

Water content 209% of average near Echo Summit

By Kathryn Reed

PHILLIPS STATION – Snow was literally melting as the last water survey of the season was taken.

Although the numbers are good for this time of year – 209 percent of average with 33.7 inches of water content and a snow depth of 66 inches – under warm sunny skies Monday, it was a bit mushy in the snow field.



Frank Gehrke barely has room to take the seventh water content reading May 2. Photo/Kathryn Reed

But there are years when May 2 has more dirt than snow covering this field at the entrance of Sierra-at-Tahoe on Highway 50.

“This is a good year, but this is not record setting,” said Frank Gehrke, who takes the measurements for the Department of Water Resources. In 1995, the water content was 44.7 inches.

He attributed the below average temperatures of April and some of overcast days for keeping the snowpack as solid as it is.

However, the stream on the far side of the meadow that has been evident most of the previous four snow surveys this season is even larger now. Gehrke was barely able to get in a seventh reading.

Gehrke said with the amount of snow still in the Sierra, a high stream flow should last into late spring.

Water content in the snow throughout the state is what determines how much people downstream get. Users of the State Water Project are scheduled to receive 80 percent of the water they have requested. The intricate canal system delivers water to 25 million Californians and irrigates about 1 million acres of farmland.

The abundance of snow this winter belied the fact that forecasters had called this a La Nina year – which by definition means much less snow than what actually fell.

Gehrke said this proves there is not definitive way of predicting what California’s weather will be like.

“There are so many variables – how the ocean and other things influence California winters,” Gehrke said.

Location	Elevation	Snow Depth	Water Content	% of Long Term Average
Alpha	7,600 feet	117.1 inches	60.1 inches	231
Phillips Station	6,800 feet	66 inches	33.7 inches	209
Lyons Creek	6,700 feet	105.2 inches	52.2 inches	231
Tamarack Flat	6,500 feet	missing	missing	missing