NOAA's National Weather Service, Newport/Morehead City NC

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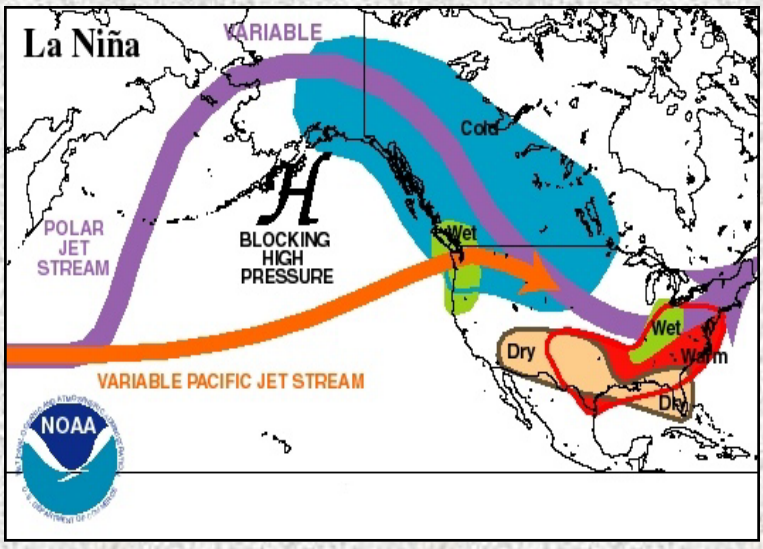
Carolina Sky Watcher

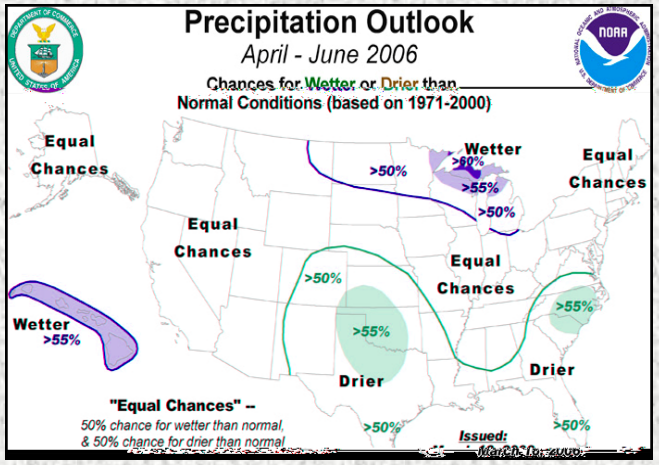
Spring 2006 edition

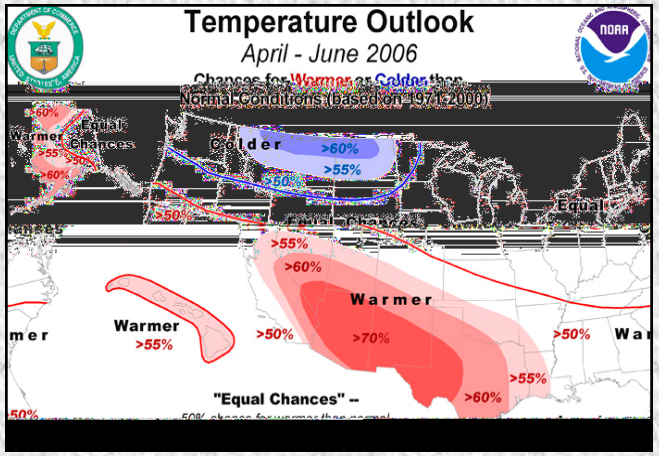
SPRING 2006 OUTLOOK *By Hal Austin*

Spring 2006 will be drier and and likely warmer than normal across eastern North Carolina, according to NOAA's seasonal outlook, issued on March 16th. Weak La Niña conditions (*see graphic below*) which developed during the past winter are expected to continue over the next 3-6 months. This contributed to significant drought concerns over the Southwest, central and southern plains. "April through June is typically dry in the Southwest, so drought will very likely persist or even worsen until the thunderstorm season arrives this summer," said Ed O'Lenic, chief, forecast operations branch, NOAA Climate Prediction Center. "NOAA's outlook also indicates a continued drought concern for the southern and central Plains." Unfortunately, it supports the potential for a significant wildfire season in the Southwest and central and southern Plains. The currently abnormally dry to moderate drought conditions over North Carolina are expected to continue and possibly expand into portions of the mid-Atlantic and Southeast. To read the full text of the outlook, go to **www.noaanews.noaa.gov/stories2006/s2595.htm**.



