Inside This Issue...

News flash

Newsletter to Be Issued Quarterly!

The combination of survey results from the previous newsletter, with an overall plan to provide more news to our customers through the Internet, has allowed us to issue more frequent editions. Table 1 summarizes the survey results; Table 2 shows our planned issuance cycle. Some changes you may see to the newsletter during the coming year:

- **A New Name.**
- **Special features on our customers, including:**
  - **Skywarn™ Spotters**
  - **Emergency Managers**
  - **The Media**
- **More news about exciting changes at our office**

Thanks to all who participated in the survey! Your input was very important to us.

Table 1. Survey results from Winter Newsletter

Number of survey respondents	**149**
Number of "yes" (quarterly web letter) responses	**138 / 94%**
Number of "no" (bi-annual paper copies) responses	**11 / 6%**
Extrapolated "yes" responses among all spotters:	**1894**
Extrapolated "no" responses among all spotters	**121**

Table 2. Planned issuances for the Newsletter**.**

Issuance Cycle				
Season	**Month**	**Web**	**Paper**	**Brief Description**
Winter	**Jan**	**Y**	**Y**	**Full tropical recap, midwinter review, spring preview**
Spring	**Apr**	**Y**	**N**	**Winter weather recap, early summer weather preview**
Summer	**Jul**	**Y**	**Y**	**Early summer recap, tropical cyclone preview**
Fall	**Oct**	**Y**	**N**	**Full summer recap, partial tropical recap**

Winter 2002 Review

DODGING A BULLET

Freezes deliver only a glancing blow

Freezing temperatures occurred in portions of west central Florida on several occasions between December and early March. However, hard freezes, defined as several hours of temperatures at or below the mid 20s, occurred only across the Nature Coast - an area more accustomed to colder winter nights. The freezes, which occurred both early and late, produced only minor damage to tender vegetation. In fact, the cold weather in early January was welcomed by citrus growers, as noted in the USDA Florida Weekly Crop report from January 14.

Based on preliminary data, 7 freezes affected west central and southwest Florida this winter. Only 4 affected the central counties around Tampa Bay and Lakeland; Lee County was spared, as was the immediate coastline from Pinellas County southward. Table 1 (below) shows the data.

January: A Cold Start, A Warm Finish

January began with ten days of below normal temperatures, as several cold high pressure areas spread south and east from the Canadian Prairies into the southern Plains. North winds east of the high pressure centers ushered cold air into the Florida peninsula. Four freezes were observed within the ten-day period. The air masses, though cold, did not contain frigid arctic air. For example, temperatures across the source regions of southern Canada were only slightly below normal prior to the January 4th and 5th event; above normal values were observed prior to the January 8th and 9th event. Freezing temperature maps for January 5th and 9th are shown in Figures 1 and 2. The lack of a deep snow pack across the central Plains and lower Midwest allowed further moderation of the air masses.

By mid month, the jet stream retreated north, allowing temperatures to return to seasonal levels. For the last 10 days of the month, warm high pressure returned to the peninsula, with temperatures averaging more than 10 degrees above normal.

February: A Warm Start, A Cold Finish

The first few days of February continued warm, but temperatures soon returned to normal as the warm high pressure ridge broke down. Normal temperatures dominated until the final week, when a series of frontal systems brought temperatures below normal once again. The strongest front raced through early on the 27th, accompanied by some of the coldest air of the season. Source region (southern Canada) temperatures were the same as those in early January.

