

El Niño's winter storms no cure-all for drought

By Michael Doyle, McClatchy Washington Bureau

The El Niño storms drenching California won't suffice to solve the state's drought and won't permanently save the Central Valley's vulnerable salmon, federal scientists are cautioning.

In an apolitical assessment that comes amid a highly political time, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration experts stress that this year's El Niño bounty is both useful and limited. It might well be followed, moreover, by a swing back to a different kind of weather complication called La Niña.

"Not all water demands are going to be met, 100 percent, by the recovery we're seeing relative to the last four years," NOAA research meteorologist Martin Hoerling said Wednesday in a news briefing. "There are systemic issues with water supply that go beyond precipitation in any given year."

In particular, Hoerling cited a "drawdown in groundwater in many places in the state that's not sustainable" and must be addressed "as a long-term policy issue."

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