

... WINTER/SPRING 2009 OUTLOOK...

...DRIER THAN NORMAL WINTER AND SPRING POSSIBLE OVER SOUTH FLORIDA...

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The National Weather Service in Miami's long range outlook for south Florida for the remainder of the 2009 winter and spring season is for an increased likelihood of below normal rainfall and near normal temperatures. Several factors go into the determination of expected long range precipitation and temperature trends. One key factor is the El Niño/Southern Oscillation, or ENSO, which is a combination of sea surface temperature trends in the equatorial Pacific Ocean and atmospheric influences which affect large scale weather systems worldwide. The warm water phase of this phenomenon is referred to as El Niño, while the cold water phase is known as La Niña. Latest atmospheric and oceanic conditions suggest that the ENSO phase is transitioning into a weak La Niña, which means that the equatorial sea surface temperatures are slightly cooler than normal. The forecast ENSO phase for the remainder of the winter and spring season is for La Niña to continue.

Precipitation Trends and Outlook

Rainfall this dry season has been below normal thus far across South Florida. This is consistent with past trends noted with neutral to weak La Niña events. Based on the forecast of La Niña conditions to persist through spring, there continues to be a rather high likelihood that south Florida will experience below normal rainfall for the remainder of the dry season which extends from now into May. It should be noted that seasonal forecasts of precipitation are subject to large errors; therefore this information should be used and interpreted with caution. Long term outlooks from NOAA's Climate Prediction Center (CPC) indicate drier than normal conditions likely through May. Local analysis of previous weak La Niña events suggests that the likelihood of a drier winter and spring is higher during these events than in years when the ENSO phase is warm. Typically, a dry winter and spring would be a concern from a water management perspective, as lack of rainfall and evaporation of surface water leads to a significant drop in water levels, particularly during the warmer spring months. However, the above normal rainfall observed over most areas last summer and early fall may partially offset the impacts of any significant reduction in water levels over the next several months. Nevertheless, all persons are urged to heed the advice of local officials regarding water usage. Dry winter and spring conditions will also increase the risk of wildfires as we get into the warmer spring months. All persons are strongly urged to follow fire prevention tips and heed advice from officials as well as Red Flag warnings issued by the National Weather Service.

Temperature Trends and Outlook

Temperatures so far this dry season have fluctuated from periods of below normal temperatures in late October, to warm conditions during the first half of November, followed by an extended period of cool weather which lasted from mid-November through early December. A rather prolonged period of warmer than normal temperatures returned to South Florida during the second week of December and persisted through the first week of January. This type of intra-

seasonal fluctuation is rather common during weak La Niña winters. Previous weak La Niña seasons such as 2000-2001 and 1995-1996 had fairly significant variability in temperatures during the winter months, with alternating warm and cold periods lasting as long as month or more with little interruption. These cold periods can be relatively strong or even intense in nature, as was the case in both 1996 and 2001 when significant freezes impacted much of the agricultural communities of south Florida. As a result, there is a higher than normal likelihood of a freeze over parts of south Florida this winter, even if overall winter temperatures end up near or even slightly warmer than normal.

South Floridians are urged to stay informed of potential significant weather events throughout the winter and spring. While the dry season is highlighted by sunny and pleasant weather, hazardous weather can and does occur. The potential for increased dryness could lead to an increased wildfire threat next spring, while rip currents are a common threat at local beaches throughout the dry season. Cold snaps and freezes lead to significant damage to crops and can severely impact the agricultural community. Stay tuned to local media outlets and NOAA weather radio for the latest weather information. For more information on the dry season outlook for south Florida, as well as for updated local weather forecasts and warnings, please visit the National Weather Service in Miami web site at weather.gov/miami.

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