

Fall weather laid the foundation for Connecticut's wildfires. Here's how.

By **Tim McGill**, Meteorologist

Updated Oct 24, 2024 8:43 a.m.



Broken & Tied Records

High Temperatures
10/21/2024

City	Records Since	2024 High	1920 Record
Boston	1872	83	82°
Providence	1904	81	81°
Hartford	1905	86	82°

NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

Records set on Wednesday as temperatures soared to 10-20 degrees above average.
NOAA

Nearly 4 million people across Connecticut were under a red flag warning on Wednesday as record heat and bone-dry air created critical fire weather conditions. The National Weather Service warned that “any fires that start may spread rapidly

and become difficult to extinguish” as southerly breezes gusted to around 30 mph to exacerbate the situation.

At least seven brush fires ignited, including one in Berlin that resulted in the death of a firefighter.

The weather this fall laid the foundation for these critical fire conditions. September helped set the stage, and a parched first three weeks of October raised the risk even more.

The Northeast Regional Climate Center reports six of the region’s 35 major climate sites had their driest Oct. 1-21 period on record, including Central Park and Kennedy Airport in New York, Newark and Atlantic City in New Jersey, and Allentown and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Bridgeport had its fourth warmest first three weeks of October, while Hartford had its 13th warmest on record.

More For You

9 CT brush fires ignite over weekend, 82 being monitored amid historic drought



After rainy start, CT skies clear Monday with highs near 70 degrees, NWS says



Officials: 10 brush fires broke out in CT over the weekend





NWS: Up to a half-inch of rain expected in CT on Sunday night

The unusual fall heat hasn't helped either. Hartford is running more than 3 degrees above average for October. New Haven is now just under 3 degrees above average for the month. Bridgeport is the relatively "cool" spot, running .6 degrees above average.

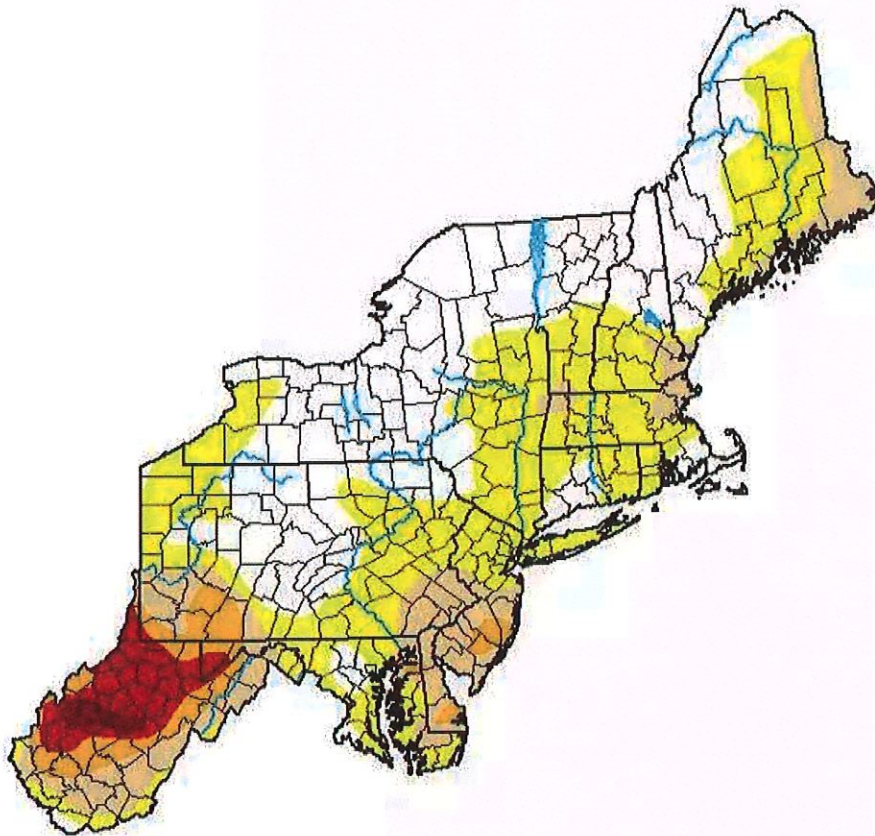
Wednesday was another day featuring prime conditions for fires as high temperatures broke records in the Northeast. Hartford hit a high of 86 degrees, shattering the old record of 82 set more than 100 years ago. Boston soared to 83 to break another long-standing record that dated back to 1920.

Drought conditions in the Northeast




The cumulative effect of the lack of rain for almost the first two-thirds of fall is evident when looking at the total rainfall from the start of September through Wednesday this week. Since the start of fall, Hartford has only received 16 percent of its average rainfall. Bridgeport has only received 14 percent of its average rainfall so far this fall. New Haven is faring only slightly better, receiving about 24 percent of its average rainfall through this part of fall.

