

Strong El Nino weather pattern spurs hope of drenching California winter

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While nobody is saying the four-year drought will soon be over, a federal report indicates that an El Nino weather pattern is gaining in strength – making the chances better that this winter will be a wet one.

“If you are a gambler, this is giving you some information in terms of what the seasonal rainfall might be,” said Tom Di Liberto, meteorologist for the federal [Climate Prediction Center](#). “But with weather there is no guarantee. El Nino is only one of many things that could impact California’s rainy season.”

With all that said, Di Liberto said that the development of a strong El Nino is good news in terms of rainfall.

A strong El Nino such as the one developing this year is usually associated with powerful winter storms, much like the very wet winter of 1997-98 when flooding and landslides occurred across broad stretches of Northern California.

In March, forecasters declared a weak El Nino had developed. On Thursday, the [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration](#) announced El Nino is strengthening.

Specifically, forecasters believe that there is a greater than 90 percent chance that El Nino will continue through next winter in the Northern Hemisphere, and around an 80 percent chance it will last into early spring 2016.

In its report, the U.S. Climate Prediction Center noted that sea surface temperatures are warming, a sign that the El Nino weather pattern is strengthening. While El Nino is no guarantee the four-year drought will be broken, robust El Ninos often bring strong winter storms.

“Often, when we have a strong El Nino, you tend to see above-average precipitation across parts of California,” Di Liberto said. “That is good. It’s been very, very dry in California over the last four years. It’s important to monitor to see whether we continue to see a strengthening El Nino.”

El Nino is a large-scale ocean-atmosphere phenomenon linked to the warming of the sea surface in the central and east central equatorial Pacific Ocean. An El Nino is detected by satellites and buoys.

“We will have to see what happens as we go forward but what we see now in the Pacific Ocean and the way the (computer) models are predicting it, we are expecting a strong (El Nino) event as we get into the late fall and winter,” Di Liberto said.

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