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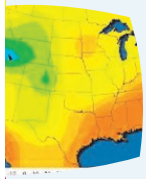

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ISSUE 2 | SPRING | 2013

Tallahassee topics

NEWS AND NOTES FROM YOUR LOCAL NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE OFFICE.

The National Weather Service (NWS) office in Tallahassee, FL provides weather, hydrologic, and climate forecasts and warnings for Southeast Alabama, Southwest & South Central Georgia, the Florida Panhandle and Big Bend, and the adjacent Gulf of Mexico coastal waters. Our primary mission is the protection of life and property and the enhancement of the local economy.

FSU's Operational Meteorology Class Ongoing This Semester

By Mark Wool

Every spring semester, the Florida State University Department of Earth, Ocean and Atmospheric Sciences' Meteorology offers a course called *Operational Meteorology* (MET 4705). The class introduces the students to the various programs conducted by the National Weather Service, including the Public, Severe Weather, Marine, Aviation, Hydrology, Tropical, and Fire Weather Programs. Additionally, the course offers an introduction to lightning, radar, severe weather forecasting, winter weather, tropical cyclone prediction, and NWS computer models and guidance. Classes are conducted in a seminar format with presentations given by local NWS personnel, as well as invited experts. Typically, our Science & Operations Officer (SOO) proctors this course. However, since that position is currently vacant, two of our lead forecasters, Parks Camp and Jeff Fournier, stepped up to fill that role. Several other staff members have taught one or more lessons. They include Jane Hollingsworth, Jeffry Evans, Joel Lanier, Mark Wool, Tim Barry, Kelly Godsey and Alex Lamers. Guest speaker, Richard Pasch, of the National Hurricane Center teaches two lessons on tropical meteorology. Bernard Meisner of NWS Southern Region HQ leads two sections on numerical weather prediction. Finally, former SOO, Irv Watson leads a lesson on radar meteorology.

New Situational Awareness Display

By Katherine Moore

Recently, our office finished updating its situational awareness display to keep us more aware of news and weather situations. The situational awareness display is comprised of one large TV screen and six smaller TV screens. The main screen is connected to an office PC, which is running a script that displays national observations and forecast data, area webcams, a map of our office's active watches, warnings, and advisories, the local and UTC time, and a list of products currently in effect. Four of the six smaller TVs are tuned to various national and local news channels to increase our awareness of any potential dangerous situations. One of these TVs is tuned to the Weather Channel or Weather scan channel to ensure that any warnings we issue are properly distributed. The other two TVs are connected to our computers processing radar data, so we can quickly check the status of the radars and quickly see any changes in the radar statuses.

Employee Spotlight
Jim Bolden

Observation Program Leader (OPL) since December 2013

By Katherine Moore & Jim Bolden

Q: When you were in the Air Force as a weather observer and forecaster, what were some of your typical job tasks?
A: *Initially, I was assisting forecasters, plotting surface charts, and getting trained on the old school (FPS '77) radar. In CO Springs, I went to the air force academy and learned to take observations. In Niagra Falls, I took observations for the National Guard (which was also at the airport) for a year. I went to forecaster school in 1980 at Chanute Air Force Base and then I was a forecaster at McDill and Williams Air Force Bases. I gave forecasts for the air force pilots and you'd get a lot of instant feedback.*

Q: What was the best/worst part about your job as a weather observer and forecaster in the Air Force?
A: *The best part was seeing places I would have never seen or gone to on my own.*
The worst part was that you never knew when you'd get orders to move. You might have great friends and co workers and the next day you could get orders to leave and move to someplace you've never been before where you don't know anybody.

Q: How did you get your start in the National Weather Service?
A: *When my 8 years were coming up and I was at Williams Air Force Base, I started talking to the MIC at the Phoenix office on a regular basis about working for the National Weather Service. Luckily 6 days after I left my job as a forecaster at Williams Air Force base, I started as an SMT (supervisory meteorological technician). I was working Monday to Friday 9-5 and then I decided to move to Florida and work rotating shifts because I missed the beaches and my family.*

