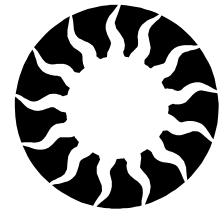


# The Weather Watcher

## of the Inland Northwest

[www.wrh.noaa.gov/Spokane](http://www.wrh.noaa.gov/Spokane)



## NWS Spokane receives National Award

One of the daily duties at NWS Spokane is launching radiosondes, or weather balloons, to obtain weather data in the upper atmosphere. This occurs twice a day, everyday—rain or shine, whether temperatures are below zero or near 100°. Despite technological advances in computer tracking, the process of manually filling balloons with hydrogen and attaching weather equipment to be released into the skies above, has remained virtually unchanged for over 50 years!



Larry Sossaman launching a weather balloon.

The “upper air team” at NWS Spokane earned national recognition by winning the 2003 National Isaac Cline Award. This elite award is presented to individuals and teams that have made significant contributions in support of NWS strategic and operational plans. It recognizes operational excellence within key facets of the core NWS mission.

The members of the NWS Spokane “upper air team” include: Bob Bonner, Verne Ballard, Milt Maas, Stan Savoy, Larry Sossaman, Irv Haynes, Bob Cummings, Merri Wallace, and Rob Sumpter. Their dedication and hard work allowed them to consistently provide complete and accurate upper air data both regionally and nationally from August 2001 through July 2002. Congratulations to the “upper air team” of NWS Spokane! ☀ *Robin Fox*

## Winter Rains with Little Snow

The Inland Northwest is currently experiencing one of the warmest winters on record. Mountain snow pack has had a tough time accumulating and still remains below normal levels. With this lean mountain snow, water supply forecasts indicate about 60 to 80 percent of average flows on area rivers this spring and summer. It remains to be seen the exact impacts on this low water flow to our region.

The region did experience one brief episode of flooding. A moist southwest flow, otherwise known as a Pineapple Express, developed at the end of January. The combination of rainfall and snow melt brought minor flooding to the Idaho Palouse near Potlatch as well as areas on the Coeur D'Alene River near Cataldo and Enaville.

☀ *Charles Ross*



*Flooding on Flannigan Road near Potlatch, ID. Luckily these drivers were safe, but driving through at least 2 feet of water can sweep most vehicles away! Please, avoid water covered roadways.*

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### Editor's Notes

Spring fever is in the air thanks to a mild winter. Some big dates are coming up; the Spring equinox is March 20 at 5 pm, and Daylight Savings Time starts on April 6. With spring knocking on our door step, so will be the start of thunderstorm and fire season.

**Severe Weather and Wildland Fire Danger Week** for the Inland Northwest is scheduled for May 5-9. During this week, there will be test warning messages on the NOAA Weather Radio, safety messages updated on the homepage and provided to the media. Mark your calendars!

If there is something you would like to see in the next newsletter or if you have comments or questions about a previous issue of the *Weather Watcher*, please contact Robin Fox or Ken Holems (509) 244-0110 extension 223.

The main purpose of this publication is to keep our readers informed about our services and programs and to recognize those who help us accomplish our mission, including weather spotters, coop observers, media and emergency management.

All articles are written by the NWS staff. A special thanks to Ron Miller, John Livingston & Charles Ross for their contributions.

# One Mild Winter for the Inland Northwest

Winter? What winter? The forecast last autumn from the National Weather Service was for a mild winter due to El Niño. But this past winter was extremely mild by just about anyone's standards. So, how does it compare with past winters? The average temperature in Spokane and Lewiston for the months of December and January was the 7<sup>th</sup> warmest ever, with records dating back to 1881. We hadn't seen those kind of mild months since 1952 in Spokane. For Wenatchee, this winter was the 3<sup>rd</sup> mildest, but with records at Pangborn Airport only going back to 1959. Nearly every single day in December and January saw above normal temperatures. In fact, high temperatures in Wenatchee remained above freezing for all but 3 days, and then even those reached 31°. Lewiston had only one such day this winter. Spokane only had one day where the high temperature stayed below 30°. The only other time this has ever happened is 1933!

