

# FORT MYERS FLORIDA WEEKLY®

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WEEK OF OCTOBER 12-18, 2016

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**INSIDE:** Temperature change by the decade, 2016 statewide rankings. **A10**

**BY THE NUMBERS**

**73.2** Average temperature in Florida this year. It is the highest EVER.

**2016** The hottest year the earth has on record.

**25** This region's ranking in wettest seasons ever. From December to February, 15.3 inches came down — 10 above average.

# HOTTER THAN EVER

This year's record-breaking heat in Florida may just be the start to more extreme weather patterns in the future

BY EVAN WILLIAMS  
ewilliams@floridaweekly.com

**T**HE 12 MONTHS ENDING IN SEPTEMBER WAS Florida's warmest on average in records that began in 1895. This last winter, December through February was the record wettest for those three months across Southwest Florida and the Everglades even though it's normally the dry season. And Hurricane Hermine and now Matthew finally broke the record longest streak without a hurricane making landfall in the state since 2005.

The hottest, the wettest, the longest. What's happening here? Are we in a disaster movie

SEE HOTTER, A10 ▶

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY ERIC RADDATZ / FLORIDA WEEKLY



## Whatever happened to Bum Farto?

BY MAXINE LOPEZ-KEOUGH  
Florida Weekly Correspondent

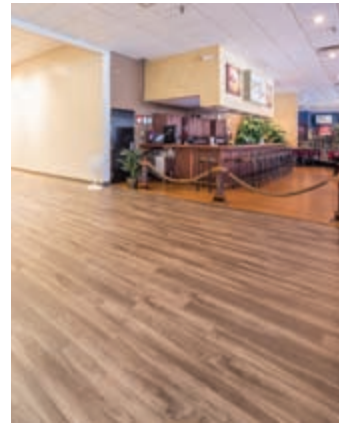
It has all the trappings of a Hollywood blockbuster: drugs, conspiracy, flashy cars, murdered witnesses, crooked politics, Santeria, an army of undercover officers and an eye-wateringly bad wardrobe. And yet, outside the borders of the tiny island where it all went down some 40

*A bizarre tale of drugs, murder and a convicted Key West fire chief who disappeared*

years ago, few are familiar with the tale — that is, unless you happen to belong to the group of particularly vocal Jimmy Buffett

SEE FARTO, A21 ▶

## INSIDE



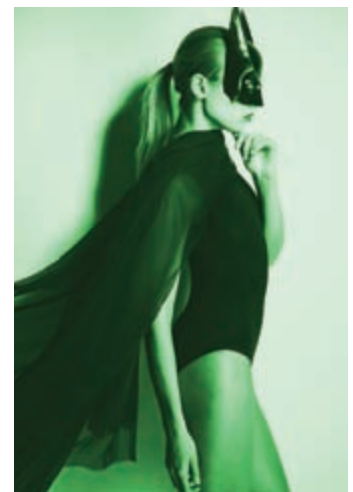
### Getting ready

Arts venues prepare for season and seasons to come. **C1** ▶



### Networking

Celebrating 100th anniversary of Lee Memorial, and renaming to Lee Health. **A33** ▶



### Business of the scare

"Green" is the real color of Halloween. **A29** ▶



### Behind the wheel

How to take advantage of the "Mazda Loophole." **A30** ▶

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ROGER WILLIAMS A2  
OPINION A4  
HEALTHY LIVING A24  
BUSINESS A29

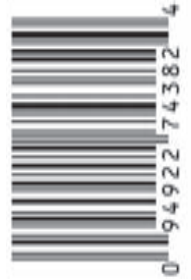
INVESTING A35  
BEHIND THE WHEEL A30  
REAL ESTATE B1  
ARTS C1

DIVA DIARIES C2  
EVENTS C6-9  
PUZZLES C12  
CUISINE C35

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# HOTTER

From page 1

sequel? Is Florida weather X-rated? Is hot air blowing in from the 2016 presidential campaigns? Probably all of the above.

Experts, meanwhile, point to other reasons for the rain, hot days and unusually muggy summer nights (even for South Florida) that we've experienced. An unusually strong El Niño and a warming planet are two factors that may have contributed to the record-breaking weather patterns over the last year, said Florida's official climatologist, David Zierden at Florida State University.

