

WeatherNext 2: Trying to Make the Atmosphere Less Chaotic (for Us)

Weather is the original adversarial dataset: messy, nonlinear, and extremely good at punishing overconfidence. Most days the question isn't "will it rain?" but "how wrong can the forecast be, and how costly is that error?" WeatherNext 2 is interesting because it doesn't just chase a single best-guess forecast—it tries to map the space of plausible futures fast enough to be useful.

What's new in WeatherNext 2

Google DeepMind and Google Research describe WeatherNext 2 as their most advanced global forecasting system, with the headline improvement being speed: it can generate forecasts up to 8x faster, and at up to 1-hour time resolution. Faster matters because it changes the practical bottleneck: instead of spending compute on one forecast, you can spend it on many scenarios.

From one future to many

The most provocative idea here is that a single deterministic forecast is often the wrong product. WeatherNext 2 can generate hundreds of possible weather outcomes from a single starting point, and it does it in under a minute per scenario on a single TPU (as described in the announcement). That's the kind of capability that turns forecasting into decision support: "what's the distribution of outcomes?" rather than "what's the one answer?"

This is enabled by a modeling approach they call a Functional Generative Network (FGN), which injects "noise" into the model in a way intended to keep forecasts physically realistic and internally consistent. In plain terms: it's not randomizing pixels; it's sampling coherent worlds that still obey the constraints of weather systems.

Where it shows up (and why that matters)

WeatherNext technology is already being integrated into consumer-facing surfaces: Google says it has upgraded weather forecasts in Search, Gemini, Pixel Weather, and Google Maps Platform's Weather API, with Google Maps integration planned as well. That's a big deal because the value of better forecasts isn't only scientific—it's logistical, operational, and very human (commutes, travel plans, outdoor work, safety decisions).

Opening it up to researchers

Beyond products, WeatherNext 2 forecast data is being made available via Earth Engine and BigQuery, and Google also mentions an early access program on Vertex AI for custom inference. If this becomes accessible to more researchers and developers, it could accelerate downstream work: impact modeling, risk tools, and domain-specific forecasting layers built on top of a strong global prior.

The optimistic take is not "we've solved weather" (we haven't), but that forecasting can become more trustworthy by being more explicit about uncertainty. In a chaotic system, honesty about the range of plausible outcomes is often the closest thing to reliability.

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