U.S. Drought Monitor Northeast

October 15, 2024
(Released Thursday, Oct. 17, 2024)
Valid 8 a.m. EDT



Intensity:

-  None
-  D0 Abnormally Dry
-  D1 Moderate Drought
-  D2 Severe Drought
-  D3 Extreme Drought
-  D4 Exceptional Drought

The Drought Monitor focuses on broad-scale conditions. Local conditions may vary. For more information on the Drought Monitor, go to <https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/About.aspx>

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droughtmonitor.unl.edu

The U.S. Drought Monitor report from Oct. 15 revealed an expansion of the Northeast's drought. The U.S. Drought Monitor is jointly produced by the National Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the United States Department of Agriculture, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

National Drought Mitigation Center

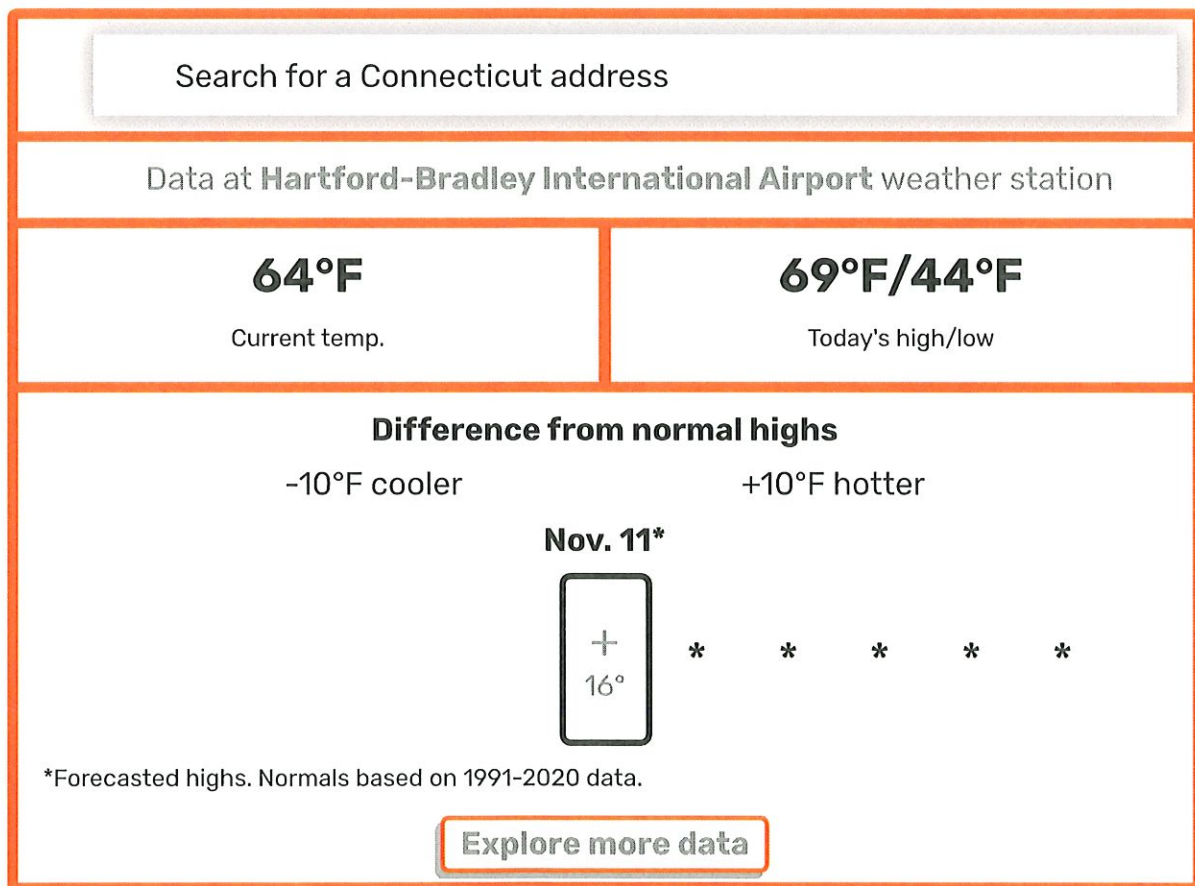
The [U.S. Drought Monitor](#) will update its report for the Northeast region later Thursday. It is expected to continue the trend of an expanding drought seen in last week's report.

Nearly a quarter of the region is in at least a moderate drought, level one out of four. This represents an expansion of about 2 percent of the region since the prior report. The area under severe drought, level two out of four, increased by a little more than half a percent. Just over 64 percent of Connecticut was experiencing "abnormally dry" conditions.

A strong ridge of high pressure anchored over the Gulf Coast states has blocked significant moisture from moving north into the state. The trade-off is a lot of sunshine but tinder-dry conditions.

A weak cold front moved through Wednesday night, turning the winds in from the northwest. Thursday afternoon, the conditions will be even drier than Wednesday. Conditions are again expected to be even more favorable for wildfire spread.

What is a red flag warning?



Red flag warnings are issued when warm temperatures combine with very low humidity levels and strong winds. In addition to Connecticut's statewide red flag warning, a special weather statement was issued for most of Massachusetts.

The next chance for rain, and it is only a slight chance, will arrive on Saturday as a weakening cold front crosses the state. If any fires are still burning by then and aren't dampened by rain, gusty winds could fan them.

There is no meaningful rain in the forecast right now all the way through Halloween.

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