

MARCH 2006 WEATHER SUMMARY

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The storm that closed out February was the prelude to a near-record shattering cold March in the central California interior. By the time the month ended, Fresno had tied for its second coldest March on record, and had recorded its 6th wettest March on record. Bakersfield had its 3rd coldest March since records began, as well as its 22nd wettest March in 117 years of rainfall records.

A cold Pacific storm reached the central California interior on March 2nd, bringing up to 3 feet of new snow to the higher elevations of the Sierra Nevada, from Yosemite to Kings Canyon, and 1 to 2 feet of new snow to the Tulare County Mountains. The cold front associated with this storm moved through the region on the 3rd, generating pre-frontal south winds up to 40 mph and several thunderstorms. One thunderstorm near Tipton (in Tulare County) reached severe levels, producing ¾-inch hail.

The next storm arrived in the evening of the 5th, and brought another 2-3 feet (3-day total, March 5th-8th) to the Southern Sierra Nevada, including the Tulare Mountains. The storm moved east of the region, generating wind gusts up to 64 mph in the Indian Wells Valley and the Kern County desert on March 7th.

The third storm of the month arrived on March 9th, bringing up to 3 feet of more snow to the Southern Sierra Nevada, and up to 8 inches of new snow to the Tehachapi Mountains. Very cold air accompanied this storm, with Bakersfield setting 3 consecutive record low maximum temperatures on March 10th-12th, and Fresno breaking its record low maximum temperature record on the 11th. The storm generated gusts of 45-50 mph in the Kern County Mountains and deserts with its arrival on the 9th, and again with its departure on the 12th.

The storm also triggered severe thunderstorms during the late afternoon of March 10th, with several reports of ¾-inch hail near NAS Lemoore. Severe weather returned the next afternoon, with ¾-inch hail falling on the Meadows Field airport in Bakersfield.

Storm number 4 moved into the area on March 14th, bringing a foot of new snow to Tuolumne Meadows in Yosemite National Park, as well as isolated thunderstorms over the San Joaquin Valley and the Sierra foothills.

The pattern of new storms every 2-3 days continued unabated, as yet another storm reached central California on March 17th. Snowfall amounts ranged from a foot at Lower Kibbie Ridge in the Southern Sierra Nevada to 6 inches at Bear Valley Springs in the Tehachapi Mountains.

Another 12-18 inches of fresh snow fell on the high country of the Southern Sierra Nevada on March 20th-21st, as the sixth storm of the month moved through, followed by storm number 7 on March 25th in the early hours of the 26th. This storm brought up to 8 inches of additional snow to the Southern Sierra Nevada, and generated gusts to 57 mph in the Kern County Mountains and deserts.

The final storm of the month reached the central California interior on the evening of March 27th. This was a very potent storm, with abundant moisture. Up to 55 inches of new snow fell in the Southern Sierra Nevada, with 15 inches falling as far south as the Piutes in Kern County. This storm also spawned an F0 tornado that touched down south of the city of Merced at 2:48 PM on the 28th. The tornado tore the roof off a barn and dropped it on utility lines, pulling down the poles.

Fresno recorded 4.73 inches of rain for the month, including a record-setting 1.05 inch on the 28th. The average temperature for March in Fresno was only 50.1 degrees. Only March 1897 was colder (with an average temperature of 48.6 degrees), and March 2006 tied March 1952 as the coldest March recorded at Fresno Yosemite International Airport. Fresno's wettest March was in 1991, with a rainfall of 7.24 inches.

Bakersfield received 1.91 inch of rain in March, and had an average temperature of 52.4 degrees. Only March 1935 (51.2 degrees) and March 1901 (51.8 degrees) had colder average temperatures. Bakersfield's wettest March was in 1938, with 4.61 inches of rain.