

# VALLEY NEWS

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## Baby, It's Warm Outside

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### So-Called 'Winter' Talk of the Towns

BY KRISTEN FOUNTAIN

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After experiencing the warmest December on record, people in New Hampshire and Vermont are talking.

Walking downtown in their shirt sleeves or driving past a glaring white patch of hard-won machined snow on local ski slopes, they remark on it frequently — how much this winter seems like spring.

"Every day I hear someone say something like that," said Miriam Osofsky of Hanover, a member of the Climate Protection Campaign, a group of town residents. "I personally feel it is very important to give it a name."

That name, according to Osofsky and other activists, is global warming — climate change caused by greenhouse gas emissions from the fuels used to run cars, heaters and

power plants. And, with winter's balmy beginning in northern New England, other area residents are wondering whether they might just be right.

The numbers are striking:

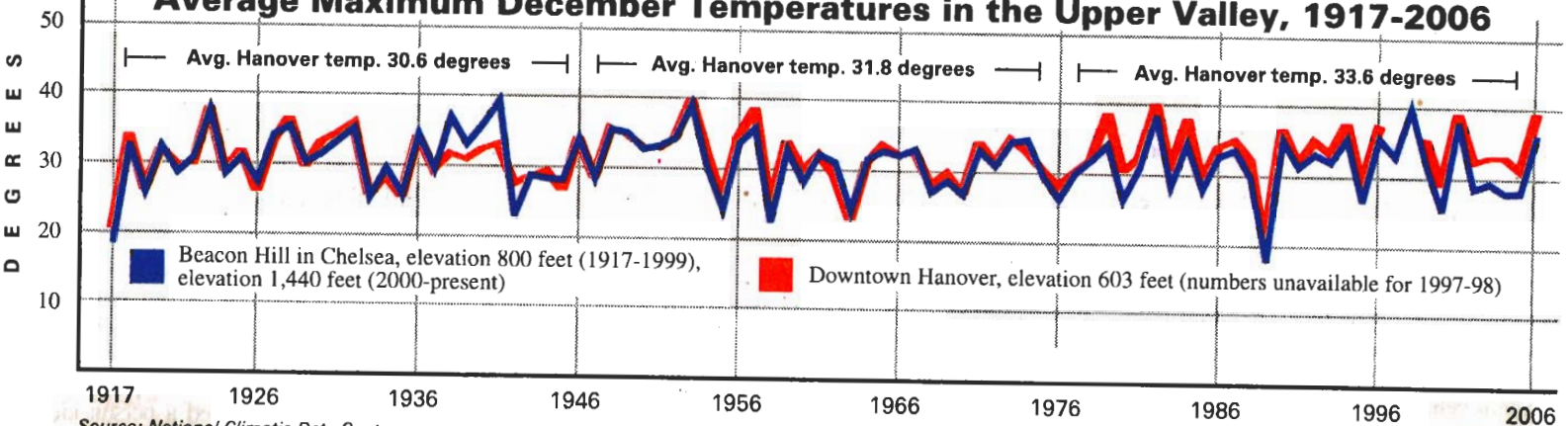
■ Last month was the warmest December ever measured in both New Hampshire and Vermont, as well as in New York and Connecticut, the federally funded Northeast Regional Climate Center at Cornell University said last week.

■ Average daily temperature in December at three reporting stations in the Upper Valley (Hanover, Lebanon and Chelsea) was between 7 degrees and 9 degrees above what has been typical there for the last 30 years, National Weather Service data show.

■ Also, in New Hampshire and Vermont, four of the 10 warmest winters (the months of December, January and February com-

See WARM—A7

Average Maximum December Temperatures in the Upper Valley, 1917-2006



Source: National Climatic Data Center

# Warm Winter Weather Part of a Long-Term Trend

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bined) since 1895 have occurred within the last decade, according to the Northeast Regional Climate Center.

Is this global warming?

Yes and no, several weather scientists said last week.

The record warm weather continues a long-term pattern of increasing temperatures regionally, they said, but it also has a more immediate cause: the jet stream.

The high westerly winds are blowing north of us recently instead of south, allowing warm air to move into New England instead of cold, said New Hampshire state climatologist David Brown, who is also an assistant professor at UNH.

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The changing position of the jet stream over North America is the same basic reason that winter temperatures in the region fluctuate so much within one season and from winter to winter one year to the next, he said.

