Minnesota Now (MPR) | Minnesota Now February forecast: Paul Huttner has the short and long term weather outlook 01GR75FG6974DTZJ889ZRDD06V

CATHY WURZER: Hey, question for you. Has it been cold enough for you? For many Minnesotans, the answer is yes, it has been. If you're hoping for a warm-up, you might be in luck. Our chief meteorologist Paul Huttner is on the line to give us some details. Hey, how are you?

PAUL HUTTNER: Hey, Cathy. I'm staying warm. That's the good news these days, right?

CATHY WURZER: Excellent. I'm glad to hear that. So it's February the 1st. And we're more than halfway through winter, is that right?

PAUL HUTTNER: Yeah, we're 2/3 of the way through. We're in the home stretch of meteorological winter, which February is the last month of. I can see the light way down in the tunnel here, Cathy. It's still a ways to go on winter, but we're getting closer.

It's interesting to note how this winter has shaped up so far. Extreme cold in December. We were 4 degrees colder than average in the Twin Cities. And then very warm in January. We were 4 degrees warmer. So you add it all up, we're just about average so far, even though we've hit two extremes.

So February will decide whether this meteorological winter is warmer or colder than average. And the outlooks right now, we're looking like we're leaning above average for at least the first two weeks of February. Also interesting to note, subzero days. We've had 10 of them in the Twin Cities so far this year. The seasonal average is 23. So we're behind pace for that. I think most people are OK with that.

And Friday morning looks like it'll be subzero. But that could be the last subzero morning for one to two weeks, looking at the weather maps ahead. So we're going to get a break.

One last thing. We've had plenty of snowfall-- 55 and 1/2 inches in the Twin Cities. That is 2 feet above average. Duluth has had 80 inches this year, Cathy.

CATHY WURZER: Yes, I know. Let's go back to that little Arctic blip that's coming through Thursday and Friday. How decent is that?

PAUL HUTTNER: It's brief, but it will be cold. The Arctic front will barrel through tomorrow. We're at 16 now in the Twin Cities. We'll hit 20 today. Tomorrow, that front blows through, temperatures falling through the single digits. We'll be below zero across Minnesota by later tomorrow afternoon. 12-below in the Twin Cities Friday morning. 20s, 30s-below in northern Minnesota once again. But that's about it.

We start to warm up as we head into the weekend. In fact, a bit of a thaw. Saturday, I think 33, Twin Cities. Around 30 Sunday. As warm as 38 on Monday. And Cathy, it's looking like we could be in the 30s most of next week in Southern Minnesota. 20s up North. The average is 26 for the high. So we'll be about 5 to 10 degrees warmer than average next week.

CATHY WURZER: Usually we get a January thaw. So I mean, is this now-- have we moved it into February?

PAUL HUTTNER: Yeah. This is interesting, because things change. We are now past the darkest three months of the year in terms of daylight in Minnesota starting this weekend. And February brings that higher sun angle, a little higher sun intensity, longer daylight. We're gaining 2 and 1/2 minutes a day now. We'll gain 3 minutes a day by February 20th. That adds up to less time at night for us to cool off. And we also start to get a little closer to the milder air masses in the Central Midwest-- Iowa, Missouri.

So February, we can see more thaws than we did in January. We usually get one good one. So yes, it's still winter. Yes, it's probably going to last another month at least. But hey, things are looking up in terms of seeing more thaws as we go through the next month.

CATHY WURZER: One more wintry question here. As you know, I watch the various canal cams and that kind of thing along Lake Superior and in the Duluth Superior area because of my ties up there. And I've noticed there's been some beautiful sea smoke that has been over the Big Lake. Which tells me there isn't a whole lot of ice on the Lake. Am I right?

PAUL HUTTNER: You are right. 7% of Lake Superior is ice covered now. So it's more than 90% open water. That's way below the historical average of 23%. The Great Lakes about the same. 8% for the Great Lakes. The average is 30%.

And I'll be talking with Jay Austin for Climate Cast tomorrow. It turns out Lake Superior is so sensitive to our average winter temperature that just a degree of 3 degrees or so-- 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit-- is about the difference between no ice and total ice on Lake Superior. It's surprising that it's that sensitive, but it really is.

And he's looked at air temperature trends and ice trends since 1998. He says there's a big change with less ice, on average, since 1998. And it really doesn't matter for summer temperatures, clouds, or wind. It's really all about that winter air temperature.

CATHY WURZER: Interesting. That's really interesting. So can we geek out for just a couple of minutes here?

PAUL HUTTNER: Yeah.

CATHY WURZER: The models-- forecast models-- people who follow this, of course. There's this thought about all the models that you all use when you do your work. Is the European model still so much better than the American GFS? And if so, why?

PAUL HUTTNER: Yeah, it is. Statistically, the European model is the best weather forecast model on the planet. And there are a few reasons for that. One is that they have 10 times more supercomputing power to run that model. They've been ahead of us.

It's kind of a weather war. We've upgraded our computers. They keep upgrading their computers. It has a better data feed process-- most modelers say-- the way they input the data, and better model physics. And they have traditionally only run that model two times a day, versus four times a day for the American GFS model, which is our main model.

So they're still ahead of us. Models are interesting. The Europeans, not always better. The GFS handled a couple of those snowstorms we had over the last couple of months a little better than the European model.

Cathy, I like to say models are like people. They all have little biases. You kind of have to know which one to trust when and who performs better in a certain situation. So that art of weather forecasting is still there. You can't always rely on the European model. But if you do, you'll be better off statistically.

CATHY WURZER: Interesting. And of course, as you say, there is the art to the forecast. And that goes with observation, too. Would you agree?

PAUL HUTTNER: Yes, absolutely. You mean in terms of daily observations?

CATHY WURZER: Yeah. Our friend-- you and I talk off air a lot about weather and that kind of thing. But Craig Edwards always used to say, you still got to get out there and look at the sky.

PAUL HUTTNER: Yes, you do. I mean, that's how I learned about weather as a child, was watching the sky and not knowing what was going on. But then once I started to study meteorology, I was like, oh, that's why I was seeing what I was seeing. Yes, observation is key. All weather is local. And besides that, it's fun, Cathy. And I know you're a weather geek, too. So you love to look at the sky, like I do.

CATHY WURZER: I do. All right. I hope you have a good day. Thanks much.

PAUL HUTTNER: You, too. Thanks, Cathy.

CATHY WURZER: Paul Huttner is MPR's chief meteorologist.