



Hydrometeorology Testbed

NOAA's Hydrometeorology Testbed (HMT) conducts research on precipitation and weather conditions that can lead to flooding, and fosters transition of scientific advances and new tools into forecasting operations. HMT's outputs support efforts to balance water resource demands and flood control in a changing climate.



Why Extreme Precipitation?

A recent study indicates that 70% of Americans feel that precipitation forecasts are critically important to their daily livelihood. Yet forecasting precipitation remains a major challenge, especially the extreme events. Indeed, the NOAA Research Council identified "improvement in our ability to forecast weather, climate, water resources and ecosystem health" as one of the 7 grand science challenges for the next 5-20 years.

In one season alone in California, only 2 of the 16 extreme precipitation events were correctly predicted with 24-h lead time. Flash floods and longer-term flooding events are among the leading natural causes of the loss of life and property, accounting for the largest share of Presidential disaster declarations in any given year.

Global climate change is expected to contribute to greater weather extremes, leading to scenarios of too much water or too little water or even both. This will further exacerbate the

TOOLS FOR WATER IN A CHANGING CLIMATE

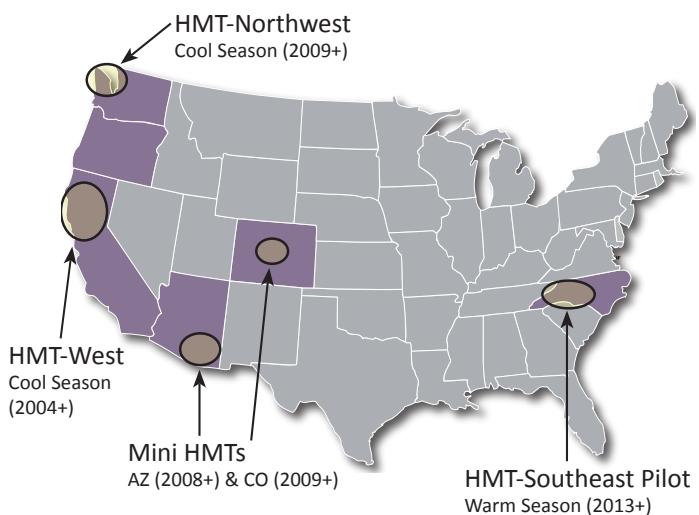
challenges of water resource management, which is aimed at balancing the needs of flood protection, and storage for domestic, industrial and agricultural consumption, recreation and the maintenance of healthy ecosystems. This balance is predicated upon access to accurate precipitation forecasts. HMT is aimed at improving forecasts to allow water managers to achieve this balance.

What is HMT?

Guided by NWS operational requirements and by emerging scientific questions and new technologies, HMT directly engages the forecasters and scientists in the research and development process. New ideas, technologies and predictive models are developed, demonstrated, evaluated and refined through the testbed, and some are then transitioned to operations.

HMT's activities are focused on the causes of extreme precipitation and the attendant flooding, including:

- Monitoring precipitation (quantitative precipitation estimates)
- Predicting precipitation (quantitative precipitation forecasts)
- Determining the type of precipitation (rain or snow)
- Coupling the precipitation falling from the sky to the impacts on the ground: snow pack; soil moisture; runoff; flooding and debris flow
- Developing decision support aids: providing not just more information to the front line forecasters, but smarter tools for effective decision making
- Verification: building credibility in the new products and services related to precipitation



PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

What's Next?

HMT originated from studies of winter storms hitting the west coast of the U.S. – storms with intensity and impacts rivaling that of hurricanes on the East Coast. It was recognized that for this research to have an enduring operational impact, a new way of conducting research was required. The year 2005 saw the first full implementation of the NOAA HMT on the West Coast. The testbed has since grown and evolved, and HMT is poised to establish new regional testbeds. HMT's current and ongoing activities include:

HMT-West: HMT-West uncovered the major role that atmospheric rivers (ARs) play in producing extreme precipitation and flooding. Given this paradigm and the uncertainty of how ARs would change in intensity or frequency in a changing climate, the State of California funded HMT to implement a 21st-century solution to help the State deal with its water resource and flood protection issues. The solution includes a more than 100-station network of state-of-the-art atmospheric and terrestrial sensors that measure the key variables that cause extreme precipitation and flooding. To take full advantage of the observing networks being installed and to provide advanced lead time of high impact weather, this project involves a numerical weather prediction component using the HMT WRF ensemble. Special display systems that can provide this value-added information in the Weather Forecast Office and River Forecast Center settings are also being implemented. Decision support tools, that will allow water managers and other decision makers to make optimal use of the information, are being developed.



Water and a Changing Climate...

"Within the United States, extensive climate-related changes have been documented over the last century. These include increases in continental-average temperatures, rising sea levels in many coastal locations, an increased frequency of extreme heavy rainfall events, lengthening of the growing season, earlier snowmelt, and altered river flow volumes. Water is an issue in every region, but the nature of the potential impact varies. Drought is a serious problem in many regions, especially in the West and Southeast; and floods and water quality problems are likely to be amplified by climate change in most regions."

– Dr. Jane Lubchenco, former NOAA Administrator



Flooding in Greenville, NC from the Tar River caused by Hurricane Floyd in September of 1999. Photo by Dave Saville, FEMA News.

The HMT-West observing network is also the framework from which the State of California and NOAA are exploring the linkages between ARs, aerosols, and precipitation through the CalWater Program: an effort aimed at understanding natural- and human-induced changes to the climate that will impact long-term water supplies, droughts, and floods.

HMT-Southeast: The second regional implementation of HMT is underway in North Carolina. The Southeastern U.S. faces unique hydrometeorological challenges from winter storms, summer convection, and land-falling tropical storms, including intense hurricanes. Similar to HMT-West, HMT-SE will begin as a pilot project, building on assets provided by partners at NOAA, NASA, and the academic community. The HMT-Southeast is being supplemented with additional observations through funding made available by the Sandy Supplemental appropriations.

HMT Outcomes

- Improved scientific knowledge and understanding of conditions that create extreme precipitation.
- Improved assessment of current conditions and forecasts, leading to improved situational awareness of extreme precipitation events.
- New observations to support long-term monitoring of our changing climate.
- Improved weather and water information that allows for more efficient management and use of water resources to balance numerous and often-competing interests.
- Demonstration of regional testbeds as conduits to infuse new science and technology into operations.
- Increased protection of lives and property through improved forecasts of hazardous weather.



hmt.noaa.gov

For more information, contact:

Dr. Allen White

NOAA/ESRL Physical Sciences Division

Allen.B.White@noaa.gov

Tel: 303-497-5155