QUALITATIVE DISCUSSION OF ATLANTIC BASIN SEASONAL HURRICANE ACTIVITY FOR 2022

We provide qualitative discussions of the factors which will likely determine next year's Atlantic basin hurricane activity with our December outlook. Two big questions with the upcoming hurricane season are if the current La Niña event will transition to El Niño next summer as well as what the North Atlantic SST configuration will look like.

Our first quantitative forecast for 2022 will be issued on Thursday, April 7.

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In Memory of William M. Gray[3]

This discussion as well as past forecasts and verifications are available online at
http://tropical.colostate.edu

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As of 9 December 2021

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ABSTRACT

We are providing a qualitative discussion of features likely to impact the 2022 Atlantic basin hurricane season rather than a specific number forecast. This outlook for 2022 will give our assessment of the probability of five potential scenarios for Accumulated Cyclone Energy (ACE).

The current way that we assess the following year's activity in the December outlook is in terms of two primary physical parameters:

1. the strength of the Atlantic multi-decadal oscillation (AMO)

2. the phase of ENSO

The Atlantic had three quiet hurricane seasons from 2013-2015, followed by six above-average seasons in a row from 2016-2021, including hyperactive seasons in 2017 and 2020. Six above-average seasons lends high confidence that the AMO remains in a positive phase, although the far North Atlantic has generally been characterized by below-average sea surface temperatures (SSTs), especially during the winter.

Another big question for 2022 is how the current La Niña event will trend over the next few months. As is typically the case at this time of year, there is considerable model disagreement as to what the phase of ENSO will look like for the summer and fall of 2022, although at this point the odds of El Niño for next summer appear fairly low.

For the 2022 hurricane season, we anticipate five possible scenarios with the probability of each as indicated on the next page:

1. AMO is very strong in 2022 and no El Niño occurs (resulting in a seasonal average Accumulated Cyclone Energy (ACE) activity of ~ 170) – **25% chance**.
2. AMO is above average and no El Niño occurs (ACE ~ 130) – **40% chance**.
3. AMO is above average and El Niño develops (ACE ~ 80) – **15% chance**.
4. AMO is below average and no El Niño occurs (ACE ~ 80) – **10% chance**.
5. AMO is below average and El Niño develops (ACE ~ 50) – **10% chance**.

Typically, seasons with the above-listed ACE values have TC activity as follows:

170 ACE – 15-18 named storms, 9-11 hurricanes, 4-5 major hurricanes
130 ACE – 13-16 named storms, 6-8 hurricanes, 2-3 major hurricanes
80 ACE – 9-12 named storms, 3-5 hurricanes, 1-2 major hurricanes
50 ACE – 6-9 named storms, 2-3 hurricanes, 0-1 major hurricane

Acknowledgment

These seasonal forecasts were developed by the late Dr. William Gray, who was lead author on these predictions for over 20 years and continued as a co-author until his death in 2016. In addition to pioneering seasonal Atlantic hurricane prediction, he conducted groundbreaking research on a wide variety of other topics including hurricane genesis, hurricane structure and cumulus convection. His investments in both time and energy to these forecasts cannot be acknowledged enough.

We are grateful for support from Ironshore Insurance, the Insurance Information Institute, Weatherboy and Evex. We acknowledge a grant from the G. Unger Vetlesen Foundation for additional financial support.

Colorado State University's seasonal hurricane forecasts have benefited greatly from a number of individuals that were former graduate students of William Gray. Among these former project members are Chris Landsea, John Knaff and Eric Blake. We would like to acknowledge assistance from Louis-Philippe Caron and the data team at the Barcelona Supercomputing Centre for providing data and insight on the statistical/dynamical models. We have also benefited from meteorological discussions with Carl Schreck, Louis-Philippe Caron, Brian McNoldy, Paul Roundy, Jason Dunion, and Peng Xian over the past few years.

DEFINITIONS AND ACRONYMS

Accumulated Cyclone Energy (ACE) - A measure of a named storm's potential for wind and storm surge destruction defined as the sum of the square of a named storm's maximum wind speed (in 10^4 knots^2) for each 6-hour period of its existence. The 1991-2020 average value of this parameter is 123 for the Atlantic basin.

Atlantic Multi-Decadal Oscillation (AMO) – A mode of natural variability that occurs in the North Atlantic Ocean and evidencing itself in fluctuations in sea surface temperature and sea level pressure fields. The AMO is likely related to fluctuations in the strength of the oceanic thermohaline circulation. Although several definitions of the AMO are currently used in the literature, we define the AMO based on North Atlantic sea surface temperatures from 50-60°N, 50-10°W and sea level pressure from 0-50°N, 70-10°W.

Atlantic Basin – The area including the entire North Atlantic Ocean, the Caribbean Sea, and the Gulf of Mexico.

El Niño – A 12-18 month period during which anomalously warm sea surface temperatures occur in the eastern half of the equatorial Pacific. Moderate or strong El Niño events occur irregularly, about once every 3-7 years on average.

