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Thursday, January 4, 2007

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## Balmy air feels good, but is a bad sign of global warming trend

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DOVER — If you're happy about the warm weather so far this winter, just think about the polar bears. Imagine the beloved symbols of the Arctic clinging to the edges of icebergs as their homes melt away.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed placing polar bears on the threatened list, due to the very real possibility that global climate change could literally melt away their habitat. It is a move that many say could be a tacit acknowledgment by the federal government that global warming exists.

State climatologist David Brown says warming temperatures have been the norm in New Hampshire since the 1970s, and last year was an excellent example. Numbers indicate December 2006 was the warmest December ever, and 2006 in its entirety was the second warmest year, he said.

"It's really been about three decades we've seen a steady upward trend in temperature, particularly in the winter season," Brown said during an interview Wednesday. "Globally, we've seen an upward temperature trend in the same period. I think what we're seeing in New England is the regional signature of the global climate change. There's no question that that's a piece of it."

The average temperature last month in Concord was 33.9 degrees, beating out a previous record of 33.2 set in 1923. The numbers, compiled by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, date back to 1921.

In addition, the state recorded the second warmest year ever in 2006, with an average temperature of 48.4 degrees. That number is surpassed only by 1998's average temperature of 48.7 degrees.

Brown says the upward trend is consistent with global climate change, a phenomenon blamed by most scientists on the collection of greenhouse gases in the earth's atmosphere due to the burning of fossil fuels.

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"There are possibly and probably multiple reasons why it's been so warm recently but it's clearly consistent with what we're seeing throughout New England, and really globally," Brown said.

Warmer temperatures have contributed to a winter with very little snowfall so far, a lamentable fact to many in the state's tourism and winter sports industries. Not just warmer temperatures, but also a rather dry season so far, are factors responsible for the lack of snow, Brown said.

Projections made by the Climate Prediction Center in Washington, D.C., for the rest of the winter indicate that there is an increased probability of warmer than normal temperatures, Brown said.

"It looks like there's a better chance than usual that it will be warmer, and that's for the rest of the winter. It's possible that unusual warmth will persist at least for the next couple of weeks," Brown said.

Weather reports for the rest of the week call for high temperatures in the 50s. Saturday's high temperature could reach 59 degrees before slightly cooler temperatures creep in Sunday and continue to drop steadily throughout next week.

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