SERRANO CREEK RANCH EQUESTRIAN CENTER

25200 Trabuco Rd., Lake Forest, CA 92630
serranocreekranch@msn.com
(949)-768-5921

July
2026
NEWSLETTER

IN THIS EDITION

Preparing for a Potentially Significant El Niño Winter

"The best time to repair the roof is when the sun is shining." — John F. Kennedy.

There has been considerable discussion recently regarding the development of El Niño conditions in the eastern Pacific Ocean. Now we are seeing the superlative "super" attached to El Niño. What does this mean for the stables for the upcoming winter season? Not to worry, to remain current, your local SCR weather bureau follows a variety of weather and climate sources. One of the most reliable is Dr. Daniel Swain, a climate scientist at the University of California who gives monthly presentations on California's future weather. Much of the information below is drawn from his recent presentations and analyses. For those interested in a deeper discussion, we recommend visiting Weather West at: https://weatherwest.com/archives/43880.

Before discussing the forecast, a brief caution is warranted. Anyone who speaks in absolutes regarding medium- or long-range weather forecasts should be viewed with skepticism. The weather is an extraordinarily complex system governed by the principles of chaos. While this winter may be significantly wetter than average, that outcome is not guaranteed. Unfortunately, some forecasters overstate with certainty to attract attention or views. That said, current and forecast conditions warrant attention.

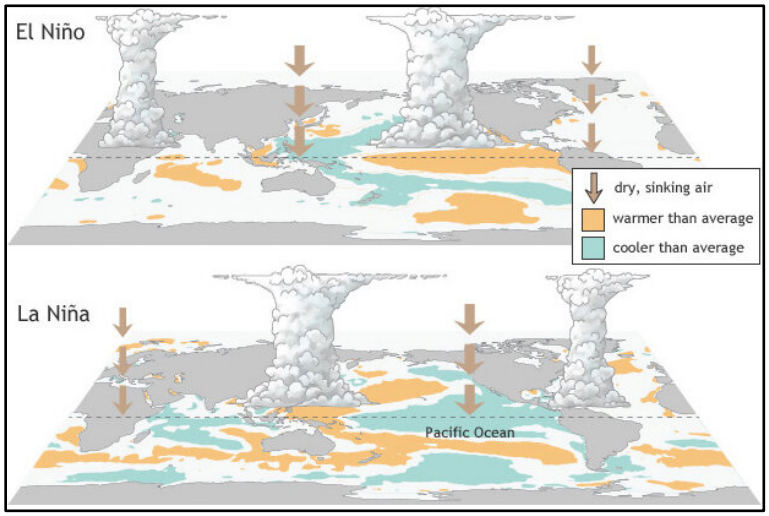

Figure #1

El Niño is the warm phase of the El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO). This recurring climate pattern develops every three to seven years when tropical Pacific trade winds (which blow from east to west) weaken or reverse. This condition allows warm water, normally concentrated in the western Pacific, to move eastward while reducing upwelling of

cooler water near South America. Even though the phenomenon is centered off Peru, the resulting warming of the eastern tropical Pacific will affect weather patterns across California. El Niño affects the atmosphere by shifting tropical thunderstorm activity eastward across the Pacific. This change influences jet stream patterns and large-scale atmospheric circulation, affecting rainfall, drought, heat, and storm activity throughout North America. See figure #1.

Current observations indicate that El Niño is already well underway and may strengthen into one of the most significant events on record by late 2026. International climate models and NOAA forecasts indicate a very high probability of at least a strong El Niño event, with many models suggesting the potential for a very strong or "Super El Niño" comparable to some of the largest events observed in the modern era. NOAA currently estimates nearly a 90% chance of a strong event and more than a 60% chance of a very strong event by autumn or early winter.

