Northwest Florida Water Management District

Hydrologic Conditions Report

May 2026

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Summary

May 2026 was a very wet month characterized by much-above-normal precipitation and below-normal temperatures (averaging around 73.4 degrees Fahrenheit). The ongoing cumulative rainfall deficit was reduced significantly with several rain events throughout the month. Most streamflows improved significantly with the increased rainfall, however surface waterbodies such as lakes and ponds generally only had small increases in stage or remained stable through the month. Similarly, groundwater level improvements were generally minimal and varied spatially with rainfall amounts and degree of aquifer confinement. Drought conditions improved significantly during May 2026 with regions categorized as extreme drought (D3) or exceptional drought (D4) receding on a weekly basis with increased rainfall amounts.

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Rainfall

In May 2026, an average of 10.88 inches of precipitation was recorded across the Panhandle. This amount was 7.16 inches (98%) above the District normal precipitation for the month of May, which is 3.72 inches (**Table 1; Figures 1 – 7**). Normal precipitation is defined as average monthly precipitation for the 30-year reference period (1991-2020).

There were several rain events throughout May 2026, mainly caused by stalled frontal boundaries, deep Gulf moisture, and sea breeze circulation convergence. The most significant rain event for the month of May 2026 occurred May 7-10, 2026, when a stalled frontal boundary brought 1.25 to 6.00 inches of rain to the Panhandle. Higher amounts exceeding 7.00 inches were observed in localized areas of Escambia and Santa Rosa Counties. The city of Marianna received nearly half of its total rainfall for the month from this rain event with a measured total of 4.04 inches.

The entire Panhandle received above-normal rainfall for the month of May 2026 (**Figure 2**) which helped to reduce the overall rainfall deficit that had been steadily building since September 2025. As of May 1, 2026, the District-wide average rainfall deficit for the previous 365 days was 14.78 inches. By May 31, 2026, the many rain events that occurred through the month reduced the 365-day District-wide average rainfall deficit by 5.12 inches. As of May 31, 2026, the 365-day District-wide deficit was 9.66 inches (**Table 2**).

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

Station	May Normal Rainfall (1991 to 2020)	May 2026 Observed Rainfall	Percent Difference
Tallahassee Regional Airport	3.36	5.28	+44%
Marianna Regional Airport	3.15	8.45*	+91%
Niceville, FL	3.78	12.46	+107%
Pensacola Regional Airport	3.90	6.01	+43%

A star (*) indicates one or more days of missing rainfall data

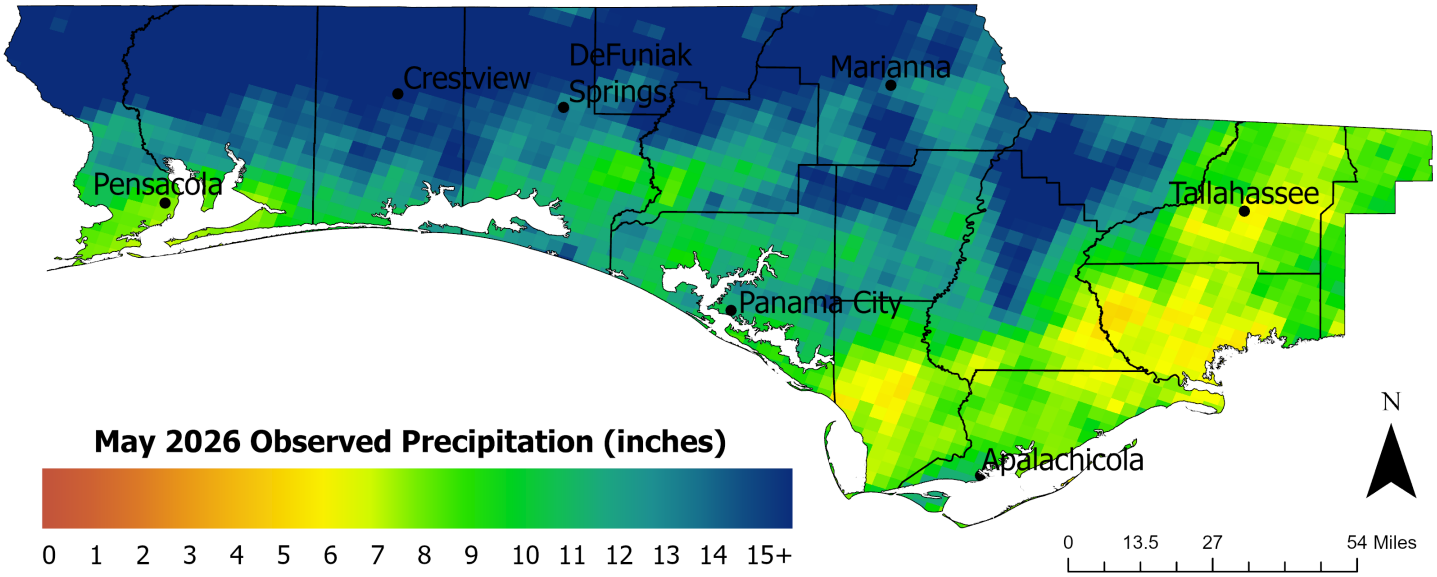
Source: https://www.weather.gov/wrh/Climate?wfo=tae
https://www.weather.gov/wrh/Climate?wfo=mob

Table 2: County-averaged rainfall deficit comparison between May 1, 2026 and May 31, 2026

County	365-day Departure-from-Normal Rainfall (inches) as of May 31, 2026	365-day Departure-from-Normal Rainfall (inches) as of May 1, 2026	Difference
Bay	-11.35	-15.17	-3.82
Calhoun	-12.77	-18.65	-5.88
Escambia	-6.40	-11.51	-5.11
Franklin	-9.14	-10.96	-1.82
Gadsden	-8.77	-17.62	-8.85
Gulf	-12.05	-12.99	-0.94
Holmes	-9.32	-17.68	-8.36
Jackson	-9.01	-18.09	-9.08
Jefferson	-13.05	-17.50	-4.45
Leon	-13.58	-17.49	-3.91
Liberty	-7.40	-12.54	-5.14
Okaloosa	-6.76	-13.61	-6.85
Santa Rosa	-6.33	-12.85	-6.52
Wakulla	-8.08	-10.63	-2.55
Walton	-9.98	-14.97	-4.99
Washington	-10.55	-15.28	-4.73

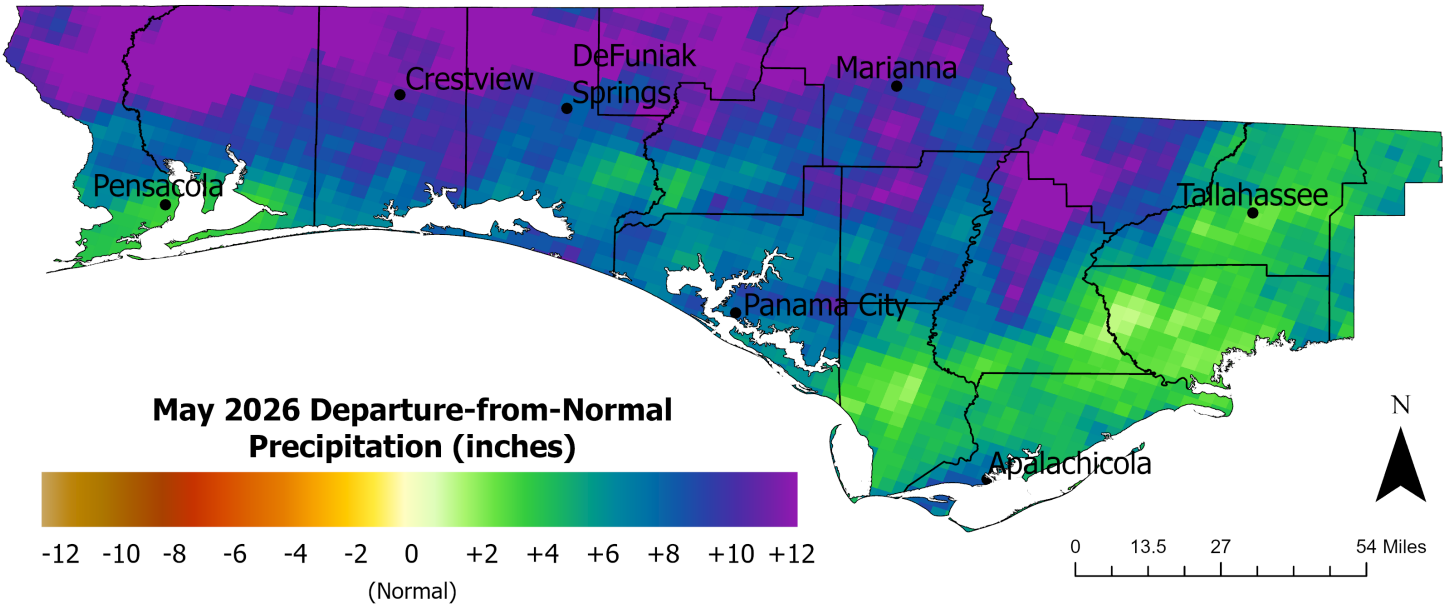
* Please note that a negative difference refers to a decrease in the deficit and a positive difference refers to an increase in the deficit between May 1 and May 31, 2026

Figure 1: District-wide May 2026 observed rainfall



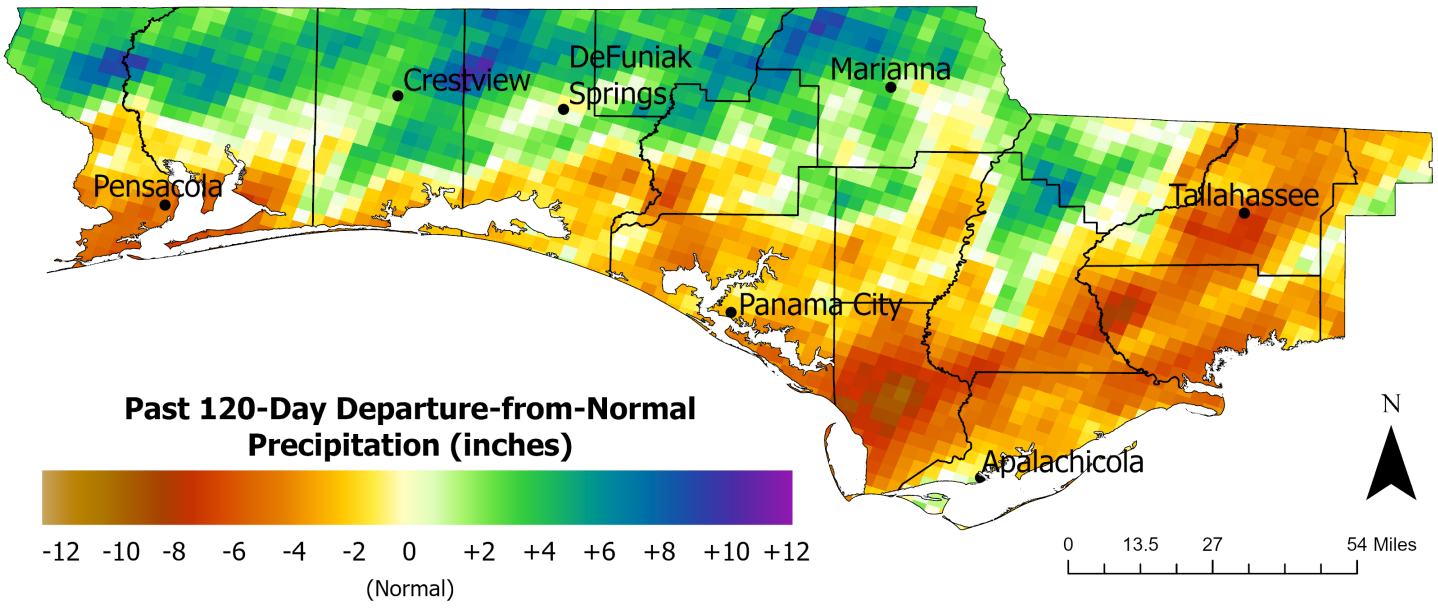
Source: *https://water.noaa.gov/resources/downloads/precip/stageIV/*

