



Extended Range Forecast for Atlantic Hurricane Activity in 2014

Issued: 12th December 2013

by Professor Mark Saunders and Dr Adam Lea
 Dept. of Space and Climate Physics, UCL (University College London), UK

Forecast Summary

TSR predicts Atlantic hurricane activity in 2014 will be close to the long-term average.

However, the uncertainties at this extended range are large. The precision of TSR's December outlooks for upcoming Atlantic hurricane activity between 1980 and 2013 is low.

The TSR (Tropical Storm Risk) extended range forecast for Atlantic hurricane activity in 2014 anticipates near-norm activity. Based on current and projected climate signals, Atlantic basin tropical cyclone activity is forecast to be close to the 1950-2013 long-term norm but about 20% below the recent 2004-2013 10-year norm. The forecast spans the period from 1st June to 30th November 2014 and employs data through to the end of November 2013. TSR's two predictors are the forecast July-September trade wind speed over the Caribbean and tropical North Atlantic, and the forecast August-September 2014 sea surface temperatures in the tropical North Atlantic. The former influences cyclonic vorticity (the spinning up of storms) in the main hurricane track region, while the latter provides heat and moisture to power incipient storms in the main track region. At present TSR anticipates the SST predictor to have a small enhancing effect on activity and the trade wind predictor to have a small suppressing effect on activity.

Atlantic ACE Index and System Numbers in 2014

		ACE Index	Intense Hurricanes	Hurricanes	Tropical Storms
TSR Forecast (\pm FE)	2014	106 (\pm 58)	3 (\pm 2)	6 (\pm 3)	14 (\pm 4)
64yr Climate Norm (\pm SD)	1950-2013	102	3	6	11
10yr Climate Norm	2004-2013	129	4	8	16
Forecast Skill at this Lead	1980-2013	12%	10%	1%	2%

Key: ACE Index = Accumulated Cyclone Energy Index = Sum of the Squares of 6-hourly Maximum Sustained Wind Speeds (in units of knots) for all Systems while they are at least Tropical Storm Strength. ACE Unit = $\times 10^4$ knots².

Intense Hurricane = 1 Minute Sustained Wind > 95Kts = Hurricane Category 3 to 5.

Hurricane = 1 Minute Sustained Wind > 63Kts = Hurricane Category 1 to 5.

Tropical Storm = 1 Minute Sustained Winds > 33Kts.

SD = Standard Deviation.

FE (Forecast Error) = Standard Deviation of Errors in Replicated Real Time Forecasts 1980-2013.

Forecast Skill = Percentage Improvement in Mean Square Error over Running 10-year Prior Climate Norm from Replicated Real Time Forecasts 1980-2013.

There is a 40% probability that the 2014 Atlantic hurricane season ACE index will be above-average (defined as an ACE index value in the upper tercile historically (>120)), a 33% likelihood it will be near-normal (defined as an ACE index value in the middle tercile historically (70 to 120) and a 27% chance it will be below-normal (defined as an ACE index value in the lower tercile historically (<70)). The 64-year period 1950-2013 is used for climatology.

Key: Terciles = Data groupings of equal (33.3%) probability corresponding to the upper, middle and lower one-third of values historically (1950-2013).

Upper Tercile = ACE index value greater than 120.

Middle Tercile = ACE index value between 70 and 120.

Lower Tercile = ACE index value less than 70.

USA Landfalling ACE Index and Numbers in 2014

		ACE Index	Hurricanes	Tropical Storms
TSR Forecast (\pm FE)	2014	2.6 (\pm 2.1)	2 (\pm 2)	4 (\pm 2)
64yr Climate Norm (\pm SD)	1950-2013	2.4	1	3
10yr Climate Norm	2004-2013	2.7	2	4
Forecast Skill at this Lead	1980-2013	3%	3%	3%

Key: ACE Index = Accumulated Cyclone Energy Index = Sum of the Squares of hourly Maximum Sustained Wind Speeds (in units of knots) for all Systems while they are at least Tropical Storm Strength and over the USA Mainland (reduced by a factor of 6).
ACE Unit = $\times 10^4$ knots².

Landfall Strike Category = Maximum 1 minute sustained wind of storm directly striking land.
USA Mainland = Brownsville (Texas) to Maine

USA landfalling intense hurricanes are not forecast since we have no skill at any lead.

There is a 52% probability that in 2014 the USA landfalling ACE index will be above average (defined as a USA ACE index value in the upper tercile historically (>2.51)), a 25% likelihood it will be near-normal (defined as a USA ACE index value in the middle tercile historically (1.09 to 2.51)) and a 23% chance it will be below-normal (defined as a USA ACE index value in the lower tercile historically (<1.09)). The 64-year period 1950-2013 is used for climatology.

