



## Winter Weather: NOAA, AccuWeather, Farmers' Almanac Weigh In

**T**he Pacific Northwest should brace for a colder and wetter than average winter, while most of the South and Southeast will be warmer and drier than average through February, according to the annual “Winter Outlook” released in late October by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s (NOAA) Climate Prediction Center.

Overall, AccuWeather’s long-range meteorologist Joe Bastardi is predicting that the worst of winter’s cold and snow will be from the Pacific Northwest into the Northern Plains and western Great Lakes. That will mean cities like Portland and Seattle that escaped with a very nice winter last year will be colder and snowier this year. Fargo, N.D. and Minneapolis to Green Bay will also receive above-normal snowfall, Bastardi predicts.

According to the 2011 Farmers’ Almanac, this winter season will display a split personality nationwide. The eastern third of the country will experience colder-than-normal winter temperatures, while the western states will see milder temperatures. The snowiest area will be across parts of the Northern and Central plains, to the Ohio River and Great Lakes region.

“Because much of New England got off relatively easily last year, this year’s weather may feel like a cold slap in the face in comparison,” says Farmers’ Almanac editor, Peter Geiger. Despite that, the 194-year-old publication assures readers that the winter season should be a “kinder, gentler” one, on the whole.

Bastardi of AccuWeather concurs that, in general, the East Coast will be granted a reprieve from the tremendous snowfall that caused 2009-2010’s winter to be dubbed “snowmageddon.” However, this does not mean a free pass for the Northeast. He predicts this winter could get off to a fast start in the East, with a major thaw coming for much of the country in January.

Bastardi makes the early cold connection between this year’s active hurricane season and his winter forecast. He

says that years that see significant hurricane landfall usually also have cold for much of the eastern and central portion of the nation in December. He adds that this year, from the central Rockies to the Northeast, a higher variance of temperatures will be present—“greater-than-normal swings between winter’s coldest and warmest days.” The conflicting warm and cold air masses contributing to these temperature fluctuations have placed this area into what Bastardi calls the “Wintry Battle Zone.”

The AccuWeather forecaster says the South and Southern Plains will escape the worst of the winter weather with warmer and drier conditions compared to last year. While these areas will be warmer and drier, this does not preclude the Southern Plains and South from the threat of a couple of ice storms, as cold air tries to intrude southward.

The best weather this winter will be in Florida, notes Bastardi, suggesting that Florida will be a great winter destination, with warmer than normal temperatures all winter long. “We will also see warmer weather all along the Gulf Coast, which could help the beach resorts recover from the economic downturn associated with the oil spill,” he observes.

**S**outhern California and portions of the Southwest could be threatened by a severe drought and high danger for wildfires, as Bastardi predicts a much drier than normal winter season for the region. However, he is also calling for more precipitation for San Francisco and areas to the north. “This may be a great winter for building the Pacific Northwest and Canada snowpack, which is opposite of last winter,” said Bastardi.

NOAA, meanwhile, asserts that a moderate to strong La Niña will be the dominant climate factor influencing weather across most of the U.S. this winter. La Niña is associated with cooler than normal water temperatures in the Equatorial Pacific Ocean, unlike El Niño, which is associated with warmer than normal water temperatures. Both of these cli-

mate phenomena, which typically occur every two to five years, influence weather patterns throughout the world and often lead to extreme weather events.

NOAA reports that last winter's El Niño contributed to record-breaking rain and snowfall leading to severe flooding in some parts of the country, with record heat and drought in other regions. Although La Niña is the opposite of El Niño, it also has the potential to bring weather extremes to parts of the nation. "La Niña is in place and will strengthen and persist through the winter months, giving us a better understanding of what to expect between December and February," said Mike Halpert, deputy director of the Climate Prediction Center, a division of the National Weather Service. "This is a good time for people to review the outlook and begin preparing for what winter may have in store."

He added that "other climate factors will play a role in the winter weather at times across the country. Some of these factors, such as the North Atlantic Oscillation (NAO), are difficult to predict more than one or two weeks in advance. The NAO adds uncertainty to the forecast in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic portions of the country." The North Atlantic Oscillation is a large-scale pattern of climate variability that has important impacts on the weather and climate of the North Atlantic region and surrounding continents.

NOAA is calling for the Pacific Northwest to be colder and wetter than average this winter. La Niña often brings lower than average temperatures and increased mountain snow to the region and western Montana during the winter months, which is good for the replenishment of water

resources and winter recreation, but can also lead to greater flooding and avalanche concerns.

The national forecast also calls for warmer and drier than average conditions in California and the Southwest, which will likely exacerbate drought conditions in these areas. All southern states are at risk of having above-normal wildfire conditions starting this winter and lasting into the spring. Colder and wetter than average weather is seen for the Northern Plains.

**T**he Southern Plains, Gulf Coast states, and Southeast are also forecast for warmer and drier conditions than average, while Florida will also be drier than average with an equal chance for above-, near-, or below-normal temperatures. The Ohio and Tennessee valleys are forecast to be warmer and wetter than average, and the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic have equal chances for above-, near-, or below-normal temperatures and precipitation. NOAA notes that winter weather for the Ohio and Tennessee valleys is often driven not by La Niña, but by weather patterns over the northern Atlantic Ocean and Arctic. The central U.S. also has equal chances of above-, near-, or below-normal temperatures and precipitation.

Finally, NOAA is calling for wetter than normal weather for Hawaii from December through February, and that statewide, the current drought is expected to continue through the winter with several locations remaining on track to record their driest year ever. Odds favor Alaska having colder than average temperatures with equal chances of above- or below-normal precipitation.

—John Needham