The Coastal Breeze

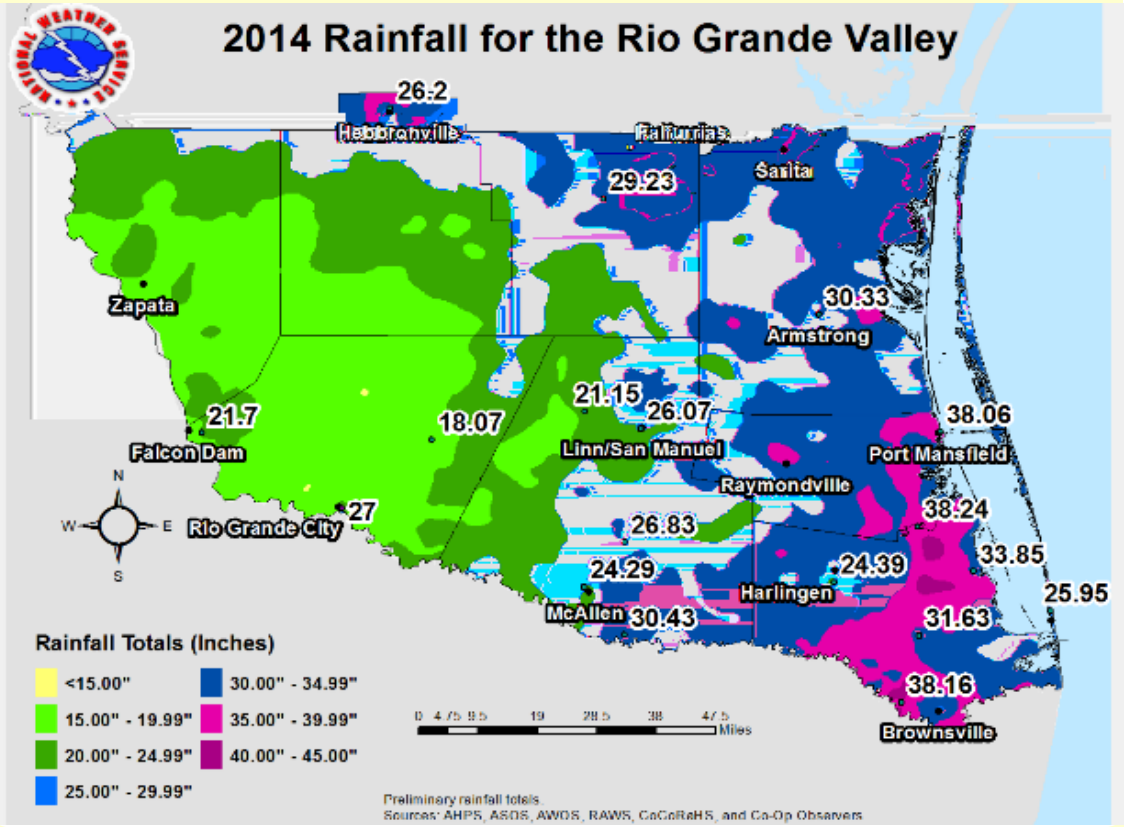
Official Newsletter of
National Weather Service - Brownsville, TX

HERE'S WHAT'S INSIDE:

By Barry Goldsmith, Warning Coordination Meteorologist

After three calendar years with temperatures warmer than normal, temperatures across the Rio Grande Valley in 2014 returned to, or just below 1981–2010 climatological averages. A chilly start to 2014 that completed a "Top 25 Coldest Winter" by March 1st continued through May, completing a streak of seven consecutive months with below average temperatures. Hotter and drier conditions returned to the region by summer, as high pressure spread across northern Mexico. The "Dog Days of Summer" lived up to its billing, as the hot and dry conditions brought a resumption of severe drought conditions from the Mid-and Upper Valleys through the King Ranch by late August.

Relief from the drought (and heat) would come during the months that end in "-ember." Torrential rainfall in September from several systems infused with tropical moisture doubled rain totals when compared to an average month. After a pleasantly warm and dry October, the remains of a massive North Pacific storm helped to transport polar air into the region in November. The associated cold front eliminated "endless summer" and allowed strings of cloudy days and generally mild weather to be seen through year's end. These weather conditions were punctuated by occasional rainy periods through December. By the winter holiday season, grass and brush were among the lushest, greenest seen in years as the calendar tuned to 2015.