One of the stranger statistics of this winter is the fact that the coldest temperature for all 3 locations was set on Halloween, rather than the typical winter months. Finally, with all the warm temperatures, snow was noticeably absent. As of March 15th, the 20.2" of snow at Spokane is the least since the 1991-92 winter. So far this winter ranks 19<sup>th</sup> on the list of least snowiest winters.

## DECEMBER

The first week of December was a dreary one with high pressure in place and plenty of low clouds and fog. By the 10<sup>th</sup> a weak weather system finally made it through the ridge and opened the door for more precipitation. Warm southwesterly systems during the middle of the month kept overnight temperatures above freezing with generous amounts of rain for most locations. After a dry and mild Christmas, the Inland Northwest entered a short period of winter weather. The year ended with some of the heaviest snow of the season. Bonners Ferry in north Idaho picked up 14" of snow!

## JANUARY

The wet weather continued into the first few days of 2003, but with warmer temperatures resulting in more rain than snow in the valleys. Another strong ridge of high pressure then developed, keeping the region dry for two weeks. A Canadian front sagged southward into the region on the 21<sup>st</sup> with one round of snow and rain. This was followed by a stronger storm system that moved into the Inland Northwest from the west with a brief second round of winter weather. A few days later a warm southerly flow ushered in record high temperatures to the area. Lewiston reached 60° on the 26<sup>th</sup> while Spokane topped out at 57°. This episode melted most of the valley snow in our region, bringing to an end a short mild winter.

## FEBRUARY

February's weather was rather benign. After two wetter-than-normal months, the Inland Northwest dried out in February. A large high pressure ridge took a firm hold over the western US. The "storm door" opened briefly in the middle of the month for some modest precipitation, but overall the month of February was drier than normal. There were actually more colder-than-normal days in February than in December and January combined. The reason was a dry northerly flow kept the fog and low clouds from developing mainly at the end of the month. ☀ *Ron Miller*

**SPRING OUTLOOK** for the Inland Northwest is above normal temperatures and near normal precipitation.

## Winter Weather Statistics

Wenatchee Airport	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Total
Avg High Temp	37.9	36.5	46.7	40.3
Departure from Norm	+4.4	+2.7	+5.1	+4.1
Avg Low Temp	31.7	30.4	29.2	30.4
Departure from Norm	+8.8	+8.6	+2.5	+6.6
Total Precip	3.10	1.88	0.22	5.20
Departure from Norm	+1.67	+0.74	-0.64	+1.77
Lewiston Airport	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Total
Avg High Temp	43.7	45.0	45.8	44.8
Departure from Norm	+4.5	+5.6	+0.2	+3.4
Avg Low Temp	32.7	34.6	30.1	32.5
Departure from Norm	+4.2	+6.6	-1.1	+3.2
Total Precip	0.68	3.01	0.68	4.37
Departure from Norm	-0.37	+1.87	-0.27	+1.23
Spokane Airport	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Total
Avg High Temp	37.8	38.4	40.8	39.0
Departure from Norm	+5.0	+5.6	+1.5	+4.0
Avg Low Temp	29.7	29.4	25.4	28.2
Departure from Norm	+8.1	+7.7	-0.3	+5.2
Total Precip	3.27	3.40	0.52	7.19
Departure from Norm	+1.02	+1.58	-0.99	+1.61
Total Snowfall	11.3	6.8	0.4	18.5
Departure from Norm	-3.7	-8.4	-7.0	-19.0

## Spokane is StormReady

Over the past year and a half, the NWS Spokane office has worked with the Spokane County/City Office of Emergency Management to successfully qualify communities in Spokane County as StormReady. This included updating the emergency operations plans and procedures, increasing the number of NOAA Weather Radios in the county, and improving communications between local officials and the National Weather Service. It was a major task, but it was finally accomplished by the end of 2002.

