

El Niño predicted for Southland winter

By Debbie Pfeiffer Trunnell
Staff Writer

The global weather phenomenon known as El Niño will make a return visit this winter, according to experts with the National Weather Service.

"Computer models are already indicating that precursor conditions to El Niño have developed," said Ivory Small, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service.

"In Southern California, that typically means we get more rain and snow in the mountains because the storms tend to move through Southern California rather than through the Pacific Northwest."

El Niño is described as a disruption of the ocean atmospheric system in the Tropical Pacific that has important consequences for weather and climate around the globe, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Among its consequences are increased rainfall across the southern tier of the U.S. and in Peru, which has caused destructive flooding, and drought in the West Pacific, sometimes associated with devastating brush fires in Australia.

The last major El Niño winter was 1997-98. There was also an El Niño to a lesser degree in 2004-05.

Ocean temperatures on pace to set record

By Seth Borenstein
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Steve Kramer spent an hour and a half swimming in the ocean this week — in Maine.

The water temperature was 72 degrees — more like Ocean City, Md., this time of year. And Ocean City's water temp hit 88 degrees, toasty even by Miami Beach standards.

Kramer, 26, who lives in the seaside town of Scarborough, said it was the first time he's ever swam so long in Maine's coastal waters.

It's not just the ocean off the Northeast coast that is super-warm this summer. July was the hottest the world's oceans have been in almost 130 years of record-keeping.

The average water temperature worldwide was 62.6 degrees, according to the National Climatic Data Center, the branch of the U.S. government that keeps world weather records. June was only slightly cooler, while August could set another record, scientists say. The previous record was set in July 1998 during a powerful El Niño.

Meteorologists said there's a combination of forces at work: A natural El Niño weather pattern just getting started on top of worsening man-made global warming,

and a dash of random weather variations. The resulting ocean heat is already harming threatened coral reefs. It could also hasten the melting of Arctic sea ice and help hurricanes strengthen.

The Gulf of Mexico, where warm water fuels hurricanes, has temperatures dancing around 90. Most of the water in the Northern Hemisphere has been considerably warmer than normal. Higher temperatures rule in the Pacific and Indian Oceans.

The phenomena is most noticeable near the Arctic, where water temperatures are as much as 10 degrees above average.

The tongues of warm water could help melt sea ice from below and even cause thawing of ice sheets on Greenland, said Waleed Abdalati, director of the Earth Science and Observation Center at the University of Colorado.

Breaking heat records in water is more ominous as a sign of global warming than breaking temperature marks on land, because water takes longer to heat up and does not cool off as easily as land.

"This warm water we're seeing doesn't just disappear next year; it'll be around for a long time," said climate scientist Andrew Weaver of the University of Victoria in British Columbia.