ENSO Longitude Index – An ENSO index that estimates the average longitude of deep convection associated with the Walker Circulation.

Hurricane (H) - A tropical cyclone with sustained low-level winds of 74 miles per hour (33 ms^{-1} or 64 knots) or greater.

Hurricane Day (HD) - A measure of hurricane activity, one unit of which occurs as four 6-hour periods during which a tropical cyclone is observed or is estimated to have hurricane-force winds.

Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) - An irregular oscillation of sea surface temperatures between the western and eastern tropical Indian Ocean. A positive phase of the IOD occurs when the western Indian Ocean is anomalously warm compared with the eastern Indian Ocean.

Madden Julian Oscillation (MJO) – A globally propagating mode of tropical atmospheric intra-seasonal variability. The wave tends to propagate eastward at approximately 5 ms^{-1}, circling the globe in roughly 30-70 days.

Main Development Region (MDR) – An area in the tropical Atlantic where a majority of major hurricanes form, which we define as 10-20°N, 85-20°W.

Major Hurricane (MH) - A hurricane which reaches a sustained low-level wind of at least 111 mph (96 knots or 50 ms^{-1}) at some point in its lifetime. This constitutes a category 3 or higher on the Saffir/Simpson scale.

Major Hurricane Day (MHD) - Four 6-hour periods during which a hurricane has an intensity of Saffir/Simpson category 3 or higher.

Multivariate ENSO Index (MEI) – An index defining ENSO that considers tropical Pacific sea surface temperatures, sea level pressures, zonal and meridional winds and cloudiness.

Named Storm (NS) - A hurricane, a tropical storm or a sub-tropical storm.

Named Storm Day (NSD) - As in HD but for four 6-hour periods during which a tropical or sub-tropical cyclone is observed (or is estimated) to have attained tropical storm-force winds.

Net Tropical Cyclone (NTC) Activity –Average seasonal percentage mean of NS, NSD, H, HD, MH, MHD. Gives overall indication of Atlantic basin seasonal hurricane activity. The 1950-2000 average value of this parameter is 100.

Saffir/Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale – A measurement scale ranging from 1 to 5 of hurricane wind intensity. One is a weak hurricane; whereas, five is the most intense hurricane.

Southern Oscillation Index (SOI) – A normalized measure of the surface pressure difference between Tahiti and Darwin. Low values typically indicate El Niño conditions.

Standard Deviation (SD) – A measure used to quantify the variation in a dataset.

Sea Surface Temperature Anomaly – SSTA

Thermohaline Circulation (thermohaline circulation) – A large-scale circulation in the Atlantic Ocean that is driven by fluctuations in salinity and temperature. When the thermohaline circulation is stronger than normal, the AMO tends to be in its warm (or positive) phase, and more Atlantic hurricanes typically form.

Tropical Cyclone (TC) - A large-scale circular flow occurring within the tropics and subtropics which has its strongest winds at low levels; including hurricanes, tropical storms and other weaker rotating vortices.

Tropical North Atlantic (TNA) index – A measure of sea surface temperatures in the area from 5.5-23.5°N, 57.5-15°W.

Tropical Storm (TS) - A tropical cyclone with maximum sustained winds between 39 mph (18 ms^{-1} or 34 knots) and 73 mph (32 ms^{-1} or 63 knots).

Vertical Wind Shear – The difference in horizontal wind between 200 hPa (approximately 40000 feet or 12 km) and 850 hPa (approximately 5000 feet or 1.6 km).

1 knot = 1.15 miles per hour = 0.515 meters per second

1 Introduction

This is the 39th year in which the CSU Tropical Meteorology Project has made forecasts of the upcoming season's Atlantic basin hurricane activity. Our research team has shown that a sizable portion of the year-to-year variability of Atlantic tropical cyclone (TC) activity can be hindcast with skill exceeding climatology. These forecasts are based on statistical and statistical-dynamical methodologies derived from 30-60 years of past data. Qualitative adjustments are added to accommodate additional processes which may not be explicitly represented by our quantitative analyses. These evolving forecast techniques are based on a variety of climate-related global and regional predictors previously shown to be related to the forthcoming seasonal Atlantic basin TC activity and landfall probability. We believe that seasonal forecasts must be based on methods that show significant hindcast skill in application to long periods of prior data. It is only through hindcast skill that one can demonstrate that seasonal forecast skill is possible. This is a valid methodology provided that the atmosphere continues to behave in the future as it has in the past.

2 The Influence of the Atlantic Multi-Decadal Oscillation on Atlantic Hurricane Activity

Over the next few pages, we discuss two large-scale physical features which we posit are fundamental for how active the 2022 Atlantic hurricane season is likely to be.

