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State Climatologist and UNH Professor Lists Top 10 New England Weather Events of the 20th Century

By *Carmelle Druchniak*
UNH News Bureau

DURHAM, N.H. -- New England weather is famed for its unpredictability, but it sure can provide a lot of variety to boot.

Tornadoes, hurricanes, record wind, floods, ice storms - - you name it, we've endured it for the past 100 years, says state climatologist Barry Keim, University of New Hampshire associate professor of geography. "Mother Nature has thrown everything our way, including the kitchen sink."

A look at Keim's picks for the top 10 New England weather events of the 20th century (in chronological order):

- 1) Nov. 3-4, 1927. A frontal system, assisted by tropical moisture, produced rainfall totals close to 10 inches across central Vermont, leading to massive river-basin flooding. Eighty-four Vermonters perished and, to this day, the storm is considered the worst weather catastrophe in the state.
- 2) April 12, 1934. Mt. Washington measures a windspeed of 231 mph, which still stands as the highest windspeed ever recorded on Earth.
- 3) Mid-March 1936. Two heavy rain events fell on greater-than-normal snowpack to produce the All-New England Flood, which led to the most serious widespread flooding ever experienced in New England. Hooksett had 18 to 20 feet of water flowing down its main street, and the Amoskeag Mills were badly damaged with record flood crests on the Merrimack River and beyond.
- 4) Sept. 21, 1938. "The Hurricane of 1938" made landfall in southern Connecticut and, given the storm's path and power, impacted the entire region. More than 600 deaths are attributed to this storm, the loss of life caused primarily by the 17-foot storm surge along the Connecticut and Rhode Island coasts. However, high winds and rain destroyed large stands of trees all the way up to the White Mountains, and flash flooding was

problematic in Massachusetts, Vermont and New Hampshire.

5) June 9, 1953. The Worcester Tornado touched down as an F4 tornado, with wind speeds between 200 and 260 mph. It carved a path 46 miles long, from Petersham, Mass., to Southboro, Mass., while persisting for 1 hour and 20 minutes. Ninety people were killed. The same day, tornadoes touched down in Exeter and Sutton, Mass.

6) Aug. 17-19, 1955: Hurricane Diane produced a 24-hour rainfall total of 18.15 inches (the New England record) and a storm total of 19.75 inches of rainfall. These impressive totals caused massive flooding as they fell on saturated grounds -- Hurricane Connie had visited the area only days prior to Diane.

7) Feb. 22-28, 1969. A Nor'easter produced more than three feet of snow and more across large portions of Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts and Rhode Island, with totals of 98 and 77 inches recorded at Mt. Washington's summit and Pinkham Notch, respectively. These values are unprecedented snowfall totals for any single storm event in the region. This storm was also preceded by yet another impressive snowstorm on Feb. 8-10, which produced one to two feet of snow across most of New England.

8) Feb. 5-7, 1978. The Blizzard of '78 was caused by an intense coastal Nor'easter with winds in excess of hurricane force and high snow totals. Northern Rhode Island received more than 50 inches of snow, with most of southeastern New England buried beneath three or more feet. The region was paralyzed for more than a week.

9) Oct. 20-21, 1996. A persistent rain storm produced all-time state rainfall records for both Maine and New Hampshire. A storm total of 19.2 inches was produced in Camp Ellis, Maine, which ranks as the second largest rain event in New England's recorded history and is estimated to be a 500-year rainfall event for the Maine and New Hampshire coastal area. New Hampshire also broke its all-time 24-hour rainfall total with 10.8 inches measured at Mt. Washington.

10) Jan. 5-9, 1998. Northern New England experienced the worst ice storm in recorded history with widespread power outages that took months to eliminate and damage to forests that will require decades of recovery.

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