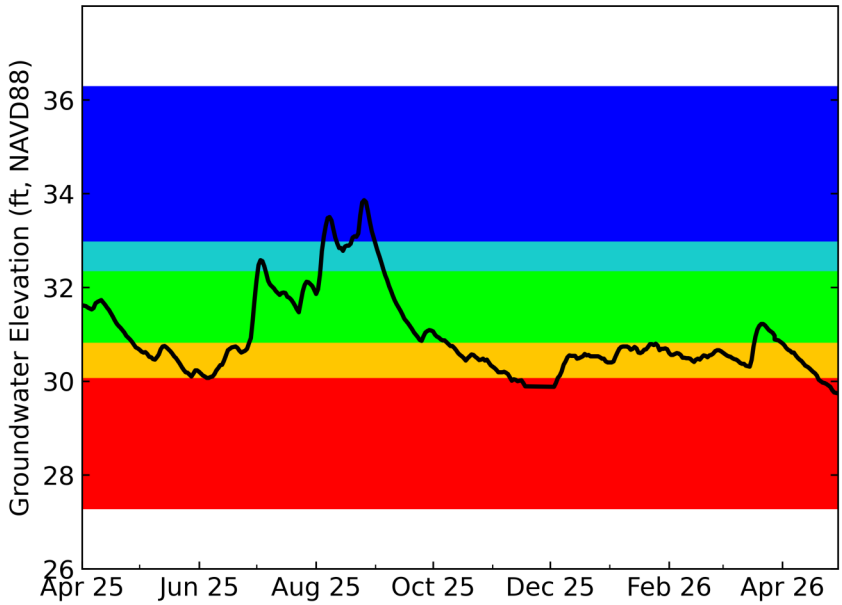


Figure 27: Daily upper Floridan aquifer levels at USGS Benchmark well (NWFID 392), Wakulla County

Land surface elevation is 46.27 ft, NAVD 88



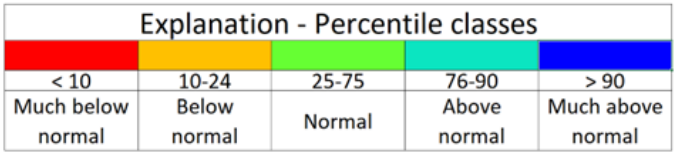


Figure 28: Daily upper Floridan aquifer levels at NWFWMD Pittman Visa well (NWFID 5266), Jackson County

Land surface elevation is 127.31 ft, NAVD 88

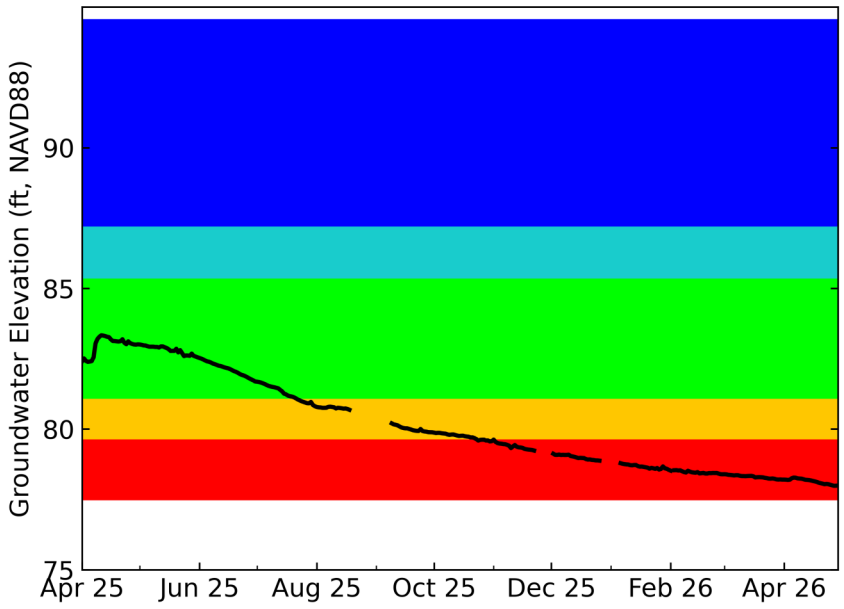


Figure 29: Daily upper Floridan aquifer levels at USGS-422A Near Greenhead well (NWFID 3216), Washington County