One of the primary physical drivers for active versus inactive Atlantic basin hurricane seasons is the strength of the Atlantic multi-decadal oscillation (AMO) (Gray et al. 1996, Goldenberg et al. 2001, Klotzbach and Gray 2008). A positive phase of the AMO (or strong phase of the Atlantic thermohaline circulation) typically leads to 3-5 times more major Atlantic basin hurricane activity than does a negative phase. The typical period of the AMO is about 60 years, with the period length varying between as short as 40-50 years and as long as 70-80 years. This means that we typically have 25-35 years of above-average Atlantic basin major TC activity and similar length periods with considerably reduced amounts of major TC activity. We had three quiet Atlantic hurricane seasons in a row (e.g., 2013-2015) which led us to question whether we had moved out of the active era that began in 1995 (Klotzbach et al. 2015). However, the Atlantic has since had six active seasons in a row, causing us to believe that the AMO remains in its positive phase.

While the AMO typically remains in an above-average or in a below-average state for periods of 25-35 years, there can be monthly, seasonal or longer breaks up to a year or two within these decadal periods when the AMO conditions of features such as SST, salinity, pressure, wind, and moisture become substantially weaker in positive AMO phases or stronger during negative AMO phases.

There is a strong inverse relationship between the strength of the AMO and the strength of the Atlantic gyre (Bermuda-Azores High). This has been well documented in our analysis of various yearly and seasonal gyre and AMO proxy variations. Hurricane activity, particularly the most intense hurricane activity, is much more frequent when the Atlantic Bermuda-Azores gyre circulation system is weak, and the Atlantic Ocean thermohaline circulation system is strong. Hurricane activity is generally reduced when the reverse conditions occur. Increased gyre strength acts to bring about cooler air (and reduced moisture) and cooler ocean water advection in the eastern half of the Atlantic. This acts to increase the strength of the trade winds and increase the low latitude (5-20°N) south to north tropospheric temperature gradient and upper tropospheric westerly winds. These changes are inhibiting factors for hurricane formation and intensification.

We currently maintain an AMO proxy that utilizes SST in the region from 50-60°N, 50-10°W and SLP in the region from 0-50°N, 70-10°W (Figure 1). The index is created by weighing the two parameters as follows: 0.6*SST – 0.4*SLP. Our AMO index is currently running at above-normal levels (Figure 2). Both the far North Atlantic and tropical Atlantic are warmer than normal (Figure 3).

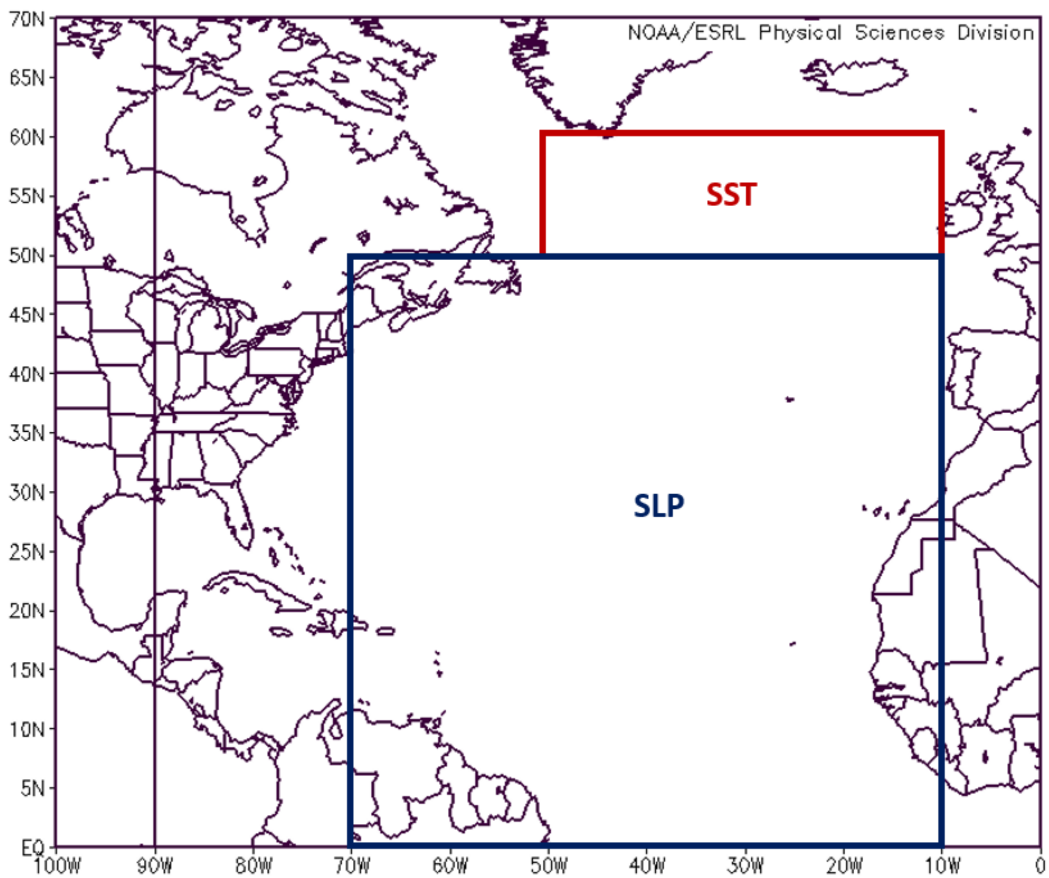

Figure 1: Regions which are utilized for calculation of our AMO index. These regions are as defined in Klotzbach and Gray (2008).

