

Northern lights a 'big miss,' US space forecaster says

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An initially promising U.S. forecast for the northern lights has gone bust.

Stargazers in the continental 48 states have essentially zero chance of seeing the astronomical phenomenon this week, the head of operations at the U.S. government's space weather prediction center said Thursday.

Curtains of color paint the [night sky](#) when the northern lights, or [aurora borealis](#), are visible. Some early reports had suggested they would be viewable as far south as Illinois this week.

Robert Rutledge, the lead of operations at the Space Weather Prediction Center, said the agency had high hopes for Thursday and Friday, but it downgraded its [forecast](#) because the chances turned out to be a "big miss."

He called the disappointing news "not incredibly unusual in space weather forecasting."

The silver lining for sky watchers is that conditions in the coming months and years look more favorable, Rutledge said.

New England stargazers had hoped to catch a glimpse of the [northern lights](#), but clouds would have made it difficult, said David Clark, a member of Penobscot Valley Star Gazers in Maine.

"I'm sure people are going to try," he said. "I don't have high hopes for it."

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