Barely any snow to measure in Sierra

By Kathryn Reed

PHILLIPS STATION — No snowshoes or skis needed. Unable to make the final measurement because the snow stopped and the stream began. Dirt and grass.

The combination of the above conditions made the results of Thursday's snow survey near Echo Summit anticlimactic. Frank Gehrke with the state Department of Water Resources walked through the snowfield that in places didn't contain snow.

He came up with an average snow depth of 13 inches that accounted for 6.1 inches of water content. This makes it 32 percent of average for this time of year.

Frank Gehrke runs out of snow to measure on March 28 along Highway 50 just west of Echo Summit. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Statewide, the snowpack is 52 percent of normal.

Snowpack is supposed to be at its peak right now. Instead, it has been diminishing since the December storms.

Holes from last month's survey of where the metal device is plunged into the snow were still evident.

With the lack of precipitation throughout the state, this makes for the driest first quarter on record. And while it's not unusual to have one month that is dry, to have three consecutive months is what is alarming.

"We can't rule out there will be a good April. But it would have to be a deluge," Gehrke said.

And to get the numbers to historic averages, it would mean 22 inches of rain for April. This equates to about 220 inches of snow.

"You probably don't want that to happen," Gehrke said.

The dim bright spot in news coming out March 28 is that the reservoirs on average are 95 to 97 percent full.

Most water users — ag and domestic purveyors — look two years out when it comes to figuring out how to meet their needs. These users were notified last week that their deliveries would be cut.

The runoff from the Sierra snowpack is what fills the reservoirs around the state. That water is then sent downstream to be used as irrigation for crops and drinking water for others.

And reservoirs that aren't full impact recreation as well as fisheries.