

Early wet season bodes well for water users downstream

By Mark Grossi, Fresno Bee

What a difference a year makes for water supply. Battered by November storms, the growing Sierra Nevada snowpack and major reservoir storage haven't looked this healthy in at least four years.

Only a year after experiencing an extended drought, the state is starting to prepare for possible flooding.

"The November storms have saturated the soils and streams are flowing again," said state hydrology chief Jon Ericson, based in Sacramento. "It's quite a start."

But water experts know the season could turn dry very quickly. That would mean less water for east Valley farmers and probably additional water cutbacks for west-side growers who face limited water deliveries come rain or shine.

West-siders get water from Northern California rivers. The water must pass through the troubled Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, where water pumping has been limited to protect dying fish. A wet year would boost their water supply, but even then farm officials still expect below 60 percent of contractual allotments.

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