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



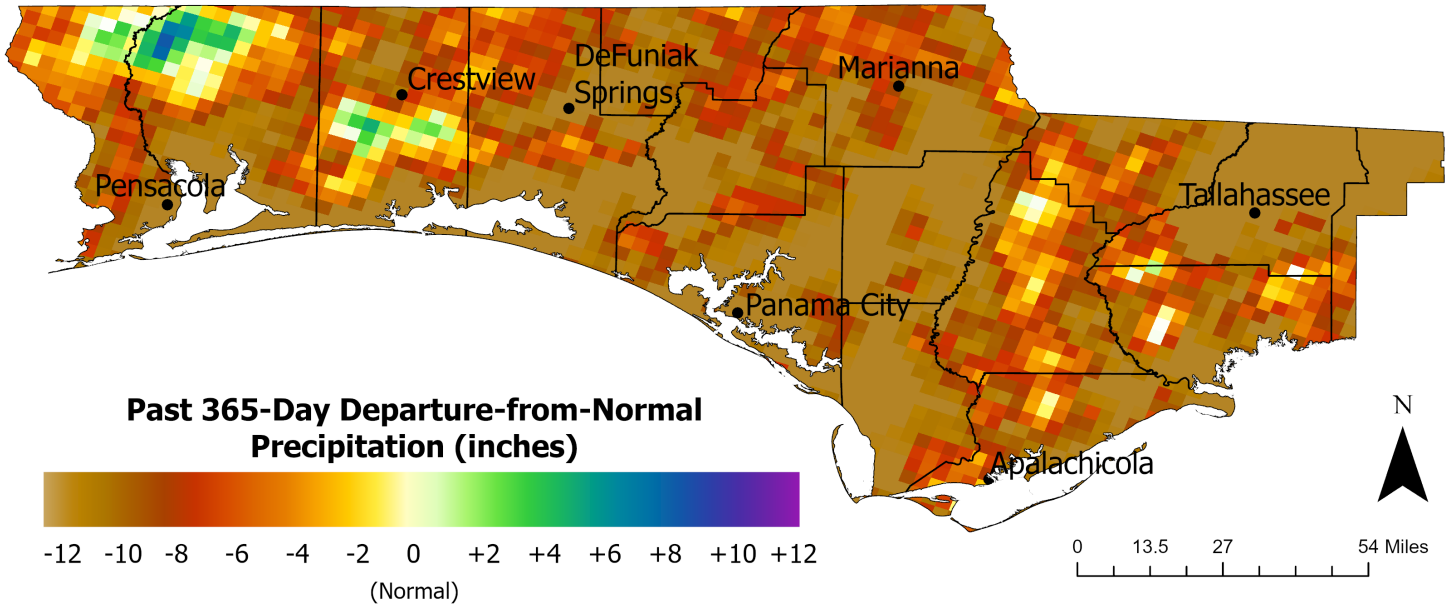
Source: *https://water.noaa.gov/resources/downloads/precip/stageIV/*

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



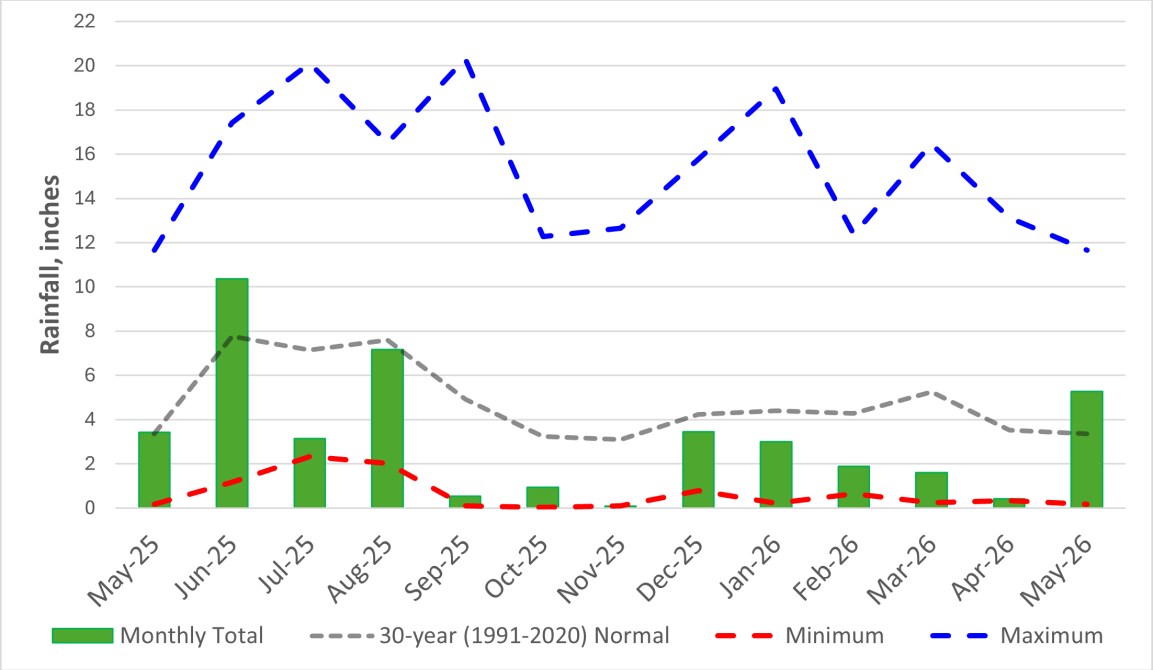
Source: https://water.noaa.gov/resources/downloads/precip/stageIV/

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



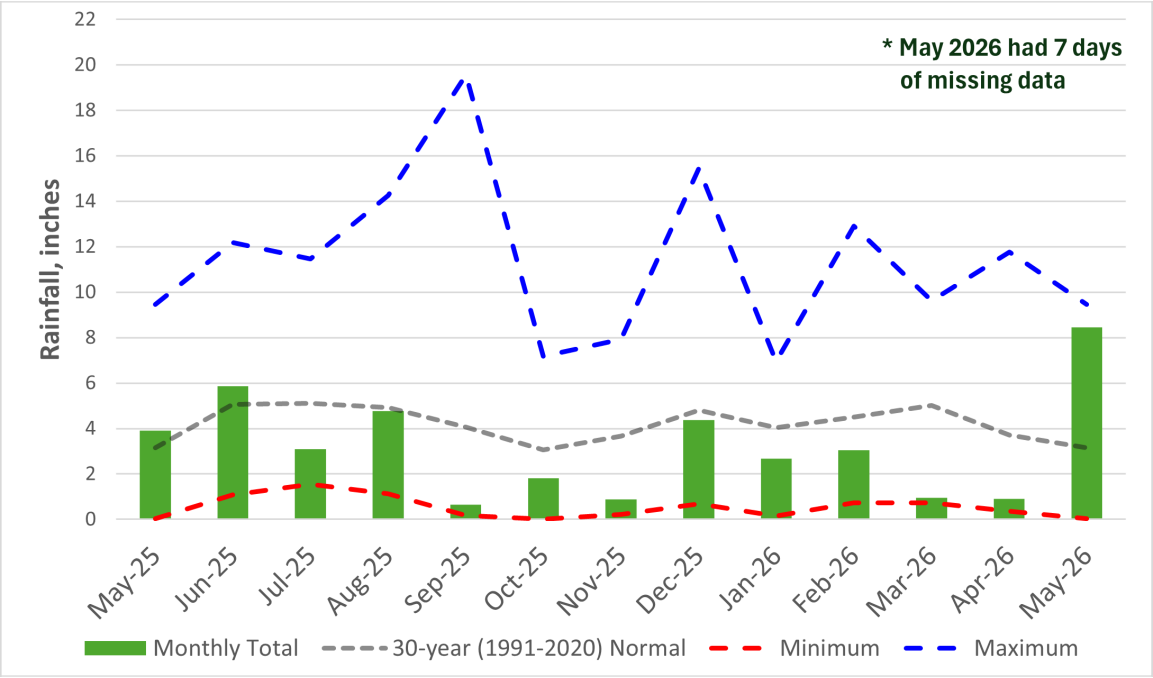
Source: https://water.noaa.gov/resources/downloads/precip/stageIV/

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



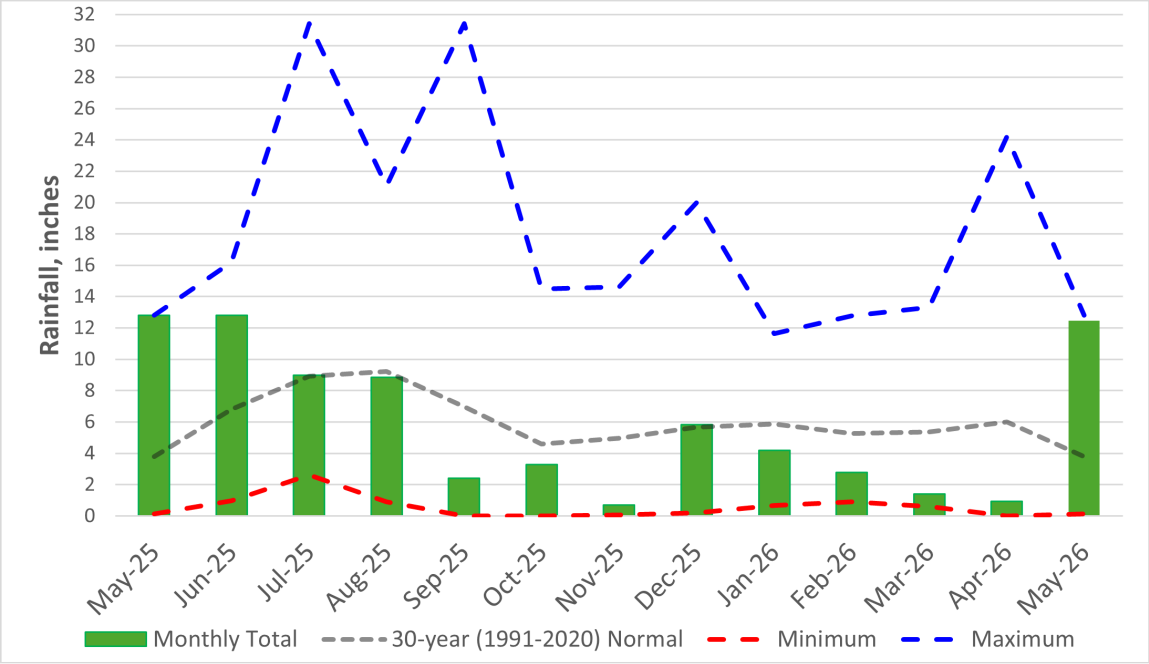
Source: https://www.weather.gov/wrh/Climate?wfo=tae

