Opinion: Tomorrow's forecast scarier than today's weather

By Joe Mathews, Zocalo Public Square

One of the little joys of being Californian is the opportunity to taunt folks back East about their terrible winter weather. Hey, Boston, how does it feel to have been colonized by Eskimos?

But this winter, we seem to be overdoing it, sending out a blizzard of social media postings of palm trees and blue skies. It's enough to make you wonder if all our taunting merely masks our fears about our own weather.

Horror film directors will tell you that nothing is more frightening than what you can't see. By that logic, California has never had a scarier winter than this one. Where is all the snow that should be in the mountains? How could San Francisco possibly go all of January without any rainfall? And what happened to the February frosts on cars, lawns, and rooftops that gave Angelenos something to talk about over their morning lattes?

The paradox of the California climate is that, precisely because we seem to have so little weather, the weather is more important here than just about anywhere else. According to a new poll, 69 percent of us say the climate is their favorite thing about living in California (and we love the weather more than we love our families). Our regional economies, our lifestyles, and our culture all rely on predictably pleasant weather. And so we are profoundly sensitive to slight changes in the weather. We talk ceaselessly about the variations in microclimates within our regions, and many of us can offer instant analysis on what we consider to be the vast differences between 77, 80, and 83 degrees.

This hypersensitivity is one big reason why Californians have taken climate change more seriously than people in other states. The threat is not merely to our coastline (sea levels could rise nearly 2 feet by 2100) or our water supplies but to our very sense of ourselves. It is unsettling to see one of our shared home's most fundamental and enduring advantages in flux.

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