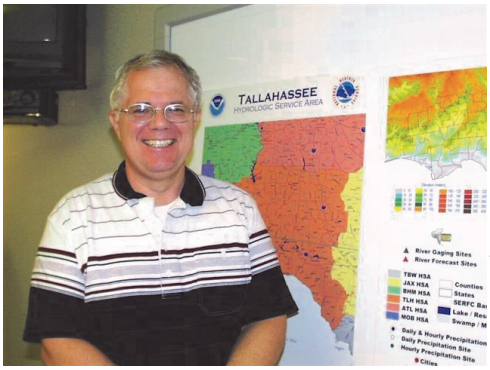
Q: How does it feel to be the staff member who has been here the longest?
A: *Old, I guess. I have a pretty good perspective of where we've been and where we are now. You really had to multitask when I first came here and it could be really stressful. Now it's not as stressful.*

Q: What are some of the biggest changes you've seen the office go through (ex. duties, staff, ideology)?
A: *The modernization when forecasters showed up, getting a bigger CWA (county warning area), the changes in products associated with forecasting, and the cooperative observer program. In the old cooperative observer program, one guy would take care of all the observing stations in the whole state.*

Q: What's the best/worst part of your new job as the OPL (Observation Program Leader)?
A: *The best part is the responsibility. I like to take ownership of things. The worst part is not having enough shifts to focus on the cooperative observer work right now while we're understaffed.*

Q: You are the office comedian and roast master extraordinaire for sendoffs, who is (are) your favorite comedian(s)? What's your secret to a good send off speech?
A: *Growing up, I watched all the Bob Hope movies which is pretty old school (this was the '60s and his movies were from the '40s). I like all the comedians, Daniel Tosh, Jerry Seinfeld, Will Ferrell.*
I guess my secret to a good send off speech is finding something quirky about the person who's leaving and embellishing a lot. The hardest part is getting that first laugh, after that it's downhill.

Q: What's your favorite thing to do when you're off duty?
A: *I have too many hobbies. I like to golf, fish, take my dog to the dog park, play guitar. I have more hobbies than I have time for.*



Recent Staffing Changes
By Katherine Moore

We've had some recent changes in our staffing with the retirement of our hydrologist, Joel Lanier (pictured left) and the promotion of one of our HMTs, Jim Bolden, to the Observing Program Leader (OPL) position. Joel Lanier had been working in the government for almost 42 years and was with the National Weather Service for 19 years. He started out in the Navy as a meteorologist, joined the NWS as a hydrologist at the Northwest River Forecast Center (RFC) in 1993, and served with the Tallahassee Weather Forecast Office (WFO) since 1998. We'd like to wish Joel farewell and happy retirement. Jim Bolden who is our spotlighted employee this issue (see above) has served the longest of any current NWS Tallahassee staff member. He also started out in the military as an observer and later as a forecaster in the Air Force in 1975. He joined the NWS in 1983 and has been with the Tallahassee since 1988. Congratulations on your promotion Jim!

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And Online

weather.gov/tae

The National Weather Service's Damage Assessment Toolkit

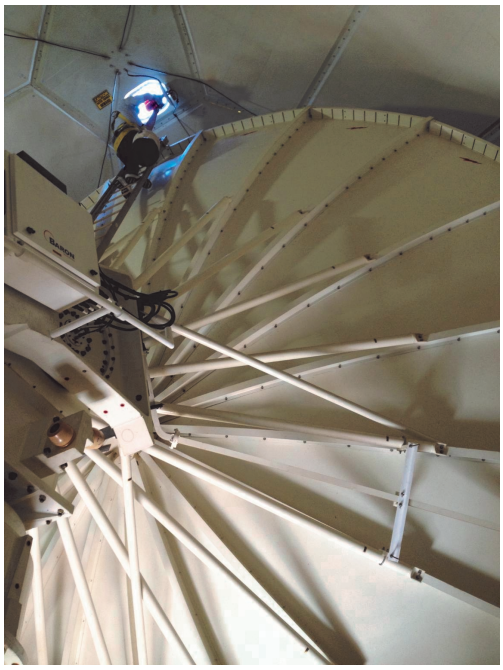
By Parks Camp

The NWS is responsible for assessing and recording storm damage information following severe weather events. This information is used in creating post-storm analyses and incorporated into a NWS storm database to provide a historical record of damage information. NWS Tallahassee, led by senior forecaster Parks Camp, is part of a team that has revolutionized the data collection process using both mobile and Web-based Geographical Information Systems (GIS) to develop a damage assessment toolkit (DAT). This kit uses smart phones and laptop computers to collect and transmit real-time storm damage data and photographs directly from the field to a central data server. Typically, a two-member team is deployed to the damage area where they quality control and aggregate the data to generate a comprehensive storm report before transmission. Once transmitted, this information is available to all DAT participating forecast offices.

