

Calif. drought: Early months of 2015 critical

By Miguel Llanos, NBC News

Drought? What drought?

Californians could be forgiven for asking that question after two big storms in December brought record rain to the north and mountain snow to Southern California that dusted palm trees in some lower-elevation towns. The start of a new year, however, has the state back in a dry stretch, and experts wonder what's in store for the critical few weeks ahead.

"We must necessarily plan for the worst but hope for the best," said Jeanine Jones, deputy drought manager with the California Department of Water Resources. "We are only now entering the normally wettest part of our winter season, and what happens – or doesn't – in the next six weeks or so will tell us a lot about the likely outcome of the water year."

But the start to 2015 does not look promising for the Golden State. On New Year's Eve, the Los Angeles branch of the National Weather Service summarized the outlook on its Facebook page. "Rain for California to bring in the New Year?" it asked. Showing a map modeling precipitation over the next week, its answer was blunt: "Not very likely."

And with California's rainy season being defined by a short winter window, what happens in January and February will be critical.

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