

By Jan Rahn

Managing Editor

This month would be a good time to employ the old cliché, “If you don’t like the weather, stick around a while and it will change.” Here in southwest Nebraska, a change for the better would definitely be welcome.

Bitter cold the first week of a brand new year followed a holiday storm that hindered travel during Christmas week and resulted in several traffic-related deaths across Nebraska.

The year 2010 started out with a severe cold weather pattern. One week ago, temperatures dipped to -5 with -25 wind chill in the area. In looking back at 2009, there were several weather events that are also recorded as severe or unusual.

For example, during a “January thaw” in 2009, several locations across western Nebraska recorded multiple consecutive days when temperatures reached 60 degrees or above.

According to records from the National Weather Service that date back to the late 1800s, there are only a handful of three or more consecutive days when highs reached or exceeded 60 degrees in January.

One year ago, temperatures in January fit into the thaw category when three consecutive days from Jan. 20-22, reached 62 degrees, 61 degrees and 63 degrees, consecutively.

Fast forward to April 2009—when heavy snow and blizzard conditions were reported across most of western and north central Nebraska. Several inches of snow closed schools, halted travel and endangered livestock.

Winds with gusts as high as 51 mph at Imperial and 49 mph at Ogallala reduced visibility down to 100 yards during the late afternoon and evening hours of April 4. Interstate 80 was closed Saturday night, April 4, and snow plows were pulled off the roads due to hazardous conditions, reported the National Weather Service.

June was the month for tornadoes with nine of the summer's 14 confirmed during that month. According to the NWS, there are an average of 11 tornado days per year in western and north central Nebraska.

Confirmed tornadoes were recorded in eight counties, with three of the counties reporting more than one tornado.

The majority of confirmed tornadoes in 2009 were rated EF-0 on the Enhanced Fujita scale, however, three strong EF-2 rated tornadoes did occur—one touched down seven miles north of O'Neill on March 23, another three miles north of Newport on June 24, and one seven miles south of Crookston on July 13.

An unseasonably cool summer saw average temperatures up to five degrees cooler than normal. North Platte recorded its seventh coolest summer on record, Imperial its sixth coolest.

According to the NWS, a moderate to strong El Niño pattern that developed over the tropical Pacific dominated the upper Midwest with a trough of low pressure.

This pattern resulted in cooler temperatures and wetter than normal conditions over the central plains and upper Midwest. Neither North Platte nor Valentine recorded temperatures of 100 degrees or greater—a rare occurrence over western and north central Nebraska in mid to late summer.

Numerous thunderstorms with wind and hail damaged or destroyed wheat, corn and soy beans in Perkins County.

It seemed winter arrived when October arrived with record breaking snowfall.

The month of October 2009 is the second coldest month on record as the result of three major snowstorms hitting the area—the first on Oct. 9-10, the second on Oct. 22, and the third system on Oct. 29-30.

Five cattle died as the result of a semi-trailer rollover during the month's final storm that pounded Perkins County, bringing 10.5 inches of snow to the Grant area, 10 inches in Madrid, seven inches northwest of Madrid and just over eight-and-a-half three miles south of Grant.