The proliferation of Global Positioning System (GPS) technology and its integration into mobile communications devices has opened the door for a revolution in how field work is conducted in the National Weather Service. Timely and spatially accurate data are imperative in storm damage surveys. The media and public are often anxious to know the cause and extent of severe thunderstorm damage. Utilizing mobile communications equipment promises to expedite the storm assessment process to help with these increasing demands. The Damage Assessment Toolkit, allows the National Weather Service to, more accurately and efficiently, document and analyze data from post-event damage assessments.

The Other Side of the National Weather Service By Doug Sherrick

Everyone has heard about the NWS's highly skilled meteorologists, but have you ever wondered who keeps the equipment up and running? The NWS also utilizes equally talented Electronic Technicians (ETs). The Tallahassee office employs an Electronic Systems Analyst, Doug Sherrick, who oversees two technicians, Clifton Bennett and Ron Eimiller. They diligently keep our meteorological equipment working not only in the office but also in the field over our entire area of responsibility which includes Southeast Alabama, Southwest and South Central Georgia, and the Florida Panhandle and Big Bend. This is facilitated by never ending training courses. Although skilled in many areas, Doug specializes in the Advanced Weather Interactive Processing System (AWIPS) computer system, Clifton focuses on our Automated Surface Observing Systems (ASOS) while Ron oversees the Doppler radar. At right, Doug is pictured working high up in the antenna dome of the radar data acquisition unit (RDA) near the airport.



Because equipment needs to be modified or upgraded, and weather occurs all the time, these technicians are on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They also work outside during some of our regions most adverse weather to insure that the meteorologists are equipped with the most reliable data to insure accurate and timely forecasts and warnings for our user community. The NWS Tallahassee could not do all the work it does without the constant help of Doug, Clifton and Ron. Thanks guys!

This Quarter's Focus: *HAM Operators & SKYWARN*

"Hamming it up with NWS Tallahassee" By Dave Barton & Ron Block

The amateur radio community ("HAM") has a long history of being the "eyes on the ground," providing critical communications during severe weather and other emergencies. Additionally, many HAMs are trained severe weather spotters through the NWS SKYWARN program. These attributes make them a natural fit to assist NWS offices. Like many offices, Tallahassee maintains an amateur radio station with two radios (call sign WX4TAE) for use by licensed HAMs during severe weather events. One radio enables communication for Leon County and adjacent counties in Florida and Georgia and a the other one reaches listeners in Southeast Alabama, Southwest and South Central Georgia as well as the western Florida Panhandle. HAM operators may employ a base station radio at home, a mobile car radio or a hand held radio, making SKYWARN trained HAMS valuable spotters during severe weather and tropical events. These reports can then be easily relayed to the National Weather Service office to assist in our warning decisions.

When severe weather threatens, the amateur radio liaison for the Tallahassee office checks to see if WX4TAE needs to be activated. If needed, several HAMs are called and scheduled to operate the station. The remainder are contacted via e-mail, twitter and on-air announcements to activate the WX4TAE station and reminded to provide severe weather reports to the Tallahassee office. This dedicated group has provided invaluable support during many severe weather events. A basic amateur radio license is obtained by passing a 35 question test and a handheld radio can be purchased for well under $100. For more information on the local amateur radio, contact Dave Barton at dave@ai4gf.com or 850-508-2795. SKYWARN training is available through the NWS Tallahassee office, contact Jeff Evans at jeffry.evans@noaa.gov for more information.

Diversity & Outreach Efforts

By Ron Block & Kelly Godsey

The office remains active in both Diversity/EEO as well as outreach activities. During December, the Diversity team published its inaugural Tallahassee Topics newsletter and hosted its initial in-office meeting. This meeting celebrated Native American History and Heritage month. Representative of four Native American tribes and the faculty advisor for the Native American club at Florida State University participated in a lively roundtable, enlightening the staff on their unique heritage and challenges. During the second half of the meeting, the team discussed conflict resolution techniques with an emphasis on improving local office interactions. The next meeting, scheduled for March 19th will highlight Women's History Month and be centered around the theme "Women Making Great Strides in Science". The second half of the meeting will focus on leadership.