By Kirk Caceres, General Forecaster

Ribbon cutting for the new Spanish Language Early Weather Alert/Warning System at NWS Brownsville.

On September 3, 2014, elected officials, state, local, and federal government employees, and local English-and Spanish-language media met at the National Weather Service (NWS) office in Brownsville to formally launch the Spanish Language Early Weather Alert/Warning System. This system, consisting of two new NOAA Weather Radio transmitters in Pharr and Harlingen, Texas, covers the entire primary Spanish–speaking population of Hidalgo, Willacy, and Cameron Counties with tone alerted hazardous weather and non–weather warnings. The two transmitters join those in El Paso, Texas, Coachella, California, and Hialeah, Florida, making five dedicated NOAA Weather Radio stations that broadcast solely in Spanish.

Planning for implementation of this system began in 2012 as a collaborative project. Meetings were held between Texas State Senator Eddie Lucio, Jr., U.S. Congressman Filemon Vela (TX-34th District), Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council (LRGVDC), Texas Department of Public Safety/Texas Division of Emergency Management, National Weather Service, and the cities of Weslaco and Donna, Texas. A Hazard Mitigation Grant, combined with local government and private sector contributions, provided the equipment, infrastructure, and human resources to successfully complete the project.

The LRGVDC worked closely with the technical staff at NWS Brownsville to ensure that transmitter placement, connections, and testing were completed to specifications. NWS Brownsville staff who participated in the implementation of the Spanish Language Early Weather Alert/Warning System included Paul Schaafsma, Pablo Gonzalez, Kirk Caceres, Doug Butts, Blair Scholl and Maria Torres.

Steve Drillette, Meteorologist–in–Charge of the NWS Brownsville/Rio Grande Valley office, said, “NOAA Weather Radio remains a vital component of the National Weather Service mission to save lives. In a world where residents can receive hazardous weather notifications from numerous sources, NOAA Weather Radio is still the most reliable source to wake people in the middle of the night when tornadoes, floods, wind, or hail storms are imminent. We are truly grateful for the trusted relationships we have established with our local and state partners, and for their tremendous effort and dedication that made this potentially life-saving project possible."

By Barry Goldsmith, Warning Coordination Meteorologist

The 2014 Atlantic hurricane season was forecast to be below average, and after 2013 where early season forecasts might be remembered for being well beyond what actually occurred, 2014's forecast was nearly perfect. With the exception of a single brush with the North Carolina coast, 2014 marked the second year with little or no impact to the large and growing coastal population along the U.S. Gulf and Atlantic coasts.

No activity occurred in June. July, though, was a different story. Hurricane Arthur quickly developed into a minimal hurricane on July 2nd in the warm, Atlantic waters off the east coast of Florida. While Arthur strengthened to a Category 2 storm while crossing the North Carolina Outer Banks, impacts were minimal when compared to hurricanes of the past. Plenty of surf was seen for the July 4th holiday as he largely paralleled the U.S. East Coast. Arthur dissipated in the Bay of Fundy near Nova Scotia, Canada.

A long track major hurricane, Gonzalo, packing wind speeds of at least 111 MPH, developed in mid-October. He ravaged Bermuda on October 17 th with sustained wind speeds up to 110 MPH, although a gust of 144 MPH was recorded. Preliminary damaged up to $400 million was estimated, but advanced preparation kept casualties at zero.

Close to home, Tropical Storm Dolly helped alleviate late summer drought conditions in the Rio Grande Valley. The only named tropical system in the Gulf of Mexico in 2014. She quickly gained tropical storm status just after Labor Day. Dolly made landfall near Tampico, Mexico late in the evening of September 2, where heavy rainfall damaged several hundred homes, killed one person, and left an estimated $6.5 million in mostly infrastructure damage. Outer rainbands from Dolly reached the Valley on the 3 rd, heralding the start of a second wet September in a row. .For her helpful, drought-relieving rains, Tropical Storm Dolly may be remember as "Baby" Dolly. for its helpful, drought relieving rains. The rains brought by "Baby" Dolly signaled the start of a second in 2014.

So why was the low number of storms anticipated? Simply put, it was a combination of wind shear, dry air, and below average seas surface temperatures. However, as was shown in 2014, some systems still develop if conditions become more ideal.