The warming of the air, land and water is expected to continue in the years to come to boost temperatures, create unexpected weather patterns, and fuel more weather extremes: wetter wet periods and dryer dry ones, as well as events like freezes.



ZIERDEN

Scientists believe the warming planet may be partly to blame for individual local weather events such as the rains this winter, or the flooding that Charlotte County's Deep Creek community experienced in early September. But it's hard to know how much.



CROUCH

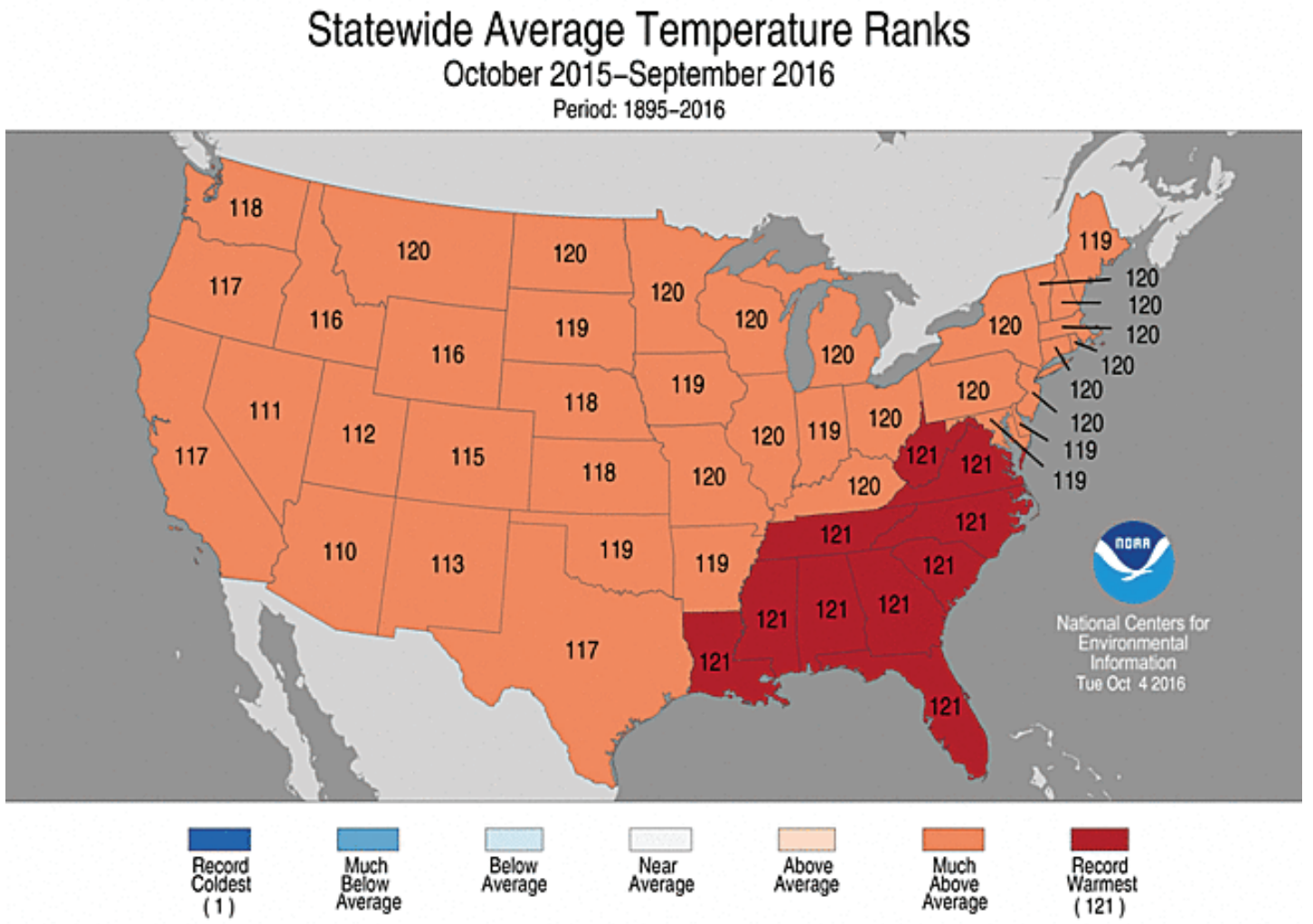
"The Earth as a whole continues to warm and that's undoubtedly due to an increase in greenhouse gases," Mr. Zierden said. "But when you start talking about regional and local effects, that's when it gets a little murkier."

