

P.E.I.'s top three wild weather stories of 2012

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Commentary

While the new year brings thoughts of hope and renewal to the forefront, I cannot help but reflect on the year of wild weather that I have experienced on Prince Edward Island since moving from Toronto.

Every year brings stories of wild weather no matter where you are, and P.E.I. is no different. I just didn't expect my first year to be one of such record-breaking weather. Here are my top three wild weather stories for 2012, and how they have affected P.E.I.

Number 3: record-high temperatures in March

The official arrival of spring in late March 2012 was more like the start of summer as historic warm weather shattered temperature records across Prince Edward Island. Daily temperatures in Charlottetown reached their warmest on record of 20.5°C on March 21 and 24.5°C on March 22 smashing previous records by as much as 7°C. Islanders enjoyed the blast of warm weather moving in from the west by wearing short pants, walking in the parks and basking in the sunshine. It was my first introduction to P.E.I. winter weather (I arrived three weeks earlier), and was wondering if I had moved to Florida.

Number 2: summer drought

P.E.I.'s summer growing season of 2012 saw less than half the normal amount of rainfall, a drought not seen on the Island for more than a decade. This led to more than usual anoxic river events (where the oxygen levels in rivers get too low making it hard for anything to survive) on the Island especially in the Winter River watershed where Brackley branch ran dry in mid-July followed by the Cudmore branch in mid-August. Charlottetown gets most of its water from the Winter River watershed, and was warned by the federal department of Fisheries and Oceans to conserve water as the dangerously low water levels were affecting fish habitat. The city did institute water restrictions in September. The hot, dry summer also took a toll on Island potato crops, threatening yields by 25 per cent for some varieties. Farmers were also put on notice in mid-August that their permits to irrigate fields from rivers and streams might be revoked if rain did not arrive soon. While the weather was bad for crops, the hot, dry conditions were perfect for native butterflies that flocked to the Island in large enough numbers to break records. It was a banner year for wasps as well, as the rain storms that destroy their colonies just didn't arrive in the summer.

Number 1: record monthly Island rainfall in September

Heavy rainfall on Prince Edward Island during the month of September was record-breaking, where the Charlottetown Airport measured 273.0 millimetres beating out the previous record precipitation amount set in December 1990 by 19.7 millimetres. Daily rainfall records were also broken as the tail end of Hurricane Isaac blew through on September 5. Charlottetown received a whopping 62.2 millimetres of rain, breaking the daily record of 26.8 millimetres for that day. After the driest summer in over a decade, the wet autumn drenched most of P.E.I.'s potato crops, making it impossible for harvesters to even get out on the field. Additional rains in October and November together with warm temperatures further slowed down P.E.I.'s agricultural harvests of corn, potatoes and soy beans causing some crops to rot in the fields or in their storage facilities.

These are the types of wild weather that scientists expect to be more frequent under climate change - extremes of heat, drought and rainfall. At the UPEI Research on Tap series in November, I went on record with my predictions for the winter ahead - warmer and drier than normal. That means for the months of December, January and February, I predict that the average temperature will be more than -6°C and receive less than 410 millimetres of rain and snow. Is this as a result of climate change or weather variability? Maybe a bit of both.

Dr. Adam Fenech is director of the climate lab at the University of Prince Edward Island

Organizations: [Department of Fisheries and Oceans](#), [Charlottetown Airport](#), [UPEI Research on Tap](#) [University of Prince Edward Island](#)

Geographic location: [Prince Edward Island](#), [Charlottetown](#), [Toronto](#)

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