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



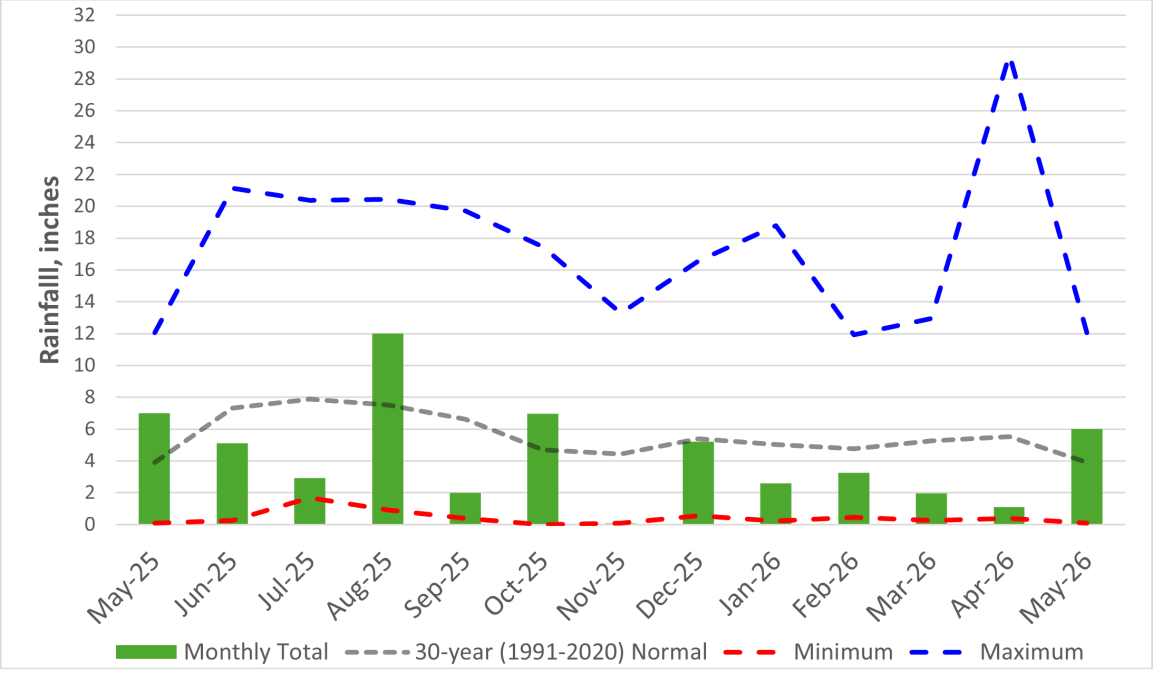
Source: https://www.weather.gov/wrh/Climate?wfo=tae

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

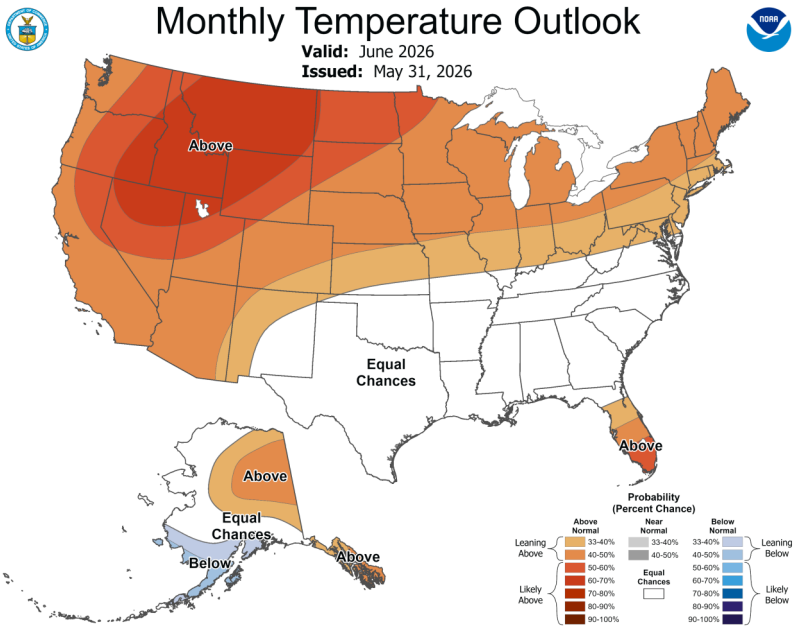
Climate Outlook

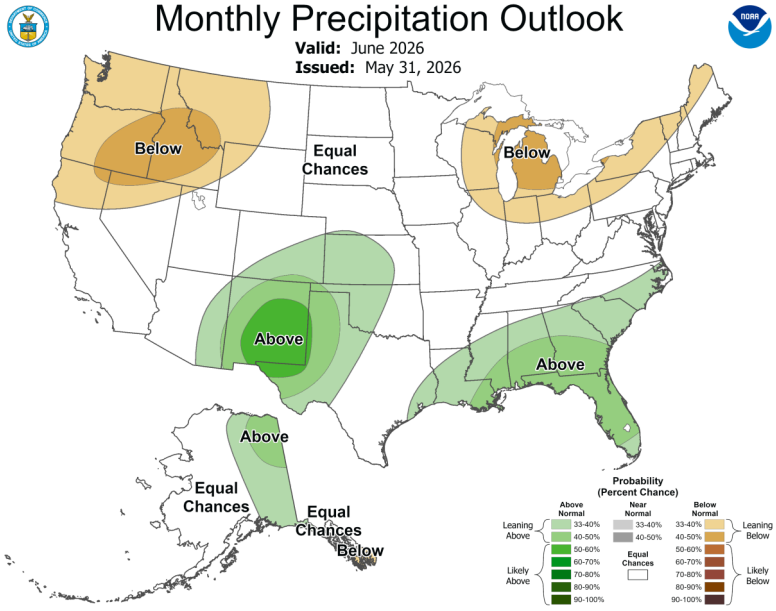
According to NOAA's Climate Prediction Center, the forecast issued May 31, 2026, for June 2026 showed equal chances for above-, below-, or near-normal temperatures in the District. The precipitation outlook showed a slight chance for above-normal rainfall in the Panhandle as well as the aquifer recharge zones in southern Georgia and Alabama (**Figure 9**).

As of June 1, 2026, ENSO-neutral conditions were present, and an El Niño watch has been issued. Between June and July 2026, El Niño is favored to emerge (82% chance) and will likely continue through the Northern Hemisphere winter (96% chance). 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: June 2026 Temperature and Precipitation Outlooks for the United States



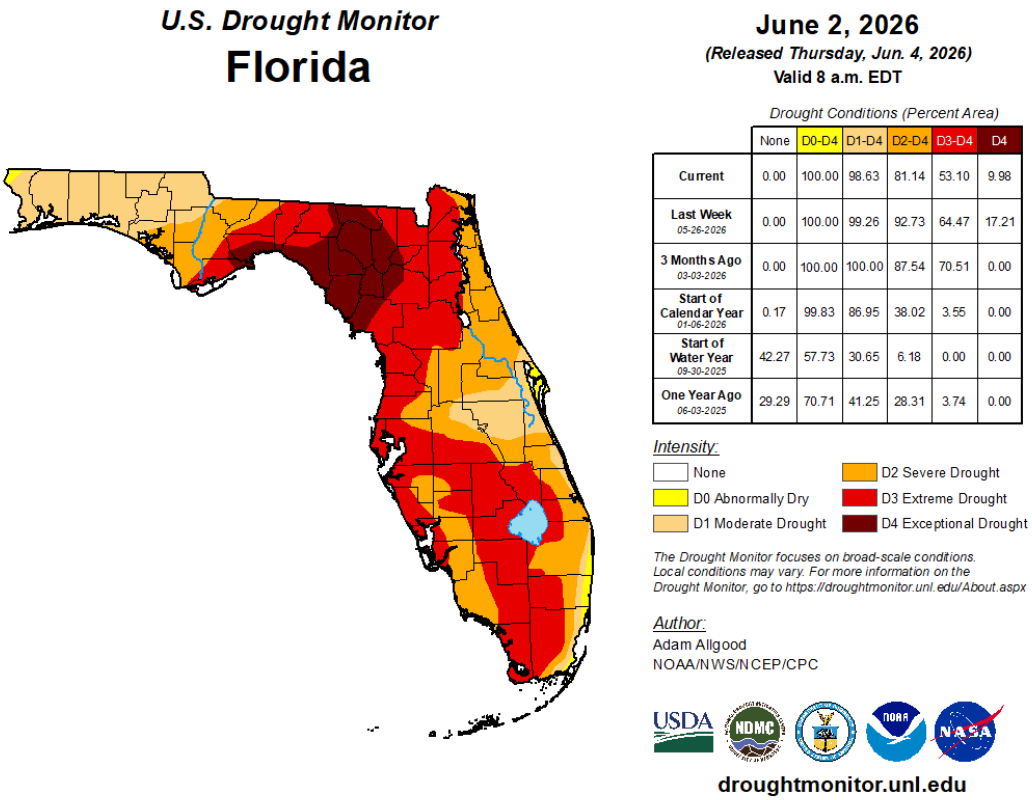


Drought Conditions

The U.S. Drought Monitor report released for June 2, 2026, showed most of the District under at least abnormally dry (D0) conditions with the majority (58%) of the Panhandle being under moderate drought (D1) conditions (**Figure 10**). This was a significant improvement from the conditions observed at the beginning of May 2026. On May 5, 2026, areas of extreme drought (D3) and exceptional drought (D4) conditions encompassed roughly 83% of the District's land area. As of June 2, 2026, the areas classified as extreme drought (D3) and exceptional drought (D4) had reduced to about 18% of the District's land area. This is due to the District receiving much-above-normal rainfall throughout May 2026, especially in the western portion of the Panhandle along the Florida-Alabama border.

According to the U.S. Monthly Drought Outlook for June 2026, drought conditions are expected to remain but improve. This is likely a result of the slight chance for above-normal rainfall during June 2026 (**Figure 9**). According to the U.S. Seasonal Drought Outlook, drought conditions are expected to remain but improve between June 1 and August 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 June 2, 2026