This year, in addition, the incoming warm air is even warmer due to El Nino, a distinct global weather pattern that is the atmosphere's complex reaction to warmer-than-normal water temperatures at the surface of the eastern tropical Pacific Ocean, said Steve Maleski, a meteorologist at the Fairbanks Museum in St. Johnsbury.

However, we are not just seeing a very warm winter, several scientists pointed out. It has so far been a winter of record-breaking warmth and is the latest in a series of record-breaking winters occurring with increasing frequency.

That makes it part of a long-term warming trend, they said.

"Because of this long-term trend, you are bumping already warm temperatures up into record territory," said Maleski.

Most climate scientists believe the warming trend is related to increasing levels of carbon dioxide and other gases in the atmosphere that, like a greenhouse, are trapping heat naturally radiated out from Earth. One piece of evidence they point to: Over the last 30 years, as the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere has grown, the region — and the globe — has been getting warmer faster.

"The only way we can explain the warmer global temperature is by including warming as a result of enhanced greenhouse gases in the atmosphere," said Cameron Wake, a climatologist at the University of New Hampshire.

Winter temperatures in particular have been

## Local Efforts to Fight Climate Change

Here is a list of some of the groups working in the Upper Valley on issues related to global warming:

### CLIMATE PROTECTION CAMPAIGN

Current projects:

- Encouraging people to turn off their cars instead of idling while waiting at bank drive-through windows or in front of schools. The group has asked three bank companies with branches in Hanover and the Dresden School District to post signs and may work with the Hanover Area Chamber of Commerce on a public information flier for businesses, said Roger Lohr, coordinator of the campaign.

- Presenting information about global warming in area schools.

- Taking inventory of current levels of energy use in Hanover so that progress can be tracked over time.

Contact: Miriam Osofsky at (603) 643-1664 or aaron.miriam.osofsky@valley.net.

### FIRST BRANCH SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY PROJECT

Current projects:

- Supporting installation of solar hot water heaters in the region by sharing information and providing group discounts. "Our goal is to get in as many solar hot water heaters as we can," before May 1, 2007, said Phillip Mulligan of Chelsea.

- Educating the community through movies,

lectures and tours of homes that utilize alternative energy power sources.

Contact: phillip@sover.net.

### SUSTAINABLE ENERGY RESOURCE GROUP

Current project:

- Supporting town committees that work to increase municipal energy efficiency. In the Upper Valley, Norwich, Thetford, Lyme, Hanover, Strafford and Sharon each have committees. Projects include promoting the replacement of town street lamps with compact fluorescent light bulbs, running town vehicles on biodiesel, and town energy audits.

Contact: Bob Walker, Thetford Center, (802) 785-4126 and serg@valley.net.

### THE CARBON COALITION

Current project:

- Placing a resolution on as many New Hampshire Town Meeting ballots as possible urging President Bush and U.S. Congress to take specific action on climate change.

Volunteers are gathering signatures or presenting the idea to selectboards in 15 Upper Valley towns, according to the Portsmouth-based group Clean Air-Cool Planet, which is organizing the effort.

Contact: www.carboncoalition.org or (603) 828-5793.

— Kristen Fountain

affected.

A September 2006 analysis by Wake shows that the average daily winter temperature across the combined region of New England, New York, New Jersey and the Canadian Maritime provinces increased an average of 1.3 degrees each decade between 1970 and 2002, compared to an increase of less than one-third of a degree per decade over the previous 70 years.

Long-term records from the Hanover station also show December temperatures increasing more rapidly in recent decades (see chart, Page A1).

The current El Nino and position of the jet stream doesn't mean that the region won't see a cold snap this winter, said Kathryn Vreeland, a climatologist at the Northeast Regional Climate Center.

There is still a good chance that coming months

will be much cooler than December was.

The National Weather Service's three-month temperature predictions put the likelihood of continued warmer than normal temperatures at slightly below 50 percent.

Also, given annual fluctuations in weather patterns, long-term warming does not mean that there won't be winters in the region's future that are colder than what we now think of as normal, several scientists said.

But that does not change what computer models of the climate are projecting will be typical in the not-so-distant future.

"It's tough to ignore the reality that we have been on this upward temperature trend," said Brown. "Every prediction for the next couple decades, they all point to a continued warming."

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**A midday jogger makes his way around Lake Runnemed in Windsor this week. Temperatures 15 degrees above average encouraged more dog-walking and running, less snow shovelling and skiing.** VALLEY NEWS — ROB STRONG

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**A snowman in a Windsor yard succumbs to the mild winter weather on Wednesday.**

VALLEY NEWS — CHANNING JOHNSON