

The Outlook for Florida's Climate Conditions

G.B. Crawford: As anyone who lives in Florida knows firsthand, weather conditions have varied from mild to awful during the past year. Long-term climate trends influence local weather in all locations. State Climatologist David Zierden explains what he and his colleagues have determined from their studies of climate data and what they imply for the future.

For this winter, Floridians can expect to live under the influence of the El Nino phenomenon, a naturally-occurring event that is linked to warming temperatures in the central and east-central Pacific Ocean near the Equator.

David Zierden: The typical climate pattern associated with El Nino is that Florida and the northern Gulf Coast get much more storminess. And because of the storminess and cloud cover we generally have cool to moderate temperatures. Basically we're looking at increased rainfall, a higher frequency of these winter storms and cooler or more moderate temperatures.

Crawford: In recent years scientists have recorded overall elevated temperatures in Florida. In the northern counties, for example, the average evening temperature in the summer months has ranged two degrees higher than normal. David Zierden says this trend is continuing.

Zierden: If you look at monthly average temperatures in Florida, we've gone three-and-a-half years with only two months of below-average temperatures. Every other month has been warmer than normal. And during that same time we have seen five months of record hot temperatures. We've definitely seen a warming trend in the past four years in this state.

Crawford: Zierden and other scientists caution that the steady increase in average temperatures is a likely indication that major hurricanes in the future may be even more destructive than Irma or Michael.

Zierden: It is much more probable that the intensity will increase. We will have stronger storms and the strongest ones will be incrementally stronger. There is a possibility that what we have seen this year is part of that happening.

Crawford: Zierden's work with farmers for more than 20 years has convinced him that agriculture can thrive in Florida despite hurricanes, drought or any other damaging weather forces.

Zierden: I think our agricultural systems are adaptable. There are new varieties and different commodities that can be grown. There is a lot that can be done to both adapt and mitigate against the worst effects of a changing climate.

This is G.B. Crawford for Florida Farm Bureau's *Newsline*.