Winter forecast: Warmer West, North; cooler South

Editor's Note: Time for another award-winning Al Gore documentary?

(AP) -- The Midwest and Northern United States are likely to get a warmer winter, while the Southeast can expect just the opposite: cooler and wetter conditions.

In Thursday's winter outlook, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration says an El Nino weather event - warming in parts of the Pacific that affects weather worldwide - will be a major player in America's winter temperatures.

Forecasters predict warmer than usual temperatures would reach a swath from Washington to Michigan, dipping south to central New Mexico. Alaska also has a higher chance of warmer temperatures.

They also say cooler temperatures are expected from southern Texas to the Mid-Atlantic and in Hawaii.

Other places, such as the Northeast and California, can go any which way on temperatures.

Overall, slightly more than half the nation by area will be warmer than normal, but when it comes to where most people live, about half the population is likely to have warmer weather and the other half cooler, said Mike Halpert, deputy director of NOAA's Climate Prediction Center

The El Nino will play a big role in helping some drought-parched regions, Halpert said. Forecasters said there is a significantly higher probability of wetter

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winters for Texas, Florida and California and the southern parts of New Mexico, Arizona, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia and South Carolina.

Hawaii, the Pacific Northwest and part of the Midwest from Michigan to Arkansas are more likely to be drier than normal because of fewer storms across the Appalachian Mountains, Halpert said.

Halpert said the El Nino is currently weak but forecast to strengthen to a moderate-sized weather variation in the next few weeks. The El Nino not only influences the forecast but it gives forecasters more confidence that what they predict will come true, he said.

The El Nino makes forecasts for a wetter southern Texas and less than average snowfall in the northern Rockies far more likely to come true, Halpert said.

And it may not be good news for next year's Olympics in Vancouver, British Columbia.

The Olympic city can expect "a dry and warm winter but it certainly can be cool enough for snow," Halpert said.

September was warmer than normal for the United States, but not greatly hotter than normal, ranking 32nd out of 115 Septembers on record. But Nevada had its warmest September on record and California tied for its warmest month on record. The nation's rainfall in September was exactly average.

NOAA also announced on Thursday that globally September was the second warmest month in 130 years of recordkeeping, just behind 2005. World temperatures last month averaged 60.1 degrees Fahrenheit (15.6 degrees Celsius), which is 1.1 degrees (0.6 degrees Celsius) above normal. Three-

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quarters of the way through the year, 2009 is lining up to be the sixth warmest year on record.

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