

Publication: Jnl Final Edition 8/2005-today; Date: Aug 25, 2008; Section: Obituaries; Page: C3



Almanac: Ready Your Long Johns

Publication predicts colder-than-average winter this year

By Jerry Harkavy The Associated Press

LEWISTON, Maine — People worried about the high cost of keeping warm this winter will draw little comfort from the Farmers' Almanac, which predicts below-average temperatures for most of the U.S.

"Numb's the word," says the 192-year-old publication, which claims an accuracy rate of 80 percent to 85 percent for its forecasts that are prepared two years in advance.

The almanac's 2009 edition, which goes on sale Tuesday, says at least two-thirds of the country can expect colder-than-average temperatures this winter, with only the Far West and Southeast in line for near-normal readings.

"This is going to be catastrophic for millions of people," said almanac editor Peter Geiger.

The almanac predicts abovenormal snowfall for the Great Lakes and Midwest, especially during January and February, and above-normal precipitation for the Southwest in December and for the Southeast in January and February. The Northeast and Mid-Atlantic regions will likely have an unusually wet or snowy February, the almanac said.

In contrast, the usually wet Pacific Northwest could be a bit drier than normal in February.

Looking ahead to summer, the almanac foresees near-normal temperatures in most places. But much of the Southwest should prepare for unusually hot weather in June and July, while Florida, Georgia and the Carolinas will get oppressive July heat and humidity.

The almanac — not to be confused with the New Hampshire-based Old Farmer's Almanac, which is 26 years older — attributes its forecasts to reclusive prognosticator Caleb Weatherbee, who uses a secret formula based on sunspots, the position of the planets and the tidal action of the moon.

Weatherbee's outlook is borne out by e-mails the almanac has received in recent days from readers who have spotted signs of nature they say point to a rough winter, Geiger said. These folklore signs range from an abundance of acorns already on the ground to the frequency of fog in August.

The almanac is at odds with the National Weather Service, whose trends-based outlook calls for warmer than normal weather this winter over much of the country, including Alaska, said Ed O'Lenic, chief of the operations branch at NOAA's Climate Prediction Center. The almanac and the weather service are in sync, however, in pointing to a chance of a drier winter in the Northwest.

O'Lenic wouldn't comment specifically on the almanac's ability to forecast the weather two years from now, but said it's generally impossible to come up with accurate forecasts more than a week in advance.

"Of course it's possible to prepare a forecast with any lead time you like. Whether or nor that forecast has any accuracy or usable skill is another question," he said.

Geiger sticks to his guns, saying the almanac was on target in the 2008 edition when it said the Northeast and the Great Lakes would have a long, cold winter with lots of snow.

The almanac claims a circulation of about 3.5 million. Most are sold to banks, insurance companies and other businesses that give them away. Other versions are sold by retailers in the U.S. and Canada.

Circulation has dropped in recent years, a reflection of a trend that affects many print publications. The almanac has been increasing emphasis on its Web site and also offers a half-hour program that airs weekly on about 90 percent of the nation's public television stations.

However, some aspects of the almanac never change. The 2009 retail edition has the usual mix of helpful hints, recipes, gardening tips, riddles, anecdotes, corny jokes and inspirational messages.

If there's a theme to this year's almanac, it's environmental awareness, frugality and living a sustainable life. There are articles on water conservation, gas-sipping motor scooters, natural cures and growing food without a yard.

Online

Almanac: www.farmersalmanac.com/