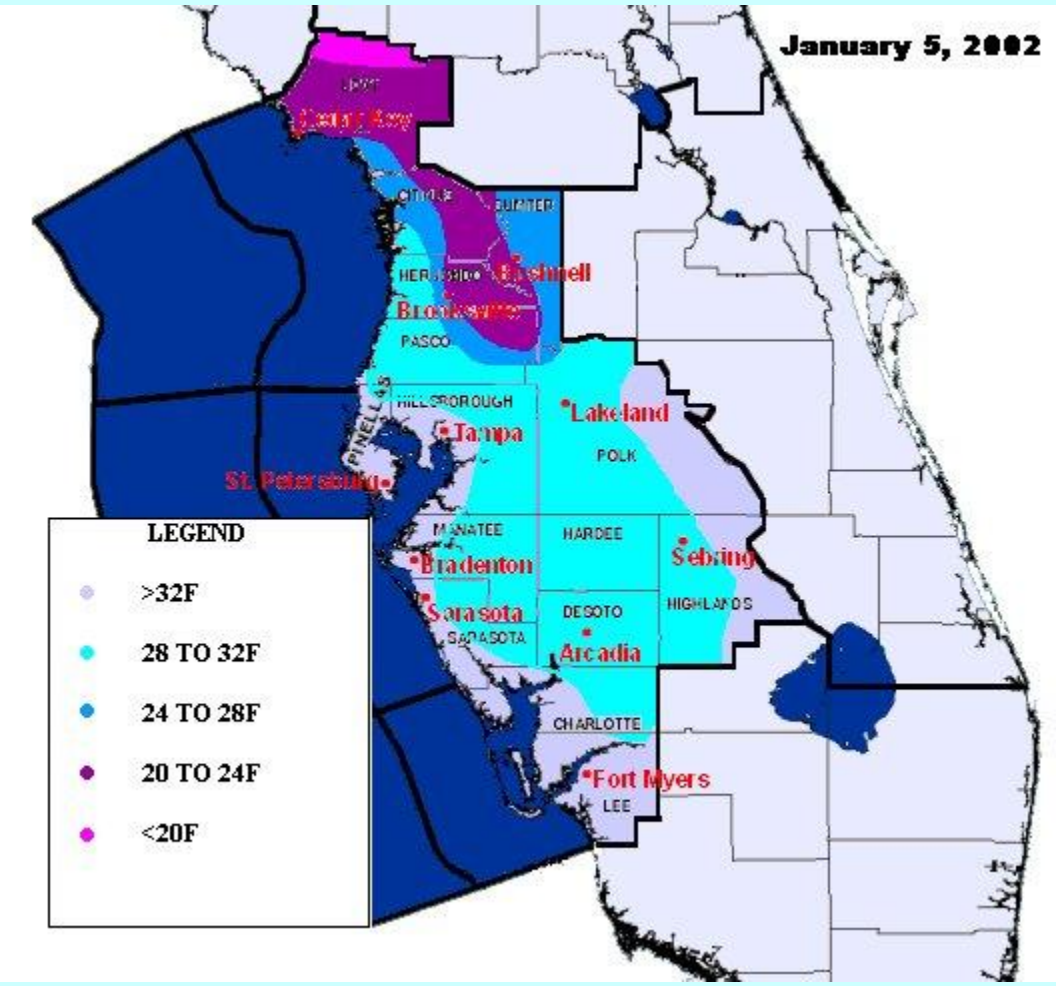

Figure 1. January 5th Freeze Map of West Central and Southwest Florida.

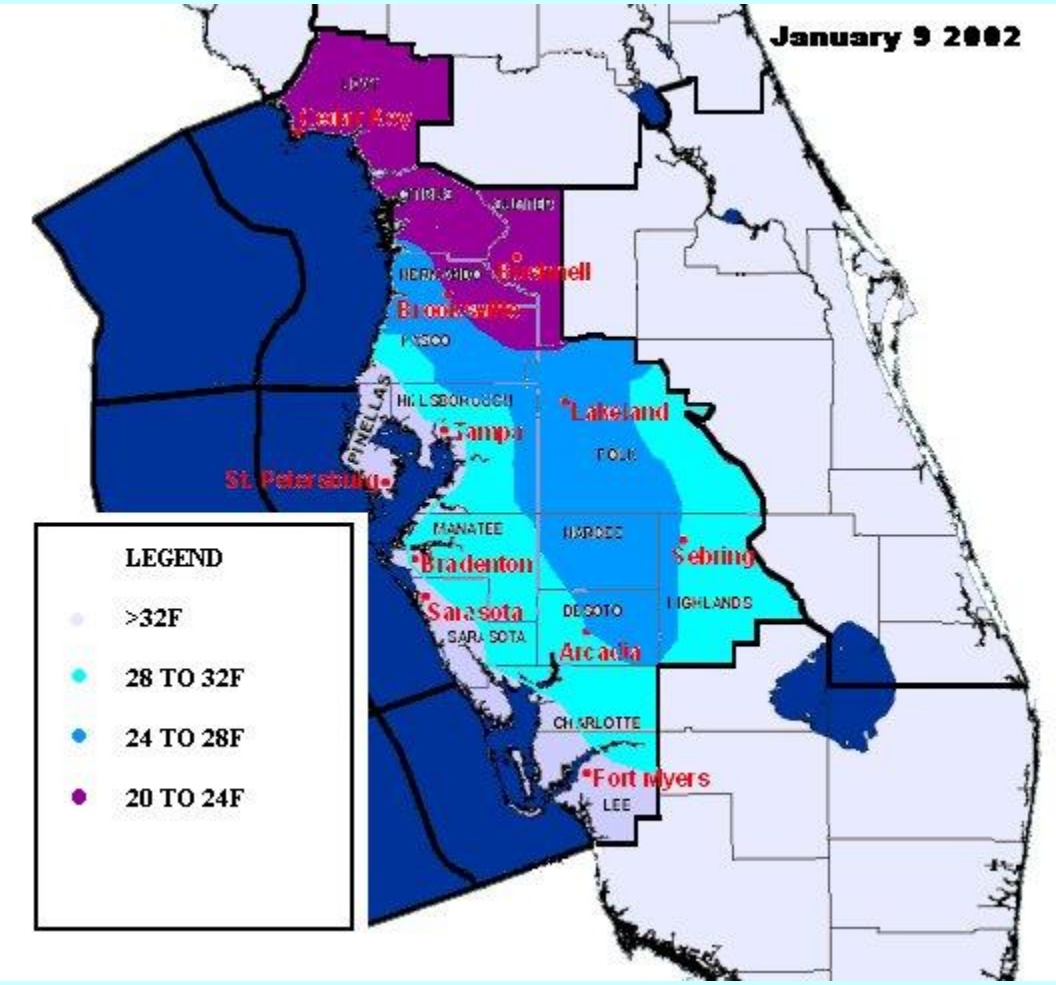

Figure 2. January 9th Freeze Map of West Central and Southwest Florida.

The eventual freeze struck hardest across north Florida, where temperatures fell into the teens. Farther south, the influence of air flowing across the peninsula above the surface, combined with a shorter night, allowed temperatures to remain above freezing from the Tampa Bay area southward. Figure 3 shows the minimum temperature map.

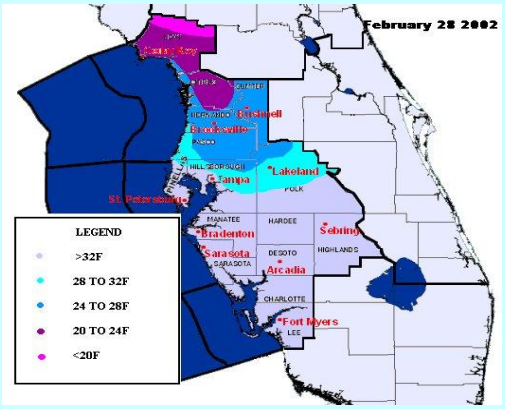

Figure 3. February 28 Freeze Map for West Central and Southwest Florida.

March began with moderating temperatures, followed by yet another shot of cold air on the 4th and 5th. The final freeze of the season occurred across the Nature Coast on the 5th. Soon after, above normal temperatures returned to the region. As of this writing, there have been no reports of any widespread plant of crop damage from the late season cold snap.

For the winter season (December 2001 through February 2002), temperatures were above normal across West Central and Southwest Florida. In fact, the entire eastern seaboard was above normal, with the northeast states receiving record or near-record winter warmth.