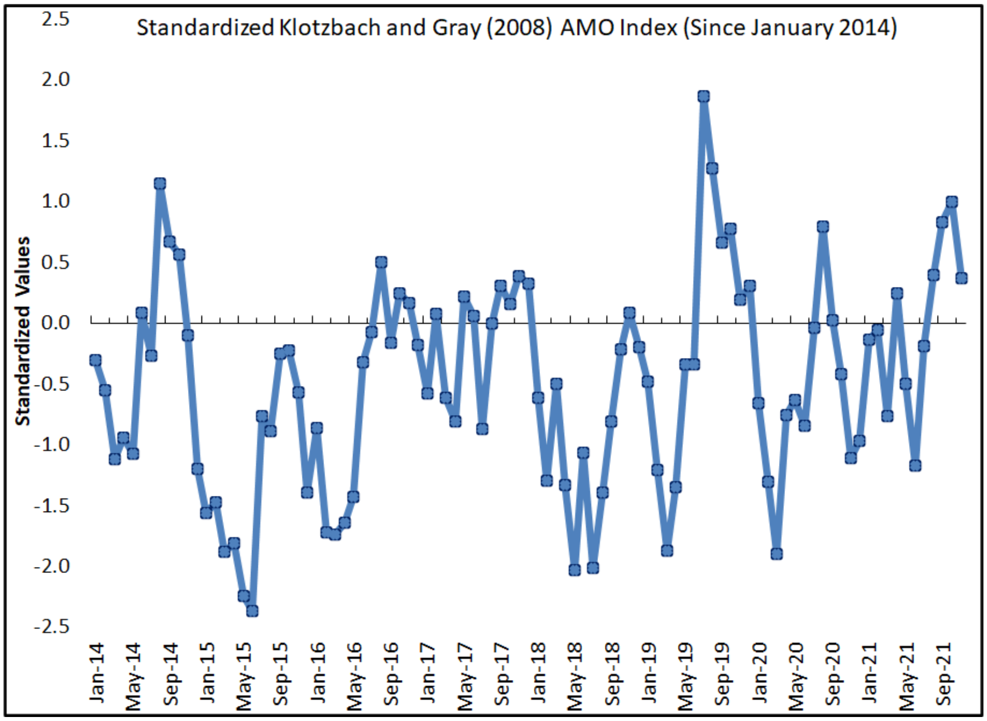

Figure 2: Standardized values of the CSU AMO index by month since January 2014.

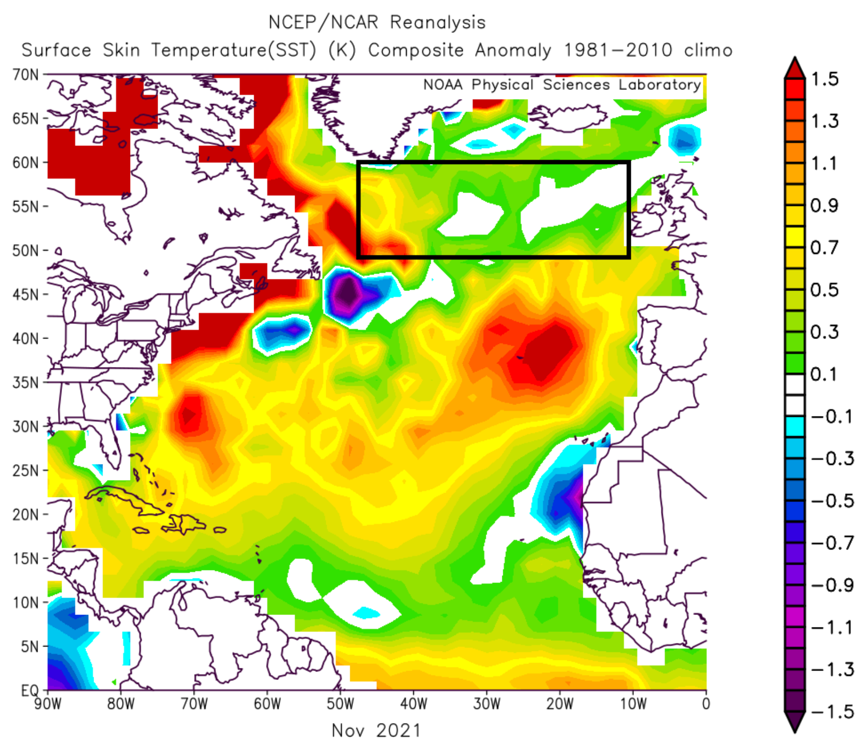

Figure 3: November 2021 SST anomalies across the North Atlantic Ocean. The black rectangle highlights the region where SSTs are measured for the CSU AMO index.

