

Oceanographer: Pacific Ocean blob is gone, but will return



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Basketball players took to shorts and T-shirts at Kitsilano Beach during unusually warm weather this week. Scientists say the Pacific Ocean blob that led to our warm winter has gone, but it return. *ARLEN REDEKOP / PNG*

The blob is gone, but it's coming back.

A University of Washington report

(<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/2015GL067308/full>) has found that the blob — a warm ocean area roughly the size of the continental U.S. — has gone, but “should appear again every five years or less.”

“It was a pretty unusual event which no one predicted. In the future, we can expect more,” said Hillary Scannell, who co-authored a recent study of Pacific Ocean temperatures for a 65-year period dating back to 1950.

“When there is persistent warming over a few decades there will be more extreme events, once in every five years or more,” said Scannell, a graduate student in oceanography at the University of Washington.

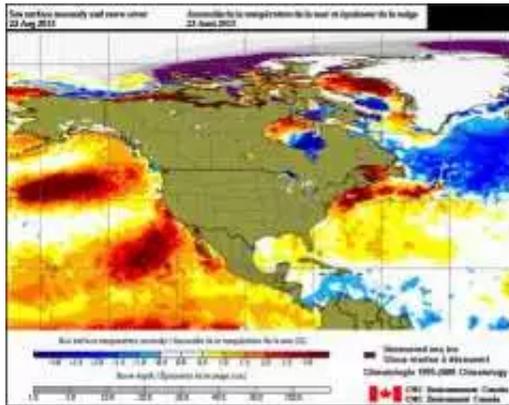


Photo of the Blob taken on August 23
2015 *ENVIRONMENT*
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The report detected that major warming had occurred before, but the instances were much less significant. The recent blob, which began in 2013 ended a year ago, stretched from Alaska to California and was on average about 1.5 C hotter than normal.

“That was the unprecedented part of the blob. The study found that temperatures had never been as

high,” she said.

Consequences for natural life will be felt; Scannell said B.C. is “right on the frontline.”

Weather changes affect fish populations, wild animals, agricultural activity, water supplies, ice cream sales and snow-dependent businesses such as skiing, she said.

“All those things have been picked out as consequences,” she said. “We see changes in what fish people are catching.”

The study examined data reported by surface ships and satellites from 1950 to 2014 (satellites have been around since the 1970s). “Tens of thousands” of data points from the U.S. National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration were charted on computers.

The planet’s warming trend continues. The Oceanographic Administration reported (<http://www.noaa.gov/>) on April 19 that for the 11th straight month, the globe set a record for heat.

Temperatures were about 1 C above the 20th century average, surpassing the highest temperature period in the 1880-2016 record.

Record temperatures were also set this week in Metro Vancouver, which experienced a summer-like heat wave less than a month after winter officially ended on March 21.

Extended hot spells in the next two months would adversely affect Metro Vancouver’s reservoirs, said Kim Stephens, who has been a water resource engineer for 40 years.

The good news is that the snowpack is about 80 per cent of normal, far higher than the five per cent experienced during last year’s record drought.

“The real question is: Will we start the summer season on July 1 with full reservoirs? If we do, that means the region has enough water to make it through the dry spell,” said Stephens, executive director of the non-profit Partnership for Water Sustainability in B.C.

“If it’s hot, the snow could vanish before July 1. There just isn’t the storage capacity in the reservoirs to last for a six-month drought,” he said.

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