In a La Nina pattern, storm systems are diverted north, with dry/warm conditions over the southern US.





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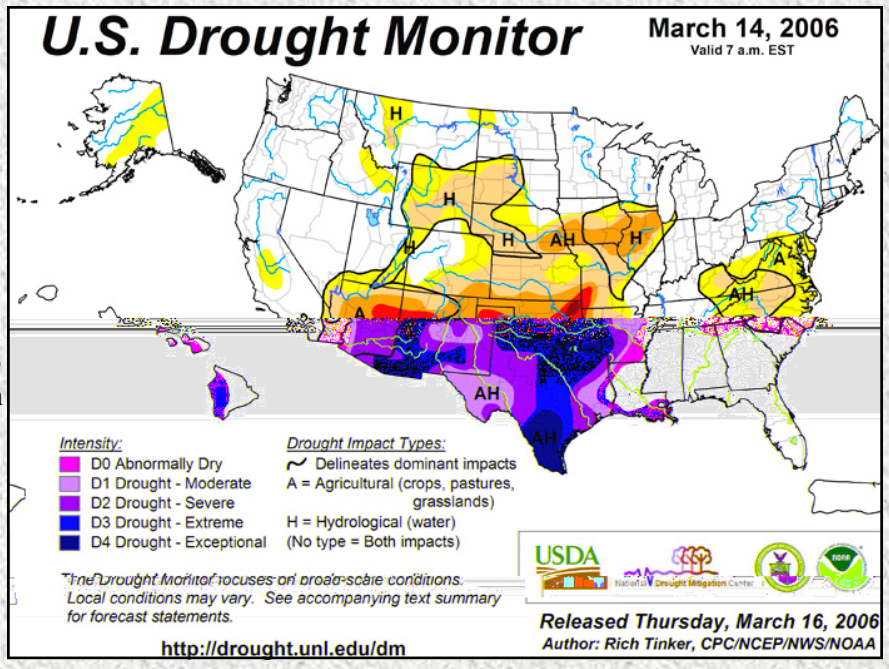
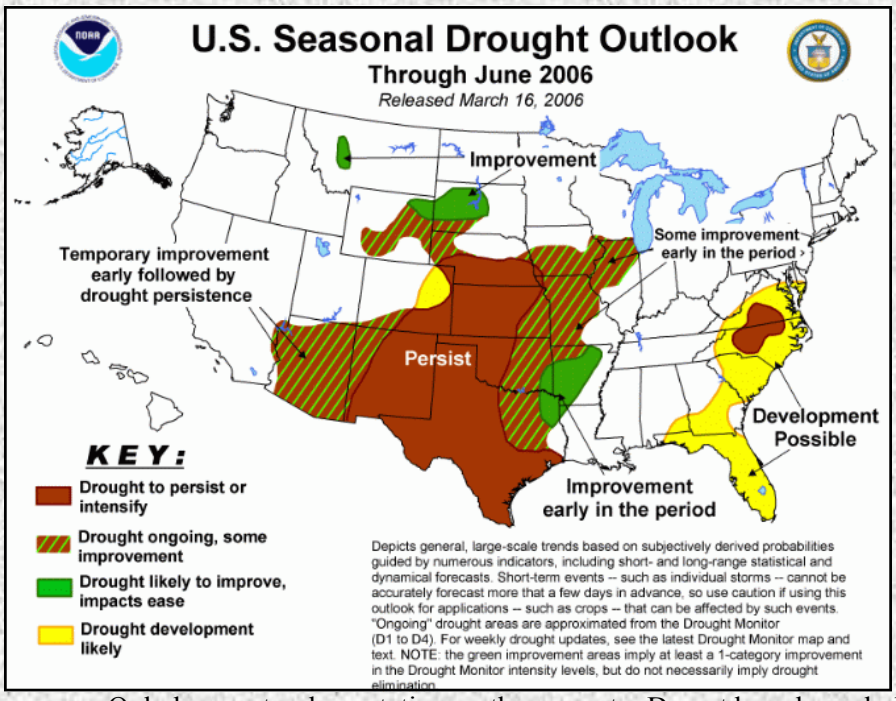
WILDFIRE THREAT INCREASES! *by Jim Merrell, Fire Weather Focal Point*

The spring precipitation outlook is calling for drier than normal conditions over eastern North Carolina (*see page 1*) and this may lead to a higher threat of wildfires during the period. March through May is the normal peak fire season in the state as conditions are more susceptible to fire ignition until plants and trees "green up".

