

INTERVIEWER: A Winter Weather Advisory is in effect for parts of northwestern and southwestern Minnesota right now. And come tomorrow this time, a Winter Storm Watch will blanket central and southern Minnesota. Yes, I know. I know, more snow is coming.

Here with all the details is MPR's chief meteorologist Paul Huttner. Well, it is March, after all. Let's-- I know. I know. You just kind of want to make it stop. But it is-- it's not going to stop until probably May.

So let's talk about this light snow, this first round. Who's getting it right now?

PAUL HUTTNER: Yeah, Twin Cities now, it's a mix of some light snow, some drizzle in the south and east Twin Cities. And it's snowing, mixed with drizzle in spots, all the way up through central Minnesota, Brainerd on up into northwest Minnesota up around Bemidji. And they've had some pretty significant snow, Cathy, in northwestern, north-central Minnesota. Fargo-Moorehead area around 3 inches. Park Rapids has had 4, about 5 in Frazee, which is in Becker County.

So that whole area, northwest Minnesota, Red River Valley, even into north-central Minnesota, about 2 to 5 inches with this snow. It's colder up there. So the roads have been a little slick.

Twin Cities, it's more of a snizzle. We're at it right around 32 degrees. Most of the roads are wet that I can see around the Twin Cities. And that'll be the case through the afternoon. This is light stuff here, Cathy. I think we'll see less than an inch on the already existing snow cover. It probably won't accumulate much at all on the roads. And it'll taper off here in a couple of hours later this afternoon.

INTERVIEWER: And then the second round comes in tomorrow?

PAUL HUTTNER: Yeah. And this storm looks like it has more bark than bite to me. It has pretty much from the beginning. So the forecast models were really gung-ho on this thing to bring us heavy snow over the weekend and into Monday. They dialed back yesterday. And I just looked at the midday models, the 12Z run, as we call it. And they're dialing back even a little more for tomorrow.

So here's how it looks like this will lay out. Snow will begin in southwest Minnesota tomorrow morning. It'll spread northeast into the Twin Cities, probably by this time tomorrow, somewhere around midday. And then through the afternoon, tomorrow night, we are going to get some snow. The forecast models for the Twin Cities, St. Cloud, this far north have been saying, today now, maybe 2 to 5 inches. I'm still in that same general range. That's what Tom and I talked about yesterday.

One of the models came in at 1.8 inches today. So we could even have some lower-end totals. But let's say 2 to 5, the American and European models going about 4 inches for the Twin Cities tomorrow and tomorrow night. Southern Minnesota, I think you'll get more snow. Mankato, Rochester, you stand a chance of seeing 6 inches into southeast Minnesota. And then Iowa, Southern Wisconsin, even Chicago area could see more than 6 inches with this system, Cathy.

So it'll be a significant event. It will be snowy tomorrow afternoon, tomorrow night. We could have some slick roads. But I don't think this is anything like some of the storms we've been looking at this winter.

INTERVIEWER: But wait, there's more. I notice that on Saturday, there's another round coming through.

PAUL HUTTNER: There is. And again, that's a ways out. But right now, that looks like it could even be maybe a little stronger than what we get tomorrow, again, 2 to 5, 2 to 6 inches, something like that. We'll see how that pans out.

But you start adding it up, Cathy. If we get 2 to 5 tomorrow in the Twin Cities, if we get another 2 to 5 over the weekend-- so what's that? 4 to 10 as a range-- if we get another 6, 7 inches of snow, we're going to start moving up that ladder for the snowiest winters on record. We're at number 13 now. We've had 74.7 inches of snow this season in the Twin Cities. That's the 13th snowiest.

Another 3.6, we're at number 10. Another 10.2, we're at number five. I don't know if we'll get there. But I do think we may crack the top 10 here as far as snowiest seasons on record for the winter season by this weekend.

INTERVIEWER: You know I was talking to Sven. And we've decided that if we're going to be that close, we might as well just go for broke and just see how far you can go.

PAUL HUTTNER: 2 feet, we need a little over 2 more feet. So hey, there's still time, right?

INTERVIEWER: There is still time. In April, as you know, it can get pretty snowy. We'll see what happens.

PAUL HUTTNER: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: I am wondering about the spring flood update. I know that we've been kind of talking about this too. With all the snow, what are the hydrologists saying from the National Weather Service?

PAUL HUTTNER: Yeah, and they just updated their forecast on Monday. So they're sticking with the above-normal flood potential now. We've still got between 2 and 6 inches of water just sitting in that snowpack on the ground, western Wisconsin, all of Minnesota. So that's like a 2 to 6-inch rainstorm just sitting there, ready to be unleashed into the rivers and lakes and some into the soils, which is good, especially if we get a slow melt.

That's the 80th to 90th percentile of all years, Cathy. And so they're saying rivers like the Mississippi and St. Paul stand a 68% chance of at least minor flooding, a 57% chance of moderate flooding. And the average would be about 19%. So it's skewing above-average.

Even a 35% chance of major flooding for the Mississippi River in St. Paul, Stillwater, St. Croix, about the same, a 64% chance, even a little higher, of moderate flooding. So we are not done yet. We're going to see how much snow we get, how much water we add to the snowpack, and then, really importantly, how quickly will it melt? Do we get a big warm-up? And then do we get rain or even thunderstorms in late March or early April on top of it?

So the story is really yet to be told here, Cathy. But we're kind of loaded as far as snow-water equivalent moisture. And yeah, it's all going to be about the melt. What we'd like is a nice, slow melt through the rest of March and into early April.

INTERVIEWER: Exactly. Say, before you go, I'm wondering, with all the snow in California, I mean, my gosh, is there a tie at all between those humongous California storms and what we're seeing here in Minnesota?

PAUL HUTTNER: Yes, there is. And so these atmospheric rivers that have been slamming the West Coast, that's part of the same jet stream pattern that's been sending these storms into the middle part of the country. Now, it's kind of like a fire hose. I mean, if you lay it on the ground and it kind of swings back and forth, it hits California.

And then some of these storms have been directed into the Southern US. We've seen those tornado outbreaks. Some of them have hit Minnesota, a lot of them. And that's why we've had all this snow, pieces of these storms breaking off.

It's a good thing we have the Rocky Mountains in between because they've squeezed out a lot of moisture. But this is absolutely part of the same weather pattern that's been just drenching California, Cathy. They've got 49 inches of snow-water equivalent in the Sierra. So they're really concerned, starting to get concerned if we get a warm atmospheric river later this week, that that's going to rain below about 4,000 feet and take some of that snow and wash it down and cause flooding.

So it's all connected, Cathy. All weather is local. But those big patterns really drive what's happening.

INTERVIEWER: Wow, really interesting. Thank you so much, Paul. Have a good day.

PAUL HUTTNER: You too. Thanks, Cathy.

INTERVIEWER: That's our chief meteorologist Paul Huttner. You hear him every afternoon with Paul-- what am I trying to say? That's Paul Huttner. You hear him every afternoon with Tom Crann on *All Things Considered*.