



WEATHER OUTLOOK

on Wednesday, December 30

by Gary Sprung

Pastel plumes and short-wave winds

I hope many of my readers were out and about on Tuesday at five pm. The setting sun ducked under the mid-level overcast and illuminated the peaks with golden apricot. On Paradise Divide, pastel plumes of snow blew off the tops.

I doubt we'll be seeing much sun in the next few days. The near blizzard of today, Wednesday, will be followed by more weak waves that will continue to bring clouds, though little snow, through Saturday.

We don't have the ingredients for a major storm here today. The jet stream is oriented well for us, defining a broad trough from a point a few hundred miles west of San Francisco, through southern Nevada, then on to central Colorado. But at our level, the bottom of the atmosphere, no well-defined cyclones have developed. We're experiencing what is better called a "short-wave," a weak north-south band of low pressure moving across the West Coast, Great Basin and northern and central Rockies. It has little of the counter-clockwise cir-

ulation so obvious in a low-pressure cyclone.

Nonetheless, it has brought us lots of wind and a couple new inches. As it crosses the Front Range outside Denver today, the National Weather Service expects gusts up to 80 mph!

Once again, we don't need a well-defined low to bring snow. I expect another three to six inches by Thursday morning at the Crested Butte ski area. That's because winds now in the Southwest and Colorado at the critical altitudes of 10,000 and 18,000 feet above sea level are from the west-southwest. That good direction will probably give Crested Butte as much powder as is possible from this storm.

Behind, looking at Thursday, another weak wave will move from its current position over Oregon across northern Colorado and Wyoming. This will be too far north to bring us more than a trace on Thursday, but it will bring more clouds. The high Thursday won't exceed 25.

Friday, New Year's Day, should be more pleasant, with sun-

light breaking through scattered cumuli in the morning. But another short-wave will approach that afternoon and give us a good possibility of precipitation on Saturday.

So if you want to ski in sun, don't party too hard on New Year's Eve, for Friday may be your only

chance until Sunday or Monday. If you want powder, wait until Saturday. For packed powder, go on Sunday.

By the way, if you've been watching the weather maps on Wednesday, you probably saw an arctic cold front moving south from Montana, forecast to cross Colorado Wednesday night and move into the Plains on Thursday. Like most such arctic airmasses, this one will have little if any affect west of the Continental Divide.

Now, a look at last week. The cut-off upper-air low hung around much too long, through Sunday, depriving us of that perfect Christmas weekend weather. It stalled in the Southwest for most of its life and dumped copious snows on northern

New Mexico. Then, on Sunday, the low moved into eastern Colorado and produced an extreme blizzard on the eastern Plains. The Broncos v. San Diego game televised that storm nationally. That should help our tourism since most Americans think snow in Denver means snow in the mountains. In fact, it does not.

For next week, the outlook calls for below normal temperatures, above normal precipitation. A solid long-wave ridge in the central Pacific and Gulf of Alaska will continue to favor the development of a long-wave trough off the central West Coast. The northern Rockies will be wet, the southern Rockies dry. In between we'll see more light to moderate snows.

