

## Top Ten Weather Events for 2008 for Northern Illinois and Northwest Indiana

By Jim Allsopp, Warning Coordination Meteorologist

### January 7 - Record Warmth and Rare Winter Tornado

Strong south winds brought unseasonably mild and humid air into northern Illinois and northwest Indiana on January 7. The high temperature of 65 and low temperature of 51 at Chicago O'Hare were both new records for the date. Rockford's high of 63 was also a record. Thunderstorms developed by early afternoon, and a tornado watch was issued for northern Illinois. A supercell thunderstorm developed over Ogle County and produced a swath of hail over the west and north sides of Rockford, as it continued to gather strength over Winnebago County. The storm eventually produced a tornado from just north of Poplar Grove, in Boone County, to just east of Lawrence, in McHenry County. The storm continued northeast producing additional tornadoes in southern Wisconsin.

The Boone-McHenry tornado was rated EF3. The twister damaged an apple orchard, several homes and farm outbuildings, and it derailed a freight train. This was only the second tornado ever documented in northern Illinois in the month of January. The only other tornado produced F2 damage in Kankakee County on January 25, 1950. There were many similarities between the 1950 and 2008 events. Chicago also set a record high temperature (67 degrees) on January 25, 1950.



*Tornado debris on a pile of old snow near Poplar Grove, IL. Photo by Jim Allsopp*

### **January 8 to 11 – Flooding at Pontiac, Watseka, Rensselaer**

After thunderstorms produced tornadoes along the Illinois-Wisconsin border on January 7, additional storms dumped heavy rain over parts of east central Illinois and northwest Indiana on the 8th. Three to five inches of rain fell over Livingston, Ford and Iroquois Counties in Illinois eastward into Newton and Jasper Counties in Indiana. The heavy rain combined with snow melt, resulted in flooding of the Iroquois and Vermilion Rivers, which inundated sections of Pontiac, Watseka and Rensselaer. One man drowned while trying to evacuate his home in Remington.



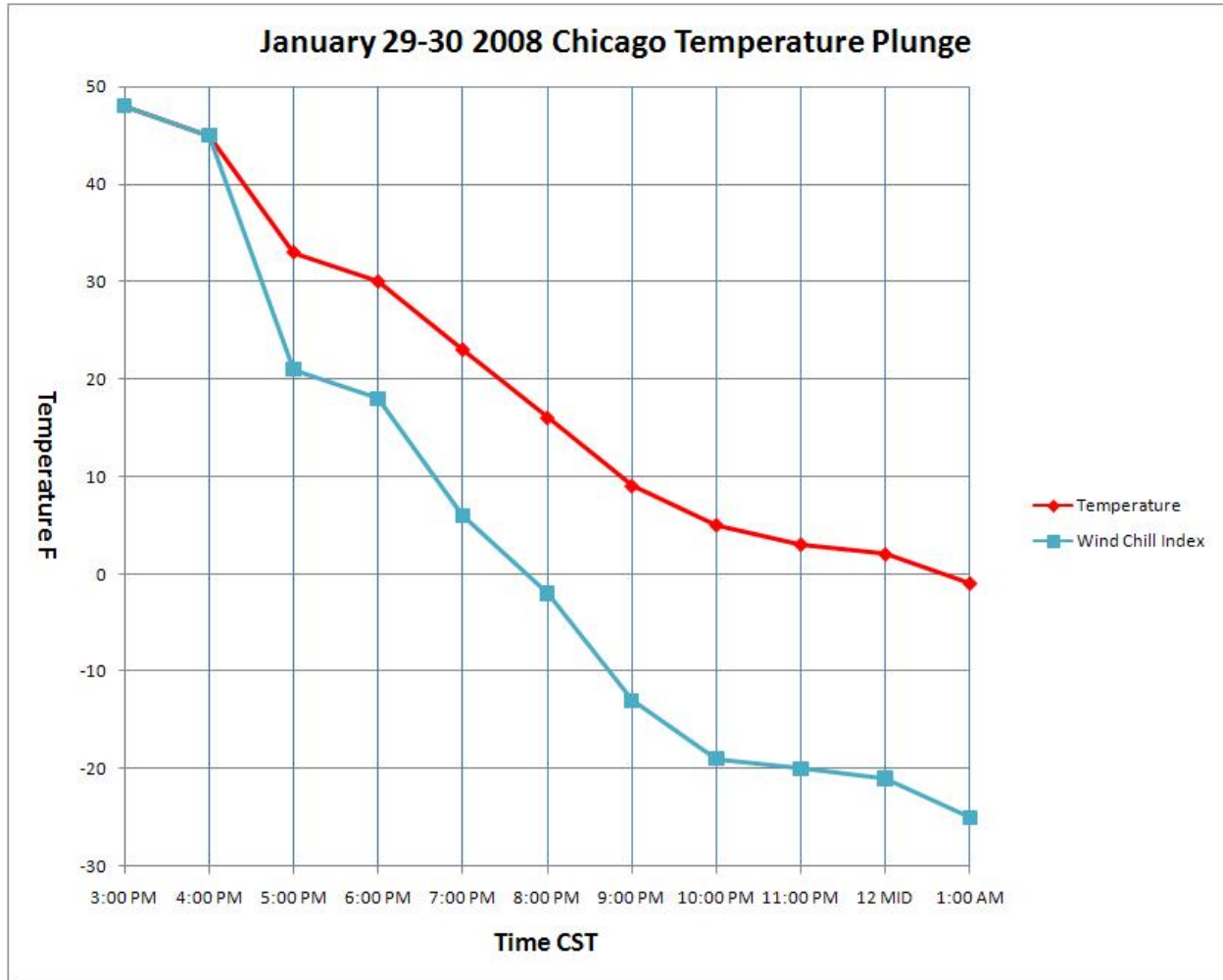
*Flooding in Pontiac. Photo by Scott Petersen - Pontiac Flying Service*