Named Storms	*Date*	*Peak Wind Speed (MPH)*
Hurricane Arthur	July 1-5	100
Tropical Depression Two	July 21-23	35
Hurricane Bertha	August 1-6	80
Hurricane Christobal	August 23-29	85
Tropical Storm Dolly	September 1-3	50
Hurricane Edouard	September 11-19	115
Hurricane Fay	October 10-13	75
Hurricane Gonzalo	October 12-19	145
Tropical Storm Hanna	October 22-28	40

The 2014 Atlantic Hurricane Season Statistics

By Barry Goldsmith , Warning Coordination Meteorologist

Meteorologist Chris Birchfield, Hydrometeorologist Sam Martinez, Data Acquistion Program Manager Jim Campbell, and Steve Saenz, standing behind the newly relocated rain gauge near La Joya.

The NWS Cooperative Observer Program consists of volunteer weather observers who record weather observations across the nation. They provide information on high/low temperatures and precipitation on a daily basis, using equipment installed by the National Weather Service. Locally, these data are critical to the long term climate record of the Rio Grande Valley, Rio Grande Plains, and South Texas Brush Country, and also help fill gaps of information among the four NWS automated weather stations that are monitored at Brownsville/South Padre Island International Airport, Harlingen/Valley International Airport, McAllen/Miller International Airport, and Cameron County Airport (in Bayview).

On December 15, 2014, Mr. Steve Saenz, a federal employee with the Department of Transportation, volunteered to maintain observations near La Joya in Hidalgo County. This site originated in Mission in September 1910, and eventually moved to the Mission Water Plant, (4 miles west of town) during the latter half of the 20th century. In late 1994, the site closed, but was relocated a few miles west and reopened again in early 1995, in La Joya. From 1995 to 2001, the site was located at the Memorial Middle School. After and through late 2014, the site relocated to the Thurber residence, where the family provided more than a decade of high quality service. All-in-all, over 100 years of climate data have been contributed by this site! And thanks to Mr.Saenz, even more data will be added to the record books.

NWS Brownsville/Rio Grande Valley is very grateful to Mr. Saenz for volunteering to continue high quality observations, which are vital for both short term records and the long term climate record of the Rio Grande Valley and Deep South Texas.

By Steve Drillette, Meteorologist-In-Charge

Meteorologist-in-Charge Steve Drillette and Warning Coordination Meteorologist Barry Goldsmith present Joseph Hillard with a NWS Special Service Award for his many years of excellent support and mutual partnership during his tenure with the Texas General Land Office. Joseph Provided NWS Brownsville with several "Laguna Madre Familiarization Boat Tours" and numerous real-time reports during hazardous weather events over many years. Joseph recently retired from the TGLO. Congratulations, Joseph, on your award and retirement.

Maria M. Torres, Spanish Language Liaison/ Program Leader and Forecaster, was named the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Employee of the Month for January, 2015! In three short years, Ms. Torres has become the friendly face of NWS Brownsville/Rio Grande Valley to the unique bilingual community along the Texas/Mexico border by the sea. Her leadership and vision to increase the office's footprint in some of the more vulnerable communities where Spanish is spoken as the primary language is critical to building a more resilent, Weather Ready region. The staff of NWS Brownsville/Rio Grande Valley is proud to call Ms. Torres a great asset.

Meteorologist-in-Charge Steve Drillette presents General Forecaster Maria Torres the NOAA Employee of the Month award.

By Maria Torres, General Forecaster

The National Weather Service office in Brownsville participated in several events during the past year to help some of the more vulnerable communities of the Rio Grande Valley.

We began in December 2013 with a collection of different Christmas gifts for foster teens of the Texas Court-Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) organization of Cameron and Willacy Counties. CASA helps change the life of foster children by reducing the time they spend in foster care, and decreasing the emotional impact of child abuse. We continued in February with our first shoe collection for Soles4Souls. This organization collects used and new shoes and clothes to give to individuals that are in need. For our first time collecting, NWS Brownsville/Rio Grande Valley collected 20 pairs of shoes, of different sizes, for women, men and children. In March, a group of volunteers got together to attend the annual Whataburger All-You-Can-Eat Pancake Breakfast with all the proceeds benefiting KRGV Channel 5 Teach the Children charity. This was the 5th year that we participated in this event, which netted a total of $25.

