

Hawaii faces winter drought despite wettest summer in years

October 21 2015, byCaleb Jones



In this Tuesday, Aug. 25, 2015 photo, a homeless boy who goes by M.J. stands on the street in rain outside his tent in Honolulu. This year's strong El Nino has flipped Hawaii's seasons, making the normally dry summer months extremely wet and the traditionally wet winter months will be very dry, forecasters said Wednesday, Oct. 21. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong)

The strong El Nino has flipped Hawaii's seasons, making the normally dry summer months extremely wet while the traditionally wet winter

months will be dry, forecasters said.

The summer rains were the heaviest the state had seen in 30 years and ended drought conditions that have persisted since 2008, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said.

However, the state can expect drought conditions to return with a much dryer than normal winter.

Ranchers will see pastures, which are now green because of all the summer rain, degrade in the next couple of months and get worse in the early part of next year, said Kevin Kodama, a senior hydrologist with the National Weather Service.

He said Wednesday that people on rain catchment systems will also feel the effects, having to purchase water for their crops and daily use.

Jari Sugano, who works with farmers as part of the University of Hawaii's College of Tropical Agriculture, said crops have already been impacted by the summer rain and there will be more problems with the upcoming dry winter.

"We've had unusual crop losses this summer because of the rain," Sugano said. "I expect that growers are going to have problems with production and the quality of their crops because of the reduction in water."

Sugano said that most crops can be grown year-round in Hawaii and that many people buy and eat locally grown produce.

Hawaii Tourism Authority officials said they have not seen any change in tourism as a result of the abnormal weather conditions. In fact, there were more tourist arrivals this August, an increase of almost 3 percent,

than for any previous August on record.

Rain associated with El Nino made August and September the wettest ever recorded in many Hawaiian locations, Kodama said.

Hawaii is also experiencing an above-average hurricane season. Those conditions coupled with warmer-than-usual ocean temperatures caused by El Nino produced the above-average rainfall this year, he said.

For the upcoming winter, the opposite will be true.

"For us, what would normally be our wet season is expected to flip around and be very dry," Kodama said.

Hawaii can expect clear nights and cloudy afternoons this winter but those clouds will not produce much rain, he said. Winter weather systems that normally move through the region slowly will pass by quickly, trade winds will die off and there will be stability in the atmosphere that will hinder rainfall.

NOAA predicts Hawaii could experience moderate to severe drought during the coming months as many areas are forecast to receive only half of their normal rainfall totals. Some isolated areas will experience extreme drought.

Officials say this El Nino is expected to remain in place through the spring and could end up being the strongest El Nino in over 50 years.

A strong El Nino arrives about once every 20 years. Ocean temperatures show this one to be the second-strongest since such record-keeping began in 1950, according to the National Weather Service.

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