### **Late January, Early February - Winter Weather**

The winter of 2007-2008 was long, wet, and snowy. Chicago had 60.3 inches of snow for the season, making it the 7<sup>th</sup> snowiest all-time. Rockford had 72.9 inches of snow, the second greatest seasonal snowfall in history. There were many winter events to consider for this list, but the worst of winter was a series of events that occurred over a two week period in late January and early February.

### **January 29 through Feb 1 – Winter Blast and Snow Storm**

On January 29 a sharp cold front blasted through the area. Ahead of the front temperatures climbed into the upper 40s and showers and thunderstorms developed. Behind the front, snow and winds gusting to near 50 mph created near-blizzard conditions in the evening. The mercury tumbled and by shortly after midnight of the 30<sup>th</sup>, temperatures had plunged 50 degrees to near zero. Wind chill temperatures dipped to 25 to 35 degrees below zero across northern IL and northwest IN.



This was followed by a snow storm on January 31 and February 1. Six inches to nearly a foot of snow fell, with the heaviest in the Fox Valley. Aurora reported 12 inches and Batavia had 11.5 inches.

**February 5 and 6 – Super Tuesday Snowstorm**

Old Man Winter wasn't done yet. A few days later, on February 5 and 6, another snow storm blanketed the far northern part of Illinois with 6 to 15 inches of snow. Some of the larger totals included 15.1 inches at Antioch, 14.0 inches at Woodstock, and 11.3 inches at Rockford.

This snow fell on the cold side of a powerful storm system. On the warm side, a major tornado outbreak occurred over the lower Mississippi and Tennessee River Valleys. There were 84 tornadoes which resulted in 57 fatalities. Five of the tornadoes were rated EF4. It was the deadliest tornado outbreak since the "Superoutbreak" of April 1974.

### **February 10 - Frigid Weather**

Four days later on Sunday, February 10 the coldest day of the winter occurred. Temperatures dipped below zero and winds howled at 20 to 30 mph, with a few gusts to near 40 mph. The resulting wind chill temperatures were -25 to -35.

### **March 21 - Welcome to Spring**

After a long, wet, snowy winter, many residents were anxiously awaiting the arrival of spring. On March 21, the first full day of spring, 5 to 11 inches of snow fell across part of northern Illinois, affecting an area from Rockford to the north suburbs of Chicago. The heaviest snow was 11.0 inches at Gurnee, and 10.0 inches at Beach Park.