One of the big scientific questions that we have been trying to better understand over the past few years is the predominant trend to a negative horseshoe of SST anomalies in the North Atlantic (including anomalously cold SSTs in the tropical Atlantic) during the winter, but the persistence of above-normal SSTs in the tropical Atlantic during the peak of the Atlantic hurricane season. Figure 4 displays January-March-averaged SSTs during 2014-2021 minus 1995-2012 – the likely peak of the positive AMO phase. Figure 5 displays the same data but plotting August-October-averaged SSTs. SSTs have generally remained near or above the 1991-2020 average across the tropical Atlantic during the peak of most hurricane seasons (August-October) since 2013 (Figure 6). The negative horseshoe of SST observed during the winter months has likely been a result of the predominantly positive North Atlantic Oscillation and associated stronger zonal winds blowing across the Atlantic. However, these zonal wind anomalies have not persisted through the summer, leading to anomalous winter to summer warming of the tropical Atlantic.

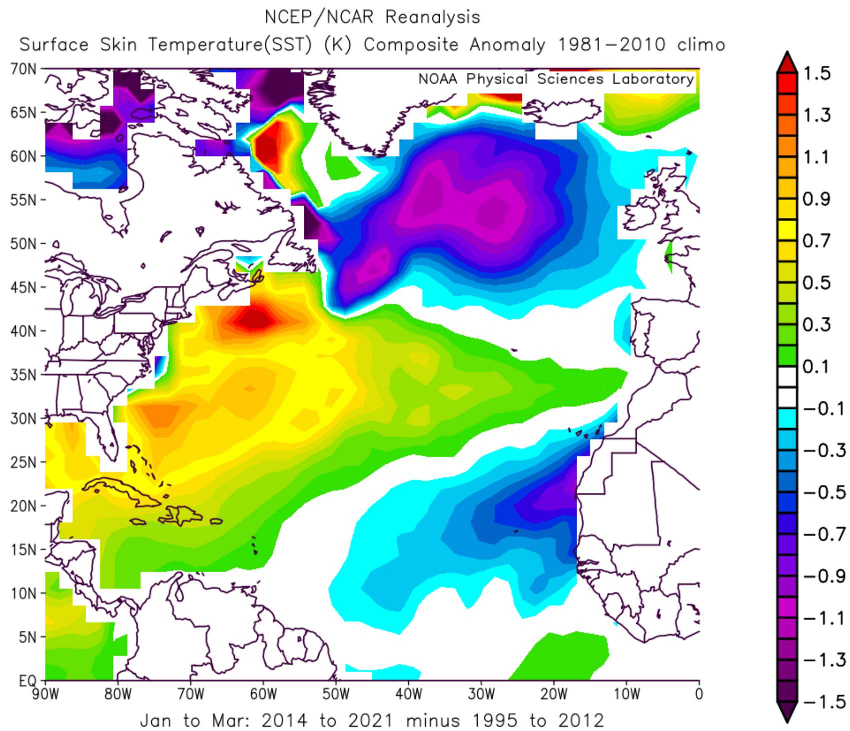

Figure 4: January-March-averaged SSTs from 2014-2021 minus 1995-2012.

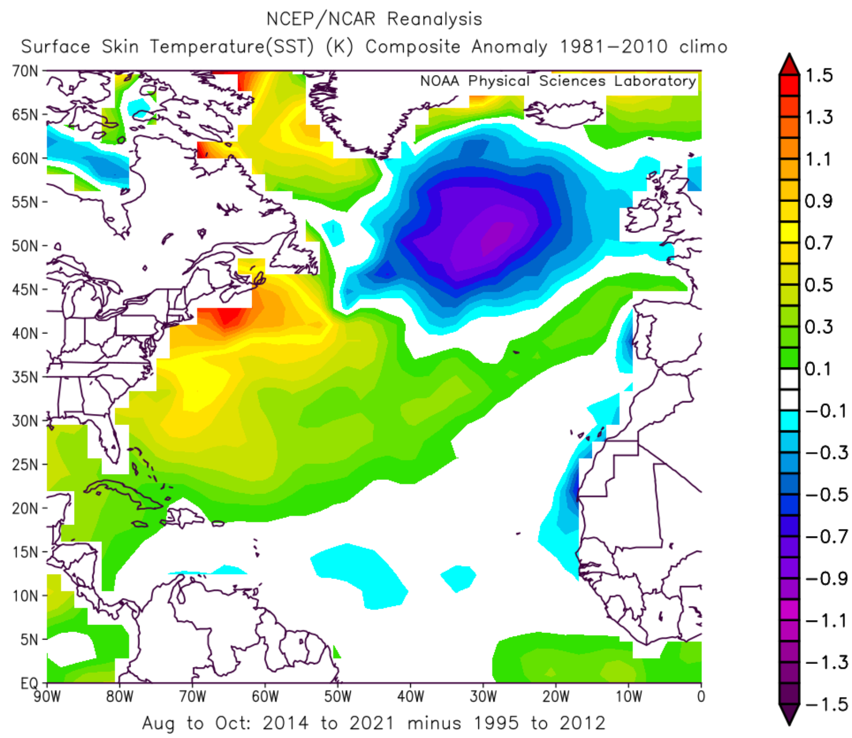

Figure 5: August-October-averaged SSTs from 2014-2021 minus 1995-2012.