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

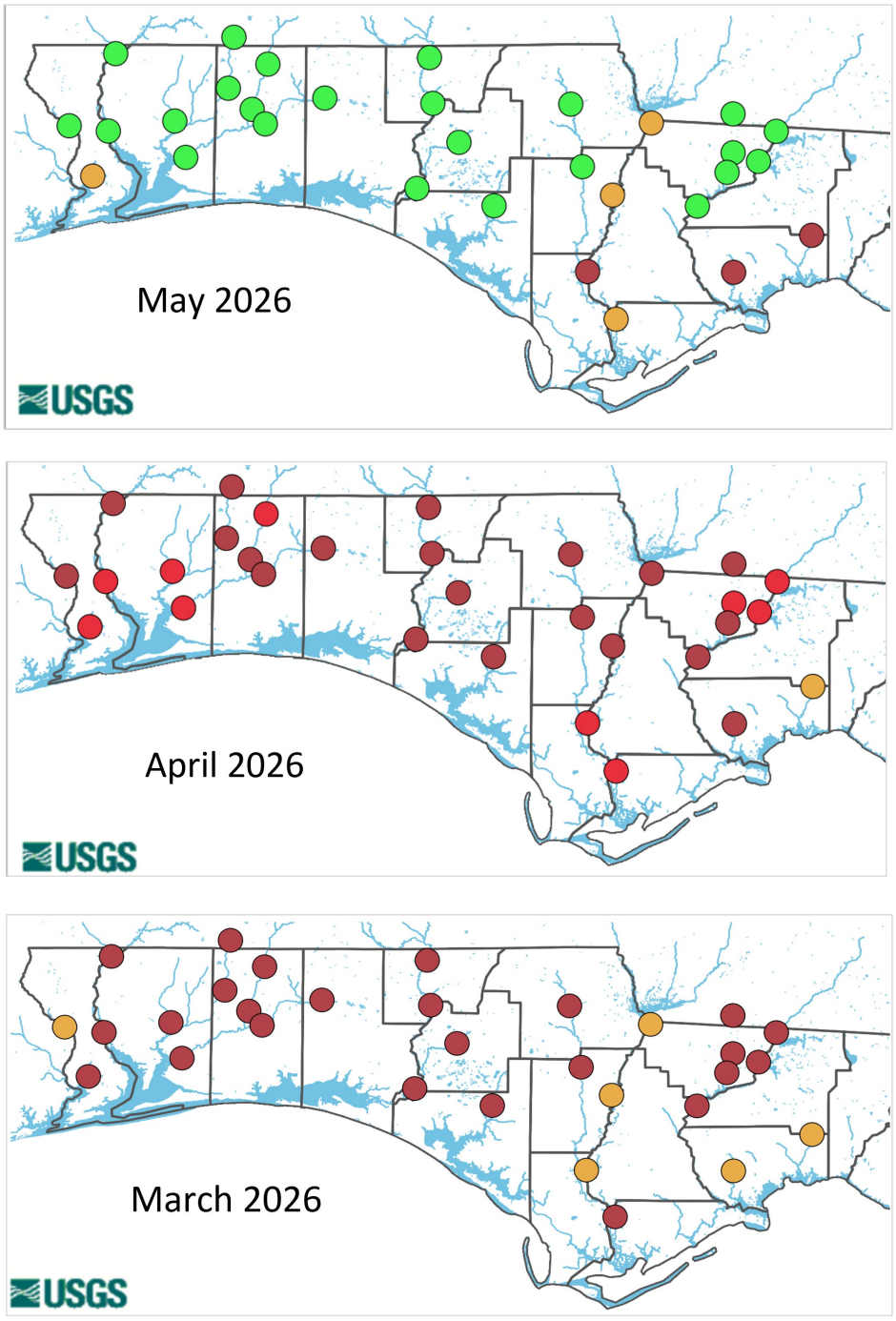
Surface Water

Streamflows. During May 2026, of 27 stations, 24 streamflow stations recorded flows within normal ranges for May, one station recorded below-normal flows, and two stations recorded much-below-normal flows on average for the month (**Figures 11 – 17**). This was the first month since August 2025 that the majority of streamflow stations recorded flows considered in normal ranges. The improvement in streamflows in and around the District was due to the increased rainfall amounts observed during May 2026. However, flows recorded at stations on the St. Marks River near Newport, the Sopchoppy River near Sopchoppy, and Elevenmile Creek near west Pensacola continued to be lower than normal due to less rainfall received in the basins for those particular streams (**Figure 3**).

Stations along the Apalachicola River were not included in the analysis because its flows are more indicative of hydrologic conditions in Georgia and Alabama due to it being dam-controlled at its headwaters. Jim Woodruff dam on Lake Seminole went into drought operations on May 1, 2026, to lower the minimum allowable flow from the dam. That decision was rescinded on June 1, 2026, following significant rainfall received in the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint Rivers basin during May 2026.

All streamflow stations with depicted time-series plots, except for the St. Marks River near Newport station, recorded increasing flows with the several rain events throughout May 2026 (**Figures 12 – 17**). Flows recorded at stations on the Choctawhatchee River near Bruce (Figure 15), Blackwater River near Baker (**Figure 16**), and Escambia River near Century (**Figure 17**) increased into above -normal or much-above-normal classifications for portions of the month with the above-normal rainfall amounts during May 2026. Elevated streamflows at numerous stations reached their action stages (bank-full) by the end of the month with the Shoal River near Crestview briefly reaching minor flood stages.

Figure 11: Northwest Florida March to May 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

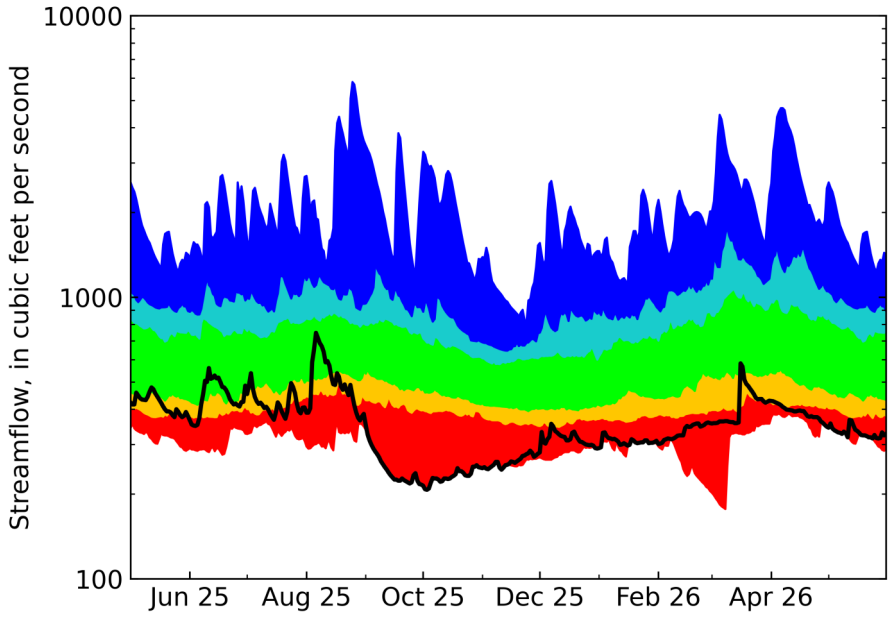


Figure 13: Daily streamflows and percentile ranges for USGS Station 02329000 Ochlockonee River Near Havana, Florida

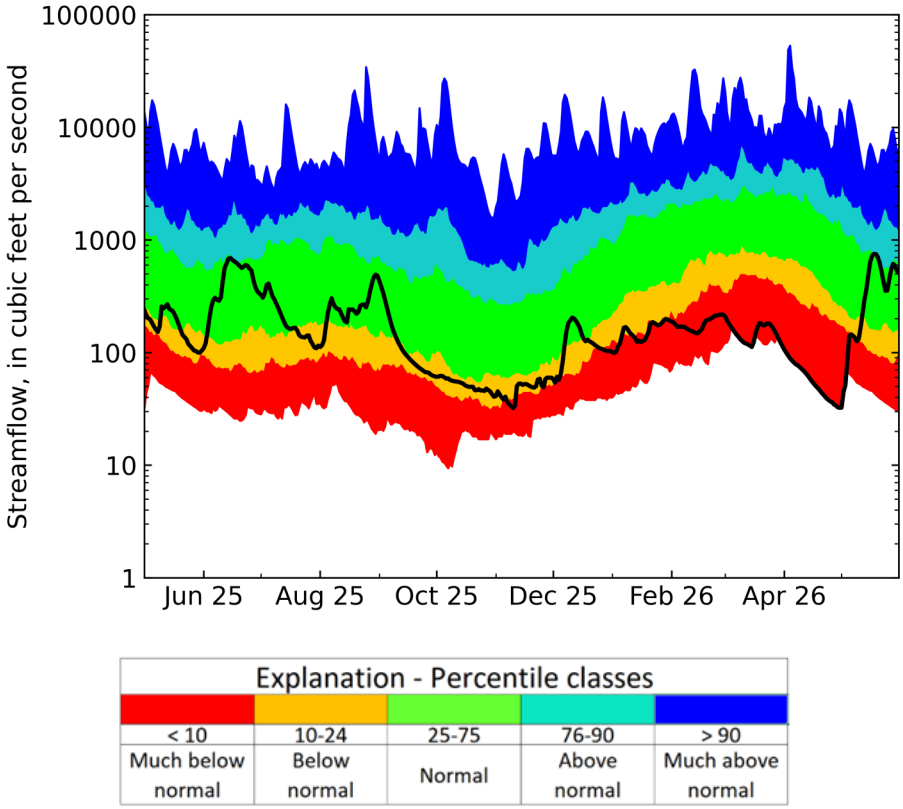


Figure 14: Daily streamflows and percentile ranges for USGS Station 02358700 Apalachicola River Near Blountstown, Florida

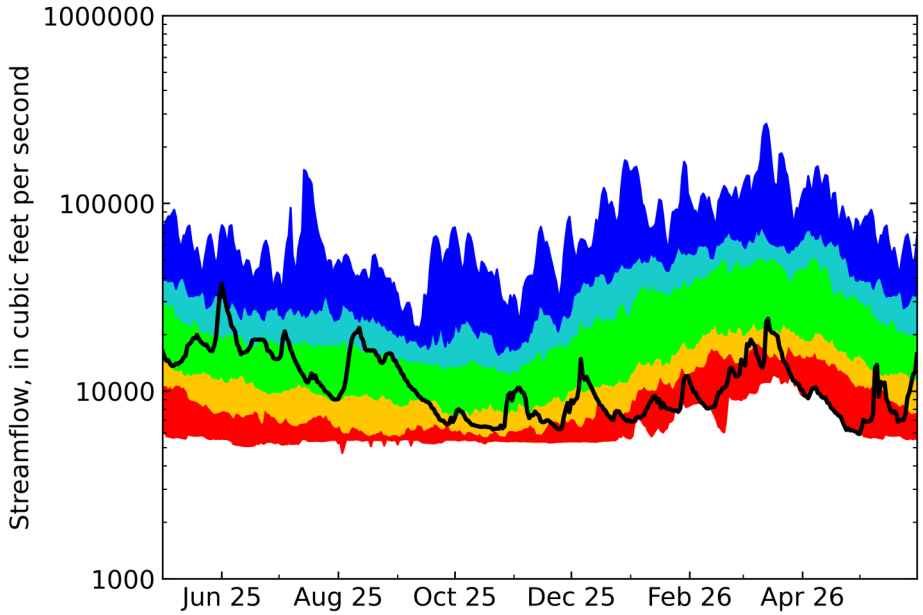
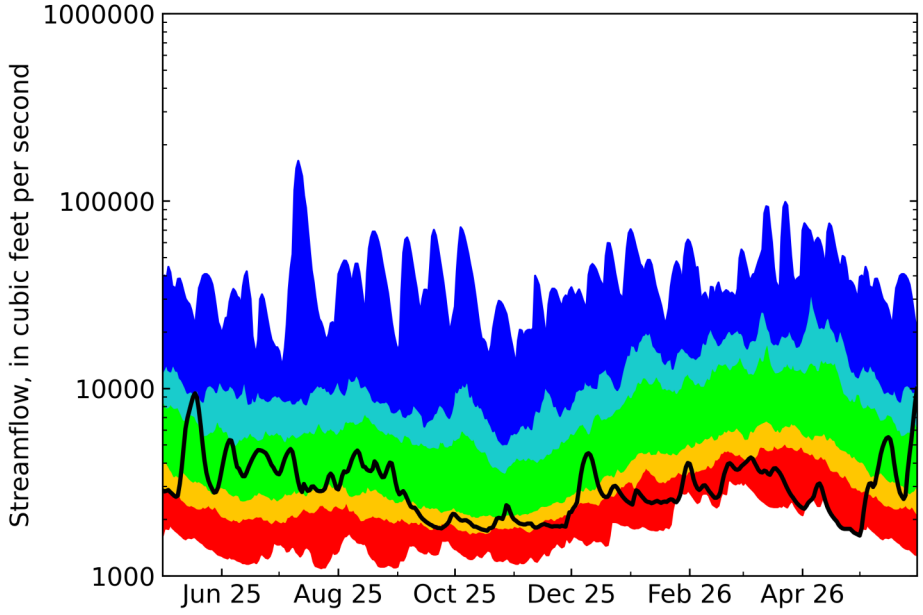


Figure 15: Daily streamflows and percentile ranges for USGS Station 02366500 Choctawhatchee River Near Bruce, Florida



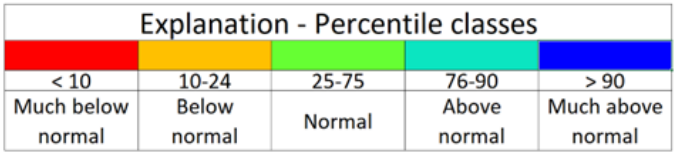


Figure 16: Daily streamflows and percentile ranges for USGS Station 02370000 Blackwater River Near Baker, Florida

