



Cold Comfort

By Monroe S. Miller

In early January I drove to the edge of town to look at the road sign on the main drag just to make sure I was still in Wisconsin. I was — *Middleton, Wisconsin, Pop. 11560*. The November weather that we had in November, again in December, still in January and on into February had me confused; at times, especially in the first months of the new year, I thought maybe I was in Nashville or St. Louis or (God forbid) Washington, D.C.

Blame it on El Nino or on the natural order of things or whatever, but we have had a very mild winter in Wisconsin. Anyone who received new ice skates or skis or a new snowmobile for Christmas most likely had to drive to Canada to try them out. The phrase "winter sports" was an oxymoron most of the winter.

Meteorologists are, in fact, blaming weird weather all across the country on El Nino, the periodic warming of the surface waters in the Pacific Ocean near the west coast of South America. The warmer water changes the jet streams, and they change our weather. It has happened before, but according to Dr. Josh Young, a UW-Madison professor of atmospheric and oceanic sciences, the effects haven't been this strong ever before. Nor have they previously been as persistent. "Seeing this warmth into January is almost unheard of in the 20th century," Dr. Young said.

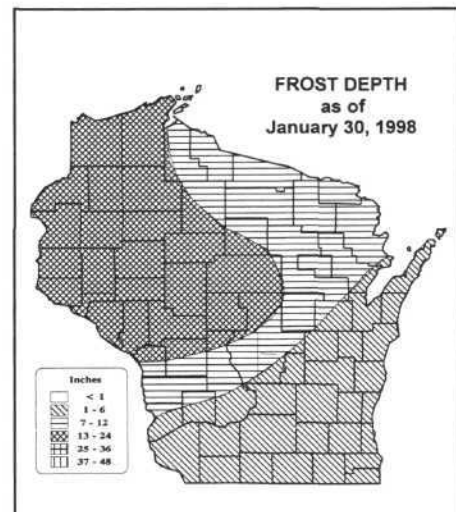
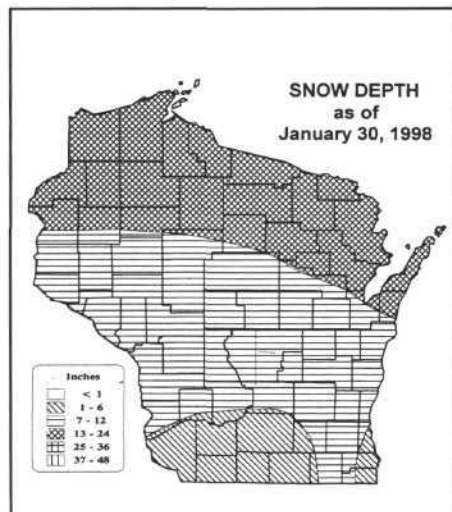
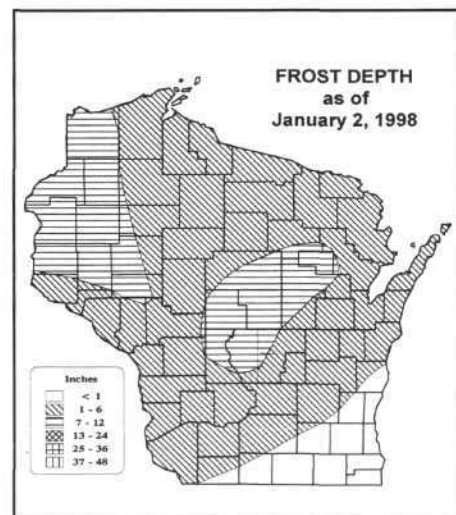
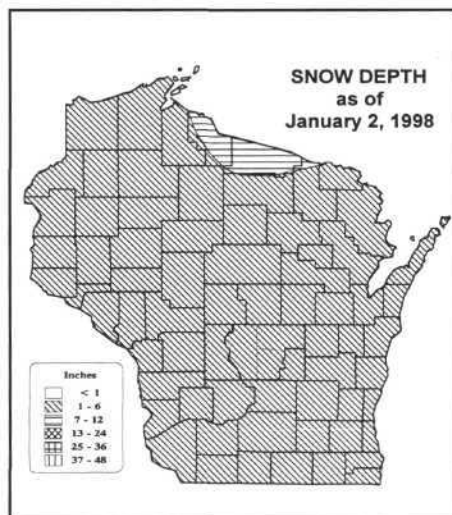
In our town it has been so warm that December and early January temperatures were averaging 35 degrees, fully eight degrees above normal. One of the gauges I use to measure winter temperatures is the freezing of Lake Mendota, the well of our irrigation water and the source of awesome natural beauty. It normally freezes on December 20th, but has iced shut as early as November 23 (in 1880). There have only been 22 times when it stayed open into January. The latest freeze date was January 30 in 1932; the second lat-

est freeze date was on January 14 in 1890. Since it finally closed on January 11, this year was the third latest since records have been kept. It is testimony to how mild the winter has been when compared to normal.

As an aside, it is interesting to note that so many statistics have been kept on Lake Mendota, due no doubt to the location of the UW-Madison on its shoreline. Mendota is one of only 27 lakes worldwide with records that date back over a century.

Winter weather data is included here from the Wisconsin Ag Stat Service.

Golf course superintendents in Wisconsin are interested in and affected by how winter weather affects plant life, insects and wildlife. Dr. Jiwan Palta, UW-Madison Horticulture prof and the resident expert on winter hardiness, believes that native Wisconsin plants will survive the oddball winter weather for the most part. Problems will come with imports like magnolias and flowering shrubs. Non-native plants aren't able to ignore false signs of spring and sometimes break dormancy and



send buds out too early. Cold weather returns and damage results.

Phil Pellitteri, UW-Madison Extension Entomologist, thinks that the mild weather could possibly help overwintering of insects like the gypsy moth, Jap beetles and saw flies.

Even birds were confused by the warm weather. When Dane County held its annual bird count on December 20th, 95 species were identified, the highest number in the 79 years this event has been held. A Northern Water Thrush was seen in Madison on that day when in reality it should have been in South America.

The world did indeed set a temperature record in 1997; land and ocean readings averaged 0.75 degrees F. above normal, exceeding the previous record set in 1990 by 0.15 degrees F. The "normal" temperature for Earth is 61.7 degrees. This made 1997 the warmest year of the 20th century. Nine of the past 11 years have been among the warmest on record, or at least since record keeping started in 1880.

This data renews, or at least invigorates, the discussion about greenhouse effects, global warming and increases that are not a product of natural variations in the climate. In other words, some feel the warmer temperatures are due to the human effect. It is worth study and maybe even some worry. In the past 100 years the average temperature has gone up 1 degree F. If the rise keeps up and temperatures rise two to six degrees by the year 2100, there will be big problems — heat waves, droughts, floods and other natural disasters and catastrophes.

On the other hand, claims of milder winters aren't new. In 1853, an article appeared in a Canadian journal called *Colonial Magazine* that said: "It appears that Canada has

already relaxed some of its famous rigors, and is in a state of continual mitigation. Since a portion of its forests have been cleared, its swamps drained, its villages and settlements established, the Indians inform us that the snows fall in smaller quantities and dissolve sooner."

And the fact is that the coldest winter in the United States in the 20th century was in 1978-1979; and it was cold — several degrees colder than any other winter in the 1900s and more than five degrees colder than the century winter average of 32.5 degrees F.

Whatever the reality of global warming is, a greater reality for us at the moment is that the EXPO is done, GCSAA conference is over, the days are longer and the winter blues are almost history. The birds will return soon, patches of golf course turf will push through the snow on south exposures and hearts will leap at the thought of spring and golf. Hoo-ray!

One final tidbit about the winter scene. For years I have casually thought about wind chill data and wondered how those numbers were arrived at. I finally got the gumption together to look it up. Here is what I found.

To figure the wind chill factor, take the wind speed and multiply it by 1.5. Then subtract it from the air temperature. As an example, if the wind is blowing at 30 mph and the air temperature is 20 degrees F, the wind chill factor is 20 degrees F. minus (30 mph X 1.5) = 20 degrees F. - 45 degrees F. = -25 degrees F. wind chill.

If you didn't know, now you do!

It is too bad Dr. Neal Jorgensen cannot remain dean of CALS at the UW-Madison for another ten years. He would, most assuredly, be recorded by history as one of the best to ever hold that position at Wisconsin or anywhere else for that matter.

But he is going to retire and the University has selected four finalists for his job.

Foremost among them is Dr. Larry Binning, chairman of the Department of Horticulture and a familiar face at WTA Field Day and the EXPO meeting. We have worked with him and know he is an excellent administrator and enthusiastic supporter of the turf-grass industry in Wisconsin.

