

Feds forecast wet conditions for next 3 months

By Paul Rogers, San Jose Mercury News

There is a 75 percent probability of average or above-average precipitation between January and the end of March for California, according to a new report by federal scientists – the first time in five years such a wet outlook has been predicted in the state during the first three months of a year.

“This is good news,” said Steve Baxter, a seasonal forecaster with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, which issued the report on Thursday predicting that the harsh reality of California’s historic drought may finally be giving way to wetter days ahead.

“There are not indications of a monster wet season,” he said. “It’s unlikely that the drought will be broken this year, but it’s likely that it will be improved.”

Pacific Ocean temperatures, which are warmer than normal, along with satellite imagery and computer models, are showing a greater likelihood of low-pressure systems, which can draw storms to California, Baxter said. There still is also a 65 percent chance of mild El Niño conditions developing this winter, which could further increase chances.

Meanwhile, reservoirs continued to slowly rise across Northern California after three weeks of drenching rains. And another report out Thursday also offered an additional glimmer of hope. The U.S. Drought Monitor, a weekly map issued by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and other agencies, showed that 32 percent of California is in “exceptional drought,” notably down from 55 percent last week, due to the recent rains.

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