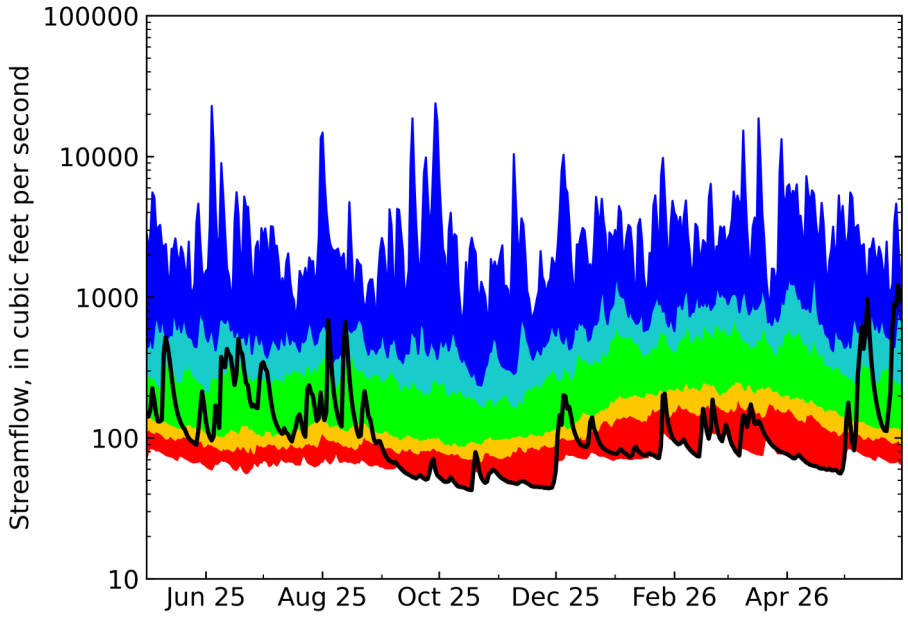
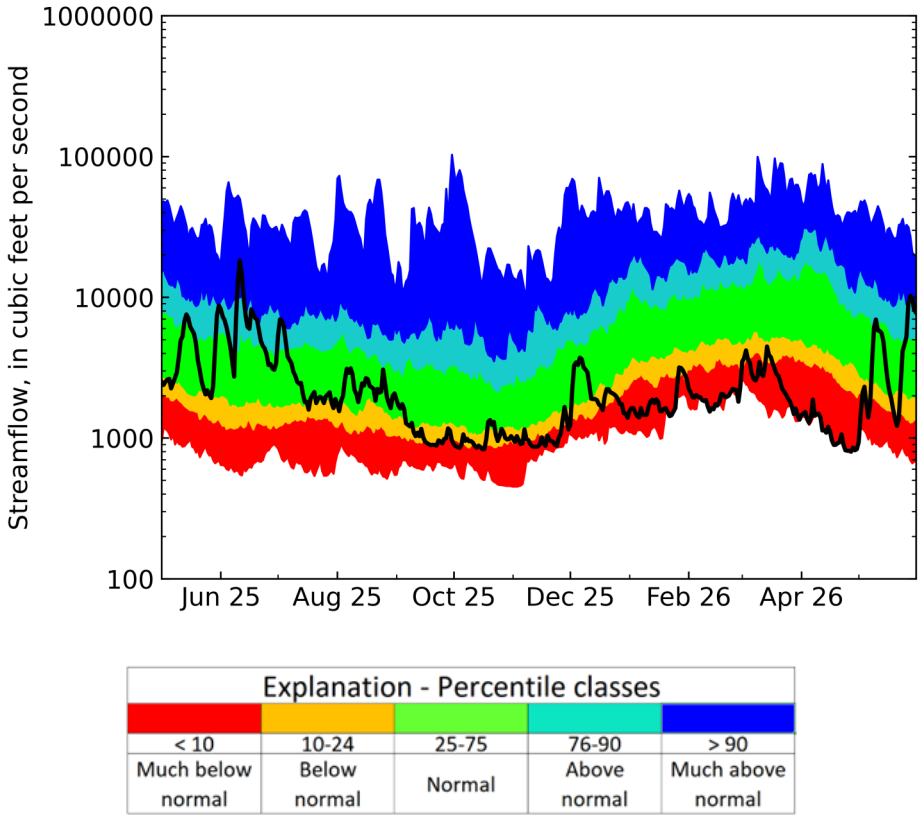


Figure 17: Daily streamflows and percentile ranges for USGS Station 02375500 Escambia River Near Century, Florida



Lake Levels. Water levels at Lake Jackson in Leon County increased 0.58 feet during the month of May 2026. Lake Jackson ended the month with a stage level of 77.82 feet, NAVD 1988 (**Figure 18**). The long-term (January 29, 2003, to May 31, 2026) average stage level for Lake Jackson is 80.81 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 have continued to remain below the elevation of the water level sensor for most of 2026 including May 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.

As of mid-March 2026, in the Econfina Creek Water Management Area in Bay and Washington counties, several recreational lakes and nearly all the ponds had begun to go dry. Porter Lake and the Whitewater lakes had very low levels with portions of the lakes going dry. Ponds like Gap Pond, Hammock Pond, Gully Pond, and Hamlin Pond had all gone dry or were nearly dry. Some of the deeper ponds such as Lake Merial, White Western, and Crystal Lake that have direct flow from the Floridan aquifer had low levels but were not completely dry. As of the end of May 2026, most of the lakes and ponds have either remained stable or increased in stage less than a foot.

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

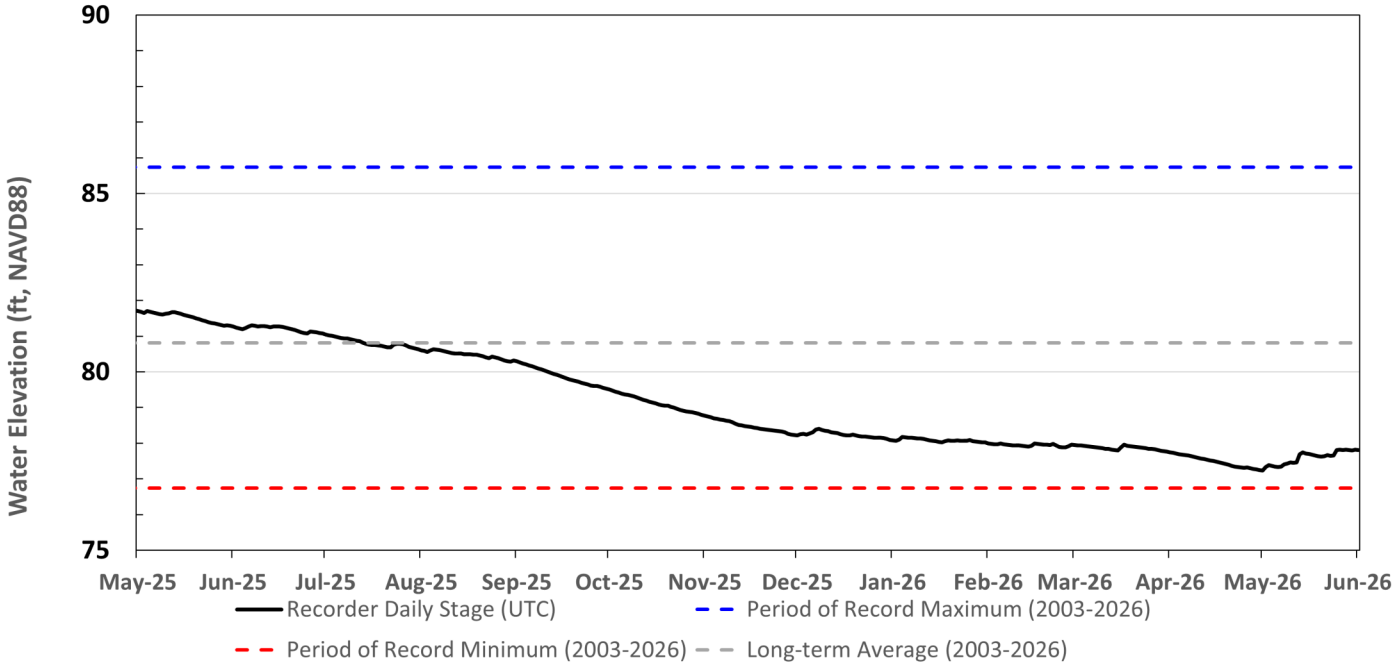
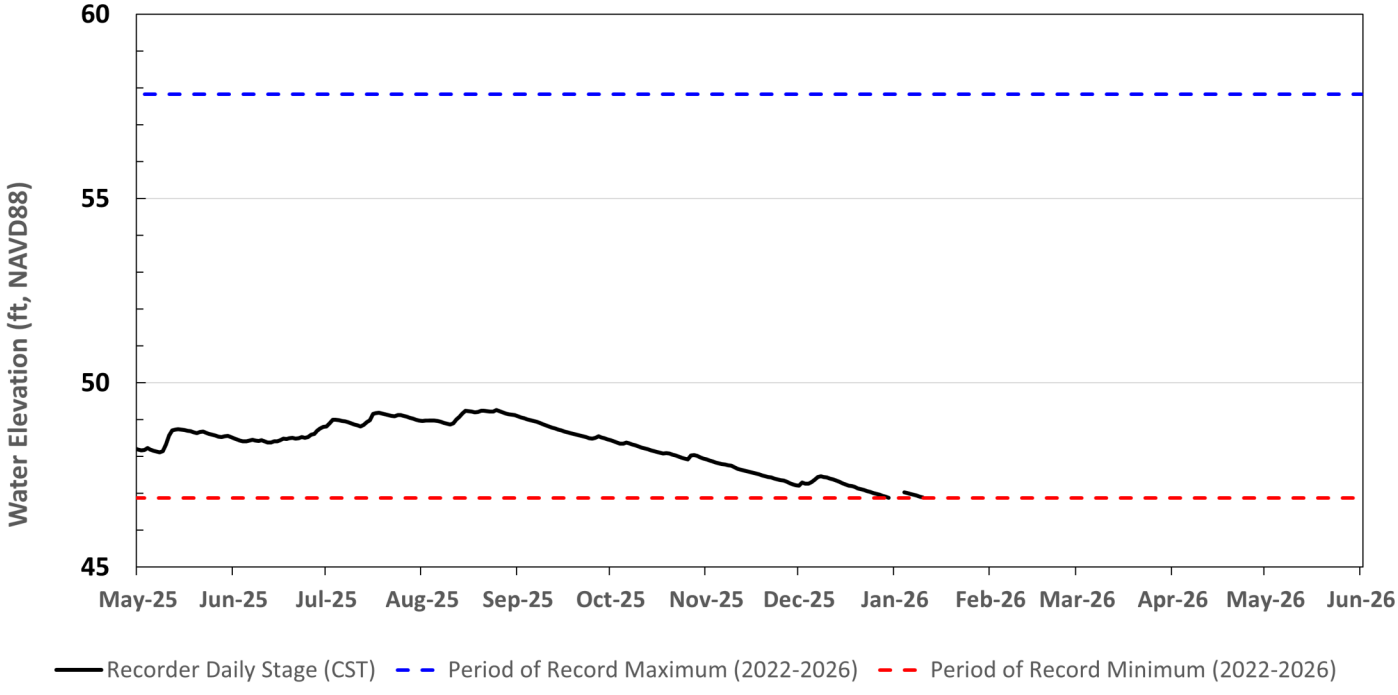


