

# Editorial: Worrisome water year in California

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North State reservoirs may be higher than usual for this date, but that's not going to last.

Some optimistic media outlets in the state, particularly those from metropolitan markets, seem to want to report and believe statistics based on wishful thinking. They report optimistically that lakes are higher than normal for this time of year, and that's true.

But those people need to get out a little – up where the water is. Or rather, where the water is supposed to be.



Sierra-at-Tahoe in late April shows how little snow is in the area. Photo/LTN

The High Sierra is nearly barren of snow. This is a time of year where there's usually snow on the ground above 6,000 feet in Plumas, Alpine and Sierra counties. The rivers streaming out of the Sierra are usually flowing high and brown with snowmelt right now.

Instead, there is very little snow. Drive to Reno, Tahoe or

Almanor right now and you have to crane your neck skyward to see any snow, only on the highest mountains. Ski resorts have long since closed, and even Donner Pass only has a hint of old, dirty snow. Rivers are running low and clear, the type of water conditions you usually see in July. Anglers out for the traditional late-April opening of trout season met summerlike conditions in the Sierra.

By the time those streams reach the valley, there's not much of them left. That was obvious last weekend, as people played in knee-deep water on a 90-degree day at the Five-Mile. Big Chico Creek is barely moving. Usually at this time of year, we're warning swimmers to be cautious around the high, cold water. Not this year. The air temperature and the river flow make it look like July.

If the spring-run salmon haven't already made it up the canyons on Butte, Chico, Deer and Mill creeks, there's a good chance they won't. The water in the lower portions of the streams is too low.

It's true that the lake levels are about normal. Heading into May, Lake Oroville was 104 percent of average for the date. Shasta was 96 percent of average. Folsom was 94 percent of average.

You have to be extremely uninformed to think that's good news.

The problem is, usually water managers are releasing water from reservoirs at this time of year to make room for the snowmelt. The lakes continue to rise in a good water year till mid-June or July, all from the snowpack.

Not this year. Lakes are already dropping and will continue to do so. The high point for Oroville, Shasta and Folsom are usually sometime in June. This year, barring a May miracle, it appears the high point was reached sometime in April.

We hope people in other parts of the state don't hear about

our higher-than-normal lakes and think water is plentiful this summer. It's not. And the sooner everybody starts conserving, the less likely it is that people will start tossing around the D-word.