Most areas saw below normal precipitation over the winter and this led to an active start to the fire season. According to the N.C. Division of Forest Resources (NCDFR), as of March there had been 1/3 more wildfires in the state than at the same time last year. Continued dry conditions would literally add fuel to the fire, causing vegetation to green up later and providing more material for fire ignition and spread.



Current abnormally dry conditions are forecast to continue, increasing wildfire threat in North Carolina.



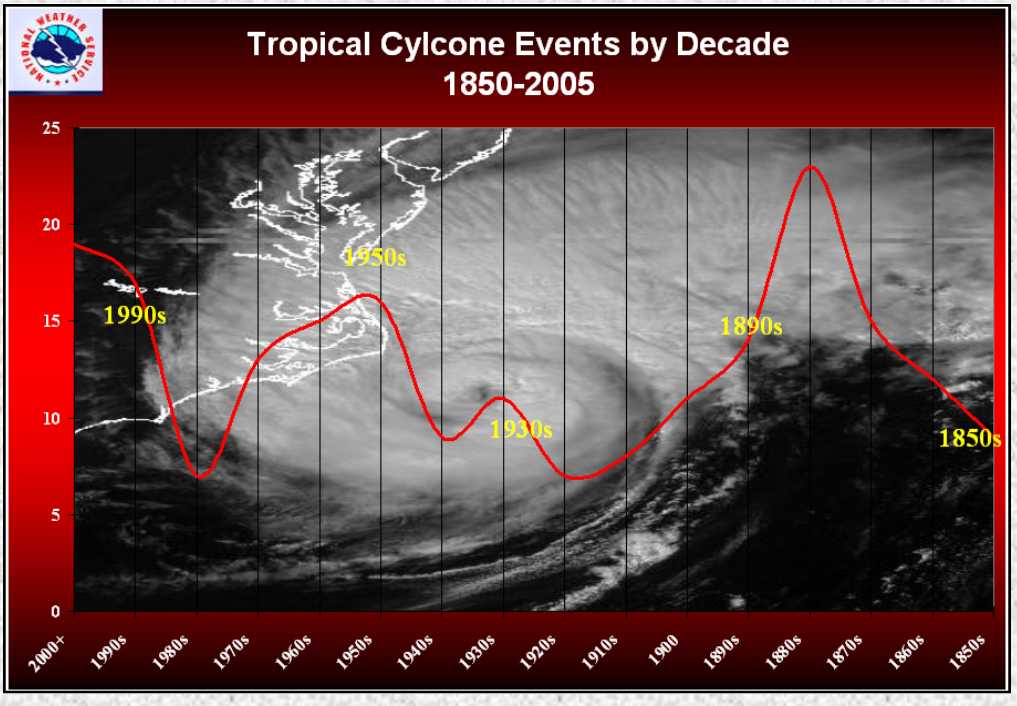
To prevent the threat of wildfires this spring, NCDFR is urging landowners not to burn debris during windy and dry periods. Debris burning is the number one cause of wildfires in North Carolina. If you do burn debris, NCDFR offers the following guidelines:

- Make sure you have an approved burning permit. You can obtain a burning permit at any Division of Forest Resources' office, a county-approved burning permit agent or online at **www.dfr.state.nc.us**.
- Check with local government officials. Debris burning may be prohibited.
- Check local laws on burning debris. Some communities allow burning only during specified hours; others forbid it entirely.
- Check the weather. Don't burn if conditions are too dry or windy.
- Consider alternatives to burning. Some yard debris such as leaves and grass may be of more value if it is not burned.
- Only burn natural vegetation on the property. Do not burn household trash or any other man-made materials. Trash should be hauled away to a convenience center.
- Plan burning for the late afternoon when conditions are typically less windy and more humid.
- If you must burn, be prepared. Use a shovel or hoe to clear a perimeter around the area around where you plan to burn.
- Keep fire tools ready. To control the fire, you will need a hose, bucket, a steel rake and a shovel for tossing dirt on the fire. Never use flammable liquids such as kerosene, gasoline or diesel fuel to speed debris burning.
- Stay with your fire until it is completely out. In North Carolina, human carelessness leads to more wildfires than any other cause.

