May 2023 Colorado Monthly Climate Summary
May broke the streak of 6 consecutive colder-than-normal months, with most of the state seeing warm conditions. Parts of northwestern Colorado, which had gone through a very cold and snowy winter, saw an especially abrupt change with a top-10 warmest May.

The major story for precipitation in May was the persistent rain along the Front Range and in northeastern Colorado. A small area in Douglas and Elbert Counties saw a record-wet May according to NOAA’s dataset. Overall, this May was not as wet as the "Miracle May" of 2015, but there was still a whole lot of water that fell!
temperature: spring

After a cold March and April and a warm May, the spring season ended up a bit colder than average across the state. The largest departures from average were in northwestern and central Colorado. The cool spring followed a cold winter, the first time that two consecutive seasons had temperatures below the 20th century average since 2013.

precipitation: spring

The spring season ended up slightly wetter than average across Colorado. The very wet May brought the Front Range to a top-20 wet spring, and some areas in the mountains were also much wetter than average from big snowstorms back in March.
quadrant charts

Each dot plots the precipitation on the x-axis and the temperature on the y-axis. Dots are colored based on temperature and size is based on precipitation. The current year is denoted with a star. Long-term averages are denoted by the dashed lines.

Statewide, Colorado was warm and wet in May. It was tied for the 16th warmest May on record, and tied for the 31st wettest. The quadrant chart illustrates that warm and wet is an uncommon combination in May: when it’s wet, it’s usually also cool during the spring.

Zooming into the Platte River basin in northeast Colorado, it was the 9th wettest May---the wettest since 2015. Other years that had a similar combination of warm and wet conditions in May were 1969 and 1987.
records tied and broken

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<th>Low Min</th>
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Tied/Broken, from NOAA National Centers for Environmental Information

state extremes

- **12.0”** Cabin Creek May 11
- **5.30”** Castle Rock May 12
- **16°F** Moon Pass May 5
- **93°F** Walsh and Campo May 10
The wet May in eastern Colorado greatly improved drought conditions, with less than 8% of the state in drought at the end of May, compared to over 37% of the state at the end of February.

Mountain snowpack remained well above average in most basins, with the Gunnison and southwestern basins still holding more than twice the typical amount of water in the snow at the end of May.
significant events

Some additional statistics on May’s heavy rainfall:
- A CoCoRaHS observer in Castle Rock reported 10.15” for the month.
- Denver recorded 2.92” of rain on May 11, the wettest single day since 1973, and 3.75” on May 11-12, which was the 2nd wettest 2-day period on record.
- Colorado Springs recorded 3.18” on May 11, the wettest May day on record and the 7th wettest day overall.

Flooding was reported from the heavy rain on May 10-12, especially on Sand Creek, Cherry Creek, Plum Creek, and parts of the Arkansas River.

Flooding was also a persistent issue as the deep snowpack melted, especially on rivers and creeks in northwestern (Elk and Yampa Rivers) and southwestern Colorado (Dolores and Mancos Rivers).
significant events

The first half of the month was active in terms of severe weather. Intense winds were observed on May 6\textsuperscript{th} in northeastern Colorado, with a gust of 98 mph in Phillips County, which is in the top 50 thunderstorm wind gusts statewide.

May 10\textsuperscript{th} was also a very active day, with several tornadoes and hail up to 4” in diameter reported west of Akron, and numerous hail reports statewide.

Landspout tornadoes were also reported on several days in southeast Colorado.
CCC in the news

- **Denver records one of its wettest Mays in decades. What does that mean for wildfires?**
  - The Denver Post, May 31, 2023, Becky Bolinger and Russ Schumacher

- **Windsor Tornado: On 15th anniversary, we look back on Colorado's most destructive twister**
  - The Coloradoan, May 21, Russ Schumacher

- **Double trouble? Colorado primed for flooding between torrential rains, spring snowmelt**
  - Greeley Tribune, May 20, Russ Schumacher

- **Why there's so much rain on Colorado’s Front Range and Eastern Plains**
  - Colorado Public Radio, May 12, Russ Schumacher

- **New study shows Durango’s water supplies declining dramatically as climate change, drought hit home**
  - Freshwater News, May 26, Peter Goble