

Record dry year for Lake Tahoe Basin



Lack of moisture means there is more beach area surrounding Lake Tahoe.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

Lake Tahoe and many parts of California and Nevada are setting records for being so dry.

Tahoe City receives on average 31.55 inches of precipitation each year. It has received 8.08 inches for 2013. Records date to 1910.

The last significantly dry year was in 1976 when 9.34 inches of precip fell.

South Lake Tahoe's numbers are not as old and are not as detailed. But the entire basin, Truckee, Reno and Carson areas all in the same dry predicament.

"The high pressure could leave us in a dry pattern in the Sierra for another week or two," Jessica Kielhorn, meteorologist technician with the National Weather Service in Reno, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

That ridge of high pressure is just sitting off the California coast, which is causing the dry spell. Storms keep going north and northeast of here.



Source: National Weather Service

Statewide electronic readings show the snowpack water content is 20 percent of normal for the date. The first manual reading of the season near the entrance to Sierra-at-Tahoe is Friday. A year ago the snowpack was 150 percent of normal for this time of year.

The official water year ends June 30, so there is time for the water year to be salvaged.

However, the lack of moisture throughout California and Nevada makes this the third year in a row for below normal precipitation.

Snowpack provides for about one-third of California's drinking and irrigation water.

Normally the hills in the Bay Area and land in the Sacramento Valley are a vibrant green at the start of a new year. That won't be the case for 2014. They aren't even the golden brown of summer. The land is barren; not even suitable for grazing.

Department of Water Resources Director Mark Cowin on Dec. 13 mobilized a drought management team "to offset potentially devastating impacts to citizen health, well-being and our

economy.” Four days later, Gov. Jerry Brown set up a Drought Task Force. Drought conditions are being felt in 94.25 percent of California, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor.

For now, farmers are likely to receive 5 percent of the water they expected. This means some fields will be fallow, while plantings will be scaled back elsewhere. This in turn affects produce prices and unemployment numbers. Both will increase.

The lack of snow is clearly impacting the Lake Tahoe Basin when it comes to tourism. Usually it's near impossible to get a hotel room this week. But there are several vacancy signs along Highway 50 in South Lake Tahoe.

While ski resorts are open, the bulk of the slopes are covered with man-made snow. Even then, no resort has 100 percent of its terrain open.

If the snow and rain stays away, the other threat to worry about will be wildfires.