Land surface elevation is 66.75 ft, NAVD 88

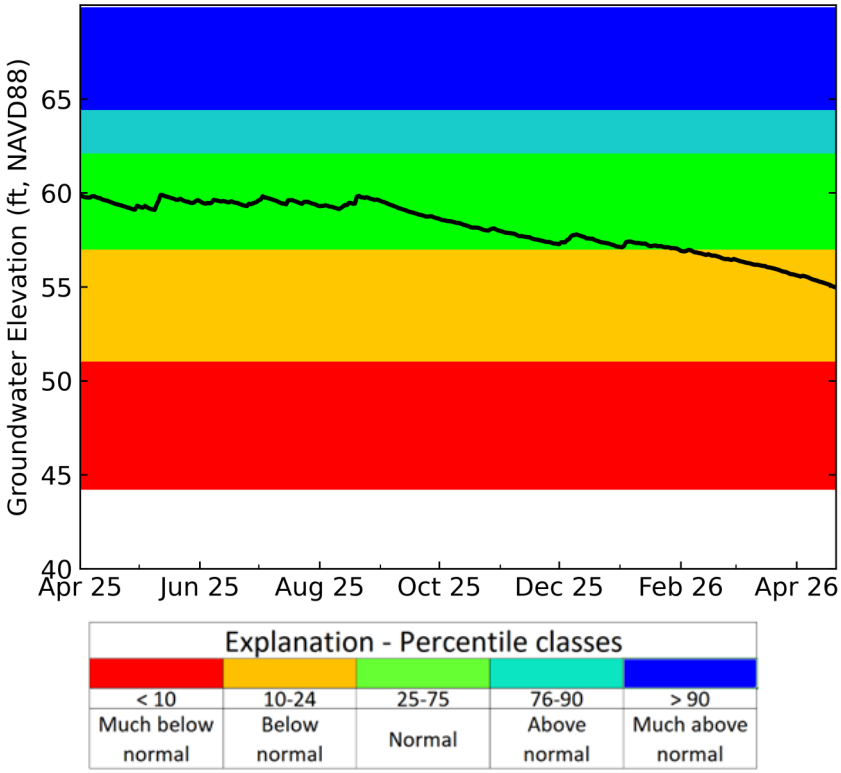


Figure 30: Daily upper Floridan aquifer levels at Fannin Airport well (NWFID 697), Washington County

Land surface elevation is 4.05 ft, NAVD 88

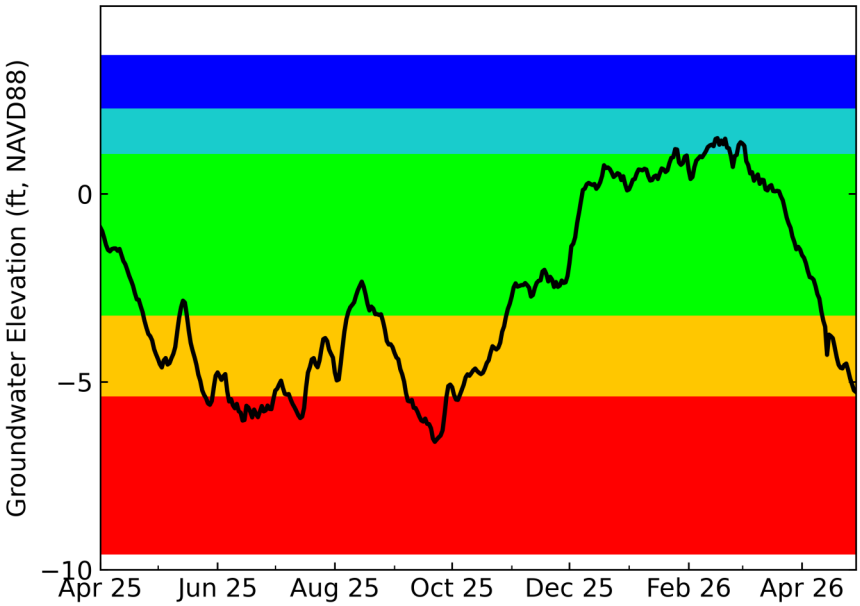
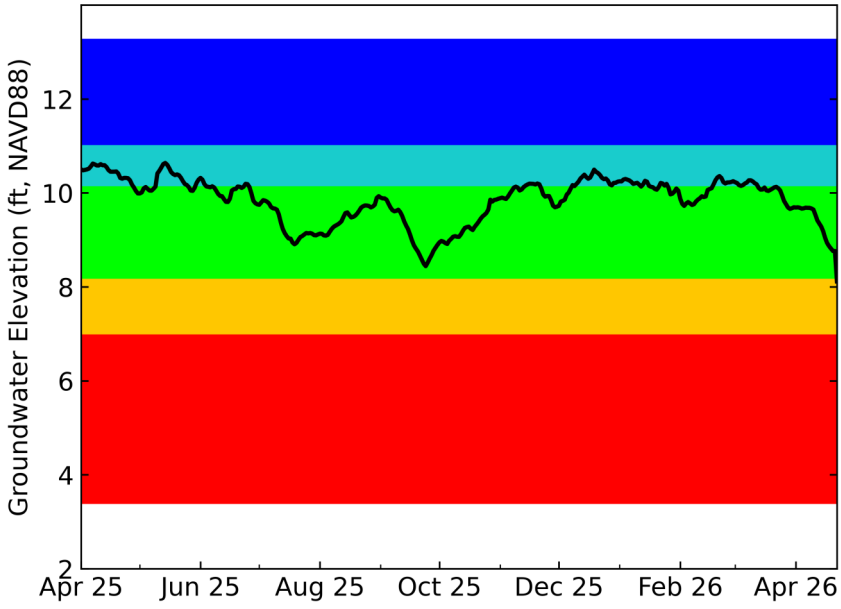


Figure 31: Daily sand-and-gravel aquifer levels at NWFWMD Weller Ave Deep well (NWFID 1382), Escambia County

Land surface elevation is 25.09 ft, NAVD 88



Explanation - Percentile classes				
< 10	10-24	25-75	76-90	> 90
Much below normal	Below normal	Normal	Above normal	Much above normal