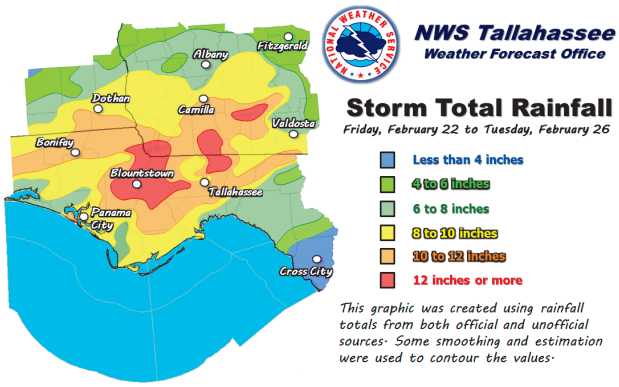
In December, this office hosted six visitors (pictured left) from Krasnodar, Russia, a 'sister city' of Tallahassee. They were briefed by Meteorologist-in-Charge Jane Hollingsworth, forecaster Kelly Godsey and Administrative Assistant Chris Duggan on the myriad responsibilities and available technology utilized by our office to fulfill its mission. In January, TAE was visited by WFXL, the Albany, GA FOX affiliate, to be featured on a news segment about the work we do at the office. During February, Ron Block, senior forecaster and Outreach team coordinator and Jeff Evans, Warning and Coordination Meteorologist (WCM), served as judges at the Capitol Regional Science Fair, the areas largest. Ron also participated in two other NOAA sponsored activities, as an evaluator of presentations for the Hollings Scholarship (see the previous issue of Tallahassee Topics for more scholarship program information), and as an advisor and judge for the Science Olympiad. Participation is planned for next year as well.

In March, the office will be collaborating with TCC and the Florida Dept. of Emergency Management on a table top exercise where a simulation of a tornado event in the Tallahassee area will be exercised. Looking ahead to later in the spring (April and May), two major community outreach events are planned. The office will staff a booth focused on weather safety at Springtime Tallahassee (April 6th) and host our second annual Hurricane Awareness Day (May 16) at the Tallahassee Regional Airport. Three large scale hurricane exercises are also planned with emergency management agencies across the Tri-state area in April and May. These exercises will simulate a large hurricane affecting our forecast area.

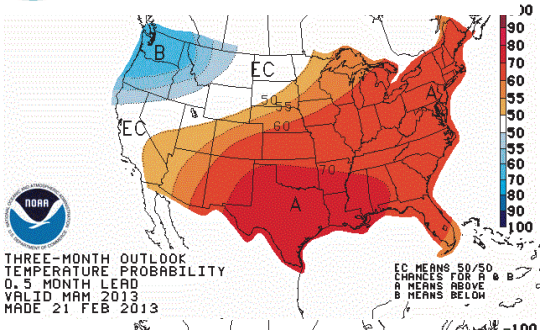
Climate Recap for Winter

By Tim Barry

The climate for Tallahassee during the 3-month period of December 2012 through February 2013 saw temperatures that were warmer than normal. January is our coldest month on average but this past winter was highlighted by the 6th warmest January on record. The monthly average temperature of 59.6 degrees was 8.4 degrees above normal. There was only one freeze in January which normally has 11 and there were only 13 freezes for the entire winter, 13 below normal. The highest temperature recorded at the Tallahassee Regional Airport during winter was 81 degrees on Jan 14th and the lowest was 23 degrees on Feb 17th, our only hard freeze of the winter. The low temperature of 65 degrees on Jan 16th established a new record high minimum temperature for that day.



While rainfall in December was only a little below average, January was very dry with less than one inch making it the 8th driest January on record. The dry weather continued well into February before an unsettled weather pattern brought widespread heavy rains during the last week of winter. Rainfall amounts during the 5-day period from Feb 22nd - 26th were generally 8 to 12 inches across the local Tallahassee area (above right) with 11.36" being the official measurement at TLH. This contributed to making February 2013 the wettest February on record with a total of 12.36". The greatest amount in a 24-hour period was 4.75" on Feb 22nd, a new rainfall record for that day. This was only 0.37" less than what we had received in the previous 12 weeks combined! Another daily rainfall record was set on the Feb 25th with a measured amount of 3.95". Although most of the winter season experienced very dry conditions, rainfall for the 3-month period measured 16.48" which was 2.39" wetter than normal.



Climate Outlook for Spring

By Tim Barry

The latest outlook for spring (March through May) from the Climate Prediction Center (at right) calls for an enhanced chance for experiencing above normal temperatures (60-70% chance) and below normal rainfall (50-55% chance). The average temperature for Tallahassee during spring is 66.9 degrees and the average rainfall is 12.47 inches.