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# Expect winter to be extra rainy

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After an abnormally dry summer, much of the state is getting relief from drought conditions, thanks to an abnormally wet winter.

Forecasters predict the wetter weather will stick around at least through March.

It could even extend into late spring.

Last month, Hilo Airport saw more than 30 inches of rain — about three times the average for December. And Lihue Airport saw about 19.5 inches of rain, compared to an average of 4.78 inches. Rainfall totals were also up markedly in Kahului and Honolulu. At Honolulu airport, some 7.5 inches of rain fell — about the same amount the airport saw over all of the preceding 11 months.

"We've really needed this rain," said Robert Ballard, Hono-lulu science and operations officer for the National Weather Service. "The really wet conditions have been helpful."

The heavy rains allowed the Honolulu Board of Water Supply yesterday to cancel a voluntary 10 percent water conservation call for Windward O'ahu residents, which started Aug. 31. With water use down and water levels up, "our Windward sources were able to have a chance to recover," water board spokeswoman Su Shin said. "The wet weather obviously helped a lot."

Average water usage in mid-December for the Windward side was 15.3 million gallons a day, compared to about 16.7 million gallons a day in December 2007.

Meanwhile, the state Department of Agriculture is reporting that water levels at the Waimanalo reservoir, which serves farms, are way up, thanks to recent heavy rains.

Though farmers still have to reduce their regular water usage from the reservoir by 20 percent, they are now allowed to use water from that source five days a week, instead of just three.

Despite all the rainy weather in recent months, parts of the islands are still recovering from drought conditions that persisted through the summer. All of the Big Island and much of Maui are still experiencing dry conditions or moderate to severe droughts, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor, which bases its drought warnings on rainfall over the year.

Under those parameters, about 81 percent of the state is still experiencing "abnormally dry" conditions, the Drought Monitor said in an update this week, and 70 percent of the state is still officially in a drought — from moderate to "exceptional" in severity.

Three months ago, 98 percent of the state was abnormally dry and 78 percent was seeing a drought.

The weather service's Climate Prediction Center in Washington, D.C., said last month that the abnormally wet weather statewide is probably thanks to weak La Nina conditions, which are expected to persist in the Pacific through early to mid-2009.

Ballard said the wet conditions are "a blessing," especially for areas of the state still recovering from drought conditions. But the heavy rains also bring headaches. On Dec. 11 and 13, torrential rains caused major flooding on O'ahu and Kaua'i.

That caused extensive damage to dozens of homes and cars on O'ahu, and the governor has asked for a presidential disaster declaration. Kaua'i residents also suffered losses, and the damage to public facilities exceeded \$2.5 million, officials said.

Meanwhile, there are no big storms in the immediate forecast.

Yesterday, parts of O'ahu got soaked as a low-pressure system with plenty of unstable air slowly moved west of the state. But this weekend, normal trade wind weather is expected to return, with some heavy showers and gusty winds likely over parts of Windward O'ahu.

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## WET WEATHER

**December was a particularly wet month in the Islands.**

**The totals at key gauges:**

- **Lihue Airport: 19.46 inches (four times the average)**
- **Hilo Airport: 30.38 inches (three times normal)**
- **Kahului: 4.54 inches (above the normal 3.08 inches)**
- **Honolulu airport: 7.5 inches (more than double the normal 2.85 inches)**  
**Source: National Weather Service**