



Today's weather is hardly unique

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A recent study out of Princeton shows that whether people feel global warming is making hurricanes worse is more related to political predilections than reality, while global trends show no change. But what about global temperatures, Louisiana's disastrous flood and California's incandescent fire season?

Since satellites began measuring lower-atmosphere temperatures in 1979, the observed warming has been only one-third of what would have been forecast by today's computer models, and the rate of surface warming has even slowed since the late 1990s, according to the new "homogenized" temperature history from the Commerce Department.

Make no mistake, though, carbon dioxide concentrations have increased and surface temperatures are high, compared with the last 150 years, and the three-dimensional patterns of change (latitude, longitude and altitude) are partially consistent with that increase. So, when there is a natural warming event, like the recent El Niño, it superimposes upon already warm temperatures and results in a record, globally and sometimes locally.

That's hard to dispute. But glib attributions of recent weather (as opposed to "climate") phenomena are more wishful than reality. Last month, Commerce Department scientists showed rain data vary so much that "no evidence was found for changes in extreme precipitation attributable to climate change in the available observed record." What's good for the U.S. is also good for Louisiana.

Another group of researchers, some with the same department, showed that California's strong recent warming, which raises the likelihood of drought and enhanced wildfires, is best explained by oceanic temperature patterns from which any carbon dioxide signal had been removed.

And, are today's high temperatures unique in human history? There's strong evidence that the Arctic Ocean could have experienced long periods of ice-free summers for approximately four millennia after the end of the last ice age (6,000-10,000 years ago) and some evidence it was globally warmer 1,000 years ago, too.

That's science, and not what we fear may be true based upon our personal philosophy.

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