

Odds are against a March Miracle saving Sierra snowpack

By Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee

After the driest December in 22 years, and a January that was merely damp, California weather watchers are hungry for any whiff of change in the air.

So when news seeped out that this winter's cursed La Niña conditions may at last be weakening, some of those eager observers began to pine for a repeat of the legendary "Miracle March" scenario of 1991 that helped California break a long drought.



Normally the area where Trout Creek enters Lake Tahoe is covered in snow on Jan. 31 -- not in 2012.

Photo/LTN

Not so fast, say the forecasters.

The pattern is definitely shifting, but so far there are few signs of really big storms on the horizon that could salvage the ski season and stave off drought.

“I don’t see it being a similar pattern,” said Jim Mathews, a meteorologist at the National Weather Service in Sacramento. “To hang your hat on a wet March, I think the odds are not in our favor.”

The weather service dug up some stats on the 10 driest November-through-January periods in Sacramento since the Gold Rush. This winter made the cut at No. 10.

Then it looked at how many of those winters, after January, concluded with above-normal rainfall. Only three did, including 1991.

Hence the long odds.

“We continue to do our snow dances, I can tell you that,” said Andy Chapman, chief marketing officer at the North Lake Tahoe Chamber of Commerce. “We do whatever we can to help the skies open up a little bit.”

Tahoe’s ski industry went without natural snowfall over the economically vital Thanksgiving and Christmas holiday stretch. Many ski resorts managed to open terrain using snow-making machines.

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