

January in Tahoe more suited for tanning

By Kathryn Reed

The storm forecast to roll into the Lake Tahoe Basin today is not going to quench the land's thirst, but it might alter the record books.

Going into the week, this has been the second driest January on record for South Lake Tahoe with 0.17 inches of precipitation. However, those records only date to 2000. The driest was in 2003 when 0.03 inches fell. No. 3 was 2001 with 0.40 inches.

In Tahoe City, where records have been kept for more than a century, this too is the second driest January with 0.35 inches. It is tied with 1985. The driest was in 1991 with 0.08 inches.



It was so warm at the Ritz-Carlton Lake Tahoe on Jan. 25 that people were lathering on sunscreen and taking off clothes. Photo/LTN

Rain is what is forecast for lake level starting today, with a

winter storm watch in effect for the basin for a 24-hour period starting Thursday at 4am. One to 2 feet of snow is possible above 8,000 feet, according to the National Weather Service in Reno, 1 foot above 7,000 feet, and 6 inches at the lake.

A “quick punch” is how Jessica Kielhorn with the Weather Service described the storm. A lingering shower may persist into Friday.

The drought of 1976-77 is often compared to what is going on now in California and Northern Nevada. One reason is because now, like then, a high pressure sat over the states that diverted storms elsewhere. The current ridge is 4 miles high and 2,000 miles long.

A silver lining compared to the 1970s is the advent of snowmaking. The overnight temperatures have allowed snowmaking operations to continue most nights through the dry spell. Heavenly Mountain Resort this week opened more terrain on the California side.

Plus, resorts will bring snow from other parts of the mountain to fill in bare spots that have been skied off. And the groomers are also earning their checks this season by ensuring runs are not slabs of frozen hardpack.

But daytime temperatures this month have been balmy. The mean maximum temperature so far for January in South Lake Tahoe has been 51.7 degrees – a record. In 2012 the mean maximum temp for January was 48.8 degrees, 47.3 degrees in 1986 and 47.2 degrees in 2003.

The highest temp for a January was recorded at 61 degrees in 2011. So far South Tahoe has hit 58 degrees as a high this month.

In Tahoe City the mean maximum temp is also at a record this month at 46.9 degrees. The previous record of 46.8 degrees was

set in 1961, with 1986 being 46.6 degrees.

The record high for a Tahoe City January was set in 1927 at 60 degrees. This month it's gotten up to 55 degrees.

While the water content for the Sierra was at 20 percent of normal when it was measured earlier this month, it will be less than that when the next readings are taken Jan. 30.

Gov. Jerry Brown's proposed 2014-15 budget calls for \$618.7 million for water efficiency projects, wetland and watershed restoration, groundwater programs, conservation, flood control, and integrated water management.

"As we work on emergency actions to manage through one of the driest winters on record, we are also taking proactive, long-term steps to prepare California for future droughts and flood," Secretary for Natural Resources John Laird said in a statement. "Each decade brings improvements, but also significantly highlights what we can do better. The California Water Action Plan gives us clear focus and vision for the next five years."

The governor's budget also would allow Department of Water Resources to better monitor the groundwater resources that provide more than one-third of California's supplies in dry years, and supports the development of a state backstop for sustainable groundwater management practices by the State Water Resources Control Board, should local efforts to do so not materialize.