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Forecasters eye 'battling signals' in predicting upcoming winter

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JESSICA RINALDI/GLOBE STAFF

People made their way down the Harborwalk in February.

By Matt Rocheleau

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Weather forecasters continue to predict New England will get above-normal precipitation during the coming winter, but they say warm temperatures, particularly during the first chunk of the season, should keep snow totals down.

There is currently a strong El Niño, an area with unusually warm sea surface temperature in the equatorial Pacific Ocean, that can dictate long-term weather patterns for much of the country.

For us, a strong El Niño typically means more storms but warmer temperatures.

Forecasters, including a new outlook released by the National Weather Service Thursday morning, project that while El Niño conditions will peak in late fall or early winter, the weather patterns will remain strong through winter and into spring.

But meteorologists also say a different area of warm sea surface temperatures will impact weather in our region this winter.



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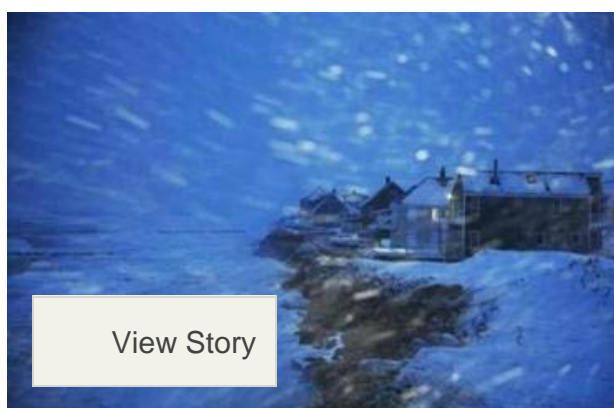
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Next winter won't be as bad — if forecasters are right

Temperatures will be milder, and the amount of snowfall should fall within historical averages, meteorologists said.

Bob Smerbeck, senior meteorologist at AccuWeather.com, said warm water in the northern Pacific, coupled with a much milder El Niño was to blame for the frigid, stormy pattern that hit Massachusetts last winter.

This year it will have to contest with the strong El Niño, and it may win at times, sending cold air our way.

“If you get enough cold air right along the coast, you could have yourself some big snowstorms,” Smerbeck said. “It’s going to be an interesting winter with some battling signals.”

Overall, he expects our region will receive roughly average snowfall.

In Boston, the average winter comes with about 43 inches of snow.

Last year, 110.6 inches of snow — including 64.8 inches in the month of February alone — fell on the city, according to the weather service. The snow left residents traumatized by ice dam problems, endless commutes, backbreaking shoveling, and cabin fever. Some have even vowed to move, the Globe reported last month.

In the meantime, forecasters expect the recent stretch of mild, dry weather to continue through the fall.

“The pattern we’re seeing, this late summer, is going to bleed into fall,” said Smerbeck.

“If it stays dry enough, even though it’s warm, that may set us up for a good season in terms of foliage,” he added.

Ideal conditions for foliage are mild days, cool nights, and occasional rainfall.

“The worst case you can have is a lot of rain,” he said.

However, the predicted weather pattern for New England this fall could spell trouble for those who are allergic to ragweed.

“Warmth can extend the growing season for plants that produce ragweed pollen,” said AccuWeather.com meteorologist Ben Noll.

And dry conditons allow ragweed pollens to linger.

“Any pollen that’s in the air now is not going to get washed out,” said AccuWeather.com meteorologist Alan Reppert.

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