

PE.I.'s top weather stories of 2014

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Winter Storm March 13, 2014

Another year has gone by and it's time to talk about Prince Edward Island's top three weather stories of 2014. This past year continues to remind us of the important part weather plays in our everyday lives. Every year brings stories of weather no matter where you are, and Prince Edward Island is no different. Here are my top three weather stories for 2014, and how they affected Prince Edward Island.

Number 3 – Hurricane Arthur in July

Post-tropical storm Arthur was the big weather story of the summer of 2014 with strong winds sinking three boats in the Charlottetown harbour, and cutting power to roughly 5,000 Maritime Electric customers on July 5. Arthur brought winds with gusts of almost 100 kilometers per hour, but not much rain (12 millimeters) as the Island was spared the flooding damage that occurred in other Atlantic Provinces. The wind storm caused the cancelling of all of the Saturday night performances of the Cavendish Beach Music Festival when travel woes grounded country-music stars Blake Shelton and Darius Rucker. And the P.E.I. 2014 Celebration Zone at Confederation Landing in Charlottetown was closed the day following the storm while staff assessed the site for damage. Trees were blown down across Charlottetown changing the streetscape, and Belvedere golf course received damage to its clubhouse as well as downed trees and branches. Arthur also caused some crop damage to the Island's ripe strawberries by the wind pushing the stems into the fruit. And while one of P.E.I.'s piping plover nests was lost in the storm due to flooding, these endangered species fared better than feared with all of the chicks surviving in the other nests.

Number 2 – Damaging Rainstorm in December

A strong Nor-easter pounded the Island on December 10 with high winds and rain. The University of Prince Edward Island climate station in Foxley River recorded over 156 mm of rain on this day, close to the most rain ever recorded on P.E.I. in 24 hours. This rainstorm caused millions of dollars in damage to roads and bridges across the province. A car fell into the water after flooding caused a bridge to collapse in Milburn with the driver escaping with only minor scrapes.

A vehicle got stuck in a sink hole that had developed on Route 175 in Tyne Valley, but the two occupants were not injured. A family of three including a young baby were rescued by Department of Transportation workers from a home in St. Lawrence in western P.E.I. because of flooding "coming up over our doorstep, coming up the stairs," as they left. The Confederation Bridge was closed to motorcycles and high-sided vehicles such as trucks, tractor trailers, recreational vehicles and buses. Northumberland Ferries cancelled crossings to and from the Island for the day. A Bonshaw family took advantage of the flooding in their front yard by breaking out the kayaks and paddling across the lawn.

Number 1 - Most Severe Winter in 42 years

Those two storms were quite formidable, but not enough to challenge for the number one spot for the P.E.I. weather story of the year – the winner being our particularly cold and stormy winter of 2014. Over the past thirty years, there has been a definite downward trend in the amount of snow that P.E.I. has received, but not this past winter. We have

to go back 42 years to find a year with more snow. If we consider the snowfall months to be November, December, January, February and March, then this past year's snowfall was about 417 centimetres (cm) of the white stuff, the most since 1972 when 425 cm fell. On average, the snowfall this past winter season was almost 60% more than normal or what is expected. This past year's snowfall was particularly jarring as the two previous winters had been very dry indeed. The winter of 1972 was a much different winter than this past year's one. By the end of March, 1972 had 80 days of snowfall, while the winter of 2014 had only 47 days with snowfall. By the end of March, the winter of 1972 had many days of small snowstorms with none above 25 cm, while the winter of 2014 had four major snowstorms on December 22 (27 cm), January 22 (37.4 cm), February 19 (27.8 cm) and March 26 (48.5 cm). The winter of 1972 went on to have 531 cm of snow once the months of April and May were added to the total, while the winter of 2014 ended with a grand total of 456 cm. And yes, the winter of 2014 was colder than normal by almost 1.5 degrees Celsius. Islanders love their weather. Islanders are defined by the weather – we live by it. We are at the whims of Nature and the weather it brings. It keeps us at home, keeps us from work, keeps our kids from school yet it brings communities together. While tragic at times, our weather brings out our great spirit of humanity, sense of community and commitment to always look out for each other. From North Cape to East Point, West Point to Murray Head – and all points in-between – weather shapes who we are. Happy New Year to all.

By Dr. Adam Fenech (A Reader's View)

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