

Snowpack 15 percent above normal in Sierra

By Don Strickland

Manual and electronic readings today indicate that water content in California's mountain snowpack is 115 percent of normal for the date statewide. This time last year, snow water content was 61 percent of normal statewide.

"Today's snow survey offers us some cautious optimism as we continue to play catch-up with our statewide water supplies," said DWR Chief Deputy Director Sue Sims. "We are still looking at the real possibility of a fourth dry year. Even if California is blessed with a healthy snowpack, we must learn to always conserve this finite resource so that we have enough water for homes, farms, and businesses in 2010 and in the future."



Frank Gehrke
with DWR at
the Dec. 30
snow survey at
Phillips
Station.
Photo/Kathryn
Reed

Lake Oroville, the principal storage reservoir for the State Water Project (SWP) is at 33 percent of capacity, and 50

percent of average storage for this time of year. Lake Shasta, the principal storage reservoir for the federal Central Valley Project, is at 56 percent of capacity, and 82 percent of average for the date.

DWR's early allocation estimate was that the agency would only be able to deliver 5 percent of requested SWP water this year, reflecting low storage levels, ongoing drought conditions, and environmental restrictions on water deliveries to protect fish species. The agency will recalculate the allocation after current snow survey results and other conditions are evaluated.

Results of today's manual survey by the Department of Water Resources (DWR) off Highway 50 near Echo Summit are as follows:

Location	Elevation	Snow Depth	Water Content	% of Long Term Average
Alpha	7,600 feet	69.3 inches	20.3 inches	96
Phillips Station	6,800 feet	62.6 inches	20.3 inches	106
Lyons Creek	6,700 feet	78.2 inches	22.9 inches	117
Tamarack Flat	6,500 feet	67.8 inches	20.2 inches	106

Electronic sensor readings show northern Sierra snow water equivalents at 129 percent of normal for this date, central Sierra at 101 percent, and southern Sierra at 119 percent. The sensor readings are posted here.

DWR estimates that fishery agency restrictions on Delta pumping adopted in the past year to protect Delta smelt, salmon, and other species could reduce annual deliveries of State Water Project water by 30 percent.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has championed a comprehensive

water plan that he recently signed into law. The package would safeguard the state's water supply through conservation, more surface and groundwater storage, new investments in the state's aging water infrastructure, and improved water conveyance to protect the environment and provide a reliable water supply.

Snow water content is important in determining the coming year's water supply. The measurements help hydrologists prepare water supply forecasts as well as provide others, such as hydroelectric power companies and the recreation industry, with needed data.

Monitoring is coordinated by the Department of Water Resources as part of the multi-agency California Cooperative Snow Surveys Program. Surveyors from more than 50 agencies and utilities visit hundreds of snow measurement courses in California's mountains to gauge the amount of water in the snowpack.

Don Strickland works for the Department of Water Resources.