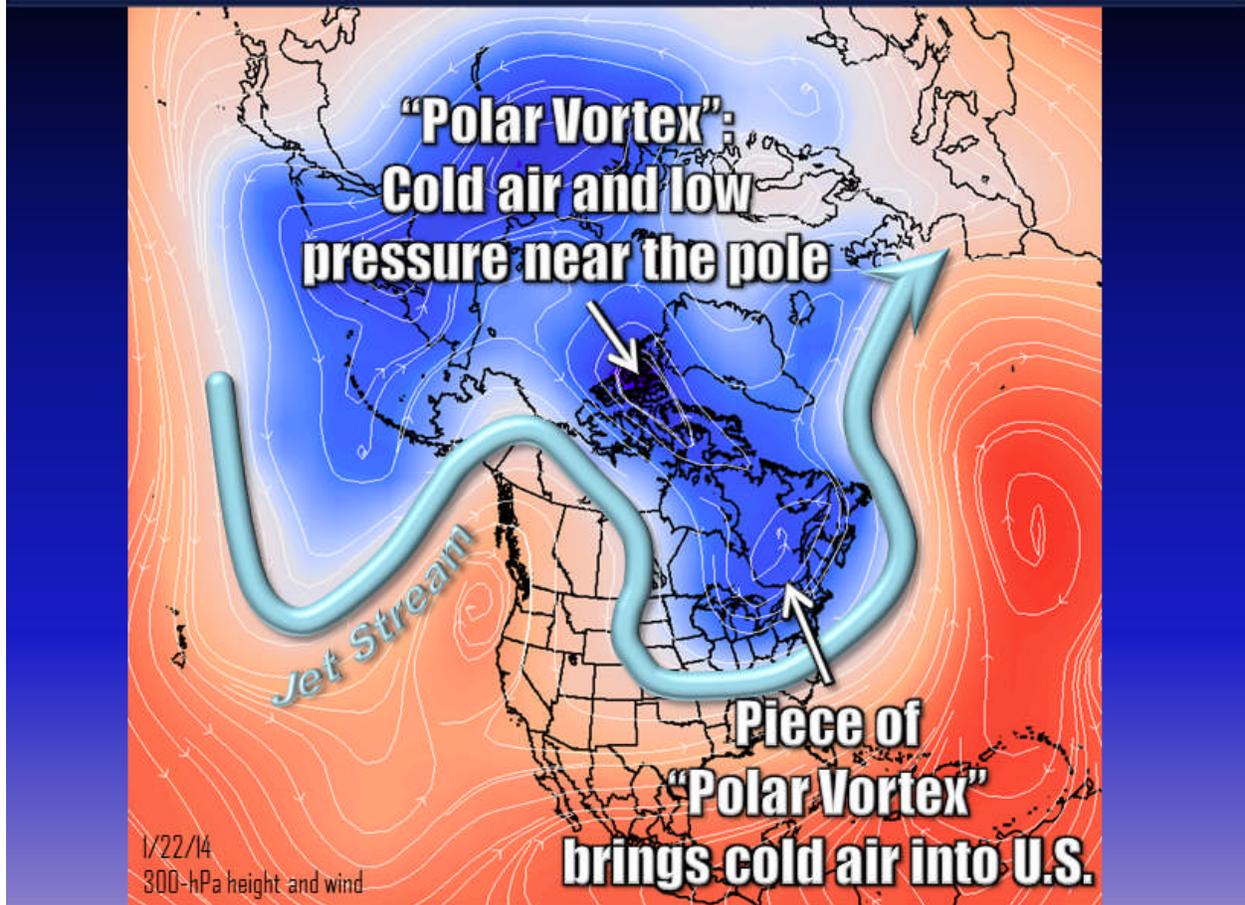


# What Is the “Polar Vortex”?



During the summer of 2012 we were introduced to the weather term “Derecho.” This winter, we learned of the “Polar Vortex.”

According to the National Weather Service, it’s nothing new. A polar vortex is a large region of low pressure that continuously sits near the North Pole during the winter. “Vortex” refers to the counter-clockwise flow of air that flows around this area of low pressure. This wind flow is strongest at the edge of the polar vortex and is what meteorologists refer to as the jet stream.

The NWS in Kansas City, Missouri noted, “The strength of this system controls the jet stream which has big effects on the weather. If the polar vortex weakens and breaks into pieces, as it did this winter, the jet stream may buckle and allow low pressure and cold air to sink southward into the United States (you can consider this a piece of the polar vortex as indicated in blue on the map). This is why the Midwest was so cold and the East Coast got hit with a snow storm. Conversely, where the jet stream surges northward, warm air and dry weather are the result. This is why California experienced a major drought this winter.”