Summer and Fall Impacts

The first impacts are likely to occur this summer and fall. Ocean temperatures along much of the West Coast are already unusually warm due to a persistent marine heatwave. Figure #2 shows a heat map of the eastern Pacific Ocean. Please note that the most extreme scale is greater than 2 degrees Celsius. Current temperatures are well above the 2 degrees. This larger temperature increase is what is leading to a "super El Niño" forecast. As El Niño likely further strengthens, Southern California is likely to experience warmer, more humid conditions than usual (remember, no absolute certainty in weather forecasting). Rather than producing dramatically higher daytime temperatures, the warmer ocean is expected to increase nighttime temperatures and humidity levels. Coastal Southern California could experience unusually tropical conditions, with elevated dew points and increased heat stress during heatwaves. **Horses may experience greater stress during periods of elevated humidity, particularly in late summer. If possible, it is best to plan to exercise outside peak-temperature hours.**

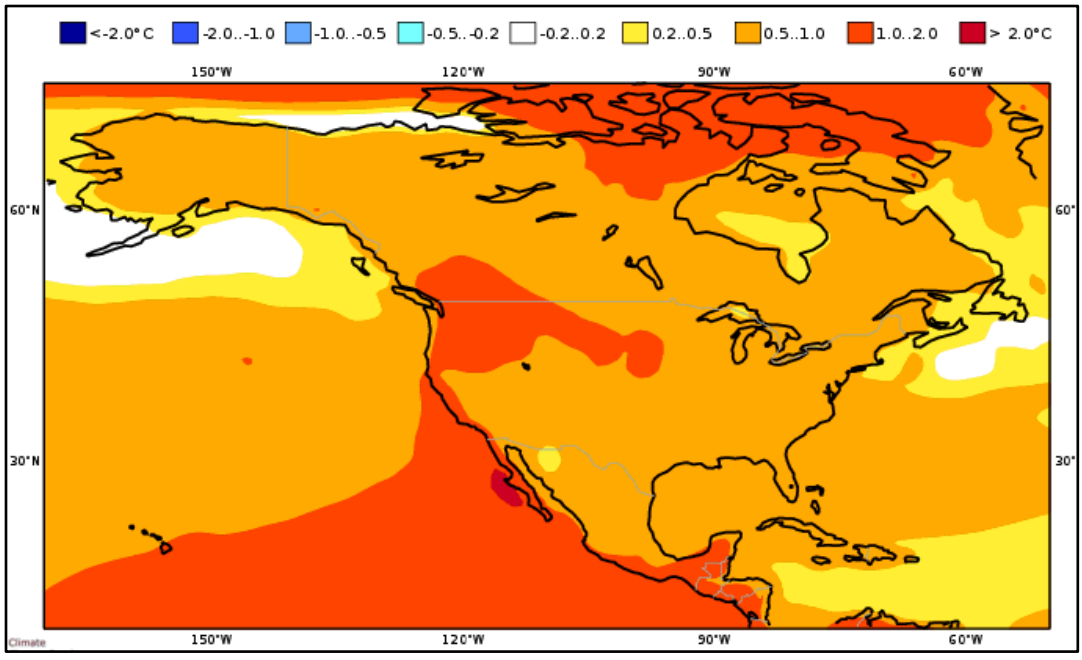

Figure #2

Another concern is tropical cyclone activity. Strong El Niño years often support more frequent and stronger eastern Pacific hurricanes due to warmer ocean temperatures. Historically, California has been protected by relatively cool coastal waters and prevailing wind patterns, making direct impacts unlikely. However, with significantly elevated ocean temperatures, the probability of tropical moisture and the remnants of tropical systems reaching Southern California is higher than normal, increasing the potential for periods of heavy rainfall.

Winter Impacts

The most significant implications for California are likely to occur during the 2026–27 rainy season. Historically, strong and very strong El Niño events are associated with wetter-than-normal winters. El Niño tends to strengthen the subtropical jet stream and direct more storms toward California, increasing the likelihood of atmospheric rivers, prolonged wet periods, and heavy precipitation events.

While weaker El Niño events often produce mixed results, research consistently shows that stronger El Niño events significantly increase the odds of above-average rainfall across much of California. Although no one can predict specific storms months in advance, current forecasts suggest substantially elevated chances of a wet and stormy winter between November 2026 and April 2027. See Figure #3 for a graphic relationship of El Niño strength and probability of increased seasonal rain totals.