HURRICANE SEASON EARLY OUTLOOK *by John Cole, Warning Coordination Meteorologist*

On average, in a typical year the United States will experience 7 hurricanes, 1,000 tornadoes, and 5,000 floods. North Carolina ranks at the top of the list along with Georgia and Florida in having the highest number of billion-dollar weather and climate disasters during the period from 1980 to 2005. These disasters are mostly related to tropical cyclone impacts.

For North Carolina, weather records show a peak level of hurricane activity in the late 1800s that declined to a low period of activity in the early 20th century. The activity level then increased dramatically during the 1940s through the mid 1960s, dropping off again in the 1970s and 1980s. Another active hurricane began in the mid 1990s and has continued. We have seen a warming of Atlantic Ocean waters, a large departure in the normal sea surface water temperature. Undoubtedly, we are in a much more dangerous period now. El Nino and La Nina, are factors in Atlantic basin hurricane development, but not the main factor. Global warming is not likely the probable cause. The Atlantic conveyor belt of warmer water since 1995 is the probable cause. It will likely continue for one or two more decades and is more cyclical in nature.



The combination of the effects of having La Nina and neutral conditions across the eastern Pacific and warm waters across the Atlantic hurricane basin, can spell trouble for eastern North Carolina. Past records show that North Carolina has been hit multiple times in one season when this scenario takes place, like 1955, 1996, and 1999. North Carolina residents will remember names like Hazel, Ione, Fran, Floyd, and Isabel for many years to come. The most likely time to have a major hurricane in North Carolina would be during a two month period from mid August to mid October. During this time Atlantic hurricane basin water temperatures are the warmest and upper level shearing winds are the lightest. The National Hurricane Center (NHC), is responsible for hurricane and tropical storm watches and warnings for the U.S. They are the hurricane experts and focus on the larger picture. The NWS in Newport/Morehead City fine tunes the forecast for the local area in eastern North Carolina.

Dr. William Gray and his team of researchers at Colorado State University predict an active Atlantic 2006 hurricane season with 17 named storms, 9 hurricanes, of which 5 of these will be intense (Category 3 or higher). If this holds true, the 2006 season will be less active than last year, with fewer storms than the record 27 named storms which occurred in 2005. None the less, another active hurricane season is likely this year.

The best advice for folks living or vacationing in the area during the Atlantic hurricane season is to keep up with the latest weather information from NOAA/NWS, or local media. Be prepared by assembling a disasters supplies kit, know evacuation routes, and heed the advice of local elected officials.

CO-OP OBSERVER HONORED

by Central Wills, Data Acquisition Program Manager

On October 5th 2005, Mr. James Franck was recognized for 50 years of volunteer service to the National Weather Service as a cooperative weather observer for the town of Trenton in Jones County. Mr. Franck is a dedicated observer and takes immense pride in the accuracy of the data which he has diligently collected for half a century and counting.

Pictured left to right: National Weather Service Eastern Region Director, Dean Gulezian, honorary co-op observer, James R. Franck and Tom Kriehn, Meteorologist-In-Charge, National Weather Service Office, Newport/Morehead City.

Mr. Dean Gulezian, Director, National Weather Service Eastern Region, presented Mr. Franck with the Edward H. Stoll award. The award is named after a historical cooperative weather observer for over 76 years from 1905-1981. Also attending the ceremony from National Weather Service Newport/Morehead City were Tom Kriehn, Meteorologist-In-Charge, and Central Wills, Data Acquisition Program Manager, who oversees the cooperative observer program for the office.

Mr. Franck and his wife Dot served a special treat to the three National Weather Service staff in attendance at the award ceremony. They served one of the best BBQ cuisine meals found in eastern North Carolina! This act of great kindness was just one more testimony of Mr. Franck's generosity and his willingness to give of himself, even during his day of recognition. It was a pleasure and a great honor to dine with the Franck's in the celebration of his distinguished achievement.

