



# Extended Range Forecast for Atlantic Hurricane Activity in 2011

Issued: 6th December 2010

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 will be approximately 40% above the long term norm in 2011. Users should note that the precision of TSR's extended range outlooks for Atlantic hurricane activity between 1980 and 2010 is low.**

The TSR (Tropical Storm Risk) extended range forecast for Atlantic hurricane activity in 2011 anticipates an active season. Based on current and projected climate signals, Atlantic basin and US landfalling tropical cyclone activity are forecast to be about 40% above the 1950-2010 norm in 2011. There is a fairly high (~66%) likelihood that activity will be in the top one-third of years historically. The forecast spans the period from 1st June to 30th November 2011 and employs data through to the end of November 2010. TSR's two predictors are the forecast July-September 2011 trade wind speed over the Caribbean and tropical North Atlantic, and the forecast August-September 2011 sea surface temperature 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 both predictors having a moderate enhancing effect on activity.

## Atlantic ACE Index and System Numbers in 2011

		ACE Index	Intense Hurricanes	Hurricanes	Tropical Storms
TSR Forecast ( $\pm$ FE)	2011	141 ( $\pm$ 58)	4.0 ( $\pm$ 1.7)	8.4 ( $\pm$ 3.0)	15.6 ( $\pm$ 4.3)
61yr Climate Norm ( $\pm$ SD)	1950-2010	102 ( $\pm$ 60)	2.7 ( $\pm$ 1.9)	6.2 ( $\pm$ 2.7)	10.5 ( $\pm$ 4.1)
Forecast Skill at this Lead	1980-2010	11%	7%	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 =  $\times 10^4$  knots<sup>2</sup>.
- 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 Wind > 33Kts.  
 SD = Standard Deviation.  
 FE (Forecast Error) = Standard Deviation of Errors in Replicated Real Time Forecasts 1980-2010.  
 Forecast Skill = Percentage Improvement in Mean Square Error over Running 10-year Prior Climate Norm from Replicated Real Time Forecasts 1980-2010.

There is a 66% probability that the 2011 Atlantic hurricane season ACE index will be above average (defined as an ACE index value in the upper tercile historically (>117)), a 22% likelihood it will be near-normal (defined as an ACE index value in the middle tercile historically (70 to 117) and only a 12% chance it will be below-normal (defined as an ACE index value in the lower tercile historically (<70)). The 61-year period 1950-2010 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 (1950-2010).  
 Upper Tercile = ACE index value greater than 117.  
 Middle Tercile = ACE index value between 70 and 117.  
 Lower Tercile = ACE index value less than 70.

## ACE Index & Numbers Forming in the MDR, Caribbean Sea and Gulf of Mexico in 2011

		ACE Index	Intense Hurricanes	Hurricanes	Tropical Storms
TSR Forecast ( $\pm$ FE)	2011	117 ( $\pm$ 55)	3.7( $\pm$ 1.5)	6.3 ( $\pm$ 2.6)	10.7 ( $\pm$ 3.7)
61yr Climate Norm ( $\pm$ SD)	1950-2010	80 ( $\pm$ 59)	2.4( $\pm$ 1.8)	4.4 ( $\pm$ 2.5)	7.3 ( $\pm$ 3.5)
Forecast Skill at this Lead	1980-2010	13%	12%	7%	3%

The Atlantic hurricane Main Development Region (MDR) is the region 10°N - 20°N, 20°W - 60°W between the Cape Verde Islands and the Caribbean Lesser Antilles. A storm is defined as having formed within this region if it reached at least tropical depression status while in the area.

There is a 67% probability that in 2011 the MDR, Caribbean Sea and Gulf of Mexico ACE index will be above average (defined as an ACE index value in the upper tercile historically ( $>92$ )), a 23% likelihood it will be near-normal (defined as an ACE index value in the middle tercile historically (43 to 92) and only a 10% chance it will be below-normal (defined as an ACE index value in the lower tercile historically ( $<43$ )). The 61-year period 1950-2010 is used for climatology.

## USA Landfalling ACE Index and Numbers in 2011

		ACE Index	Hurricanes	Tropical Storms
TSR Forecast ( $\pm$ FE)	2011	3.6 ( $\pm$ 2.1)	2.1 ( $\pm$ 1.6)	4.9 ( $\pm$ 2.2)
61yr Climate Norm ( $\pm$ SD)	1950-2010	2.4 ( $\pm$ 2.2)	1.5 ( $\pm$ 1.3)	3.1 ( $\pm$ 2.0)
Forecast Skill at this Lead	1980-2010	6%	5%	7%

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 =  $\times 10^4$  knots<sup>2</sup>.

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 67% probability that in 2011 the USA landfalling ACE index will be above average (defined as a USA ACE index value in the upper tercile historically ( $>2.54$ )), a 22% likelihood it will be near-normal (defined as a USA ACE index value in the middle tercile historically (1.09 to 2.54) and only an 11% chance it will be below-normal (defined as a USA ACE index value in the lower tercile historically ( $<1.09$ )). The 61-year period 1950-2010 is used for climatology.