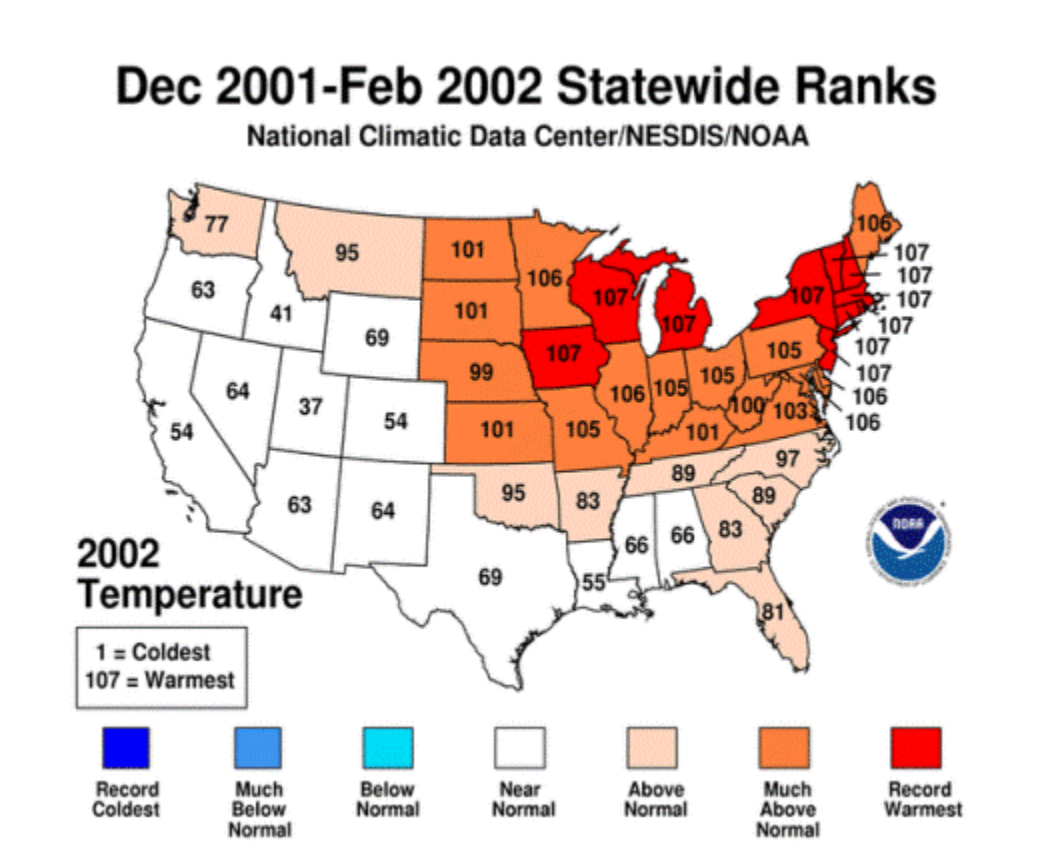

Figure 4. Statewide Ranks of Temperature for the U.S., Winter, 2001/02. Data courtesy of National Climatic Data Center.

Table 1: Winter Freezes, December 2001 - March 2002

Freeze Number	Date	Freeze	Hard Freeze
1	12/27/01	Levy, Citrus, Hernando, Sumter	Levy
2	1/4/02	Levy, Citrus, Hernando, Sumter, Pasco	Levy

		Hillsborough, Manatee, Hardee, Desoto, Highlands, Polk	
3	**1/05/02**	Levy, Citrus, Hernando, Sumter, Pasco, Hillsborough, Manatee, Desoto, Hardee, Polk	Levy, Citrus, N. Sumter, N. Hernando
4	**1/08/02**	Levy, Citrus, Hernando, Pasco, Sumter	Levy
5	**1/09/02**	Levy, Citrus, Hernando, Sumter, Pasco, Hillsborough, Polk, Manatee, Sarasota, Charlotte, Desoto,Highlands, Hardee	Citrus, Hernando, Sumter, Pasco
6	**2/28/02**	Levy, Citrus, Hernando, Sumter, Pasco, Hillsborough, Polk	Levy, Citrus, N. Sumter
7	**3/05/02**	Levy, Citrus, Sumter	N. Levy

Spring 2002 Preview

Wildfires: Be Prepared

Spring is traditionally Florida's wildfire season. Warming springtime temperatures, combined with the lack of abundant rainfall, increase the conditions for the spread of wildfires. A wildfire is an undesirable fire occurring in the natural environment. In Florida since 1998, more than 15,000 wildfires have devastated over one million acres and destroyed more than 750 structures. 90 percent of wildfires are started by humans and the other 10 percent are started by lightning.

In our area last year, there were two large wildfires of note. In Northern Polk County, in late February, 11,000 acres of mainly grass, scrub trees and shrubs burned along and north of Interstate 4. A 10 mile stretch of Interstate 4 was closed between Polk City and Lakeland due to the wildfire for nearly 10 days. Smoke and Ash, from this fire, was observed as far away as St. Petersburg in Pinellas County and Ft. Myers in Lee County. The other wildfire occurred in Sarasota County, in April, as the wildfire burned over 5,000 acres near Venice (Figure 1). The fire destroyed one home and forced the closing of Interstate 75 east of Venice, for several days.

Adding to the fire hazard is the growing number of people living in the new communities built in areas that were once wildland. This growth places even greater pressure on the states wildland firefighters. As a result of this growth, fire protection becomes everyones responsibility. Residents can help to protect life and property by taking action, and through educational programs such as Firewise, can reduce the threat of wildfires through fire resistant construction and landscaping techniques.