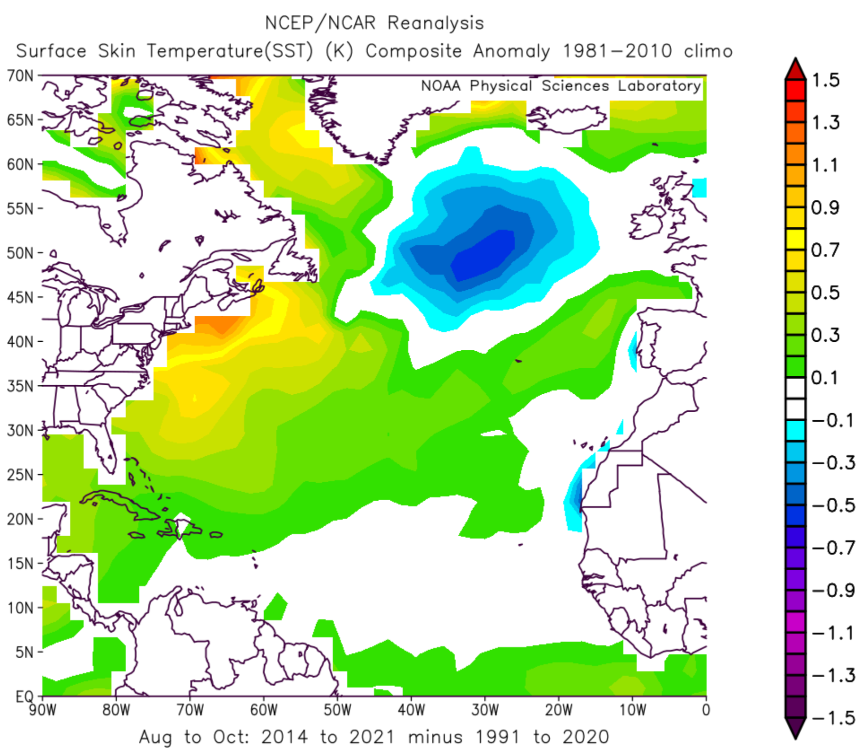

Figure 6: August-October-averaged SSTs from 2014-2020 minus 1991-2020.

3 ENSO

The tropical Pacific is currently characterized by La Niña conditions (Figure 7). SST anomalies are generally between 0.5-1°C below average for most of the eastern and central tropical Pacific. One of the important questions for every hurricane season is what the ENSO state will look like during the peak of the hurricane season. In general, most ENSO forecast models call for the current La Niña to weaken and that neutral ENSO conditions will prevail next summer (Figure 8). The official NOAA ENSO forecast calls for a 60% chance of neutral ENSO conditions for next June-August (Figure 9).

The September-October-November-averaged (SON) Oceanic Nino Index (ONI), defined as the three-month average of SSTs in the Nino 3.4 region, is currently -0.8°C. Table 1 displays SON ONI values for all weak La Niña events (between -0.5°C and -0.9°C) since 1950 along with the following year's August-September-October-averaged (ASO) ASO ONI values. Of the ten previous weak La Niña events during SON, two transitioned to El Niño (>=0.5°C), five were neutral ENSO while the remaining three were La Niña (<=-0.5°C).

We note that this is the second consecutive SON with La Niña conditions interspersed with neutral ENSO conditions during the intermediate summer – a phenomenon known as a double-dip La Niña. Two consecutive SON periods with La Niña conditions is a fairly common phenomenon. Since 1950, SON ONI values <= -0.5°C in two or more consecutive years occurred in: 1954-1955, 1970-1971, 1973-1975, 1983-1984, 1998-2000, 2010-2011. Table 2 displays SON and following ASO values in the second (or third) consecutive SON with La Niña conditions. Of the eight previous second (or third) consecutive SON with La Niña conditions, two transitioned to El Niño (>=0.5°C), three were neutral ENSO while the remaining three were La Niña (<=-0.5°C).

There is considerable uncertainty at this point what ENSO will look like by the peak of next hurricane season from August-October, but at this point given model forecasts as well as our statistical analyses, it appears relatively unlikely that El Niño will develop by next summer.

