



The ArkLaMiss Observer



Spring 2009 Edition

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Shareholder's Report

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By: Alan Gerard, Meteorologist-in-Charge

My colleague Lans Rothfusz, Meteorologist-in-Charge of the Atlanta/Peachtree City, GA National Weather Service office, for several years has been putting together what he calls a "shareholder's report" for their customers. His concept is that you, as a federal taxpayer, are a "shareholder" in the National Weather Service, and such deserves a report each year on how your investment (through your tax dollars) is performing. Being that April is tax time, I thought this would be a good time to prepare a short shareholder's report focusing on your NWS office here in Jackson.

To start with a broad view, the

NWS budget as authorized by Congress for last year was just over \$900 million. Putting that in perspective, this means each U.S. citizen contributed about \$3 to the operations of the National Weather Service. So here are some statistics and accomplishments that show what each of you received for that \$3.

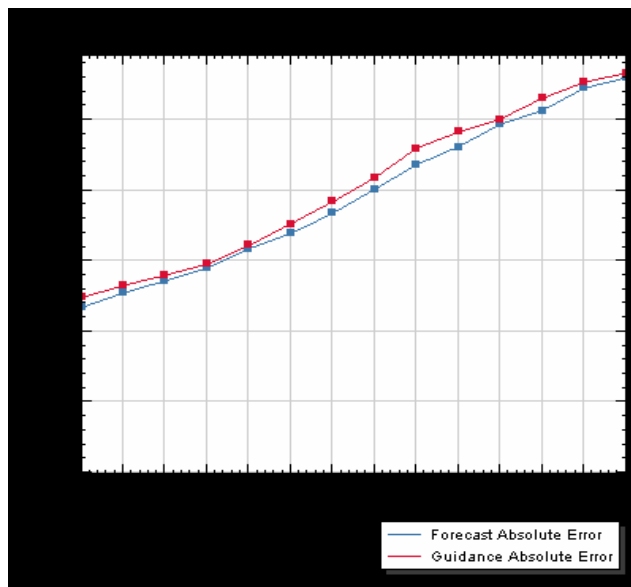
Obviously, the most important thing the NWS does is provide warnings, forecasts, and services during hazardous weather. For us, the statistics that show how we are doing in this area from a meteorological perspective is our severe weather verification. Below is a table showing our statistics at a local and national level for tornado and severe weather verification for 2008.

NWS Entity	Tornado Detection	Tornado False Alarms	Tornado Lead Time	Severe Detection	Severe False Alarms	Severe Lead Time
NWS Jackson	83%	75%	18 min	93%	38%	19 min
National NWS	72%	75%	14 min	83%	45%	19 min

To put this in plain language, when a tornado occurs in our service area, there was a tornado warning on it 84% of the time. For false alarms, when we issued a tornado warning, a tornado did not occur 75% of the time (or in other words, a tornado actually occurs with a tornado warning about once every four times). The average lead time between when a tornado warning is issued and tornado damage occurs is 18 minutes. Our statistics are better than the national average for detection and lead time, and the same for false alarms. Obviously, we wish the false alarm rate for tornado warnings was lower, but unfortunately the state of the meteorological science does not allow for much better false alarm rate, assuming that we want to continue to have high levels of detection and lead time.

For severe weather overall, our rate of detection is 93% while our false alarm rate is 38% (severe weather occurs in about 60% of all warnings we issue). Our lead time is 19 minutes for severe weather. Here, our performance is better than the national average for both detection and false alarms, and the same as the national average for lead time.

With regard to general forecasting, the below graph shows our average temperatures error (red) compared to computer produced forecasts (blue), starting with the first 12 hour period of the forecast out to the 14th (day 7). You can see that our forecasts are consistently an improvement on the computer forecasts, and that our average error for the first period of the forecast is now down to just over two degrees Fahrenheit.



