

Lack of snow signals year 4 of Calif. drought



Lack of snow doesn't mean lack of beauty at Fallen Leaf Lake. Photo/Toogee Sielsch

By Kathryn Reed

The state didn't need to take a snow survey to prove that it's dry and moisture has been scarce.

"Unfortunately, today's manual snow survey makes it likely that California's drought will run through a fourth consecutive year. DWR managers said heavy precipitation and cooler temperatures in the next three months would be required for the snowpack to build and give Californians hope for beginning to recover from drought this year," Department of Water Resources officials said in a press release.

What the numbers from today's reading do is quantify how horrible things are. In the field adjacent to the road leading to Sierra-at-Tahoe, 7.1 inches of snow was found. It has a water content of 2.3 inches. This is 12 percent of average. Just a month ago it was at 33 percent of normal. Statewide the average is 25 percent of average, when it was 50 percent in December.

These measurements at Phillips Station near Echo Summit are taken at an elevation of 6,873 feet.

Six hundred feet lower, at lake level, people are raking, picking up pine cones and wondering if winter is only for those who live on the East Coast. Those in the Bay Area and elsewhere in the state are wondering the same thing as they watch blossoms appear sooner than usual and begin to water lawns that are used to being fed by Mother Nature.

January is normally California's wettest month. 2015 is likely to go into the record books as the driest in history.

Locally, the Lake Tahoe Basin's economy is what suffers the most when it doesn't snow. