



WEATHER OUTLOOK

on Wednesday, December 19

by Gary Sprung

Trapped in a Great Basin high

If you wanted to get from here to the ocean, which direction would be quickest?

Go west-southwest to San Diego or southwest to the Gulf of California. That's the direction our strongest storms come from. Today, Wednesday, our jet stream altitude winds (34,000 feet) are from the southwest, so we should be getting some moisture. Sure enough, up high we can see an overcast of cirrostratus clouds.

But the winds below are light and variable, almost dead calm. We're trapped in a typical mid-winter Great Basin High...typical of January, not December. This month is supposed to be (on average) the second snowiest of the season. But the calm lower winds and surface high pressures are yielding stagnant air, strong

temperature inversions in mountain valleys like ours, and air pollution.

The cause is a split in the polar jet stream. Out in the Pacific Ocean about a thousand miles west of the West Coast the jet divides into two branches, with the stronger branch heading north into Canada and the southern branch flowing into Baja California and the American Southwest.

The southern branch is today bringing a moderate storm to New Mexico, benefiting ski areas like Taos and perhaps flinging some minor snowfalls to the southern slopes of Colorado's San Jaun Mountains. Were the jet stream consolidated, the storm would have intensified to major proportions and brought us some snow.

Another cyclone (the term

for a pattern rotating counter-clockwise around a low pressure center) appears on the satellite photo a few hundred miles west of San Francisco. It, too, will die southeastward, too far south to do us much good. We'll probably see only some clouds from it on Sunday.

I'm sorry to report that the outlook for next week looks dry. We will at least see normal

temperatures—cold. That will preserve our snowpack for a while longer, leaving downhill resort skiers frustrated, but allowing wonderful and mostly safe backcountry skiing. The 30-day outlook into January issued by the National Weather Service this week showed no trend for western Colorado.

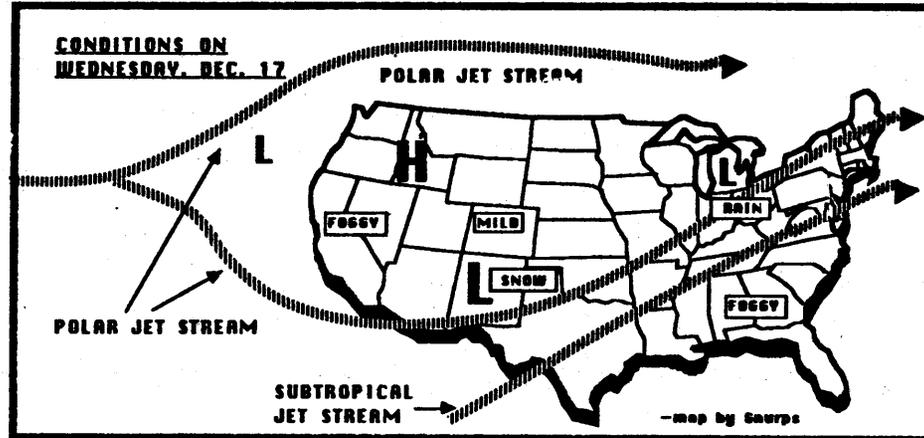
It's way to early to jump to start thinking about drought.

the forecast

Friday: increasing clouds; highs low to mid 30s in Crested Butte, high 30s to low 40s in Gunnison; lows in the teens

Saturday and Sunday: cloudier and cooler; very slight chance of snow, especially highest elevations; highs mid 20s to mid 30s

Monday: fair and warmer



Crested Butte weather — courtesy L.C. Adams

| Date | High | Low | Snow |
|-------|------|-----|------|
| 12/10 | 15 | -30 | 0 |
| 12/11 | 20 | -19 | 0 |
| 12/12 | 29 | -17 | 0 |
| 12/13 | 31 | -15 | 0 |
| 12/14 | 28 | -15 | 0 |
| 12/15 | 32 | -12 | 0 |
| 12/16 | 33 | -7 | 0 |
| 12/17 | | -8 | 0 |