Key Predictors for 2014

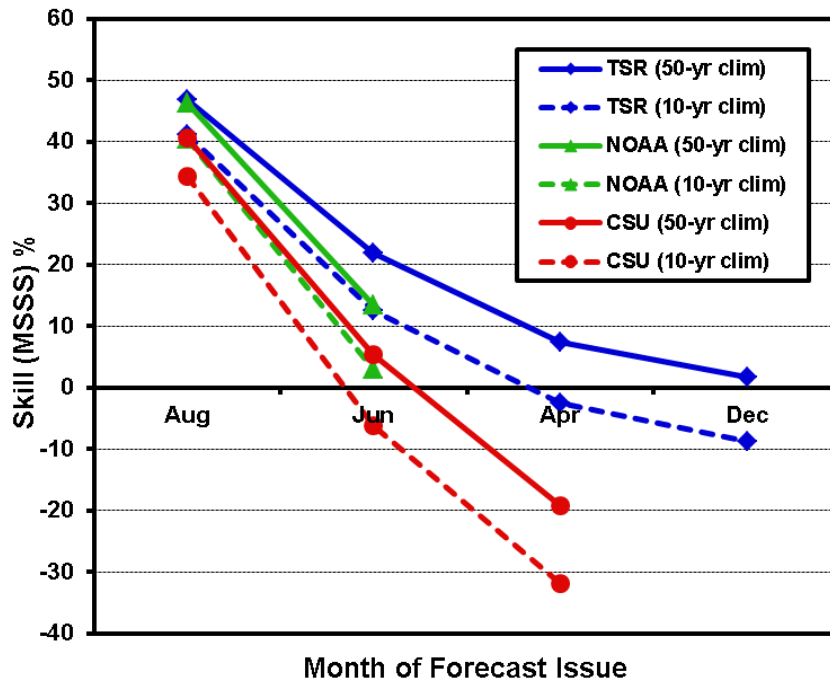
The key factors behind the TSR forecast for a near-normal hurricane season in 2014 are the anticipated small suppressing effect of the July-September 2014 forecast trade wind at 925mb height over the Caribbean Sea and tropical North Atlantic region ($7.5^{\circ}\text{N} - 17.5^{\circ}\text{N}$, $45^{\circ}\text{W} - 85^{\circ}\text{W}$), and the small enhancing effect of the August-September 2014 forecast sea surface temperature for the Atlantic MDR ($10^{\circ}\text{N} - 20^{\circ}\text{N}$, $20^{\circ}\text{W} - 60^{\circ}\text{W}$). The current forecasts for these predictors are $0.07 \pm 0.82 \text{ ms}^{-1}$ stronger than normal (1980-2013 climatology) and $0.19 \pm 0.28^{\circ}\text{C}$ warmer than normal (1980-2013 climatology). The July-September 2014 trade wind prediction is based on an expectation of weak positive ENSO conditions in August-September 2014 as forecast by a consensus of dynamical and statistical models obtained from the International Research Institute website http://iri.columbia.edu/climate/ENSO/currentinfo/SST_table.html. The forecast skills for these predictors at this lead are 25% and 35% respectively. However, it should be stressed there are large forecast uncertainties in both these predictors at this extended lead.

Precision of Seasonal Hurricane Forecasts 2004-2013

The figure on the next page displays the seasonal forecast skill as a function of lead time for predicting the number of North Atlantic hurricanes. Skill is displayed for the most recent 10-year period 2004-2013 and is shown for three forecast centres: TSR, NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) and CSU (Colorado State University).

Forecast precision is assessed using the Mean Square Skill Score (MSSS) which is the percentage improvement in mean square error over a climatology forecast. Positive skill indicates that the model performs better than climatology, while a negative skill indicates that it performs worse than climatology. Two different climatologies are used: a fixed 50-year (1950-1999) climatology and a running prior 10-year climate norm.

It should be noted that NOAA does not issue seasonal hurricane outlooks before late May and that CSU stopped providing quantitative extended-range hurricane outlooks from the prior December in 2011. It is clear from the figure that there is little skill in forecasting the upcoming number of hurricanes from the previous December. Skill climbs slowly as the hurricane season approaches with moderate-to-good skill levels being achieved in early August.



In terms of recent seasonal forecast successes and failures, TSR correctly predicted from the previous December the correct tercile (lower, middle, upper) of six of the last ten hurricane seasons 2004-2013. These years are 2004, 2005, 2008, 2010, 2011 and 2012. The TSR extended range forecasts for the 2006, 2007, 2009 and 2013 hurricane seasons were not successful.

Further Information and Next Forecast

Further information about TSR forecasts and verifications may be obtained from the TSR web site <http://www.tropicalstormrisk.com>. The first TSR forecast update for the 2014 Atlantic hurricane season will be issued on Monday 7th April 2014.