

2015 was second-warmest year on record in U.S.

By Associated Press

U.S. weather officials say December's wild El Niño pushed 2015 to near-record levels for heat, moisture and downright extreme conditions.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration announced Thursday that last year was the second warmest and third wettest in 121 years of record keeping for the lower 48 states.

The 54.4-degree average last year was second only to 2012.

Scientists blame a combination of man-made climate change and El Niño, the natural warming of the central Pacific that changes weather worldwide.

The U.S. set the record for warmest and wettest December, beating the old monthly warm temperature mark by nearly a degree.

NOAA said its extreme-weather index ranked 2015 as the most extreme year on record.

Global figures come out later, but 2015 will likely rank as the hottest.

Nevada falls to last in

education ranking

By Trevon Milliard, Reno Gazette-Journal

After years of floundering near the bottom in a widely watched report card for state education systems, Nevada has sunk to dead last.

For the first time, the Silver State fell behind all other states and Washington, D.C., in the annual Quality Counts report, which assigns overall scores to states based on student performance, school financing and other qualities of K-12 public schools.

“It’s honestly disheartening,” said Nevada interim Superintendent Steve Canavero on Wednesday before the results were publicly released.

Read the whole story

El Niño to soon have waterfalls overflowing

By Tom Stienstra, San Francisco Chronicle

For many, to see a waterfall can be love at first sight. Each has a look and a personality.

They go dry in a drought, flood over the banks in a deluge, and each day can provide a different look. When you first sight a waterfall that captures your senses, it can feel like a bass drum is pounding in your chest.

In the coming months, the El Niño-driven winter is reviving hundreds of waterfalls across the Bay Area and Northern California. I've made it a mission to see every one I can find.

[Read the whole story](#)

PCSO offering free safety awareness class

The Placer County Sheriff's Office is offering a free safety awareness class for business owners, managers, and employees to help them keep their businesses and themselves safe.

The class will be Feb. 9 from 6-8pm at the Auburn Justice Center, 2929 Richardson Drive in Auburn. The presenter is Deputy Zach Poiesz, a problem-oriented policing deputy. He deals with chronic nuisance problems in the greater Auburn area and is offering this class in response to business and safety concerns.

Topics covered will include: how to safely open for business at the start of the day; front counter safety; attention during breaks and lunch; banking precautions; closing safeguards; and introduction to the "Run, Hide, Fight" philosophy.

SLT looking for input on design criteria

South Lake Tahoe is putting on a design guidelines workshop on Jan. 21 from 3-5pm.

The purpose is to discuss how to improve South Lake Tahoe's visual character.

The Planning Commission is hosting the event at Lake Tahoe Airport.

EDC seeks to be part of State of Jefferson

Updated Jan. 8, 6:40pm:

By Alexei Koseff, Sacramento Bee

Now tallying 20 counties among their ranks, supporters of the movement to carve an independent "State of Jefferson" out of Northern California plan to introduce a bill this session seeking sovereignty.

Organizers on Wednesday turned in declarations for 15 counties, including Sutter, Nevada and El Dorado, asking the state to grant them permission to separate. Six others petitions – which were either passed by the county boards of supervisors or reflect signature-gathering drives – have already been filed.

Jefferson proponents contend that their rural areas lack

adequate representation in state government, which has led to over-regulation and environmental policies that decimated their regional economies, particularly the logging and mining industries that historically supported them. Their seal bears an XX, signifying that they have been double-crossed by state government.

Read the whole story

Multimedia artist to exhibit work at LTCC

Multimedia artist Cynthia Hooper is bringing her videos and paintings of California and Mexico landscapes to Lake Tahoe Community College's Haldan Gallery.

The exhibit opens Jan. 14 with a free artist's reception from 5-7pm in the Haldan Gallery. Hooper will give a short talk about her work at 5:30pm.

The exhibit remains open until March 18.

The exhibit features 10 documentary videos about dams and water use in California and Mexico, industrial landscapes in Baja, California, and the timber and fishing industries in Humboldt Bay.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



· Barton Health's Health & Wellness Directory has expanded. The directory is online.

· Douglas County has received a grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency through the Carson Water Subconservancy District for the preliminary design of a flood retarding structure east of Stephanie Way in the valley.

· New Treatment Options for Cardiovascular Disease is the subject of the Feb. 4, 6-7pm free talk by David Young of Barton Cardiology. It will be in the board room at Lake Tahoe Community College.

