

Snowpack, reservoir levels well above normal

By Tim Hearden, Capital Press

California's record-setting rainfall in the past week has left many reservoirs flush with water and mountains smothered in snow.

The state's Department of Water Resources is predicting its deliveries of state project water will be at least half of contractors' requests – an extraordinarily high amount for this early in the season.

"The usual procedure is to start out conservatively at the first of the water year and see what kind of direction mother nature is going to take," DWR spokesman Don Strickland said. "Obviously she is going in the right direction now, so it's not beyond the possibility that water allocations could be increased again provided the storms keep coming on through."

The prediction comes as the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation has been releasing water from several nearly full reservoirs to make room for more.

At Shasta Lake, crews have been sending 15,000 cubic feet per second down the Sacramento River, up from the normal 7,000 cfs. Releases from Folsom Lake near Sacramento were ramped up from 15,000 cfs to 30,000 cfs, and the Tolluch Reservoir on the Stanislaus River has been letting out 1,500 cfs rather than the normal 200 cfs.

Bureau officials expected releases to ease back to normal by this weekend as the deluge lets up, spokesman Pete Lucero said.

"With all of our reservoirs, one of their main purposes is for

flood control,” Lucero said. With these storms coming in this past weekend and coming up this week, we need to be sure we have enough flood reservation space within the reservoirs.”

There’s plenty more water coming. As of Dec. 21, the water content in snowpack statewide was 204 percent of normal for this time of year, including 274 percent of normal for the southern Sierra Nevada Mountains.

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