

Summer weather not in the forecast for Lake Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

That whining noise you hear is nearly every Lake Tahoe Basin resident complaining about the weather.

“A lot of people are on their toes waiting for summer to come, but it’s going to be at least another week,” said Scott McGuire, meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Reno.

Snow, rain, wind, clouds. That’s the forecast for about the next 10 days. With the calendar saying summer is 19 days away, the banter being heard is “bring on summer, we’ll just skip spring”.



June in South Lake Tahoe started off with snow. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Old man winter doesn’t seem to want to leave despite having overstayed his welcome. June started off with snow for much of the basin, with the white stuff accumulating as the afternoon went on.

While May 2011 was wetter than May 2010, it was actually slightly warmer in South Lake Tahoe this year.

The average temperature for South Lake Tahoe this May was 43.9 degrees. In 2010 it was 42.8 degrees. The normal average is 46.5 degrees.

The hottest it ever got was 72 degrees on May 5. The coldest was 18 degrees on May 16.

Plenty of plans were wrecked by the weather. One need just remember the Tour de California that never happened in Lake Tahoe. Mother's Day was wet. Memorial Day weekend saw several inches of snow accumulate.

In total, South Lake Tahoe collected 1.38 inches of precipitation in May. A year ago the total was 0.84 inches. The Weather Service doesn't have the average.

Oddly enough, Reno was below it's average for moisture in May. Normal is 0.66 inches. This May it received 0.4 inches. (The Reno temps were 2 degrees below the normal 54 degrees.)

In Tahoe City the gauge hit 2.04 inches in May. Normal is 1.21 inches.

"It's the second spring when it's been wetter, windier, cooler and cloudier than normal," McGuire said. "We can't be 100 percent certain, but a significant portion last year was the affect of El Nino. This year was the La Nina off the coast of South America."

No record highs, lows or moisture totals were recorded in the region in May.

The cooler weather has the benefit of keeping the snow in higher elevations from melting at a rapid pace. It has the downside of keeping hiking trails looking like snowshoe paths for longer.

“We are not anticipating any danger for flooding. Some creeks are running high, but it’s almost a good thing with the extent of the snowpack to have below normal temperatures in spring,” McGuire said.



Many beaches in Lake Tahoe have less sand and more water than people are used to.

The snowmelt, added moisture and lack of evaporation have Lake Tahoe rising on a daily basis.

At 1pm June 1 the lake was at 6,226.78 feet. The natural rim is 6,223 feet, with the legal limit being 6,229.1 feet.

The last time Lake Tahoe was this high was Aug. 6, 2007.

Still, the level is below average. The lake now has 460,000 acre-feet of storage above its natural rim. The average for June 1 is 474,500 acre-feet. So, it was at 97 percent of average for June 1. Capacity is 744,600 acre-feet.

During the most recent drought, which was called off earlier this year by Gov. Jerry Brown, the lake dropped to a low of 6,222.62 feet on Dec. 6, 2009.

The last times it was near full were June 16, 2000, and June 28, 2006 – both dates show a level of 6,229.06 feet.

Water officials in Reno are projecting a high-water mark to be

set between June 10 and June 15.

A little bit of water is being released downstream now – 66 cubic feet per second. That is about 40 percent of the average release for this time of year.