

Seasons and climate change, but politicians stay the same

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By Graham Saunders, published in the Chronicle Journal

Fall Equinox – You caught it, if an early riser. The equal instant happened at 5:51 EDT. And astronomers are ready to move on.

I have noted before that climatologists, meteorologists and others of that breed decree that the fall season begins on September 1st. It makes life a little easier for number crunchers because fall is always 91 days long.

The Fall Equinox and other seasonal changes during the year depend on the Earth's orbit and inclination to the sun. There is no fixed date on the calendar. Fall begins from the 20th to the 23rd. Comparisons of different seasons would be more involved.

Recent weather has met some of the stereotypes of fall. Sequences of cloud, rain and wind followed by a sunny day have been common.

Generous rainfalls have occurred throughout the Lake Superior Basin. Thunder Bay's rainfall has already exceeded the average for September, with another week to go.

Much of this rainfall has been associated with thunderstorms, with six thunderstorm days (Friday included) so far this month. An unofficial count is 35 for 2007. The average yearly total is 25 but obviously includes all months.

Several recent *Weather Whys* columns described Climate Change: Solving it Together. All tickets were sold several days ago, indicating that many recognize this as a key issue. It has not happened yet as I write this, so details such as, did the electronic equipment work without too much trauma?, still have to be answered.

Heavy rains did prompt some concerns. Dr. Jay Austin, with the topic "Lake Superior and climate change: a canary in the coal mine" emailed from Duluth that he would be delayed.

"Life here just got a bit more complicated as last night's rains flooded out our son's preschool, who is now home for the rest of the week. As my wife teaches until 1:00 on Fridays, I can't leave until then."

Thunder Bay experienced the same storm system, but a gentler version of 30 to 40 mm on Wednesday – Thursday. In Duluth and other parts of northern Minnesota rain totals were 100 to 200 mm. Flash-flood warnings continued to be posted because of more rain forecast (and occurring) on Friday.

We have our fingers crossed that more flash flooding does not happen. Who wants a conference on climate change disrupted by extreme weather? It might make some kind of point.

Concerns about climate are not new. A world meeting took place in Toronto in 1988 and recommended more drastic cuts to greenhouse gas emissions than Kyoto, nearly one decade later.

The Kyoto Agreement in 1997 was signed by most countries, including the US. It was seen by many as a baby step. It was for Europe, where most countries proceeded with investment in renewable energy and major reductions in emissions.

Infants usually crawl before they talk – not so for the Federal Governments of Canada and US. There was much talk, minimal action.

In Canada, both the Liberals, then the Conservatives lacked focus. After taking office in Ottawa, Steven Harper's talk reflected his skepticism about scientific consensus that human activities, primarily the burning of fossil fuels, are having a major impact on climate. The words have changed because he is clever and knows that the old approach will appear silly alongside news of record melting in Arctic and other indicators.

His most recent talk, at the Asia Pacific meetings in Sydney, Australia was an attempt at another approach. He was given credit by a few for helping APEC to reach the so-called Sydney statement with gems like "long term aspirational global emission reduction goal"

The English language and the planet seem to be in trouble.

If you have comments, suggestions or questions please contact me at weatherw@tbaytel.net