**June 2026 update to CSU's seasonal Atlantic hurricane forecast reduces numbers, continues prediction of below-average season**

**By MarComm. Staff**

***Note to reporters:*** *The CSU team will issue forecast additional updates on July 8 and Aug. 5. All information, including this release and future updates, will be stored at tropical.colostate.edu. Multimedia assets, including video interview clips and other imagery, are available by request. Please contact Jennifer Dimas (Jennifer.Dimas@colostate.edu) or Joshua Rhoten (Joshua.Rhoten@colostate.edu) for English and Spanish media inquiries and if you would like to be included in future news release sends.*

Colorado State University hurricane researchers have reduced their original forecast slightly and continue to call for a below-average Atlantic hurricane season with their updated 2026 projection. CSU's Tropical Cyclones, Radar, Atmospheric Modeling, and Software Team, in the Department of Atmospheric Science, cites the increased likelihood of a moderate to strong El Niño as a primary factor for the prediction of 11 named storms (e.g., tropical storms and hurricanes), of which they anticipate five to become hurricanes and two to become major hurricanes (Category 3+ on the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale). These numbers are below the long-term seasonal average of 14, seven and three, respectively. For reference, the April forecast called for 13, six and two, respectively.

El Niño, a recurring climate pattern that is characterized by warmer than normal water in the eastern and central tropical Pacific, tends to increase upper-level westerly winds across the Caribbean into the tropical Atlantic. These winds result in increased vertical wind shear, which is unfavorable for Atlantic hurricane formation and intensification. Moderate to strong El Niño events generally have a stronger tropical Atlantic vertical wind shear impact than weak El Niño events.

The tropical Pacific currently has warm neutral El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) conditions. These conditions are forecast to transition to El Niño shortly. While the intensity of the El Niño remains uncertain, the CSU team anticipates that a moderate to strong El Niño is very likely by the peak of the Atlantic hurricane season from August–October.

Currently, waters in the western tropical Atlantic are near average, while they are cooler than normal in the central and eastern tropical Atlantic. Overall, current sea surface temperatures across the tropical and subtropical Atlantic present mixed signals for the hurricane season. While the eastern subtropical Atlantic is relatively warm, favoring above-normal Atlantic hurricane activity, the relatively cool waters in the eastern and central tropical Atlantic favor below-normal hurricane activity. Warmer water temperatures in the Atlantic favor an above-average season, since a hurricane's fuel source is warm ocean water. Additionally, a warm Atlantic leads to lower atmospheric level pressure and a less stable atmosphere. Both conditions favor hurricane formation.

Given the marginal signals in the Atlantic and the increased likelihood for a moderate to strong El Niño, the CSU forecast team is now more confident in its prediction of a below-normal 2026 season.

**How does CSU put its seasonal hurricane forecast together?**

The team bases its forecasts on a statistical model, as well as four models that use a combination of statistics and predictions of the large-scale conditions. These models are developed at the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF), the UK Met Office, the Japan Meteorological Agency and the Centro Euro-Mediterraneo sui Cambiamenti Climatici. They each use 25 to 40 years of historical hurricane season data and evaluate variables such as Atlantic sea surface temperature, sea level pressure, vertical wind shear, the ENSO phenomenon and other factors. For the first time this year, the CSU team is also utilizing a machine learning-based model called the Ai2 Climate Emulator (ACE2), which is run with predicted sea surface temperatures from the ECMWF climate model. Most of the model guidance points toward somewhat below-average activity.

“So far, the 2026 hurricane season is exhibiting characteristics similar to the 1957, 1965, 1987, 1997, 2009 and 2015 seasons,” said Phil Klotzbach, a senior research scientist in the Department of Atmospheric Science at CSU and lead author of the report.

“Our analog seasons all had below-average Atlantic hurricane activity,” Klotzbach said. “The relative lack of activity in our analog seasons increases our confidence in a below-normal 2026 Atlantic hurricane season.”

The team predicts that 2026 hurricane activity will be about 60% of the average season from 1991–2020. By comparison, 2025’s hurricane activity was about 105% of the average season. The most significant hurricane of the 2025 Atlantic hurricane season was Hurricane Melissa, which made landfall as a Category 5 hurricane in Jamaica, resulting in about $12 billion in damage and causing 93 fatalities across the Caribbean.

The team also forecasts the Accumulated Cyclone Energy (ACE) occurring west of 60 degrees west longitude. This is an integrated metric accounting for storm frequency, intensity and duration in the western half of the Atlantic Basin that has proven to be useful for landfall probability prediction. ACE generated west of 60 degrees correlates better with landfalling storms in the Atlantic Basin than basinwide ACE, since virtually all hurricane-prone landmasses in the Atlantic Ocean are located west of 60 degrees west.

Generally, a slightly lower percentage of basinwide ACE occurs west of 60 degrees west in El Niño years relative to La Niña years. Since the team anticipates El Niño as the most likely scenario in 2026, the percentage of basinwide ACE occurring west of 60 degrees west is predicted to be somewhat lower in 2026.

This is the 43rd year that CSU has issued an Atlantic forecast. The late Professor Emeritus Bill Gray originated the seasonal forecasts at CSU and launched the report in 1984. He continued to author them until his death in 2016. The authors of this year's forecast are Phil Klotzbach, Michael Bell, Levi Silvers, Juhyun Lee, Delián Cólon-Burgos and Nicholas Mesa. The CSU-RAMS Team is part of the Department of Atmospheric Science in the Walter Scott, Jr. College of Engineering at CSU. The department is home to one of the top-ranked atmospheric science programs in the world.

The CSU forecast is intended to provide a best estimate of activity in the Atlantic during the upcoming season – not an exact measure.

As always, the researchers caution coastal residents to take proper precautions.

"It takes only one storm near you to make this an active season for you," Michael Bell said.

**Hurricane landfalling probability included in 2026 report**

The report also includes the following probability of major hurricanes making landfall in 2026:

- 24% for the entire U.S. coastline (average from 1880–2020 is 43%).
- 11% for the U.S. East Coast, including the Florida Peninsula (average from 1880–2020 is 21%).
- 14% for the Gulf Coast from the Florida panhandle west to Brownsville, Texas (average from 1880–2020 is 27%).
- 26% for the Caribbean (average from 1880–2020 is 47%).

The forecast team also provides probabilities of named storms, hurricanes and major hurricanes tracking within 50 miles of each county or parish along the Gulf and U.S. East Coast, as well as hurricane-prone coastal states, Mexican states, Canadian provinces and countries in Central America and the Caribbean. These probabilities for regions and countries are adjusted based on the current seasonal forecast.

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**ATLANTIC BASIN SEASONAL HURRICANE FORECAST FOR 2026**

| Forecast Parameter and 1991–2020 Average (in parentheses) | Issue Date 9 April 2026 | Issue Date 10 June 2026 |
|---|---|---|
| Named Storms (14.4) | 13 | 11 |
| Named Storm Days (69.4) | 55 | 45 |
| Hurricanes (7.2) | 6 | 5 |
| Hurricane Days (27.0) | 20 | 15 |
| Major Hurricanes (3.2) | 2 | 2 |
| Major Hurricane Days (7.4) | 5 | 4 |
| Accumulated Cyclone Energy Index (123) | 90 | 70 |
| ACE West of 60°W (73) | 50 | 35 |
| Net Tropical Cyclone Activity (135%) | 100 | 80 |