A climate scientist with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Jake Crouch, said scientists are starting to figure out how to make those determinations.

"It's kind of an emerging area of science to parse out" the shorter and longer-term trends that cause local weather events, he said.

While many variables including chance come into play, the underlying long-term trend influencing our climate is global warming, said Mr. Crouch. The year 2016 is set to be the record warmest year for Earth, in front of 2015 and 2014.

Florida is warming too, he noted, since 1950 at a rate of about three



degrees Fahrenheit per century. For the year ending in September, the state's average temperature of 73.2 degrees set the record high.

An unusually strong El Niño during the first half of the year was the major short-term factor that boosted temperatures and the rainfall that drenched South Florida during what is normally the winter dry season. In the coming winter, the opposite La Niña cycle, although it is expected to be a weak one, could mean dryer weather.

"Last winter we were in, by some measures, the strongest El Niño of the century and El Niño is really well known to bring much above normal rainfall to South Florida in the winter months," Mr. Zierden said.

From December to February this year, 15.3 inches of precipitation soaked the Southwest Florida region and the Everglades, almost 10 inches above the 20th century average, NOAA data shows. A record.

Even so, the overall amount of rain averaged over the year ending in September made it the 25th wettest year on record for the region. And over the summer the amount of rain we saw in South Florida was about normal, and slightly below normal on the southeast coast.

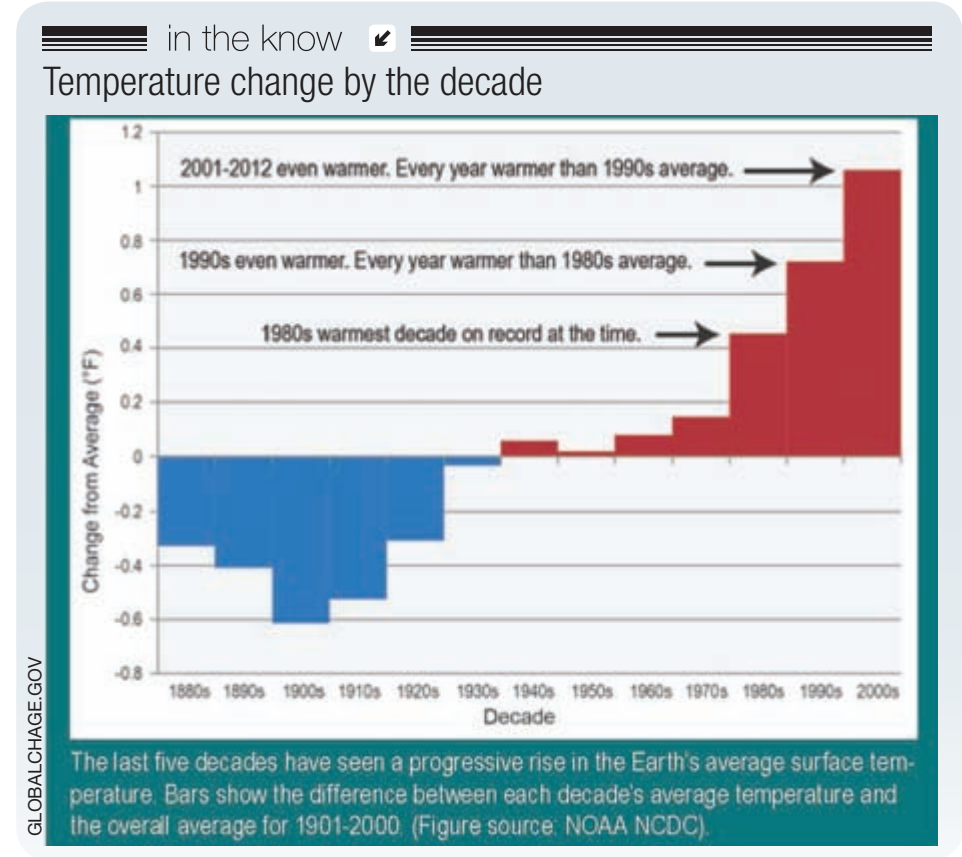
"What we're seeing more of, is we're getting more precipitation occurring in single events," said Mr. Crouch, instead of spread out throughout a year.

