

Climatological Narrative For Wilkes-Barre/Scranton, Pennsylvania

The Wilkes-Barre/Scranton International Airport is located about midway between the two cities at the southwest end of the crescent-shaped Lackawanna River Valley. The river flows through this valley and empties into the Susquehanna River and the Wyoming Valley a few miles west of the airport. The surrounding mountains protect both cities and the airport from high winds, influence the temperature and precipitation during both summer and winter, causing wide departures in both within a few miles of the airport. Because of the proximity of the mountains the climate is relatively cool in summer with frequent shower and thundershower type precipitation, usually of brief duration. The autumn usually offers a spectacular foliage color display of bright reds, oranges, and yellow. The winters in the valley are not severe. The occurrence of sub-zero temperatures and severe snowstorms is infrequent. A high percentage of the winter precipitation occurs as rain.

For the period of record, the temperature extremes were recorded when the observations were taken in Scranton; 103 degrees on July 9, 1936, and minus 19 degrees on February 9, 1934. Maximum temperatures of 100 degrees or higher have been recorded on several days. There have also been a few days when the maximum temperature was only zero degrees.

Although severe snowstorms are infrequent, when they do occur they can approach blizzard conditions. High winds cause huge drifts and normal routines can be disrupted for several days. From a meteorological viewpoint, severe storms are most interesting. In going back to the period before the turn of the century, the blizzard of 1888 is the only severe storm worthy of note. The storm began March 11 as rain, with wind velocities estimated at 65 miles an hour. The rain changed to snow the night of March 11, and continued as snow for 2 more days. Snow depth was 15 inches, and drifts 15 to 20 feet were reported. In recent history, the Blizzard of March 1993 produced nearly 2 feet of snow in the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton area.

The area has felt the effects of tropical storms. Hurricane "Hazel" on October 15, 1954, resulted in considerable wind damage. Back to back hurricanes in August 1955, "Connie" and "Diane," resulted in floods on the Lackawanna River from Scranton, south. Hurricane "Agnes," in June 1972, resulted in the worst natural disaster to hit the region with record flooding along the Susquehanna River. In Wilkes-Barre, the river crested on June 24 at a height of 40.91 feet, almost 8 feet above the previous record. There were five deaths attributed to the storm, and property damage in the Wilkes-Barre area was set at nearly \$1 billion.

While the incidence of tornadoes is very low, Wilkes-Barre has occasionally been hit by these storms which has caused loss of life and property damage.