

Current forecasts suggest the state will not see any significant increase in precipitation this winter to reverse the drought, according to the state climatologist at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

“We’re probably going to see a more normal winter,” said Al Dutcher, state climatologist in the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources at UNL.

December through February typically is a dry period for the state, he said.

“To eliminate the drought, we would have to set a record snow season, and even then, I don’t know if it would be enough,” he said.

Those hoping winter will be more like last year’s with above normal temperatures also are most likely out of luck.

Dutcher said the critical period to determine if the state will have another significant drought will be March into next spring.

“It’s going to take an exceptionally wet pattern next April through May to have a decent shot at reducing the drought,” he said.

Dutcher said as the state progresses through this fall, forecasts are backing off on a projected El Nino event, which would typically bring cooler and wetter conditions to the southern one-third of the United States.

“Models were indicating a potential El Nino into the late summer, but sea surface temperatures haven’t cooperated,” he said.

Sea surface temperatures must average at least 0.9 Fahrenheit above normal for three consecutive months in the central and eastern Pacific Equatorial Basin to qualify for an El Nino weather pattern.

“There will be occasional bursts of the southern jet that will resemble El Nino, but then we’ll have a more normalized winter pattern with a big player being the northern jet stream,” he said.

Dutcher said the problem last winter was La Nina and the northern jet remained far north and kept very cold air from infiltrating the southern and northern plains. Currently the state is not in a La Nina or El Nino weather pattern.

Dutcher said the northern jet stream already has carved out significant troughing east of the Rocky Mountains bringing decent snow pack in central and southern Canada and the northern third of North Dakota.

“Therefore, we do have a snow foundation in place, so that will make a big difference. It should reduce the likelihood that we’ll see the extent of the above normal temperature pattern that we experienced last winter,” he said.

Dutcher said portions of the Nebraska Panhandle have nearly accumulated half the snow it received last year. And while central and eastern Nebraska hasn’t seen any substantial snowfall yet, there is light snow in the forecast this week.