

El Nino could last beyond spring

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A University of Colorado weather expert has warned the El Nino weather pattern over the Pacific Ocean could survive past the upcoming spring.

Klaus Wolter said this year's version of the phenomenon is "pretty robust" and may survive to have an effect on the 2007 hurricane season, USA Today reported Monday.

The pattern has been largely credited with the calm 2006 hurricane season, and federal weather officials have said it is strengthening, a development that could lead to a warm and dry winter in the northern United States and increased precipitation in the southern parts of the country.

"The (nation's) midsection is always where you're rolling the dice," said Mark Svoboda, a climatologist with the National Drought Mitigation Center.

The possibility of rain may prove to be good news for drought-ravaged Texas and Florida, but could also cause mudslides in areas of California that were struck by wildfires in previous months.

El Nino's effects are being felt all over the world, with the World Meteorological Association saying Australia and Indonesia "are suffering severe drought" and Africa is receiving heavy rains.

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