

El Nino may, or may not, soak California

December 15 2006

El Nino, the periodic warming of Pacific waters, puzzles meteorologists who said they don't know whether it will bring needed rain to Southern California.

The National Weather Service said it anticipates California could have a wetter winter because of El Nino. Southern California could get higher-than-average rainfall as early as January, the Los Angeles Times said Friday.

The key, weather forecasters said, is the buildup of warming waters in the Pacific Ocean.

"Things are actually evolving much as anticipated and hoped for," said Michael Halpert, lead forecaster for the agency's Climate Prediction Center in Maryland. "The favorite and most likely occurrence is wetter than average, but we certainly have not ruled out an average or below average winter."

Michael Anderson, the acting California climatologist, said he has taken a wait-and-see attitude regarding El Nino's unpredictable effects in Southern California.

"I'm still watching, expectantly waiting," Anderson said. "I haven't quite seen the signature changes that you might expect by now."

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