During the month of April, in partnership with the Leadership Brownsville Class XXIX, we assisted the Brownsville Bike Barn by collecting a monetary donation. The Bike Barn is a work-to-earn program, where middle school aged children can use tools and parts to repair and rebuild bicycles and have a bicycle friendly future city. Even though we didn't have parts to donate, our staff made a $40 donation which became part of a grand total of $300 collected by the Leadership Brownsville Class. Later in April, we participated in the Texas General Land Office Adopt-A-Beach Clean Up, where we collected more than 10 bags with almost 100 pounds of trash.

During the "official" week of service in 2014, we collected a box of different food items for donation to the Ozanam Center in Brownsville and we prepared a hamburger/hot dog picnic meal for around 60 homeless residents. The Ozanam center provides individuals and families with housing assistance, food and clothes. The residents and workers at Ozanam appreciated all that we did for them and for taking the time to help in the kitchen.

By Kirk Caceres, General Forecaster

Data Acquisition Program Manager, Jim Campbell

The National Weather Service (NWS) in Brownsville, Texas has seen the departure of two Electronic Technicians, the retirement of the Data Acquisition Program Manager and Hydrometeorological Technician, and the arrival of an Information Technology Officer, an entry-level Meteorologist, and two new Electronic Technicians all within the past eight months.

Electronic Technician Cesar Ochoa accepted a position as Electronic Systems Analyst at NWS Boulder, Colorado in June of 2014. Later in the summer of 2014, Brian Ramos left NWS Brownsville for the same position at NWS Corpus Christi.

Long-time Data Acquisition Program Leader (DAPM) and staff favorite "Jim" Campbell retired on December 28, 2014 after nearly 43 years of federal service. A native of Fort Worth, TX, Jim began his career as an Aerographers Mate in the United States Navy from August 1971 to May 1974. His military career assignments included many locations in the United States and abroad including Vietnam, Singapore, Hong Kong and Japan. After separating from the military, Jim joined the National Weather Service in 1974 as a Weather Service Specialist in Houston, TX. Subsequent stops included serving as an Upper Air Specialist at NWS offices in Jackson, MS in 1977 and Apalachicola, FL in 1979, where he was also a Radar Specialist. He was a Weather Service Specialist in Midland, TX in 1981, Tallahassee, FL in 1983, and Victoria, TX in 1987. In October 1994, Jim joined the Brownsville Weather Forecast Office as the Data Acquisition Program Manager (DAPM) as the first and only person to ever hold this position!

For 20 years, Jim was an outstanding DAPM at WFO Brownsville. His exemplary leadership contributed to one of the highest performing Public Service Units (PSU) in the NWS, with the upper air and COOP programs consistently ranking as top performers in the region and nation. He selflessly trained and mentored numerous student interns and volunteers, incoming staff, and many of our current forecasters in upper air and other duties associated with the PSU. He was recognized with numerous awards, including several local and regional Cline awards for leadership and program success. He established many strong and long term relationships with his cooperative observers and other constituents. His upbeat personality and humor will be sorely missed. After his retirement, Jim is looking forward to "sleeping in" and in spending more quality time with his wife Darlene and his grandchildren.

Long-time Hydrometeorological Technician and all around "great guy" Sam Martinez retired on December 31, 2014 after 41 years of federal service. Sam is a native of Corsicana, Texas. He began his Federal service as an Aircraft Mechanic in the United States Air Force from June 1973 to August 1977.

Hydrometeorologist, Sam Martinez

His military career included several assignments in the United States and abroad, including Japan. After separating from military duty, Sam joined the National Weather Service in January 1978 as a Hydrometeorological Technician in Brownsville, TX.

Sam demonstrated excellent proficiency and leadership as the senior Hydrometeorological Technician during his 37 years at WFO Brownsville. According to available records, this makes Sam the longest-serving employee in the history of the Brownsville National Weather Service office. Sam served with utmost integrity and earned respect and admiration from the entire staff. Sam led the Cooperative Observer Program which consistently ranked as one of highest performing programs in the NWS. His experience, work ethic, and can-do attitude will be certainly missed at WFO Brownsville. After his retirement, Sam is looking forward to spending more quality time with his wife Martha and his entire family.