## Caribbean Lesser Antilles Landfalling Numbers in 2011

		ACE Index	Intense Hurricanes	Hurricanes	Tropical Storms
TSR Forecast ( $\pm$ FE)	2011	2.0 ( $\pm$ 2.0)	0.3 ( $\pm$ 0.4)	0.7 ( $\pm$ 0.6)	1.5 ( $\pm$ 0.9)
61yr Climate Norm ( $\pm$ SD)	1950-2010	1.4 ( $\pm$ 2.0)	0.2 ( $\pm$ 0.5)	0.5 ( $\pm$ 0.7)	1.1 ( $\pm$ 1.0)
Forecast Skill at this Lead	1980-2010	0%	0%	10%	0%

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 within the boxed region (10°N-18°N,60°W-63°W) (reduced by a factor of 6). ACE Unit =  $\times 10^4$  knots<sup>2</sup>.

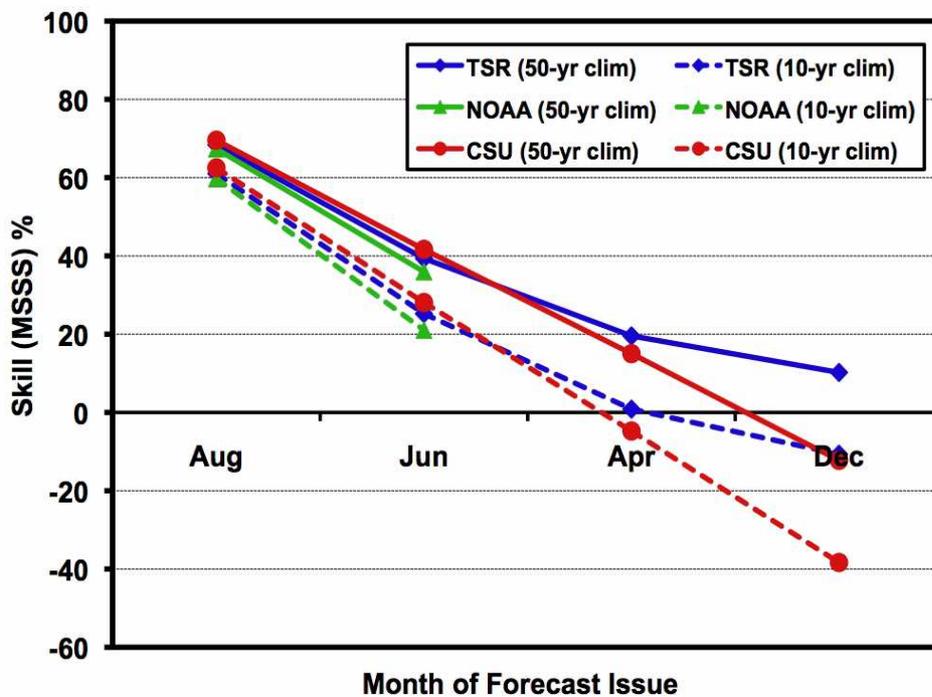
Landfall Strike Category = Maximum 1 Minute Sustained Wind of Storm Directly Striking Land.  
Lesser Antilles = Island Arc from Anguilla to Trinidad Inclusive.

## Key Predictors for 2011

The key factors behind the TSR forecast for an above-average hurricane season in 2011 are the anticipated moderate enhancing effect of both the July-September forecast trade wind at 925mb height over the Caribbean Sea and tropical North Atlantic region (7.5°N - 17.5°N, 30°W - 100°W), and of August-September forecast sea surface temperature for the Atlantic MDR (10°N - 20°N, 20°W - 60°W). The current forecasts for these predictors are  $0.70 \pm 0.83 \text{ ms}^{-1}$  weaker than normal (1980-2010 climatology) and  $0.27 \pm 0.29^\circ\text{C}$  warmer than normal (1980-2010 climatology). The trade wind prediction is based on a forecast for a weak La Niña in August-September 2011 from the consensus model predictions from the current IRI ENSO forecast ([http://iri.columbia.edu/climate/ENSO/currentinfo/SST\\_table.html](http://iri.columbia.edu/climate/ENSO/currentinfo/SST_table.html)). The forecast skills (assessed for the period 1980-2010) for these predictors at this lead are 23% and 32% respectively.

## The Precision of Seasonal Hurricane Forecasts

The figure below shows the precision of seasonal North Atlantic hurricane forecasts as a function of issue month averaged over the last 10-year period 2001-2010.



Forecast precision is assessed using the Mean Square Skill Score. MSSS is the percentage improvement in mean square error over a climatological forecast. Positive skill indicates the model performs better than a climatology forecast, whilst 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.

The figure compares the forecast skill of the TSR, NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) and CSU (Colorado State University) seasonal hurricane outlooks 2001-2010. NOAA does not issue seasonal outlooks before late May. It is clear that the skill of the extended range hurricane forecasts issued in early December, while positive, is low. Skill climbs slowly as the hurricane season approaches. Moderate skill levels are achieved in early June and good skill levels in early August.

In terms of forecast successes and failures in recent individual years, the 2004, 2005, 2008 and 2010 North Atlantic hurricane seasons were predicted to have 'high activity' (i.e. in the top one third of years historically) to high (60-70%) probability from the previous December. In contrast, the extended range forecasts for the 2006, 2007 and 2009 hurricane seasons were less impressive.

## Further Information and Next Forecast

Further information about the TSR forecasts and verifications may be obtained from the TSR web site <http://www.tropicalstormrisk.com>. The first TSR forecast update for the 2011 Atlantic hurricane season will be issued on Tuesday 5th April 2011.