Also on the list are Elton Aberle of the University of Nebraska, Alan Bennett from UCAL- Davis, and Dan Hess of the Novartis Company. They were chosen from a group of 70 applicants.

I exchange chapter publications with some other chapters around the country. One of those is Minnesota.

The December/January issue of the *Hole Notes* features a president's message. The piece was written by Jim Nichol, the new MGCSA president, and it contained an idea he is going to try in Minnesota that long ago I floated (more or less unsuccessfully) in Wisconsin. Jim is going to propose they have only three golf outings in 1999 — the championship, the scholarship scramble and the research scramble. "The rest of our regular monthly meetings will be education-oriented, held in the late afternoon and not necessarily on Monday.

"My thinking in this matter is as follows: Mondays in the past were generally a day off when the course was closed. Now many courses utilize Monday for outside events to generate much needed revenues. The mornings are generally set aside for us to complete tasks that cannot be done around golfers. I have been told by some of our affiliate members that they do not need to take a day off to play golf with their competition, and after all, we can all benefit from more education. So a typical monthly meeting may look like this: 4:00 p.m. Registration (before rush hour), 4:30 p.m. - 5:30 p.m. Speaker, 5:30 p.m. - 6:00 p.m. Social, 6:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m. Dinner and Social."

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Jim's got something there and I hope he succeeds. A look at the history of our chapter will show that from its start in 1930 through the years I was in college, that was pretty much the format. It merits consideration by the WGCSA, too.

It is always sad to report the passing of one of the veterans of our chapter. On January 15, John E. Crewe passed away in Racine at the Lincoln Lutheran Care Center. John was 97 years old.

John lived in Racine all his life. He was a well-known golfer in Racine as well as the golf course superintendent at Racine CC for 22 years. John was a long time member of the WGCSA and an Army veteran of WWII.

While I was a student and during my early years as a golf course superintendent, John was a familiar presence at WGCSA meetings. I remember him as a good guy.

Thanks to Ric Lange for sharing the news.

The spread of the destructive gypsy moth across eastern and central Wisconsin has necessitated wider spraying and tougher eradication measures this year by the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection.

These miserable insects feed on 300 different types of trees and each year, despite efforts to the contrary, they have caused more damage. Although most of the moth problem is limited to the eastern part of Wisconsin, some have been found in the western counties. In fact, all 72 counties have reported their presence.

Last year, four counties were under gypsy moth quarantine; that number could grow to 17 this summer.

Our mild winter won't help any; the warm days could reduce winter kill and dramatically increase their numbers this summer.

Sixty-five sites covering 38,000 acres will be sprayed with B.t. bacteria. Residents affected will be notified, and there will be public meetings to answer question. The best we can hope for, unfortunately, is to slow the spread of gypsy moth injury. No state so far has completely stopped their onslaught.

Cubby O'Brien wants to thank the Wisconsin vendors who helped with the expenses of hosting the fall dinner dance at Drugan's Castle Mound Golf Club. They are:

Cannot Turf Supply, Wisconsin Turf, Natural Athletic Turf, Turf Supply Company, J.W. Turf, Terra, Bayer Corp., Rhone Poulanc, Scotts, Pursell Industries, UHS, Milorganite, Spring Valley, Pendelton Turf, Watertonics, Novartis, Horst, Olds Seed and T.J. Emmerich.

Thanks from all of us.

Shortly after returning from the GCSAA conference, I received a note from Clay Loyd. Most remember this man well — long time editor of *Golf Course Management* magazine. He is retired now, but working on a huge project. He's writing a book, one that will detail the history of the GCSAA and the golf course superintendent's profession.

His note explained he was working on the development of a section of the book about father-son golf course superintendents, or even more than

two generations. He wanted my help in that regard for Wisconsin.

I quickly made a list of those that came to mind and then called Wayne Otto. Below is the list we developed, in no particular order.

- Hans Schaller, sons Tom and Francis, and Francis' son Scott (now president of WGCSA)
- Frank Musbach, son Robert, his sons Dean and Jeff.
- Bill Sell and his son Greg.
- Lester VerHalen and his son Ron.
- Fred Wenzel, son Jerry, and his son Jerry, Jr. Also, Fred's nephew Tom is a Wisconsin golf course superintendent.

Have we omitted any? If so, please call me.

Will this be the earliest golf season ever in Wisconsin? Maybe. Maybe not. It is too early to tell. But in case it does turn out to be early, spend plenty of time these next few weeks with the home crowd and rest up.

It might be a long summer. 🌞

