



THE ATMOSPHERIC RESERVOIR

Examining the Atmosphere and Atmospheric Resource Management

A Winter to Remember

By Mark D. Schneider

Meteorological winter began December 1 and ended February 29 (this year being a leap year). Some of the highlights from the winter season included Fargo and Grand Forks recording their warmest winters on record, Jamestown and Williston finishing second warmest, Bismarck fourth, and Dickinson and Minot seventh. A record warm December started the winter season with Williston having its warmest on record, Dickinson tied for warmest, Bismarck and Jamestown their second warmest, and Minot's December placed fourth. The U.S. had its warmest December on record dating back 130 years.

Most of us remember the one really cold period this winter when subzero highs lasted for a few days in mid-January. However, when you average the temperatures from that one cold snap into the entire three-month period, they become relatively insignificant. Megan Jones, Climate Program Leader for the National Weather Service Bismarck explained that "the extreme Arctic air in January had little impact on the overall seasonal temperature anomalies." Looking at the statewide winter departure-from-normal temperature map, one can see this more clearly.

The end of winter held records of its own with Bismarck reaching 64 degrees on February 26 and then cooling off to 3 degrees the next morning. The 61-degree temperature difference set a record for Bismarck's largest temperature change in a 24-hour period.

Temperatures weren't the only element that made this winter one for the record books. In January, Divide County only received 0.03 inches of precipitation, making it the driest county in the entire U.S. for the month. Megan Jones stated that "precipitation was overall below normal across the state, with the main exception (being) the eastern part of the state that was heavily impacted by the Christmas ice storm." Jones also commented on statewide snowfall for the winter season remarking that "snowfall was well below average during meteorological winter, which is also not super surprising, given the warm temperatures, and El Niño events typically skew towards less snow than normal for the full snow season total."

