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Melita: No Early Spring This Year

Dave Melita of Houston-based Weather Insight has been nothing if not consistent this year. From the get-go, he said that El Niño would not dominate the Winter pattern. It didn't exactly look like that early on, but by early to mid-January, temperatures took a pronounced dive from the unprecedented early Winter warmth, and never looked back in most areas east of the Rockies.

Sustained below-average temperatures have become notable in both their widespread geographic coverage and intensity that peaked in the first half of February.

Melita says that the intense cold pattern of early February continues to rule the Eastern third of the country for a few more days, as the fresh supply of arctic air draining all the way south to Florida in the wake of the Valentine's Day Winter storm gets reinforced by another cold weather disturbance this upcoming weekend. Besides keeping temperatures on the order of 15-20 degrees below average, the Alberta Clipper will add a little more snow to what has quickly become an extensive snow pack from the Rockies to the East Coast, he says.

"Regardless of the recent extreme Winter conditions, many questions now concern the fate of the remainder of Winter and Spring. Computer models have recently trended toward substantial moderation of the cold pattern during the final 10 days of February, leading some to say that Winter is now effectively over. However, Weather Insight once again stands apart from the crowd by saying Winter is not over," Melita says.

Well, isn't that lovely.

"This is not to say that the transition from sustained bitter cold to a milder temperature pattern during the final 10 days of February is inconsistent with Weather Insight forecasts issued in January. However, it is the intensity and duration de-tails of the upcoming temperature moderation that remains an important subject of debate."

He says that government computer model consensus – including Weather Insight's QCAST – indicates substantial widespread, well-above average warmth flooding the majority of the eastern half of the US.

However, Melita says his firm is now suggesting several reasons why they disagree with all the latest computer out-put, including their own proprietary QCAST model (which is essentially a bias-corrected approach to determining the consensus of all computer models).

"Models typically perform poorly in determining the intensity and southern extent of low-level cold air drawn south-ward by slow-moving, upper-level cutoff lows traversing the southern US, leading to major forecast busts in distinguishing snow and ice storms from rain events. All models agree that an active storm pattern will accompany the temperature moderation of late February to early March. The combination of greater amounts of cold air drawn into these systems, more snow and ice deposited by them, along with existing snow-cover, all point to a colder temperature regime than alluded to by models. This is not to say that no above-average warmth will make it all the way to the East Coast, as Weather Insight fully expects this to occur for a brief period just before an over-all colder regime set up again in March. However, the core of the late February above-average warmth is expected to remain focused between the Rockies and Mississippi Valley and only translate to the Northeast for a few days, signaling the imminent end of the milder pattern."

So, it's gonna be way cold. This next pattern transition is forecast to occur in the longer range beyond the model forecast horizon or close to it in early March, setting up another extended period of temperatures well below average for the East, Melita says.

“This is due to several factors, including the total demise of the early Winter El Niño as well as the fact that, even during the late February temperature moderation, a fresh supply of arctic air will continue to pool in the Northwest Territories. This represents a far different scenario from that of December 2006, when there was no arctic air available anywhere in North America. This next cold period is not expected to rival the intensity or duration of that which dominated early February. However, considering the fast rise in seasonal temperatures that occurs in March, negative temperature anomalies are expected to be of similar magnitude. It is still too early to say with any reasonable degree of confidence exactly what day this expansive pool of arctic air will surge into the western US and progressively translate eastward, but as the less amplified moderate pattern of late February unfolds, more information will present itself for interpretation.”

Indeed.

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