· The Washoe County Sheriff's Office Citizen Corps is offering an emergency preparedness and response training academy beginning Jan. 21. The training is free and trainees are not required to become a Citizen Corps volunteer to participate. To sign up for training, contact Shirlee Rhodes at 775.325.6928 or srhodes@washoecounty.us.

Burning Man appeals tax that could raise ticket prices

By Riley McDermid, San Francisco Business Times

A new Nevada state tax that could cost the promoters of

popular festival Burning Man an extra \$3 million a year and cause ticket prices to rise is being appealed by promoters.

Promoters from the Burning Man Projects have said the increase could cause tickets prices to spike as much as \$35 to about \$425 per person.

Last year, Nevada passed SB 266, which says says non-profits that offer for sale 7,500 tickets or more, and where the patrons participate in that entertainment, and “the number of tickets to the activity offered for sale or other distribution is 15,000 or more,” are no longer excluded from the live entertainment tax.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Let's face it, California is nuts

By Joe Mathews

My fellow Californians, the state of our state is nuttier than ever.

I know you will hear more conventional assessments of the state of things in the coming weeks. January is the high season for elected officials to offer addresses on how our state is faring—overviews of California and its local governments. And, to be clear, I am not judging the sanity of Californians (we have lower rates of mental illness than the U.S). Nor am I referring merely to the growth in our almond and walnut production.



Joe Mathews

I offer my assessment of our essential nuttiness as a starting point for a year in which we will debate and cast votes on our taxes, drug laws, schools, roads, our rails, and water. As we figure things out, let us not lean too heavily on reason, or appeal too often to common sense. After all, this state—with its peculiar history of rapid change—has never been a particularly reasonable or sensible place.

So when things make no sense in the coming year, take comfort in the words of the writer Edward Abbey: “There is science, logic, reason; there is thought verified by experience. And then there is California.”

We have been so singular for so long that California has become obsessed with singularity—and even afraid of “the singularity,” the idea that artificial intelligences will eventually surpass our own, dooming humanity. When Gov. Jerry Brown gives his own State of the State address, there likely will be a predictable list of California singular-status boasts: as a leader in renewable energy, high-speed rail, protecting undocumented immigrants, and fighting climate change.

Such policies are to be celebrated. They also are the fruits of our perceived nuttiness—other states have rejected high-speed rail cap-and-trade for greenhouse gas emissions as irretrievably wacky ideas.

You won’t hear this month’s official speechmakers talk about the other half of the nut—the way our nuttiness can turn on

itself.

Ours is a state of creative communities and people that is ruled from Sacramento via the most centralized regime of regulation and taxation in the United States.

California has the highest percentage of its population living in poverty of any state in the country, and yet our leaders pursue policies that give us some of the most expensive electricity, gas, and housing in America. We embrace freedom and restrict it in the same breath. Californians are on our way to legalizing marijuana—but good luck finding a place in the state where you can smoke it, or anything else. The state is pioneering self-driving cars—even as we let our roads deteriorate into impassable messes.

We've led the way in expanding health insurance for poor people—roughly half of our children are now on Medi-Cal, California's version of Medicaid—but at the same time, we've made it harder for people to see a doctor and get treatment. California desperately needs more college graduates—we'll be short a million skilled workers by the middle of the next decade—so, naturally, we've been under-funding public higher education and limiting enrollment in our colleges.

We Californians also have a nutty weakness for empty and extravagant promises. We spend years on Elon Musk's waiting lists for Teslas he can never seem to deliver in the promised numbers. We invest billions in the trivial—how many online coupon companies and photo-sharing apps does one state need? And we overdo it. CalPERS wants to lower its expected rate of investment return to 6.5 percent (just a year after it said it could guarantee 7.5 percent). Our governments are still offering billions in retiree health care—without setting aside money to fund it—even in an age when Medicare and Obamacare should cover all.

This year, you'll hear lots of big talk about how we'll reform

our crazily complicated criminal justice and tax systems. We should reform, though we probably won't. A place as nutty as this needs simpler rules, not 5,000 separate criminal provisions and over 400 penalty enhancements.

I could go on—take note that I've gone this far in a column about California nuttiness without once mentioning San Francisco—but what's the point? While our nuttiness has its costs, California will survive. And we'll cope, as we always do, by celebrating how crazily creative we are.

As Compton's Kendrick Lamar will rap at this new year's Grammys when he wins a boatload of awards, "We gon' be alright. Do you hear me, do you feel me? We gon' be alright."

Joe Mathews writes the Connecting California column for Zocalo Public Square.