Just how much recent heat and rain could be attributed to climate change at this point is undetermined, Mr. Zierden said.

"This year and this summer was certainly exceptional but it's only one year and we'd need to see a continuation in this kind of change in temperatures and humidity to really be able to attribute it to climate change," he said. "But as climate change progresses, I think it would be safe to assume we'll see more



summers like the



one we just endured here in Florida."

Flooding and drought combined with increasing temperatures in Florida "could really have compounding effects on our hydrologic systems and our water resources," one of his primary concerns in Florida, Mr. Zierden said.

The rains this winter had wide ranging implications — from agriculture to businesses such as Lehigh Acres-based Larue Pest Management, for its lawn care and pest control services.

"I remember October, November, December it was just rain, rain, rain," said owner Keith Ruebeling, followed by an even wetter January. "It just doesn't seem to have stopped."

The saturated soil at times made it difficult or impossible to apply expensive products that control proliferating pests such as a chinch bug.

"It's affected our lawn business tremendously," he said.

He's hoping for a dryer season this year but is preparing for "whatever happens."

"We've had to staff up, keep more guys out there to get the work done and keep more management out there to follow up on these properties. You adapt as a business but it's not always the move you want to make, you know?"

Even if climatologists are predicting more uncertainty and extreme weather, farmers are experienced at dealing with it already, said Gene McAvoy, who works closely with commercial producers as Hendry County extension director with the University of Florida.

"We had summer-like rains throughout our dry season and that greatly affected crops," he said. "We lost quite a number of plantings on sweet corn and green beans, (and) it had impacts on a lot of other crops."

Now in his 60s, Mr. McAvoy points out that unpredictable weather is not new, even if some say it's bound to get worse.

"I've seen a lot of weather over my life. Sometimes we forget what we saw before."

#### Hot days, steamy nights

A steady heat persisted for weeks of 90-degree plus temperatures on Florida's southwest and southeast coasts during parts of the summer.

"As much as average temperatures were above normal this summer, it was the nighttime low temperatures where we saw the greatest increase in heat," Mr. Zierden said.

Across Florida as well as much of the

NOAA GRAPHIC



“This year and this summer was certainly exceptional but it’s only one year and we’d need to see a continuation in this kind of change in temperatures and humidity to really be able to attribute it to climate change.” — **David Zierden**, Florida State University Florida’s official state climatologist

United States, overnight temperatures were worsened by urban heat islands in heavily populated coastal areas, and a cycle of increasing humidity warming an atmosphere that can in turn hold more moisture.

“So it’s kind of a feedback loop,” Mr. Crouch said. “The more moisture it holds the more it continues to warm.”

Minimum overnight temperatures along the heavily populated southeast coast of Florida tied with 2010 for the warmest on record during June, July and August at 76.8 degrees, 4 degrees above normal at a time of day when many people like to crank up the A/C to get a better night’s sleep.