Pablo Gonzalez accepted the position of Information Technology Officer in June 2014. He has a total of over six years as a civilian with the Federal Government and has over 25 years with the U.S. military both active duty and reserves. Pablo has taught college computer related classes at South Texas College for 16 years at the level of Associate Professor. His civilian education includes a Bachelor Degree in Computer Science from The University of Texas at Austin, a Masters Degree in Management Information Systems from University of Central Texas at Killeen, TX, and a Master Degree in Computer Science from University of Texas Pan-American at Edinburg, TX. He is married to Diana Gonzalez, and they have two children ages 13 and 10. The family lives on a small ranch in Edinburg, TX. Pablo enjoys spending time with his family, reading, and building things.

Information Technology Officer, Pablo Gonzales

Meteorologist, Chris Birchfield

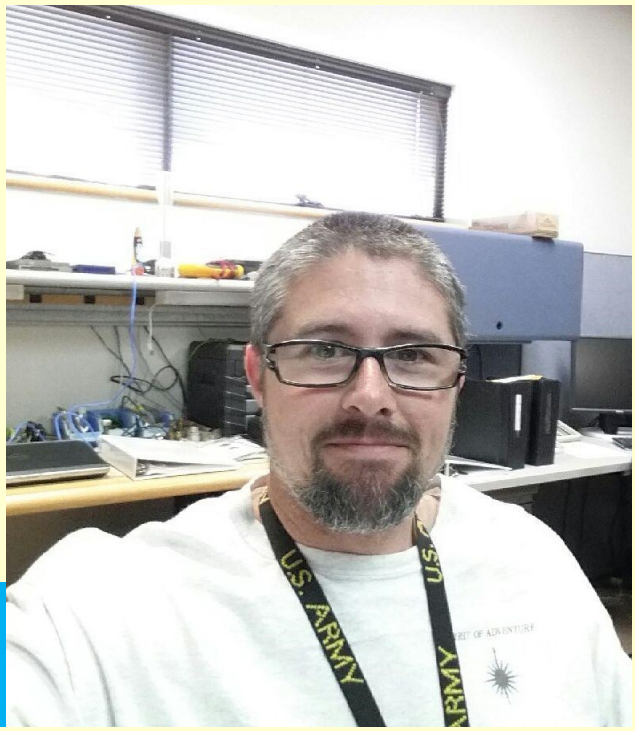
Chris Birchfield is an entry-level Meteorologist who also arrived in Brownsville in June 2014. He is a native of Marysville, OH and earned a Bachelor's degree in Atmospheric Science and a Minor in Spanish at The Ohio State University in 2013. Chris has a huge passion for meteorology and has always been fascinated by clouds and extreme weather. He enjoys traveling, cycling, storm chasing, Xbox, and going to the movies. Chris also enjoys a wide range of music including electronic, alternative, 90s rock and pop.

Derek Urch and Everett Briggs are our new Electronic Technicians.

Before accepting the Electronic Technician position, Derek Urch worked for the Department of Defense as a Logistics Management Specialist at the Naval Air Station in North Island, CA. Derek has also served as a DOD Avionic Electronics Mechanic. He is certified through the Department of the Navy in electronics troubleshooting and repair and has an Associate's Degree in Microprocessor & Microcomputer Design from San Diego College. He has been recognized for numerous performance and achievement rewards within DOD. Derek and his wife spent a short time in El Paso, and are looking forward to moving to a more "down to earth" lifestyle in South Texas.

Everett Briggs joined the NWS Brownsville staff in October 2014. Before excepting the electronic technician position at Brownsville, he previously worked as a Senior Engineering Systems Technician at Intel, Inc. Earlier in his career, Everett worked as an engineering technician at Qualcomm, Inc. in San Diego, CA and a Radar Tech in the US Navy. Outside of work, Everett has a strong interest in geology and genealogy.

Please join us in welcoming these new team members to the Rio Grande Valley!



Electronic Technican, Derek Urch

The Coastal Breeze

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Location	Frequency	Station
Brownsville	162.550	WWG-34
Pharr	162.400	KHB-33
Rio Grande City	162.425	WNG-601
Harlingen (Spanish)	162.450	WZ-2542
Pharr (Spanish)	162.475	WZ-2541

NOAA Weather Radio in Deep South Texas and the Rio Grande Valley!

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