Figure 19: Daily water levels at Piney Lake, Washington County



Spring Flows

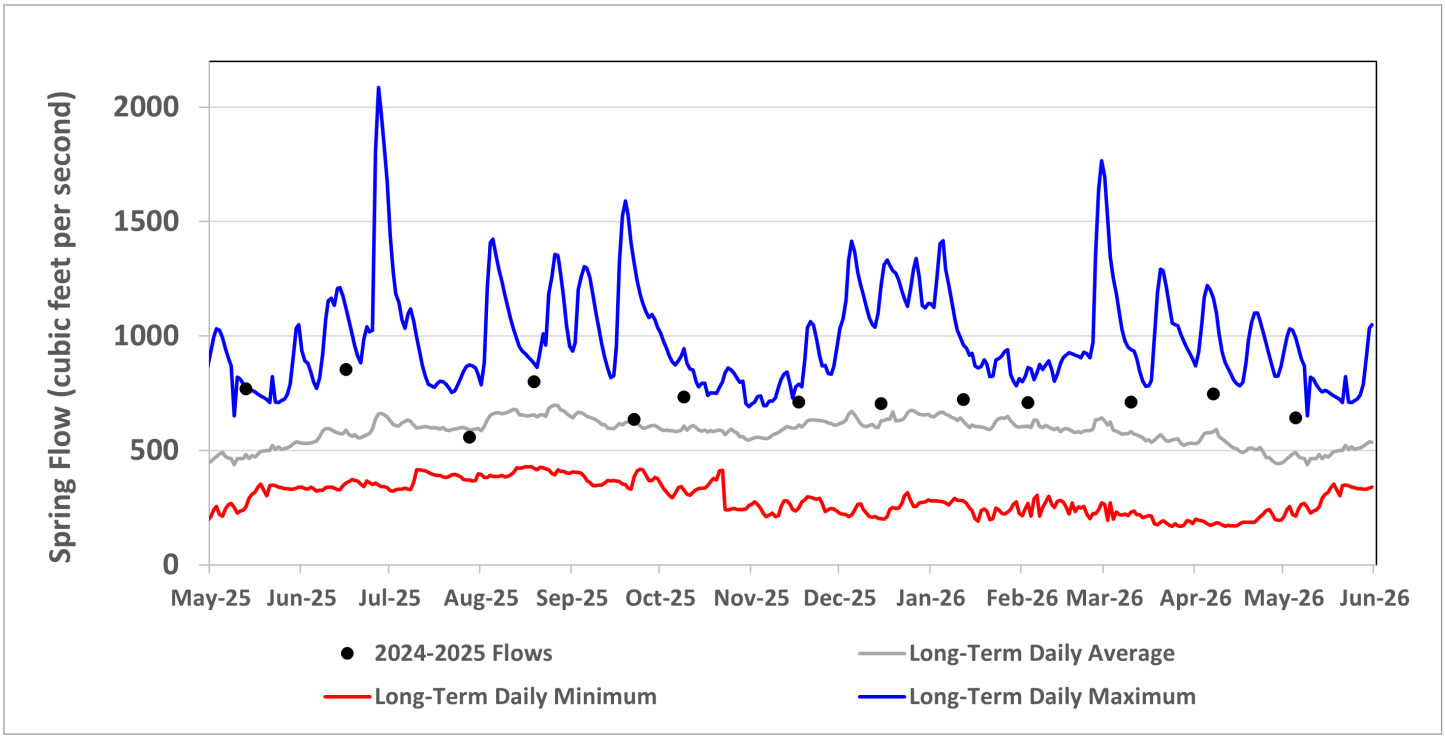
Wakulla and Sally Ward Spring System. Flow from Wakulla Spring decreased 105 cubic feet per second (cfs) between the measurements taken in April and May 2026. Previously, flow had remained generally stable around 720 cfs between the six monthly measurements between November 2025 and April 2026. The most recent flow measurement for Wakulla Spring was 643 cfs, on May 5, 2026 (Figure 20). This measurement was 154 cfs higher than the long-term (October 23, 2004, to May 5, 2026) average flow for the month of May of 489 cfs.

Flow from Sally Ward Spring declined 3.1 cfs between the measurements taken in April and May 2026. Previously, flow remained generally stable around 22.7 cfs among the six monthly measurements between November 2025 and April 2026. The most recent flow measurement for Sally Ward was 20.6 cfs on May 5, 2026. This measurement was 1.2 cfs higher than the long-term (November 1, 2004, to May 5, 2026) average flow for the month of May of 21.8 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 May 5, 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 May 5, 2026, represent discrete measurements. Daily statistics are based on the October 23, 2004, through May 5, 2026, period of record.

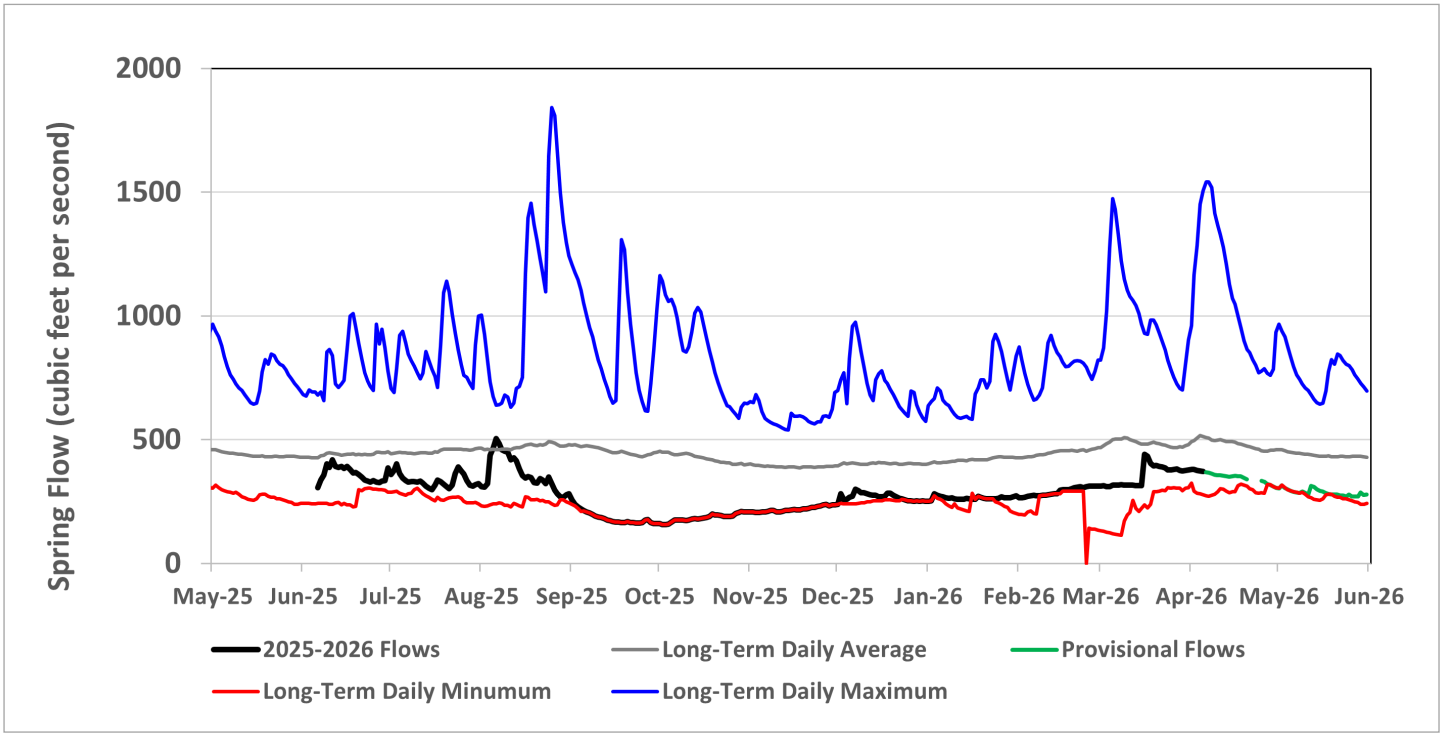


St. Marks River Rise. The mean daily spring flow for May 2026 at the St. Marks River Rise was 286 cfs, based on the available USGS provisional data which extends through May 31, 2026 (Figure 21). This was below the long-term (October 1, 1956, through May 31, 2026) average flow for the month of May of 439 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 May 31, 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 becomes available.

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

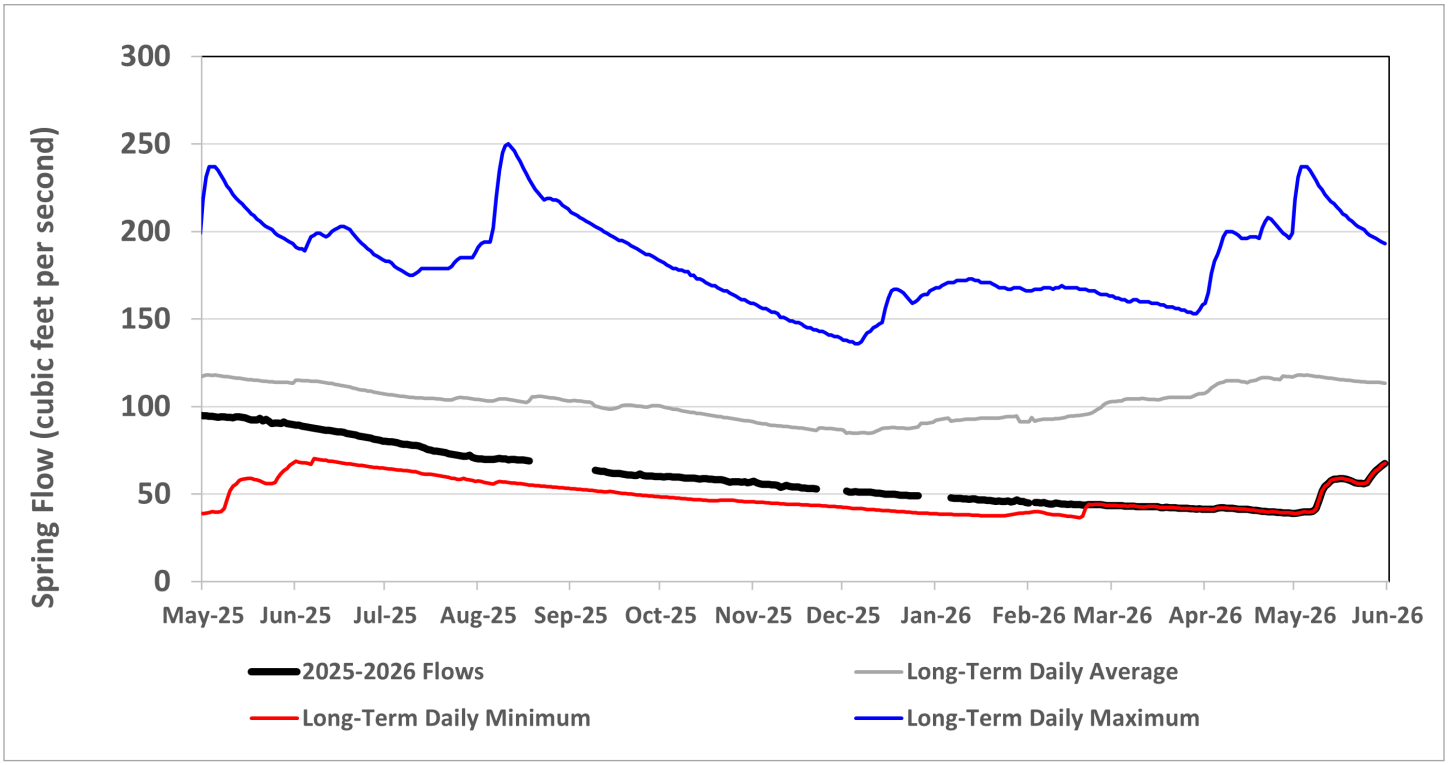


Jackson Blue Spring. Daily flows at Jackson Blue Spring during the month of May 2026 averaged 53.0 cfs. This was below the long-term average flow of 115.7 cfs for the month of May, based on the January 1, 2005, through April 29, 2026, period of record. Flows from Jackson Blue Spring have been below the long-term daily average flow since January 2025 and have been period of record low for the time of year 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 May 31, 2026. The long-term (January 1, 2005, through May 31, 2026) median flows from Jackson Blue Spring are 96.5 cfs, which exceeds the established minimum flow of 92.2 cfs by 4.3 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 May 31, 2026.