To learn more about firewise and other fire related information, visit the websites for Florida firewise at www.firewise.org (lower case), or the Florida Division of Forestry at www.fl-dof.com(lower case).

Figure 1. Flames along interstate 75 near North Port in mid April, 2001.

Preparedness

The HEAT Is On…

…In April and May!

April, and often a good portion of May, is characterized by increasingly strong sunshine, a steady increase in afternoon temperatures, and a gradual rise of average dewpoints. However, daily heat-relieving afternoon storms don't arrive until June, when deep tropical moisture overspreads the region.

Afternoon temperatures in early May can reach or exceed 90 degrees, especially across interior counties. The combination of these temperatures, dewpoints in the 60s, and a high sun angle can produce heat stress on residents who are just beginning to acclimate themselves to summer conditions. Heat index values (Figure 1) generally remain in the 90s through May, though they have surpassed 100 in past years.

Residents of West Central and Southwest Florida should review the basic heat safety rules. Stay safe this spring!

Hot Weather Action Box

- Never leave a child or pet in an unattended vehicle - even for a few minutes!
- Drink plenty of non-alcoholic fluids and eat low-calorie foods.
- Dress in loose, light fitting, light colored clothing.
- Slow down; restrict strenuous exercise to the cooler part of the day

- Stay out of the sun, and in an air conditioned location, especially between 10 AM and 4 PM.

- Use sunscreen, and consider wearing a hat.

- During prolonged heat episodes, check on elderly family, friends, and neighbors.

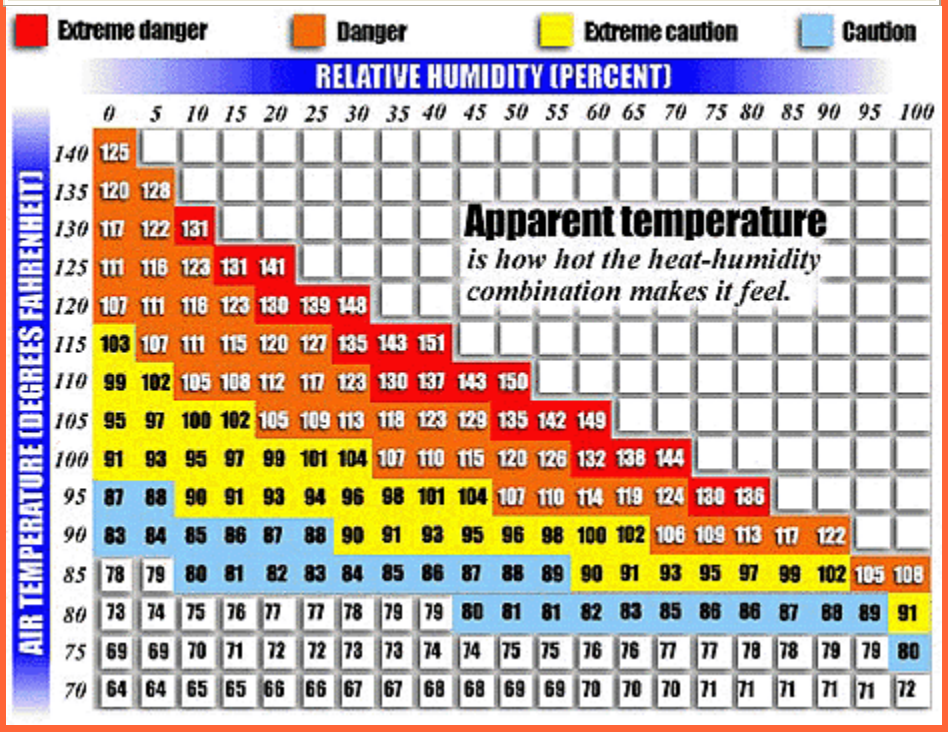

Figure 1. Heat Index Chart. Data Courtesy of National Weather Service.

REPORT REVIEW...REPORT REVIEW...REPORT REVIEW

What to Report
Tornadoes...Waterspouts...Funnel Clouds
Hail of any size
Damaging Winds 50 knots/58 MPH or greater

Flooding Rains 2" per hour or 4" per day
Damage that is directly weather related

How to Report
Call the 1-800 Unlisted Number
Identify yourself with Spotter ID number
Report the Phenomena and Time Observed
Please report *only* event criteria that are listed above.