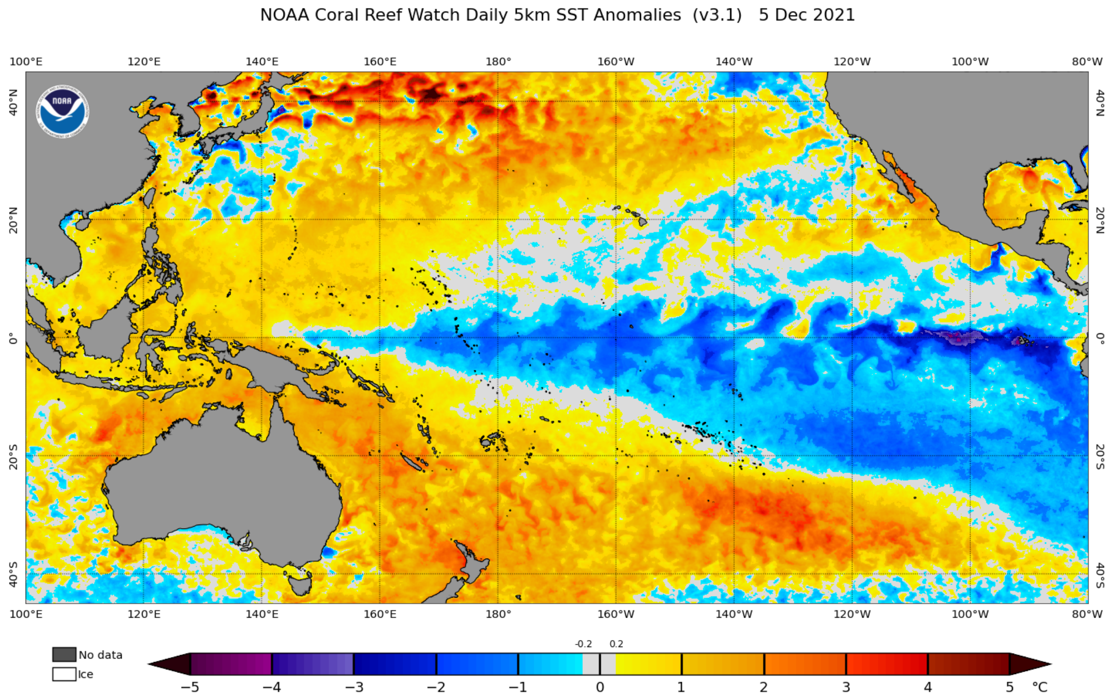

Figure 7: Early December 2021 SST anomalies across the Pacific Ocean. Cold SSTs prevail across the eastern and central equatorial tropical Pacific.

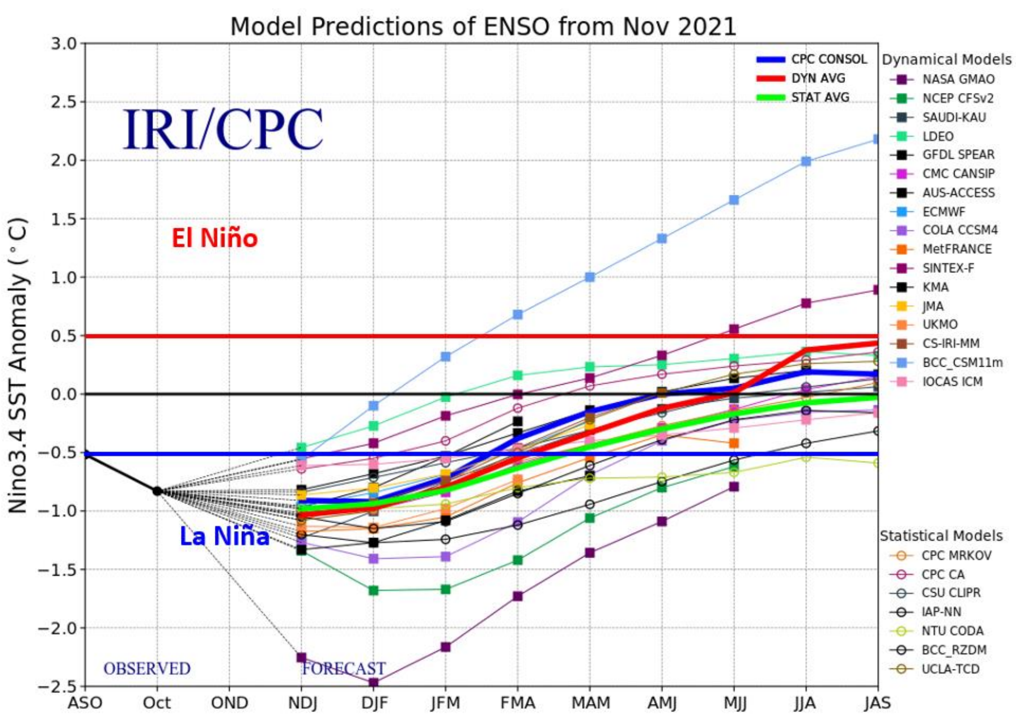

Figure 8: ENSO model prediction plume from mid-November for the next several months. Figure courtesy of the International Research Institute for Climate and Society.

