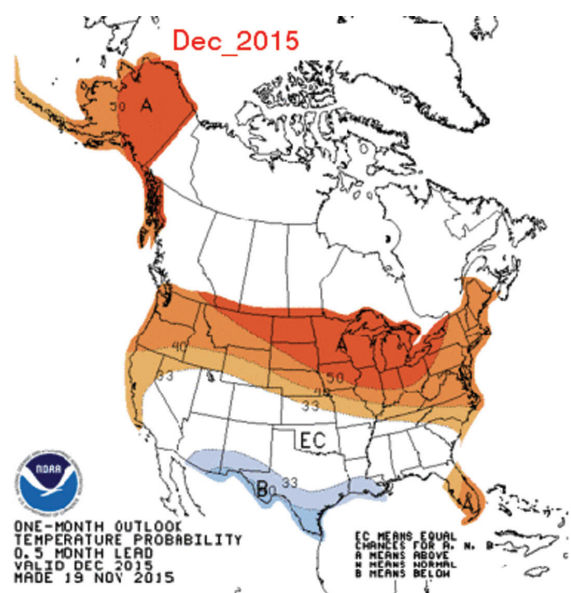


A Warm 2015-16 Winter Weather Forecast



BROOKINGS, S.D. - Based on the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration Climate Prediction Center's outlook released this week, a strong El Niño continues to affect the U.S. as warmer than average temperatures are forecast for South Dakota and the northern states this coming winter season (December 2015 through February 2016).

"The current observations in the Pacific Ocean rank the current El Niño as the second or third strongest since 1950, and this is projected to have impacts on our wintertime climate in the U.S. El Niño is expected to reach its peak intensity in the next two to three months," said Laura Edwards, SDSU Extension Climate Field Specialist.

Across northeastern South Dakota in December, Edwards said there is a 50 percent likelihood of above average temperatures, with 33 percent chance of near average and 17 percent chance of below average tempera-

tures. "The rest of the state is favored to have warmer than average temperatures, with slightly less likelihood in the month ahead," she said.

The precipitation forecast for December is leaning towards drier than average for the northern tier counties. The remainder of the state has equal chances of above, below or near average precipitation for the month.

Looking further ahead - through February - there continues to be an increased chance of warmer than average temperatures across all of the northern states, from coast to coast. "This is consistent with a strong El Niño climate pattern that we have seen in the past, and many of the long-range computer climate models are forecasting that the same will hold true in winter of 2015-16," said Dennis Today, South Dakota State Climatologist & SDSU Extension Climate Specialist.

The precipitation forecast for the three months ahead sets South Dakota in be-

tween an area that is favored to be drier to our north and west, and wetter to our south in Nebraska. "The last two winters with similar El Niño conditions were in 1982-83 and 1997-98. In both of those years, South Dakota wintertime precipitation was near to slightly below average," he said.

Today added that it is possible that South Dakota could experience storm events which bring rain or snow to our state this winter. "Particularly if we get a surge of moisture from the south or southwest," he said. "But it is also possible that many areas could have an open winter, with little to no snowcover for much of the season."

The implications of an open winter are both good and bad, Edwards explained. "Less snow cover could make winter wheat more susceptible to frost and freeze damage," she said. "The same situation could be positive for cattle and livestock operations who prefer drier conditions."

Currently, the risk of major spring flooding is low.

This is due to the fact that soils are not saturated and there is some capacity to take in rain and snowmelt this winter. Also, drier than average conditions are favored upstream along the Missouri and James Rivers, and some western tributaries as well.

Edwards and Today explained that this dry pattern in the northern Rockies and the surrounding area is also consistent with El Niño impacts in the U.S.

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BETTER CHOICES
better health
GOOD & HEALTHY SOUTH DAKOTA COMMUNITIES

Program Helps SD Manage Chronic Disease

BROOKINGS, S.D. - Living with a chronic disease, like diabetes, Crohn's disease or arthritis, can be lonely, confusing and, if not managed correctly, debilitating.

Working to provide South Dakota adults living with chronic conditions with the skills and resources they need to better manage their conditions, SDSU Extension, along with many other statewide collaborators, partnered with South Dakota Departments of Health and Social Services to launch the South Dakota Better Choices, Better Health program in 2013.

Developed by Stanford University almost two decades ago, Better Choices, Better Health is an evidence-based program with a proven track record in 50 states and 27 countries.

"Chronic disease is among the top five causes of death in our state. Through collaboration, we can provide this research-based, self-management program to help South Dakotans better manage their chronic conditions and live healthier, happier lives," explained Suzanne Stluka, SDSU Extension Food & Families Program Director, who serves as one of two grant project directors.

South Dakota Better Choices, Better Health was initially introduced to the South Dakota communities of Rapid City, Pierre, Aberdeen, Huron, Sisseton, Mitchell and Sioux Falls. To aid in expanding the program statewide, the partnering South Dakota organizations recently received a two-year, \$765,140 grant from the Administration on Aging (AOA).

"As anyone familiar with chronic disease understands, it is a lifelong condition. Through Better Choices, Better Health and the partnership between our three organizations, we're able to provide long-term solutions to help manage chronic disease," said Linda Ahrendt, former Administrator of the Office of Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion with the S.D. Dept. of Health.

Ahrendt also explained that the grant funds will be used to implement sustainable

program infrastructure.

How Better Choices, Better Health makes a difference

South Dakota Better Choices, Better Health trains local volunteers to lead workshops which bring adults suffering from a variety of chronic conditions together once a week for six weeks to learn self-advocacy skills and healthy life skills, such as eating a balanced diet and engaging in regular exercise, that will help them better manage their chronic conditions. South Dakota Better Choices, Better Health Master Trainers and Lay Leaders use curriculum, which is written by Stanford University.

"Through the program, participants gain self-confidence and learn how to be an advocate for their own health - basically, it teaches those with chronic disease how to manage once they've left the doctor's office," said Lori Oster, program coordinator for Better Choices, Better Health, who works on contract with the S.D. Dept. of Health.

A three-year study of 1,000 Better Choices, Better Health participants from across the U.S. showed an improvement in overall health and quality of life.

"This data is encouraging. The AOA grant allows us to conduct our own evaluation to learn what South Dakota participants think and how they feel they benefited from the program," says Lacey McCormack, Assistant Professor of Nutrition and Dietetics at South Dakota State University and grant co-project director with Stluka. "We want to see whether participants' self-efficacy in disease management increases over the course of the program."

So many times programs are evaluated based on dollars spent and people impacted. We are measuring the success of Better Choices, Better Health based on its ability to improve the lives of South Dakotans."

To learn more about this program, how you can participate or volunteer to lead, contact Megan Olesen, SDSU Extension Nutrition Field Specialist, 1.888.484.3800 or by email.

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