



# Southwest Weather Bulletin

Fall Winter 2012-2013 Edition

National Weather Service Santa Teresa-El Paso



## Warm Dry Weather Brings Drought and Record Wildfires

**Westerly winds and high pressure allowed warm dry drought conditions to persist across southern New Mexico, western Texas and surrounding areas through the late winter, spring and early summer of 2012. As a result much of the southwest suffered through a series of devastating wildfires including the Whitewater-Baldy Complex Fire which burned almost 300,000 acres over portions of southwestern New Mexico including the Gila Wilderness and sections of Grant County. The lack of rain and snowfall also lowered water levels at Elephant Butte Reservoir to only 10 percent capacity. In some cases the lack of rainfall dried up small ponds, killing hundreds of fish and other wildlife.**

**Unfortunately high pressure in the upper-atmosphere dominated the weather pattern through much of the summer across southern New Mexico and western Texas.**



The devastating Whitewater-Baldy Complex Fire burned thousands of acres over southwestern New Mexico including the Gila Wilderness during the spring and early summer of 2012. (Kari Greer)

**Consequently the region experienced a rather quiet dry monsoon season with limited thunderstorm activity and below-normal rainfall over much of the area. By late September the Rio Grande was again running low due to the very limited water availability from Elephant Butte.**



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Severe drought conditions reduced water levels to almost 10 percent capacity at Elephant Butte Reservoir by the late spring of 2012.

## Seasonal Weather Highlights

May 8: Strong thunderstorms produce penny-size hail over Hatch and Chaparral in Dona Ana County and causes minor street flooding over El Paso.

May 9: A lightning strike ignites what is to become the Whitewater-Baldy Complex Fire. The fire becomes the largest in New Mexico history, burning almost 300,000 acres across the Gila Wilderness including portions of Grant County. The fire destroys at least a dozen residences, forces the evacuations of small towns and closes the Gila Cliff Dwellings and Catwalk Recreation Area. The fires continue into late July before heavy rain showers finally assist firefighters in putting out the flames.

May 11: Late afternoon and early evening severe thunderstorms drop egg-size hail near Loma Linda in Hudspeth County. In Otero County storms also produce golf ball-size hail near White Sands Monument and quarter-size hail at Orogrande.

May 13: Severe thunderstorms strike northern Otero County during the early evening with half dollar-size hail falling around Tularosa and quarter-size hail near Cloudcroft.

May 14: Penny-size hail falls over Vado in Dona Ana County.



Hail covers the ground across Hatch NM after strong thunderstorms move across the area on May 8. (Courtesy of storm chaser "DTRAVELZ" )



Severe thunderstorms with a rainbow move over southern Otero County on May 21. (Mike Hardiman NWS/NOAA)





**May 21 severe thunderstorms over southern Otero County .  
(Greg Lundeen NWS/NOAA)**

May 21: Late afternoon thunderstorms produce quarter-size hail near Hueco Tanks over southern Otero County.

May 23. Very windy across the region with winds gusting around 40 to 50 mph over much of southern New Mexico and western Texas.

June 2013. A hot dry month for the Borderland with temperatures well above normal occurring along with little rainfall. El Paso has an average high temperature of 100 degrees.

June 15: Severe thunderstorms produce an 82 mph wind gusts over White Sands Missile Range with gusts near 70 mph at El Paso .

July 6: Over an inch of rain falls over portions of El Paso causing minor street flooding.

July 7: Thunderstorms dump 1.6 inches of rain on La Luz in Otero County.

July 9: Thunderstorms with heavy rains move across much of Dona Ana County. 2.5 inches of rain are measured at Mesquite with over an inch falling at Las Cruces.

July 18: Over an inch of rain falls at La Luz.



**Wildfires burn much of the Gila Wilderness through  
June 2012. (Kari Greer)**



**Thunderstorms with heavy rains move over El Paso  
on July 6. (John Fausett NWS/NOAA)**



**Intense thunderstorm moves over east El Paso on July 6. (Eddie Romero News Channel 9 El Paso)**



July 26 evening thunderstorms produce spectacular lighting over southern Dona Ana County. (Mike Hardiman NWS/NOAA)

July 25: Late afternoon thunderstorms strike rural portions of Luna County flooding area ranch roads.

August 16: Almost 2 inches of rain fall over southwestern portions of Grant County.

August 17: Almost 2 inches of rain fall near Cloudcroft.

August 18: Late afternoon thunderstorms with heavy rains hit portions of Grant County. Roads flood near Santa Clara and an inch of rain falls near Silver City and Bayard.

August 19: Thunderstorms drop over an inch of rain around Silver City and also at Sunspot in northern Otero County.

August 23: Severe thunderstorms with heavy rains strike portions of the area. Wind gusts are measured at 76 mph at White sands Missile range with gusts to 67 mph over El Paso. Over an inch of rain falls around Cloudcroft.

August 26: Severe thunderstorms produces 60 mph winds at Rock Hound State Park in Luna county while dime-size hail fall over El Paso.



**On September 7 strong thunderstorms with heavy rains move across across the El Paso vicinity. (Greg Lundeen NWS/NOAA)**

September 7: Evening thunderstorms bring 1 to 2 inches of rain across portions of Dona Ana and El Paso Counties including the Las Cruces and El Paso vicinities. Flooding forces road closures over portions of Las Cruces.





Despite a rather dry monsoon these flowers were in full bloom over El Paso by late September. (Charlotte Rogash)

**Spotters...Please call the National Weather Service If You Observe:**

**Tornado or Funnel Cloud...Report Time, Location and Movement**

**Hail...1/2 Inch or Larger**

**Damaging Winds...Damage To Buildings, Motor Vehicles, Trees, Power Lines  
And Other Structures**

**Flash Flooding...Flooding Of Streets and Buildings , Or If Rivers, Streams And  
Arroyos Flood Or Overflow**

**Heavy Rains...1/2 Inch of Rain In Less Than 30 Minutes Or At Least 1 Inch Of  
Rain In Less Than 2 Hours**

**Blowing Dust...Whenever Blowing Dust Reduces The Visibility To Less Than 2 Miles.**

**Snow Amounts Greater Than An Inch**