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COLD TO ARRIVE LATE, FORECASTER SAYS

Many forecasters are calling for a cold winter, but the timing of the cold is not as well defined. Certain assumptions are necessary to bring cold air into northeast energy markets.

A conventional El Nino weather pattern is not likely during this winter heating season, but that is not to say that the El Nino conditions that are in place will not impact key eastern energy markets.

“Usually El Nino puts all its’ anomalous warm water in the Eastern Pacific, but this year it will be in the central Pacific and a bit weaker. To adjust just take the typical El Nino climate and move it to the west,” suggests Scott Yuknis, meteorologist with Climate Impact Co.

What happens is that the north central and northwest U.S. will most likely be mild and dry, and there is little that can be said about the Northeast. “It does imply that if the western U.S. is going to be susceptible to a ridge, then the eastern U.S. is likely to eventually be affected by a troughing in the jet stream”.

“We believe that will happen and will generate cold air,” he said. However the idea that Canada would be warm and the idea of bringing in a “Siberian Express” is a very low probability event and cold air will have to be generated within North America.

“That has happened the last couple of winters and the best way to do that is get a trough in the upper atmosphere to sit over a large area with snow cover. That scenario is expected to happen over the Northeast U.S. by mid to late winter,” he predicted.

He admitted that this outlook will be dependent upon December being stormy and snowy over the Northeast. “If that happens conditions will be in place to generate cold air over the mid to late winter period,” he explained.

That's the only opportunity in the dynamics of the upper atmosphere to generate cold weather, but that appears to be the consensus forecast according to Yuknis.

A word of caution. The Canadian national forecast calls for a warmer than normal winter, for a strong west east jet stream bringing mild Pacific air is expected to block incursions of arctic air.

“There will certainly be snow cover over Canada, but what we are hoping to see is that snow cover arcing south over Minnesota, North Dakota, and the Great Lakes into Appalachia, New England and New York and have a tendency to stay there.

Snow cover has always been important, but it is more so this season since it is so hard to generate cold arctic air,” he admitted.

What is interesting is that the National Weather Service has blended an El Nino winter featuring a cold wet Southeast with the warmer and drier West. (See attached diagram).

“Typically the Northeast has a hard time staying colder than normal and usually cold air masses extend to the south thus the Southeast has the best chance of being colder than normal.”

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