Graph showing NWS Jackson average temperature forecast error versus computer produced forecast error

Of course, these statistics only provide feedback on the meteorological accuracy of our forecasts and warnings, and thus only tell part of the story. We continue to make efforts to

enhance the service side of our operations, including initiatives such as web-based and face-to-face briefings for key governmental decision makers at the state and local level, enhanced aviation services, new graphical based forecasts, and others. Over the last year, we have provided services like these for major weather events such as the January 10th 2008 tornado outbreak, Hurricanes Gustav and Ike, and the severe weather and snowstorm of December 2008.

As always, we would like to hear from you, our customers, on how we can better serve you. Feel free to contact me any time at Alan.E.Gerard@noaa.gov.

Tales from the ArkLaMiss

By: Jim Fairly, Meteorologist Intern

Extreme weather affects everyone. Whether it's tornadoes, hurricanes, severe thunderstorms, flash

flooding or even a freak southern snow/ice storm, we've all experienced some type of unusual weather in our lives. Here's your chance to tell your story.

Well, it turns out that our next storm story is one of those unusual southern snow/ice storms as recalled from the personal experiences of John Harris. Mr. Harris, a fellow weather enthusiast,

lives in Satartia, Mississippi where he has been a Cooperative Observer for the National Weather Service since August of 2002. Anyway, let's get to the story about the Ice Storm of February 1989 as told by John Harris:

“The first few days of February began unseasonably warm with temperatures in the 80's. However, on the morning of Friday, February 3rd, I awoke to a cold and rainy scene. It rained off and on all day and skies remained grey and overcast even into the evening hours. Saturday morning was a carbon copy of Friday, cold grey and overcast. The temperatures hovered around the freezing mark all day long, and by the late afternoon a light misty rain began to fall. This continued all the way up till bedtime, steadily getting heavier and heavier as the night wore on. I can remember mentioning to my mother, “If this keeps up we're headed for real trouble.” Shortly after midnight the rain became heavy with thunder and lightning and plenty of it. I said to myself, “My word, our power is not gonna stand up to this very long.” While this was going on, the temperature was a bone chilling 29 degrees. I took a gander outside and there was ice everywhere. It was about that time that the real brunt of the storm was

just locking in on us. I was so excited that I couldn't sleep! I was totally amazed at the intensity of the thunder and lightning. These storms didn't seem like the type of storms that you normally get in February. They seemed more like a spring drenching round of thunderstorms that train over the same area. The best I can recall the power went out around 3 am that morning and would not be heard from again for another 8 days.

The morning after, I awoke to the sound of huge oak and pine trees breaking and snapping. Actually, the sound was more like the sound of bombs going off. Those that didn't break were twisted to the ground like pretzels. The thickness of the ice, which I would estimate to be between 1 to 3 inches thick, was everywhere. The storm finally left our area around daybreak, but the ice was here to stay for several days of subfreezing temperatures. This was truly a storm that will forever linger in my mind.”

Here are some interesting details about the ice storm that Mr. Harris wrote about. The information comes to us from storm reports compiled by the NWS Jackson office in February 1989. The storm report is a bit lengthy, so I'll

just focus on the part concerning where Mr. Harris lives.

Some roads iced up in Central Mississippi on the morning of the 6th. The most severe icing was in a 50 mile wide band from Vicksburg to Yazoo City to Kosciusko. Trees were heavily damaged and it took at least one week to get all power line damage repaired. In some instances, ice had accumulated to more than an inch thick. Freezing rain on both the 5th and 6th caused this heavy icing.

Counties just outside this area received moderate damage. In the Jackson area alone, nearly 60,000 people were without electricity. An estimated 150,000 people were without electricity in the state, and most of them were in Central Mississippi.

The objective of this section of the newsletter is simply to give everyone an opportunity to share their own real-life weather related story(s). (If any of you are interested in participating, you can either send me and email at Jim.Fairly@noaa.gov or call me at 601-936-2189.) Lastly, I would like to thank Mr. Harris for sharing his ice storm experience with us and also for his enthusiasm and dedication to the Cooperative Program over the past 6 ½ years.

30th Anniversary of the “Easter Flood” of 1979

By: Marty Pope, Service Hydrologist

This year marks the 30th

anniversary of an event that many locals in the Pearl River, Tombigbee River, and the Big Black River Basins remember

well. The week of April 12th to 18th is the commemoration week for the “Easter Flood of 1979 – 30th Anniversary”. Rainfall from 5

to in excess of 20 inches fell over much of Central Mississippi. Flash flooding and record river flooding shocked many residents across Central Mississippi.