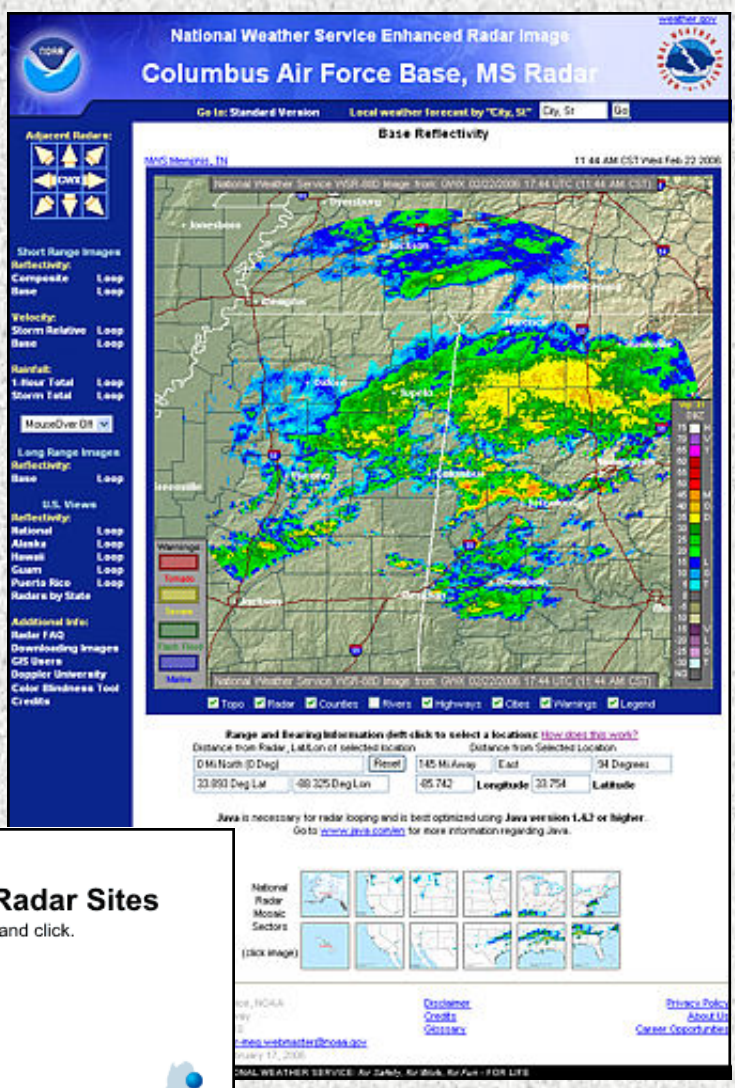
Pictured left to right: Honoree James R. Franck, Tom Kriehn, Meteorologist-In-Charge, NWS Newport/Morehead City, Central Wills, Data Acquisition Program Manager, NWS Newport/Morehead City, and National Weather Service Eastern Region Director, Dean Gulezian.

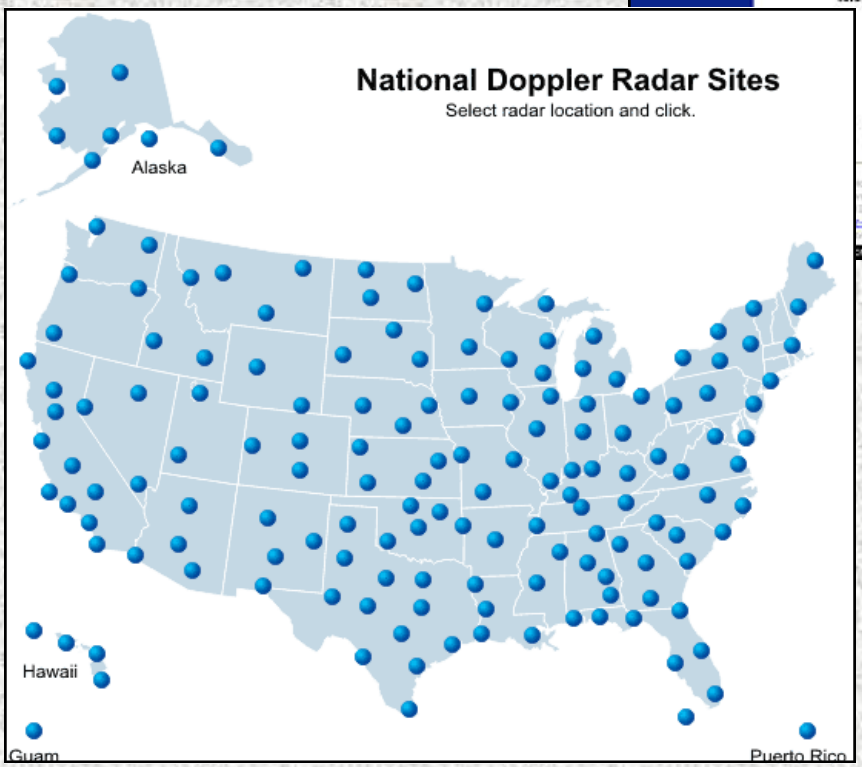
WE NEED YOUR HELP!

