

MARCH 1997: The warmer than normal conditions that enveloped the Washington/Baltimore area during the Winter of 1996–1997 continued into the first month of meteorological Spring, with temperature departures between +1.2°F and 1.5°F reported at the three major airports. Although there were no daily record highs as in January and February, there were several days (11) when the mercury rose above 60°F. In addition, there were no outbreaks of bitterly cold air which can occur during this transitional month. There were 18 days with at or above normal temperatures at DCA and only 2 days with lows of 32°F or lower (the fewest such March days since 1973; tied with 1996). The mild weather also contributed to an early start to the growing season, leading to the blooming of many trees and flowers, including the cherry blossoms, around Washington. The variability in March weather was highlighted at the end of the month as highs soared above 70°F on Easter weekend (29th & 30th) only to be followed by isolated severe thundershowers (29th), strong winds, scattered snow showers, and lows in the thirties on the 31st.

March got off to a wet start with more than two inches of rain soaking parts of the local area between the 1st and 3rd. Monthly precipitation totals ranged between 4 and 6 inches at all five airports. Measurable precipitation fell on 14 days at DCA, including 6 of the first 10 March days. On the 1st, nearly an inch of rain soaked the area while on the 3rd heavy rains generated more than inch of rain. Despite frequent precipitation, there was only a trace of snow recorded at DCA (the lowest March total since 1983). In fact, the only noteworthy winter–like precipitation events in the Washington/Baltimore area occurred during the early morning hours of the 19th and on the last day of the month. On the 19th, rain changed over to snow before ending, with only minor accumulations observed on grassy areas around Washington. Both BWI and IAD reported slightly over an inch of snow with this event as did many of the northern and western suburbs. Significant snowfall occurred on the last day of the month across parts of northeastern Maryland (up to 12 inches in Harford County) as a powerful Nor'easter developed and rapidly intensified off the New Jersey coast. While only brief, scattered snow showers dusted the Washington area, snow blanketed BWI (1.4") and downtown Baltimore (6"). Farther north, the storm generated blizzard conditions across much of central New England with more than three feet of snow reported in some areas.

MARCH 1997 WEATHER STATISTICS FOR THE WASHINGTON/BALTIMORE AREA:

Station Location	Temperatures (°F)					Extreme/Day		Precipitation (In)			
	AvMx	AvMn	AvgT	NmlT	DepNml	MaxT	MinT	Total	Norm	DepNml	Snow
National (DCA)	57.8	39.6	48.7	47.2	+1.5	77/29	31/16	4.15	3.17	+1.02	T
Baltimore (BWI)	56.2	34.7	45.5	44.1	+1.4	76/29	23/17	5.68	3.38	+2.30	2.7
Dulles (IAD)	55.1	34.0	44.6	43.2	+1.2	75/29	23/16	4.78	3.17	+1.61	1.5
Ft. Belvoir (DAA)	59.7	38.3	49.0	N/A	N/A	77/27*	27/16#	5.04	3.7	+1.3	T
Andrews AFB (ADW)	56.2	35.9	46.0	N/A	N/A	77/29	25/16#	4.53	3.6	+0.9	T

Other Occurrences: * March 28th and 29th; # March 17th.

LOOKING AHEAD TO APRIL: *A fifth consecutive warmer than normal month?*

Last year was highlighted by several cooler than normal months across the Washington area. In fact, 9 of the 12 months in 1996 were marked by subnormal temperatures. Only April, June and December 1996 featured warmer than normal conditions. The abnormally mild weather that highlighted the end of 1996 (December Average Temperature at DCA: 43.0°F; Dep. Nml. +3.6°F) carried into the 1996–97 Winter with a seasonal temperature departure of +4.4°F recorded at DCA (sixth warmest winter on record). As mentioned above, March was slightly warmer than normal, marking the fourth consecutive month with above normal temperatures across the local area. Now the question arises whether this warmer than normal streak will continue into April. If it does it will be the most significant period with above normal temperatures since the record equalling 11 months of October 1990–August 1991 at DCA.