The origins of the flood dated back to December of 1978, when rainfall amounts exceeded 150 percent of normal in Central Mississippi. From January to March, the trend of above normal rainfall continued, leaving soil conditions saturated. April began where all of the four previous months ended, with heavy rainfall from 2 to 4 inches from April 1st to the 4th, and another 1 to 3 inches from April 8th to the 9th. With the Pearl River and Tombigbee and their respective tributaries running near or above flood levels, the stage was set for an extraordinary flood event.

A major storm system moved slowly, stalling briefly, across Central Mississippi from April 11th to 13th, bringing heavy rainfall. Rainfall totals ranged from 10 to in excess of 20 inches. The heaviest rainfall fell over the Upper Pearl River Basin in Winston County. From 10 to 16 inches of rain fell over the Noxubee River, Tibbee

Creek, and the Luxapallila Creek's sub-basins within the Tombigbee River System. Flash flooding of small streams caused much damage and harm throughout Central Mississippi. In Winston County, a hundred homes and many streets were flooded and washed out. Also, swift waters swept away 2 small girls. A man was also killed in Neshoba County when he ran off the road during the heavy rain, and drowned in the high water along the roadside. The flooding had only just begun.

After the weather system exited Mississippi on the 13th, record flooding was reported on the Noxubee River, and the Luxapallila Creek in Columbus. Homes and property were flooded in these areas. Record flooding was reported on almost all river forecast points in the Upper Pearl River Basin, with the exception of the Tuscolameta Creek. Major flooding occurred in the Jackson, MS area, where much of Northeast Jackson flooded just south of Ross Barnett Reservoir. The city's fairgrounds flooded, which included the Mississippi Coliseum. Water backed up many of the small streams which flow out of

the city. Downtown Jackson was flooded by Town Creek. The final toll showed over 15,000 people evacuated. Many businesses and homes flooded with total costs exceeding 500 million dollars. This is equivalent to around 1 to 1.25 billion dollars today. One death occurred in Jackson when a little girl fell off her home porch into flood waters below.

Downstream of Jackson, record flood waters continued their course southward. Flood water inundated homes and camps along the river. Many highways flooded and portions of north Columbia flooded.

The "Easter Flood" of 1979 will be remembered for many years to come because of the impact that it had on Central Mississippi and the State Capital of Mississippi. A flood in Mississippi of the magnitude of the 1979 flood is very likely to occur again. Those living along the Pearl River and other rivers in the Jackson County Warning area are urged to take precautions and purchase flood insurance. This is the only way to cut your losses in the event of a record breaking flood.

Staff Changes at the NWS in Jackson

By: Alan Gerard, Meteorologist-in-Charge

There have been a number of changes to the staff here at NWS Jackson that I would like to let you know about.

First, forecaster Christopher Bannan has left NWS Jackson to become a senior forecaster at the NWS New Orleans/Baton Rouge office, located in Slidell. Chris has been a forecaster in Jackson for several years, and has been active in outreach and spotter

presentations. Taking Chris' place in our forecaster ranks will be Joanne Culin, who has been a meteorological intern here for a couple of years. Joanne has a B.S. in meteorology from Texas A&M, and a M.S. in meteorology from Florida State University. She will

also have an active role in outreach and customer education.

Another loss to our forecaster ranks will be the editor of this wonderful newsletter, Ashley Wester. Ashley will be marrying Doug Butts, currently a senior forecaster at NWS Shreveport who was a long time forecaster here at the Jackson office, on April 18th. She will then be transferring to NWS Shreveport in May so that

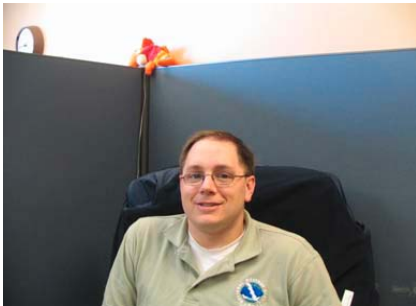
she and Doug can actually be in the same state! A replacement for Ashley should be hired and in place by mid-summer.