Our office is in need of cooperative observers in the Belhaven (Beaufort Co.) and Mesic (Pamlico Co.) areas. If you can help us, please call (252) 223-5127 and talk to us!

"RIDGE" RADAR OFFERS BETTER GRAPHICS *by Hal Austin*

Have you looked at the radar display on our webpage recently? If you have, you've no doubt noticed the display background has changed. In February, the National Weather Service announced all 122 offices are now using the new RIDGE radar display. RIDGE stands for ***R**adar **I**ntegrated **D**isplay with **G**eospatial **E**lements*. It allows the National Weather Service to combine radar and warning imagery with commonly used topographical and map features for display on the websites. Currently, RIDGE radar allows users to overlay the latest imagery over local maps displaying topographical features such as roads, rivers, cities and county boundaries. Left clicking on the image zooms in, and right clicking zooms out. While zoomed in, clicking and holding the left button allows you to move the image around. Click the auto update button and new images will be loaded automatically. Go to our webpage today (**www.erh.noaa.gov/mhx**) and see for yourself. You'll like what you see!





A depiction of the new RIDGE radar graphics (*above*), and a map of all National Weather Service offices with live, online Doppler radar (*left*) offering RIDGE enhanced graphics.

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RECORD WINTER WARMTH *by Hal Austin*

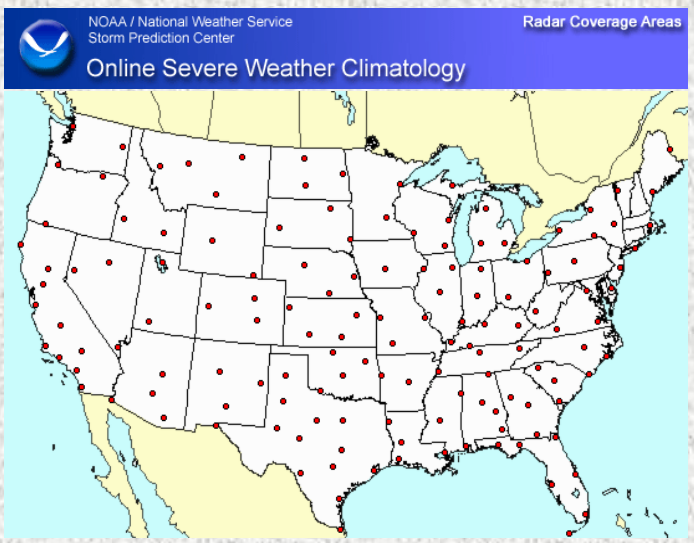
The 2005-2006 winter season was the fifth warmest December-February period on record for the contiguous United States, according to scientists at the NOAA National Climatic Data Center in Asheville NC. Based on preliminary data, the average temperature for the contiguous United States for December-February was 36.3 degrees F. This was 1.2 degrees above the 1895-2000 mean, making it the fifth warmest on record. The relatively warm winter led to below normal residential energy demand for the U.S., as measured by the nation's Residential Entergy Demand Temperature Index. Using this index, NOAA scientists determined that the nation's residential energy demand was approximately 11 percent less than what would have occurred under average climate conditions for the season. Sea surface temperatures were cooler than average across the central equatorial Pacific, indicating the presence of a weak La Niña during the last few months.

SPOTTER TRAINING ONLINE *by Hal Austin*

In the past couple of months, basic/intermediate and advanced spotter classes were held in the area, conducted by John Cole, Warning Coordination Meteorologist, National Weather Service Newport/Morehead City. If you weren't able to attend, you can watch it online! Just go to the Newport District Skywarn page at **www.mhxskywarn.org** and click on "Training Resources" at the top. If you have never taken a basic spotter class, watching it online does not qualify you to be an official National Weather Service spotter. However, it *can* be used as a refresher if it's been a while since you've attended a basic spotter class, or it can be a good introduction to spotting if you've never taken one.

SEVERE CLIMATOLOGY ONLINE *by Hal Austin*

Severe weather climatology for every National Weather Service office's forecast area in the continental U.S. (*see map on right*) is now available online from the Storm Prediction Center's website at **www.spc.noaa.gov/climo/online/rda**. The data covers the years 1980-2004. From the main page, simply click on the office you wish to examine. You'll then be taken to a page with severe thunderstorm wind, hail and tornado data with annual totals, hourly and monthly averages depicted in easy-to-use tabular and graphical formats. Weather enthusiasts, emergency preparedness personnel and researchers will find this data extremely useful!



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