MAY 2006 WEATHER SUMMARY

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High pressure moved over California at the beginning of May, keeping temperatures well above normal. Bakersfield's high temperatures on the 1st and 2nd were 89 degrees, while Fresno had a pair of 87's for high temperatures on those days. The warm weather caused some melting of the snowpack over the higher terrain of the Southern Sierra Nevada, and as the cold, moist air descended down the Sierra Nevada slopes, it warmed and lifted into afternoon cumulus clouds. A few of these clouds continued to develop, resulting in isolated showers and thunderstorms near the crest.

The jet stream began to buckle over the Eastern Pacific on May 2nd, forming an upper-level low-pressure trough that moved into California the next day. Temperatures dropped a few degrees on the 3rd, then fell sharply on the 4th, as the trough deepened the marine layer along the coast and marine air spilled through the Sacramento delta. Fresno cooled 15 degrees from the 2nd to the 4th (to 72 degrees), and Bakersfield was down 14 degrees (to 75). Temperatures then warmed to 80 degrees at both cities on the 5th, as a weak ridge aloft built into the region. The warming also triggered isolated thunderstorms over the high Sierra. After a weak upper-level short-wave moved through California on May 6th, a stronger ridge built into California to push temperatures above normal. Neither Bakersfield nor Fresno would again see high temperatures below 80 degrees until May 21st.

With strong high pressure aloft, Bakersfield and Fresno recorded their first 90-degree day of the year on May 10th. Bakersfield was above 90 degrees for 8 of the next 9 days, hitting a high of 99 degrees on May 18th for its warmest day of the month. Fresno saw a consecutive strong of 9 days above 90 degrees (from the 10th through the 18th), culminating with a high of 101 on the 18th; both the warmest day of the month at Fresno, and its first 100-degree day. (Bakersfield would not hit the century mark for another month, on June 18th.)

With the hot temperatures, the snowpack continued melting, creating a moist, unstable airmass along the Southern Sierra Nevada crest. Aloft, a southeast flow brought warm, moist air from the Gulf of Mexico across the Desert Southwest into California. This resulted in thunderstorms developing over the crest on May 16th and again on the 17th.

An upper-level low approached California on the 19th, bringing cooler temperatures and even a few sprinkles to the central and southern San Joaquin Valley in the evening. The low reached the central California interior on the 21st, bringing the only appreciable rain to the San Joaquin Valley floor for May. As mentioned above, Valley high temperatures dropped back into the 70s with this storm. The storm also gave both Bakersfield and Fresno record rainfalls for the 21st.

Dry weather returned to the region on May 23rd, with Valley high temperatures fluctuating between the mid 70s and lower 80s, but staying a few degrees below normal. A dry upper-level trough moved through California on the 27th, dropping temperatures at Bakersfield and Fresno into the lower 70s.

High pressure aloft returned to California for the last few days of the month, with highs at Bakersfield and Fresno again climbing above 90 degrees on the 31st.