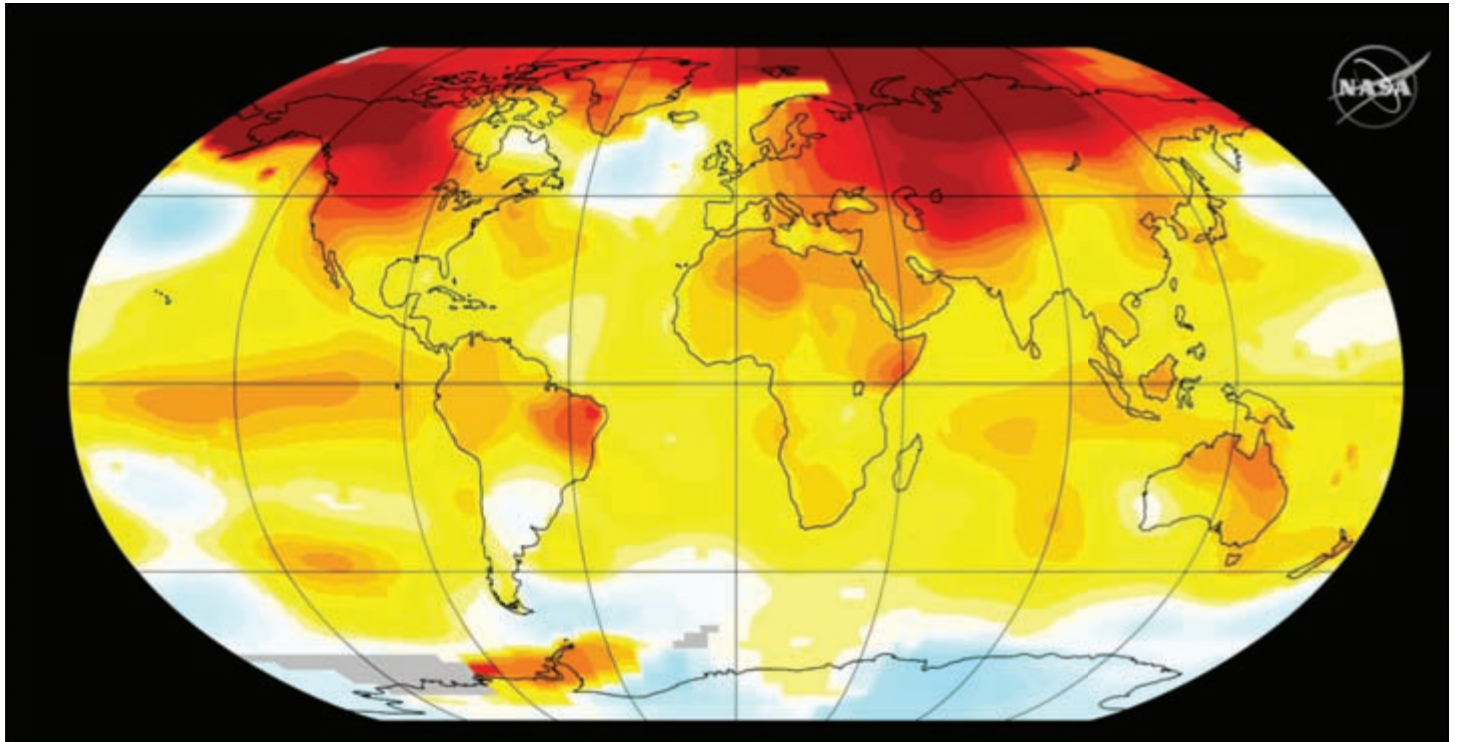
The heat has lingered on through September and into October.

“It got hot like in February and it looks like it’s going to stay hot through Thanksgiving,” said Louis Bruno, CEO of Naples-based Bruno Air Conditioning.

Among those with older and traditional units, his company saw a 15 percent increase in repairs over the last summer season, while customers’ energy consumption increased 40 percent, he said. A newer model designed to combat Florida’s humid climate performed far better on both counts.

Kenneth Robinson, owner of East Fort Myers-based Country Cooling & Heating Incorporated, said that the lightning accompanying storms this year caused flurries of evening and afternoon calls due to units tripping breakers and other problems. And the heat and humidity that can be rough on A/C units was made worse by the winter rains that kept the soil saturated.

“Moisture is a big, big concern,” he said.



NASA PHOTO

Each of the first six months of 2016 set a record as the warmest respective month globally in the modern temperature record, which dates to 1880. Meanwhile, five of the first six months set records for the smallest monthly Arctic sea ice extent since consistent satellite records began in 1979.

“Too much moisture, too much humidity and you’ve got mold growth starting.”

While it might be human nature to see the climate through the lens of the latest storm, Janice Stillman takes a longer view.

“We live in most cases less than 100 years and we maybe only think about the weather only several decades of that time,” said Ms. Stillman, an editor of The Old Farmer’s Almanac with its famous weather forecasts that take into account solar cycles, climatology and meteorology.

“Our experience of the change in the Earth over longer periods is really relatively brief and we have to recognize that it’s just always changing.”

All the record-breaking events mentioned in this article, for instance, are based on modern records that only go back to the late 1800s, while the Almanac was founded in 1792.

The 2017 edition describes this Solar Cycle 24 as the smallest in more than a century, which could cool off the atmosphere.

“If greenhouse gasses weren’t there

we might be able to say we’d be going into a colder than normal period,” Ms. Stillman said. “But greenhouse gasses could mitigate or offset the effects of low solar activity. It’s really a bit of an unknown.”

The Almanac’s forecast for Florida this winter includes “above normal” rainfall in the north, and “near normal” in the south; a “cooler and rainier than normal” summer; and a “warmer and drier than normal” September and October 2017. ■

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