

# Since La Niña is a no-show, does that give us hope for rain this winter?

**Steve Scauzillo, Los Angeles Newspaper Group, 9-30-16**

It's an infamous milestone at best.

Friday marked the end of the California water year. The fifth consecutive year of the drought is officially in the books.

Some measure calendar years, others fiscal years. But the state Department of Water Resources measures water years from Oct. 1 through Sept. 30. This governmental machination aside, the point remains the same: We have had five years of drought.

## **What's next?**

I asked Bill Patzert, the climatologist with the biggest media presence since Dallas Raines, to put on his forecast hat. Here's some of what he had to say:

First, the El Niño that was a bust in Southern California last winter was a whopper in other places, like Texas, Mexico and the Pacific Northwest. Even much of Northern California got average, to above-average rainfall in some spots.

That red blotch on the NASA/JPL animation shows a rise in sea surface height in the central Pacific. In other words, that El Niño is still hanging around! He's like the nightmare house guest who drinks too much of your liquor but won't leave the party.

Second, predictions by national climatologists of a condition that usually brings dry, rainless winters to Southern California — a La Niña — um, ain't happening, Patzert said on Friday. "So far, it has not happened," he said.

What we have now, at the start of a new water year, is what Patzert called a head scratcher that's crashing the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's computer models.

"We have no La Niña. And we have a residual of El Niño and a very warm blob in the Northern Pacific," Patzert said. "It is unusual conditions."

## **Oookaaay. So now what.**

Patzert believes the remnant of El Niño, combined with the no-show La Niña, may "leave the door open a crack" for some rainfall this winter in Southern California. "There is some hope here because of the absence of La Niña."

That takes guts, especially for a guy who predicted El Niño's bounty. But Patzert never runs from a fight.

He's always said El Niños are not historically the answer to L.A.'s droughts. Throughout history, they've only provided 12 percent of the region's rainfall.

Most of our rain comes from two sources: 1. Storms from the northern Pacific that come down the West Coast

as a result of cut-off lows. 2. Atmospheric rivers that start out in the tropics (commonly known as the Pineapple Express).

Could that remnant El Niño spawn atmospheric rivers in November and December? Patzert says it's a possibility, as long as the La Niña stays home. Or La Niña could be a late bloomer, show up in winter and spoil the party, he said.

He doesn't know. No one really knows.

So here's what we do know:

Southern California has had the five driest consecutive years ever. Ever. No five-year period has been drier dating back to rainfall records from the 1870s.

Although some reservoirs in Northern California were filled, the drought has dropped local water tables to record low depths. This has set off a buying spree from local water agencies trying to pump life back into the Main San Gabriel Basin (and others) using this temporary Northern California bonus.

How long will that extra supply last? (If you know the answer to that one, call me. I need a big scoop).

### **Is global warming and drought for real?**

Ask my bougainvillea. It fried in the heat this summer and early fall.

"You would be irresponsible not to plan for another drought year," Patzert advised.