We have also had a number of staff changes outside of the forecast staff. Carolyn Bryant, our Observation Program Leader (OPL), resigned in March after she and husband Brad (NWS Jackson forecaster) had a baby boy in January. Carolyn worked closely

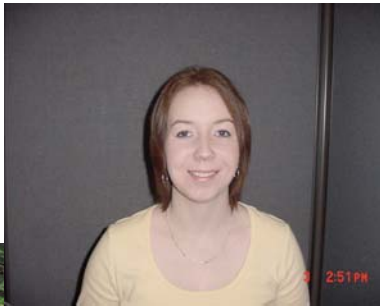
Ashley Wester

with our cooperative observers. We expect to hire a new OPL by the end of April. Also, electronics technician JL Winger was recently selected to be the new Electronics System Analyst at NWS Caribou, ME.

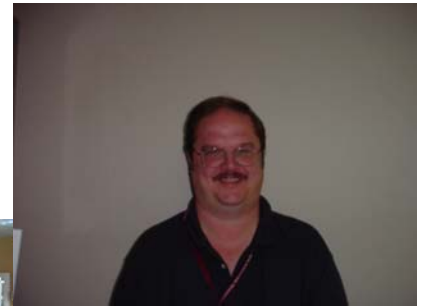
While we are sorry to lose so many great people, they are all moving on to “bigger and better things.” Our new staff will continue to provide the best weather services possible to the ArkLaMiss region.



Chris Bannan



Ashley Wester



JL Winger



Joanne Culin



Carolyn Bryant

!!Fun Stuff For The Kids!!

Lightning Quiz

- T F 1. When there is lightning, crouch under a tree.
- T F 2. When there is lightning, stay away from anything made of metal.
- T F 3. Stay by the window and watch for streaks of lightning.
- T F 4. In a storm, you usually see the lightning before you hear the thunder.
- T F 5. When the sky lights up, but you can't see the streaks of lightning, it means the storm is over.
- T F 6. When there is lightning, go to the highest spot on a hill and get out your umbrella for protection from the storm.
- T F 7. Every day someone is struck by lightning.
- T F 8. Lightning never strikes twice in the same place.
- T F 9. If there is lightning, call all your friends to make sure they are safe.
- T F 10. Lightning storms may occur in the winter but are most common in spring and summer.

Answers: 1. F, 2. T, 3. F, 4. T, 5. F, 6. F, 7. T, 8. F, 9. F, 10. T

Reaching Out to You

By: *Ashley Wester, Journeyman Forecaster/Editor, and Alan Campbell, Journeyman Forecaster*

Our goal here at the National Weather Service in Jackson, MS is to protect life and property. In an attempt to do this, we issue various types of watches, warnings, and advisories to alert you, the public, of impending hazardous weather that is either occurring or could possibly occur in your area. Knowing that hazardous weather is possible is one thing, but what should you do if hazardous weather is threatening you and/or your family?

When hazardous weather occurs, seconds can literally mean the difference between life and death. Staying calm and knowing the correct instructions to follow could save your life. This is why the

National Weather Service in Jackson, MS believes it is important to educate people about severe weather safety and preparedness. In our efforts to accomplish this task, we offer various forms of outreach, such as talks and setting up booths at area events, just to name a few. We provide these services for any community, school, public/private group, or business that is interested in learning about severe weather safety and how to prepare for it. We also offer office tours that allow you to see what the National Weather Service is and what we do.

If you would like to schedule to have someone come and talk to your community, school, group, business or if you would like for us to set up a booth at your next event, please contact Steve

Wilkinson, Alan Campbell, Joanne Culin, or Latrice Maxie. If you would like to schedule an office tour, please contact Marty Pope. All can be reached at the National Weather Service in Jackson, MS at (601) 936-2189.



Cream: Jackson, MS service area
Blue: Memphis, TN service area
Purple: New Orleans, LA service area
Green: Mobile, AL service area

Thank You!

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