What This Means for Serrano Creek Ranch

Preparation remains the best strategy regardless of the ultimate outcome. While SCR has spent decades

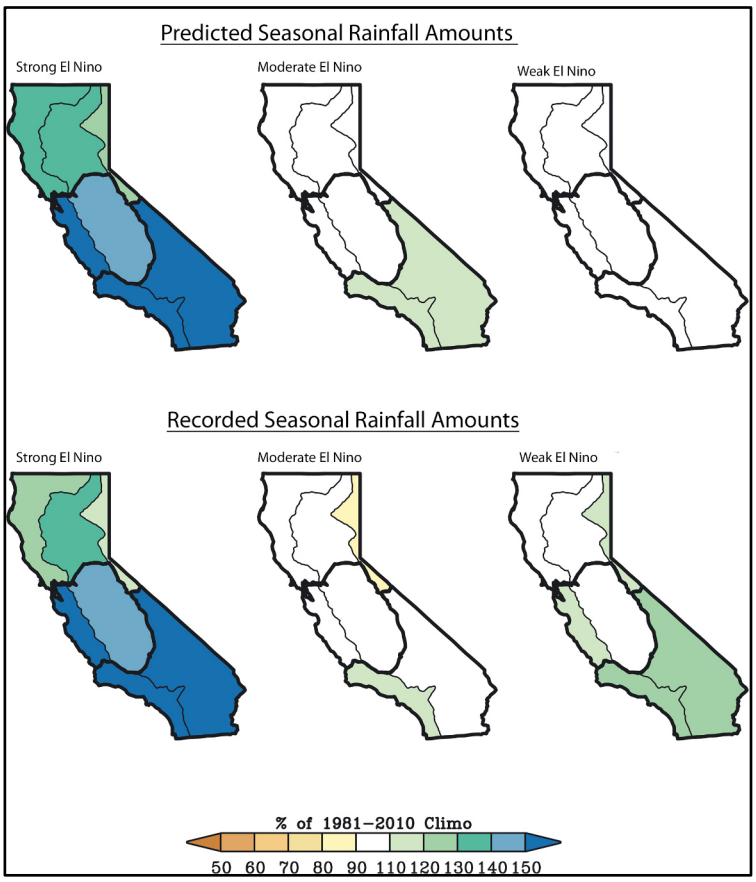

Figure #3

reducing mud, we continue to work to minimize stable downtime post-storm events. This summer is the best time to prepare for potential increases in storms. Current efforts include:

Careful management of arena surfaces. When the stable experienced above-average rainfall in past years, horses can remain in their stalls for regrettably extended periods of time. Often, dry periods between storms are minimal or nonexistent. When there is a series of storms, we alternate between arenas to ensure at least one will be available after the latest storm. Closing and compacting areas requires many hours of work and must be done during the ground crew's working hours. If a storm is expected to arrive at night, then all arenas will be closed and compacted by the end of that working day. There were times when storms arrived in the morning, and we would still close the previous working day, as there would be insufficient time to prepare for the following day's rain. Our evening riders are shut out and miss the chance to exercise their horses, which could be a lost opportunity.

We have now replaced the footing in three arenas (front, lesson, and bee) to eliminate the fines that make the footing slippery after the rains. This work allows SCR to keep the arenas open slightly longer before rain because the compaction time is shorter. It also allows for a greater margin of error in forecasting if rain starts a little earlier than expected. For evening riders, our hope is to keep an arena open for their use and not close it until the following morning. Previously, if an arena was not compacted and then was rained on, it could be out of use for days and days. Hence, the gain of a few pre-storm hours of riding would not be justified, as there would be the potential of losing days and days of use post-storm arena use.

Improved loop road surface. The scheduled installation of pavers near A-Barn this summer is the next step toward eliminating additional muddy sections. Because this is a high-traffic area that receives no direct sun in winter, it can become a quagmire. The extension of the all-weather road will be a blessing in the depths of winter.

Improved stormwater retention & subsurface water injection. The large retention basin by the park has proven very successful at keeping stormwater on the property. It also has the dual purpose of injecting water into the soils of the fence-line vegetation, thereby saving water by reducing summer irrigation. In preparation for this winter, the injection line will be extended to utilize the collected stormwater better. This upsizing could prove critical, as it increases the retention basin's drawdown rate, ensuring that, even with back-to-back storms, the holding capacity remains satisfactory.

While no forecast is certain, the current outlook suggests that preparing for a wetter-than-normal winter is both reasonable and prudent. SCR will continue to monitor conditions closely and invest in improvements that enhance safety, reduce downtime, and protect the Ranch, our horses, and our boarders. As Benjamin Franklin famously observed, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." The work we undertake today may prove invaluable when the winter storms arrive.