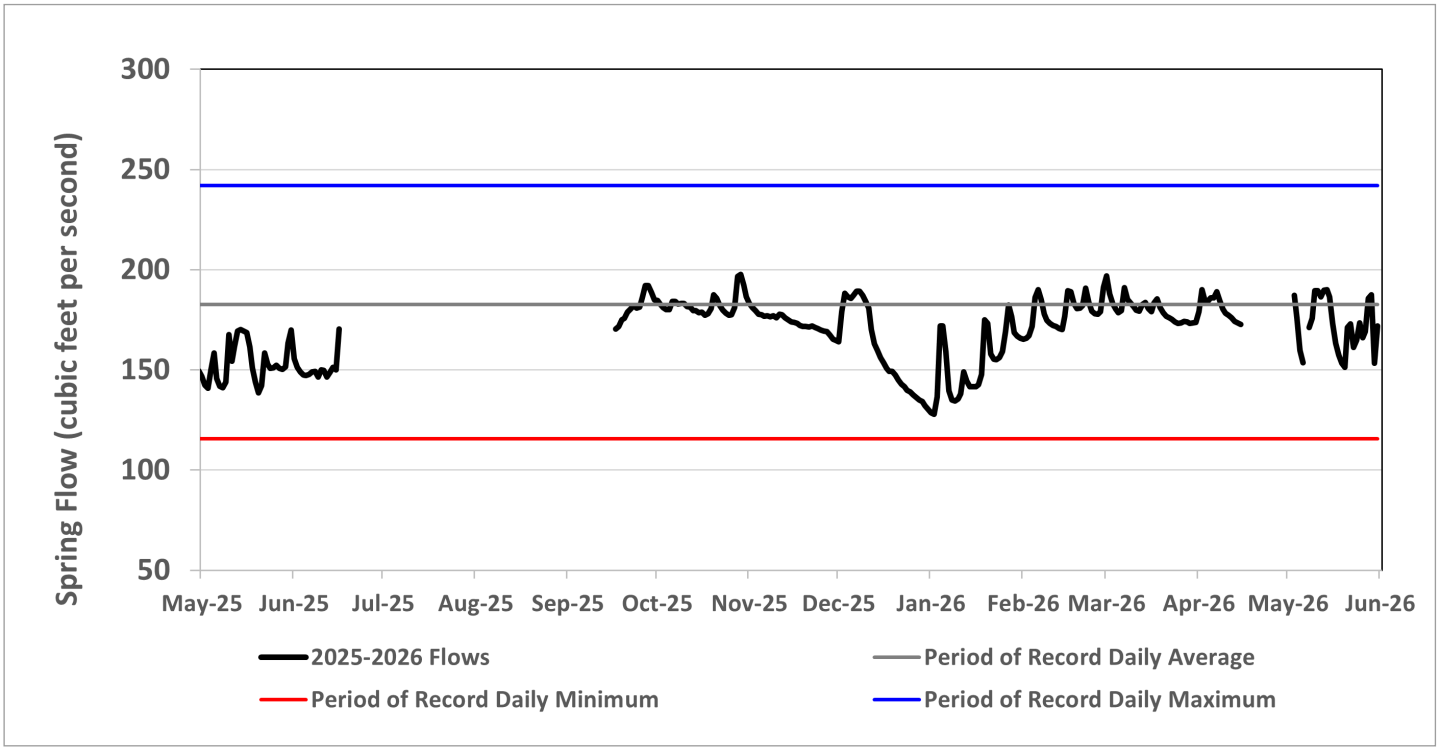


Gainer Spring Group. During May 2026, the average flow from the Gainer Spring Group was 173 cfs (**Figure 23**). The record period (October 28, 2019, through May 31, 2026) average monthly spring flow for the month of May is 175 cfs. It should be noted that there is a relatively brief period of record 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

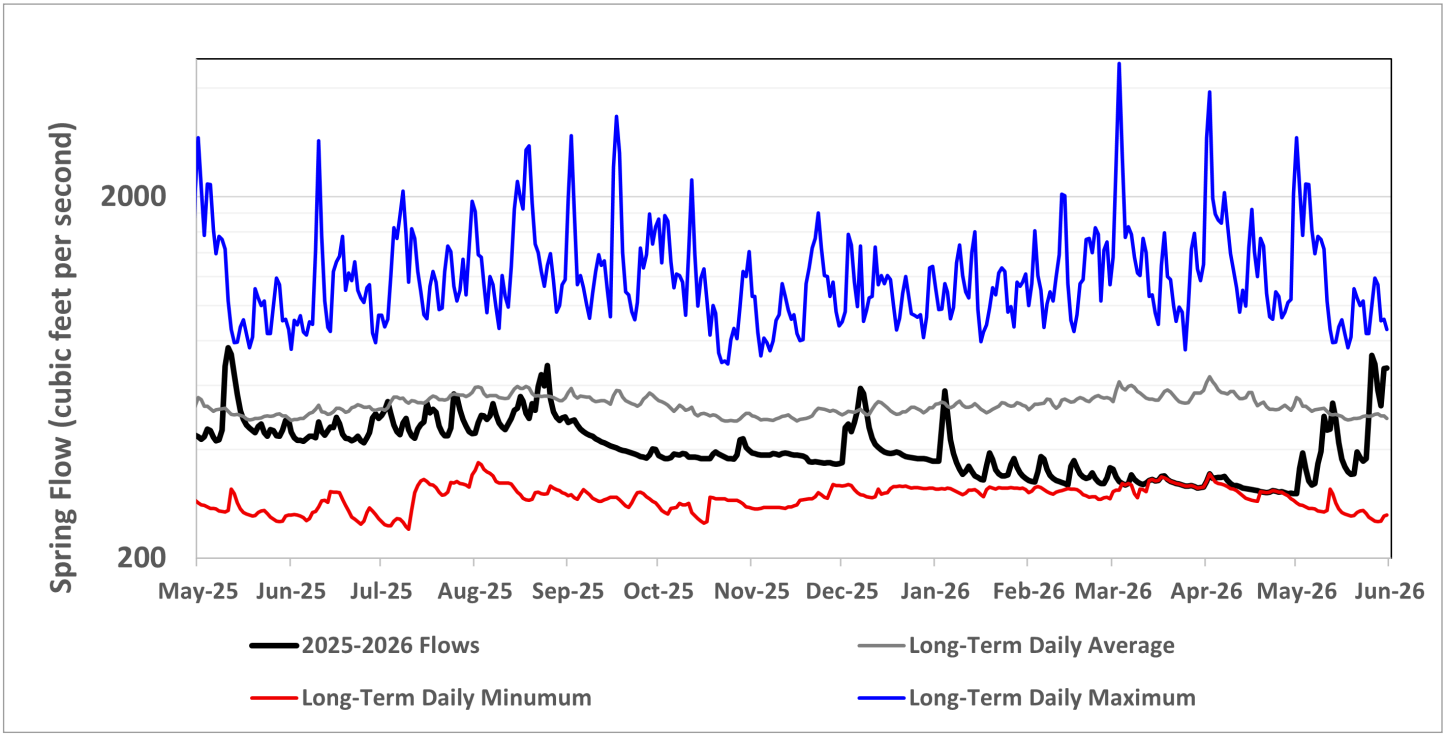
Data represents daily averages. Streamflow statistics are not shown due to the relatively short period of daily data.



Middle Econfina Creek. The mean daily flow for May 2026 at Middle Econfina Creek was 439 cfs, based on the available USGS provisional data which extends through May 31, 2026 (**Figure 24**). This was below the long-term (October 1, 1935, through May 31, 2026) average flow for the month of May of 507 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 May 31, 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 May 2026, of a total of fourteen Floridan aquifer monitor wells, four wells were classified as having groundwater levels within normal ranges, four were classified as below-normal, and six were classified as much-below-normal (**Figures 25 - 31**). Though May 2026 was a very wet month for most of the District, a majority of water levels at Floridan aquifer monitor wells with sufficient long-term data to calculate percentiles did not recover more than a few tenths of a foot. The largest increase of around two feet was recorded at the Pittman VISA Floridan monitor well (NWFID 5266) in eastern Jackson County. This increase in groundwater level brought the percentile classification from much-below-normal into below-normal levels by the end of the month (**Figure 28**). The only other Floridan percentile classification change between April and May 2026 was at the Newport Recreation monitor well (NWFID 671) in eastern Wakulla County. Groundwater levels at this well were previously much-below-normal but rose into below-normal levels by the middle of May 2026 (**Figure 25**). Water levels at all other Floridan monitor wells with sufficient long-term data to calculate percentiles did not change enough to affect their percentile classification.

Of four sand-and-gravel aquifer monitor wells with sufficient long-term data to calculate percentiles, one had groundwater levels within normal ranges and three had much-below-normal water levels. The only monitor well that had a percentile change was USGS- Wright Test monitor well (NWFID 2823) in southern Okaloosa County. Groundwater levels at this well declined and were considered much-below-normal in mid-May 2026 (**Figure 25**). Water levels at all other sand-and-gravel monitor wells with sufficient long-term data to calculate percentiles did not change enough to affect their percentile classification.

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

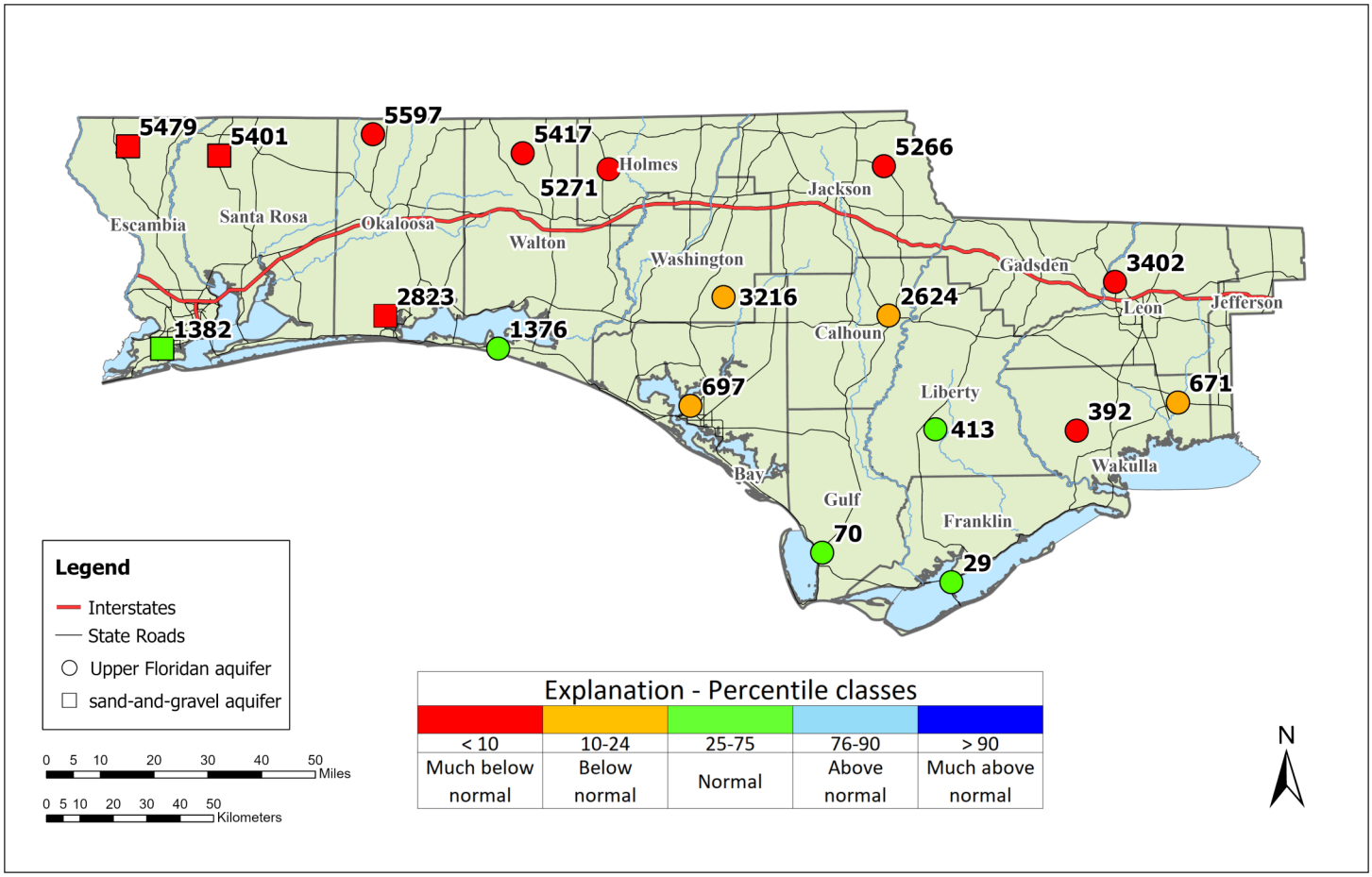


Figure 26: Daily upper Floridan aquifer levels at USGS-Lake Jackson well (NWFID 3402), Leon County