### **June 7 - Tornadoes southwest of Chicago**

Supercell thunderstorms developed across LaSalle and Livingston Counties during the afternoon of Saturday June 7. The Livingston County storm produced a couple of tornadoes west of Odell and Dwight. The storm reorganized and produced a series of tornadoes from northwest Kankakee County, across Will County and into south suburban Cook County before dissipating at the Indiana state line. A total of eight tornadoes occurred, four of them were rated EF-2. At one point, one of the tornadoes was estimated to be at least a quarter of a mile wide in rural Will County. Several homes were destroyed in Will County. Large, metal trussed, high tension power line towers were damaged near Monee, closing I-57. Apartments and businesses were damaged in Richton Park, University Park, and Chicago Heights.



*Large “wedge” tornado near Wilton Center in Will County June 7 – photo by Amy Pavlik*

### **June 15 to 18 - Fox, Des Plaines, and Rock River Flood**

A wet and snowy winter and spring left the ground saturated and rivers swollen over southern Wisconsin and northern Illinois. Several rounds of thunderstorms with additional heavy rain occurred in early June. This sent area rivers to near record levels. June rainfall totals of 5 to 9 inches were reported from Winnebago to Lake Counties in far northern Illinois, while some locations in southern Wisconsin recorded in excess of 10 inches. The Fox River set a record crest at New Munster, Wisconsin on the 15th. Downstream in Lake and McHenry Counties many homes and businesses were impacted as well as the Chain of Lakes State Park. In Winnebago County, the Rock River reached the second highest crest on record at Rockton on June 18. An area from Roscoe through Machesney Park and Loves Park, north of Rockford, was hardest hit by the flood. Several hundred homes were inundated.



*Flooding of the Rock River in Machesney Park. Photo by Jim Allsopp*

### **August 4 - Derecho**

A well organized, long lasting, bowing line of thunderstorms, known as a derecho, marched across northern Illinois on August 4. The powerful storms produced a widespread swath of 50 to 70 mph winds, knocking down trees, limbs, and power lines. Localized wind gusts of 70 to 90 mph occurred. The storms were also accompanied by thousands of cloud to ground lightning strikes and heavy downpours. Wrigley Field was evacuated during a Cubs game. There were six small, brief tornadoes embedded along the front flank of the line of storms. Tornadoes struck twice in Bloomingdale, and also hit Bolingbrook, Orland Park, and Griffith, Indiana. The strongest tornado was at Griffith, where EF-2 damage occurred. A separate storm produced a tornado near Boswell in Benton County Indiana later that night.



*Tornado damage in Griffith, IN. Photo by Tim Halbach*

### **September 13 and 14 - Flood**

The remnants of Hurricane Gustav provided 2 to 4 inches of widespread rainfall across northern Illinois and northwest Indiana during the first week of September in an area that had been very dry. This was welcome relief at the time, though it set the stage for trouble.

One week later, remnants of tropical storm Lowell came out of the Pacific Ocean and moved across a stationary front, producing heavy rainfall across northern Illinois and northwest Indiana late Friday night September 12 and during the morning of Saturday September 13. One band of heavy rain was along the Illinois/Kankakee River Valley and another swath was across Kane, northern DuPage, and northern Cook Counties. Another wave of heavy rainfall came Saturday night and Sunday September 14 as remnants of tropical storm Ike moved up from Galveston and Houston. This time the heaviest rain was concentrated across the south suburbs, east central Illinois and northwest Indiana.

Rainfall totals for the weekend were 5 to 10 inches across much of the area. The heaviest amounts, up to eleven inches, fell near Valparaiso. The heavy rain caused flash flooding of roads, basements, creeks and small streams – including Salt Creek

and the DuPage River in DuPage County, and the north branch of the Chicago River and Little Calumet River in Cook County and Lake County IN. The run off eventually reached the larger streams. There was record or near record flooding at Shelby, IN on the Kankakee River, at Des Plaines and Riverside along the Des Plaines River, and at Morris and LaSalle on the Illinois River. The heavy rain and flooding resulted in four fatalities and around 100 million dollars in damages.



*Flooding in downtown Des Plaines. Photo courtesy of CLTV.*