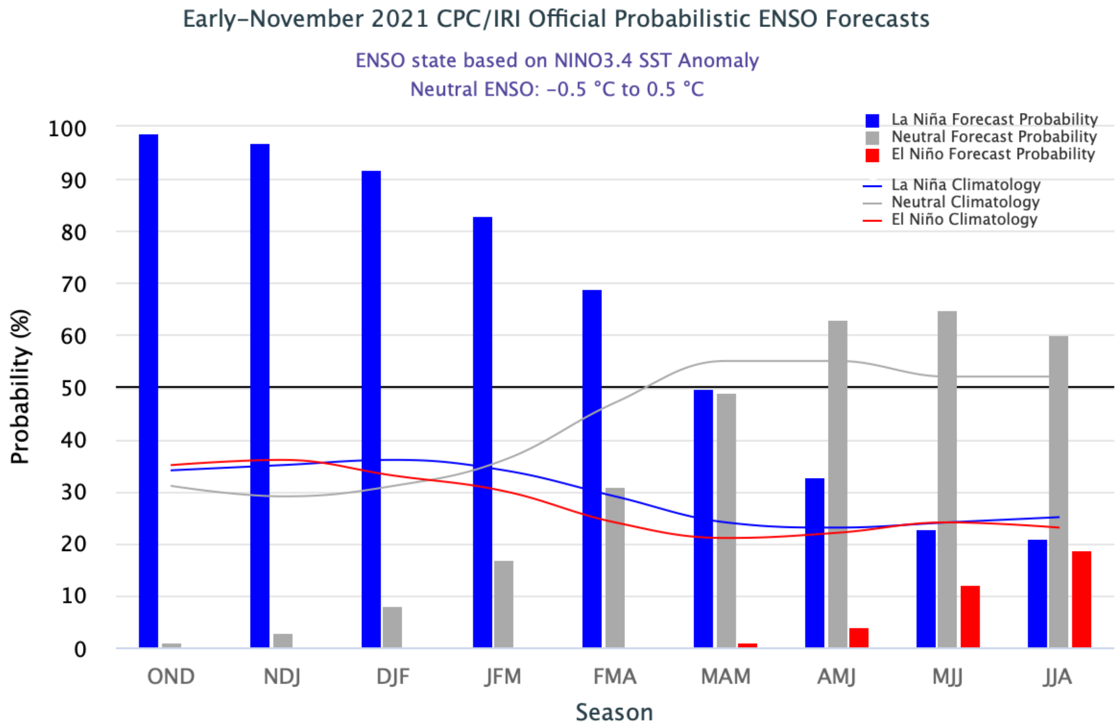

Figure 9: Official NOAA probabilistic ENSO forecast for the next several months.

Table 1: Oceanic Nino Index (ONI) values in September-November of weak La Niña events (between -0.5°C and -0.9°C) along with ONI values during the following August-October. Events meeting the La Niña threshold are color-coded in blue, while events meeting the El Niño threshold are color-coded in red.

Year	SON ONI	Following Year ASO ONI
1954	**-0.8**	**-1.1**
1964	**-0.8**	**1.9**
1970	**-0.7**	**-0.8**
1971	**-0.9**	**1.6**
1974	**-0.6**	**-1.4**
1983	**-0.8**	-0.2
1984	**-0.6**	-0.4
2000	**-0.6**	-0.2
2016	**-0.7**	-0.4
2017	**-0.7**	0.4
2021	**-0.8**	???

Table 2: September-November and following ASO ONI values in the second (or third) consecutive SON with La Niña conditions. Events meeting the La Niña threshold are color-coded in blue, while events meeting the El Niño threshold are color-coded in red.

Year	SON ONI	Following Year ASO ONI
1955	**-1.4**	**-0.5**
1971	**-0.9**	**1.6**
1974	**-0.6**	**-1.4**
1975	**-1.4**	**0.6**
1984	**-0.6**	-0.4
1999	**-1.3**	**-0.5**
2000	**-0.6**	-0.2
2011	**-1.1**	0.3
2021	**-0.8**	???

5 Summary

We detail in this outlook two key parameters that are critical for determining levels of Atlantic hurricane activity: North Atlantic SSTs and ENSO. Currently, tropical Atlantic and far North Atlantic SSTs are above normal, indicative of a positive phase of the AMO. The tropical Pacific is currently characterized by La Niña conditions. Most models predict that La Niña will transition to neutral ENSO conditions by next summer, while our statistical analyses also favor neutral ENSO conditions for next summer. We are closely monitoring these conditions and will have additional discussion with our early April outlook.

6 Further Updated Forecasts of 2022 Hurricane Activity

Seasonal outlooks for the 2022 Atlantic basin hurricane season will be issued on **Thursday April 7**, **Thursday June 2, Thursday July 7, and Thursday 4 August**. We will also be issuing two-week forecasts for Atlantic TC activity during the climatological peak of the season from August-October. A verification and discussion of all 2022 forecasts will be issued in late November 2022. These forecasts will be available on our project's website.