Three separate ceremonies were held during the first week of February to recognize the county and 13 separate communities in the county as StormReady. Even with the important news developing around the country and world, these events still received significant news coverage.



*MIC John Livingston, Mayor John Powers, and WCM Ken Holmes at the Spokane City ceremony.*

On February 3rd, a StormReady plaque and signs were presented to Spokane City Mayor John Powers during a public meeting of the City Council. Emergency Manager Dave Byrnes complimented the work of the National Weather Service and the development of the Inland Northwest Emergency Alert System plan. MIC John Livingston emphasized the importance of StormReady and disaster preparedness for the community. WCM Ken Holmes gave the background on the StormReady and discussed past severe weather events that had impacted the area. KREM and KXLY television provided coverage during the meeting, and the event was written up in the Spokesman Review.

**Trivia answer: January 1947 was the start of the weather balloon records in Spokane!**



*WCM Ken Holmes, Chairman John Roskelley, and MIC John Livingston at the Spokane County ceremony.*

The recognition ceremony for Spokane County was completed on February 4th at the commissioners chambers during a public meeting. John Roskelley, Chairman of the Spokane County Commission accepted the StormReady plaque and signs. Emergency Manager Dave Byrnes and representatives from WFO Spokane gave similar presentations to those on Feb 3<sup>rd</sup>. They explained the Storm Ready program and why the county was being recognized.



*MIC John Livingston, WCM Ken Holmes and representatives of the 10 other StormReady Communities in Spokane County.*

The third ceremony on February 6th completed the recognitions with presentations of Storm Ready plaques and signs to 10 of the remaining 12 cities and towns within Spokane County. The 12 communities included Airways Heights, Cheney, Deer Park, Fairfield, Latah, Liberty Lake, Medical Lake, Millwood, Rockford, Spangle, City of Spokane Valley and Waverly. The ceremony was held during a joint meeting of the Spokane County Board of Commissioners and local government leaders. About 60 public officials attended this meeting. For more information, visit [www.stormready.noaa.gov](http://www.stormready.noaa.gov) ☀ John Livingston & Ken Holmes



**More News on StormReady!**

The county of Whitman along with the communities of Colfax and Pullman have completed their StormReady applications and have been approved. Official StormReady presentations will be planned in April or early May. ☀ *Ken Holmes*

**Spotter Kudos**

Despite our rather balmy winter, there were some memorable events when the spotters of the Inland Northwest rose to the occasion. The NWS received a terrific response in reports of snow, wind & flooding over the past several months. Yet there were some outstanding spotters that deserve special recognition. Good job!!!

Tim Dorgan—Lewis #2 in Winchester, ID for his reliable daily snow reports on the Camas Prairie.

Janet Millard—Chelan #34 in Lake Wenatchee, WA for her dependable snow reports from the Cascades.

Richard Kreiger—Latah #23H in Troy, ID for his detailed faxed observations.

Hoyt McClain—Shoshone #9 in Pinehurst, ID for his investigative skills in providing details to wind damage in the Silver Valley. ☀ *Robin Fox*

**All-Hazards TVs**

A new series of full-performance alert television sets were released early this year. Exclusively from RCA, “Alert Guard” is the first alert system to be integrated into a television which will receive digital data and audio information for a wide range of alerts. It is a family safeguard and warning system that will receive all federally broadcast hazards from the NWR network. It will also provide NOAA weather broadcasts 24 hours a day.

With this new technology, consumers will for the first time have the means to monitor local and national emergencies. The “Alert Guard” system will work when the television is tuned to a local station, cable or satellite, viewing a DVD or videotape, playing a video game or even when the TV is turned off. In combination with the front panel LED lights, the TV can provide options on both audio alert tones and verbal information, as well as onscreen closed captioning highlights.

Initial models of “Alert Guard” televisions will be available by mid 2003. For more information, visit your local electronics outlet or [www.rca.com](http://www.rca.com). ☀

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**Trivia: When did weather balloon launches begin in Spokane?**