Land surface elevation is 121.40 ft, NAVD 88

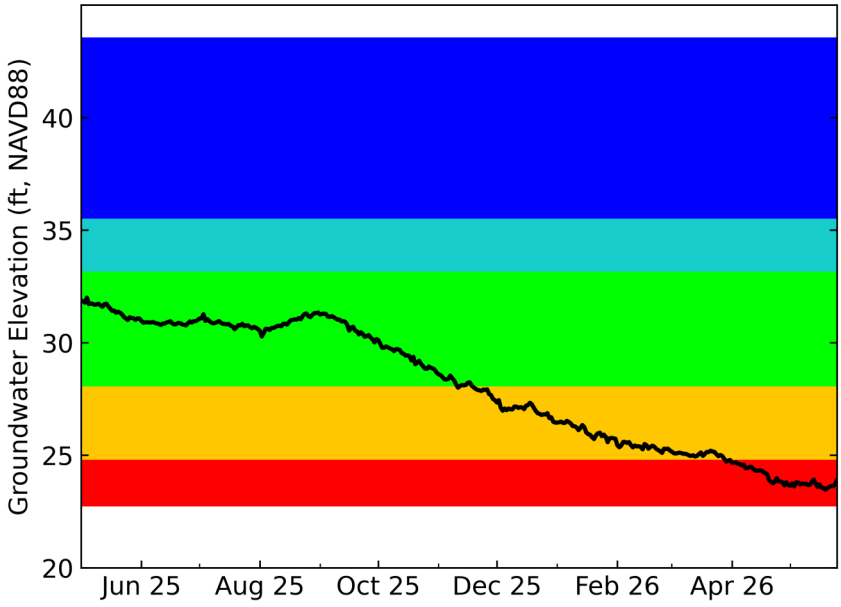
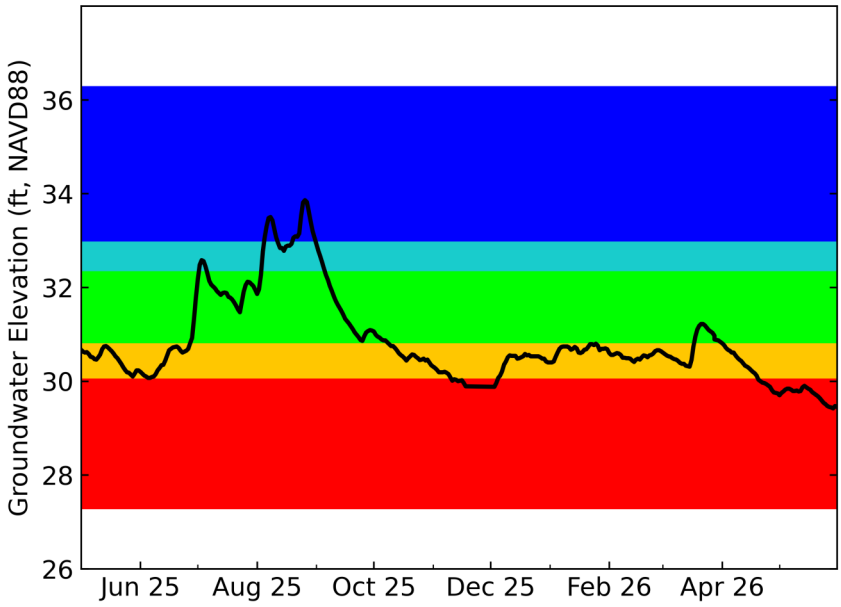


Figure 27: Daily upper Floridan aquifer levels at USGS Benchmark well (NWFID 392), Wakulla County

Land surface elevation is 46.27 ft, NAVD 88



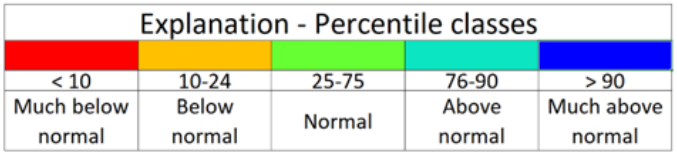


Figure 28: Daily upper Floridan aquifer levels at NWFWMD Pittman Visa well (NWFID 5266), Jackson County

Land surface elevation is 127.31 ft, NAVD 88

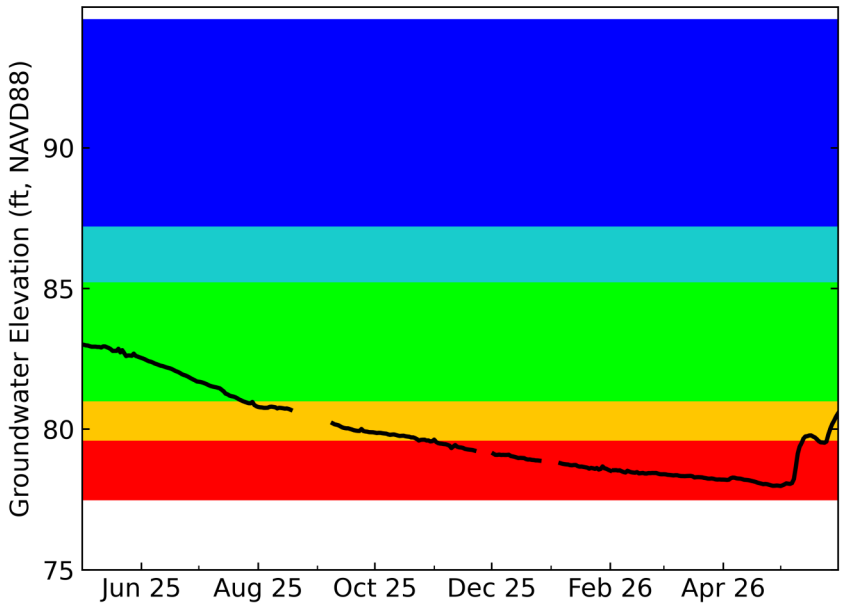


Figure 29: Daily upper Floridan aquifer levels at USGS-422A Near Greenhead well (NWFID 3216), Washington County

Land surface elevation is 66.75 ft, NAVD 88

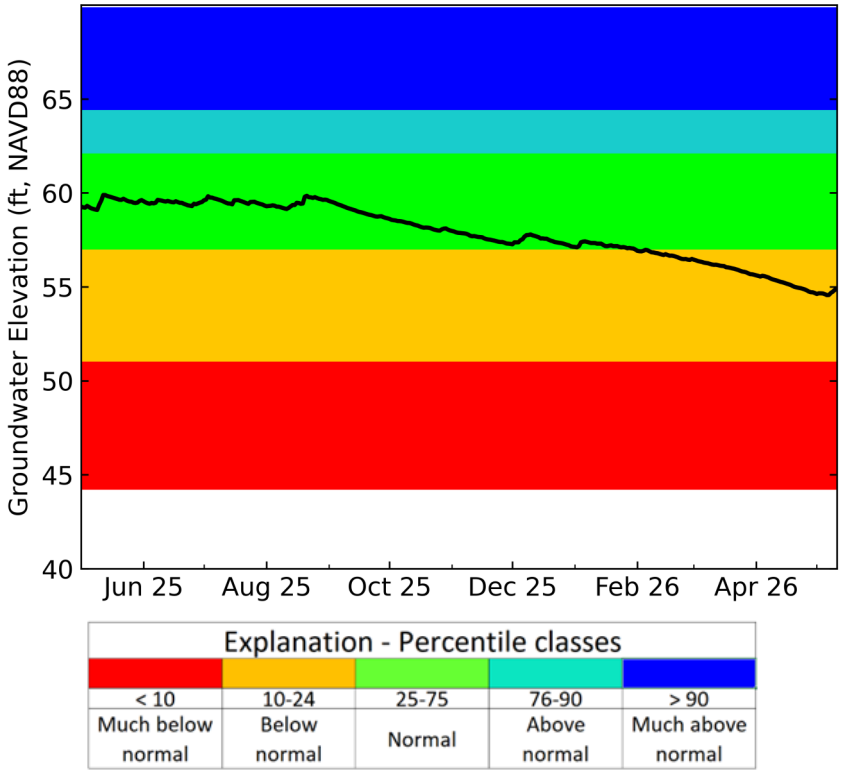


Figure 30: Daily upper Floridan aquifer levels at Fannin Airport well (NWFID 697), Washington County

Land surface elevation is 4.05 ft, NAVD 88

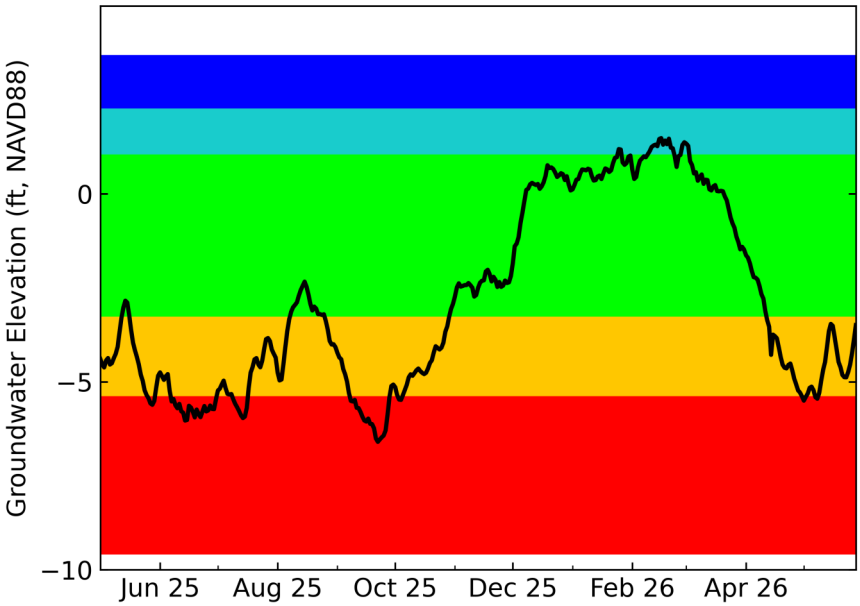


Figure 31: Daily sand-and-gravel aquifer levels at NWFWMD Weller Ave Deep well (NWFID 1382), Escambia County

Land surface elevation is 25.09 ft, NAVD 88