

Rafting season could evaporate quickly

By Paul McHugh, Sacramento Bee

California boasts some of our globe's hardest-working water. It flows off ski slopes, rolls past wildlife habitats, tumbles into reservoirs, then gushes through pipes and turbines, sprinklers and faucets. En route – particularly in a drought year – water managers horde every drop they can capture, and parcel it out according to an elaborate rubric of contracts and agreements.

Thanks to that essential arrangement, northern and central portions of the state will score a whitewater recreation season that will be surprisingly long and robust, but only on dam-controlled rivers such as the Klamath, Trinity, and south and middle forks of the American and the Tuolumne.

On popular free-flowing rivers, such as the Kings, Merced and California Salmon, would-be rafters and kayakers should look online to study flows and weather, talk to outfitters, and stay poised and ready to leap onto these streams in April and May. Once their thin snowpacks melt and flow down the canyons, they'll be done.

So much for the general whitewater season profile.

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