

A Note on the Names for Winter Storms

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This note reviews briefly the history of naming tropical storms. It then discusses the very recent and sometimes controversial phenomenon of naming winter storms. Finally, a list of the most recent designations for winter storms is provided.

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Introduction

In order to discuss the very recent phenomenon of naming of winter storms, it is useful to review briefly the naming of tropical storms as a precursor to this practice. The christening of tropical storms (hurricanes in the Atlantic Ocean, typhoons in the Pacific Ocean) has a long history. Ivan R. Tannehill (1890–1959) reports (Tannehill, 1938: 150) that, in the nineteenth century, hurricanes in Puerto Rico received saints' names for the birthday of the saint on the day on which they occurred. Three examples include: (1) Santa Ana (July 26 1825), (2) San Felipe the first (September 13 1876), and (3) San Felipe the second (September 13 1928). Clement L. Wragge (1852–1922) began to name tropical cyclones in the mid-1890s (Adamson, 2003: 359) with letters of the Greek alphabet, characters from Greek and Roman mythology, women, and politicians. Likewise, George R. Stewart's (1895–1980) novel *Storm* (Stewart, 1941) provides a fictional account of this now well-established tradition. In that novel, Stewart's protagonist explains his private habit of bestowing women's given names to tropical storms (Stewart, 1941: 12–13).

Not at any price would the Junior Meteorologist have revealed to the Chief that he was bestowing names — and girls' names — upon those great moving low-pressure areas. But he justified the sentimental vagary by explaining mentally that each storm was really an individual and that he could more easily say (to himself, of course) “Antonia” than “the low-pressure center which was yesterday in latitude one-seventy-five East, longitude forty-two North.”...

At first, he christened each new-born storm after some girl he had known — Ruth, Lucy, Katherine.... Of late the supply of names had run short, and he had been relying chiefly upon long ones ending in *-ia* which suggested actresses or heroines of books rather than girls he had ever known....

The National Weather Service's rationale for designating tropical cyclones with female and male names has two purposes (National Weather Service, 2015). First, it is subject to less error than employing the previous, and more cumbersome, latitude-longitude identification methods. Second, it allows for rapid communication of storm information in a variety of venues (weather stations, coastal bases, ships at sea).

The practice of naming tropical storms began in 1953 when only female given names were given to such storms. In 1979, the names alternated between male and female names. When a storm causes a great deal of damage and loss of life, the storm name is retired, e.g., "Katrina" (August 23–30 2005) and "Sandy" (October 22–29 2012). It should be noted that both of these storms achieved Name of the Year status (Evans, 2013: 124) — "Katrina" in 2005 and "Sandy" in 2012 — in the American Name Society's voting on the Name of the Year at its annual meeting.

The naming of winter storms

The naming of winter storms in the United States, however, is a very recent phenomenon. Although they are designated as winter storms, some of them take place in late autumn or early spring. The Weather Channel® began the practice of naming winter storms in November of 2012 in a systematic fashion. According to The Weather Channel®, only those storms that are disruptive to people can receive a name. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration of the US government, it should be noted, does not name winter storms because of the difficulty in pinpointing where one starts and ends as is the case with tropical depressions. Furthermore, AccuWeather® does not name storms based on the belief that it is not good science and it misleads the public. Despite this public polemic about the naming of winter storms, the new custom may well be on its way to be an established tradition.

The third annual alphabetical list of winter storms (2014–2015) and their meaning appears in Table 1 below (Weather Channel® 2015). The fact that The Weather Channel® leaves the name of a winter storm for the letter "W" blank suggests that this annual naming process is a ploy for publicity by engaging its audience in a competition or game with a deadline of October 15 2014. "Wolf" was ultimately selected with 45% of a total vote of 37,731 as the designation for "W" from a list that included "Warren," "Wilda," "Willie," "Woden," and "Wolf" (Wedgies, 2015).

In defense of its initiation of naming winter storms, The Weather Channel® (2015a) uses specific quantitative criteria including population affected (two million people) and area affected (400,000 square kilometers). Nevertheless, the winter storm naming committee reserves the right to override its strict guidelines if the winter storm is one of historical significance. The Weather Channel® engages in a continual process of improving its naming guidelines.

Each year since 2012, The Weather Channel® has announced the names for winter storms. The third set of annual designations for winter storms for 2014–2015 appears in Table 1.

Concluding remarks

This note reviewed the now well-established custom of naming tropical storms, which dates back to the nineteenth century. It also discusses the very recent practice of

TABLE 1
2014–2015 WINTER STORM NAMES (WEATHER CHANNEL®, 2015b)

Name of winter storm	Meaning of name
Astro	In Greek, it means star.
Bozeman	In honor of the Miss Shupe's Bozeman High School Latin class, which provided the 2013–2014 list of winter storm names.
Cato	The name of a Roman statesman and his great-grandson, who were both known for integrity.
Damon	From Greek mythology; known for his loyalty.
Eris	From Greek mythology, the goddess of discord.
Frona	Greek, short for Sofronia; related to the word for wise.
Gorgon	From Greek mythology, one of three monsters; serpentine humanoids.
Hektor	From Greek mythology, the Trojan champion who was killed by Achilles.
Iola	From Greek mythology, a variant spelling of Iolè, a beautiful woman who Hercules wanted to marry, but could not.
Juno	From Roman mythology, a goddess who looked after the women of Rome.
Kari	A Finnish name derived from the Greek name Makarios from old-Greek meaning blessed or happy.
Linus	From Greek Mythology, a son of Apollo known as a great musician.
Marcus	An Ancient Roman name referring to Mars, the god of war.
Neptune	From Roman mythology, the god of the sea.
Octavia	The sister of the first Roman Emperor, Augustus, who was also known as Octavian.
Pandora	From Greek mythology, the first human woman created by the gods.
Quantum	From the Latin word <i>quantus</i> , meaning how much.
Remus	From Roman mythology, one of the founding brothers of Rome, along with Romulus
Sparta	Prominent Greek city that was the principal enemy of Athens during the Peloponnesian War.
Thor	From Scandinavian mythology, god of thunder and rain.
Ultima	From Latin, feminine version of <i>ultimus</i> , meaning last, furthest, final.
Venus	From Roman mythology, the goddess of love.
W ???	Help us choose! Take the poll on this page. [The name "Wolf" was selected from a list of five names that began with "W."]
Xander	Dutch form of Latin name, Alexandrus.
Yuli	Basque for the Latin name, Julius.
Zelus	From Greek mythology, personifies dedication, envy, jealousy, and zeal.

naming winter storms, which has been a source of debate among various commercial meteorological services. Finally, it provides an enumerative list of winter storms for 2014–2015. It remains to be seen if the practice of naming winter storms becomes a firmly entrenched tradition comparable to the longstanding tradition of naming of tropical storms.

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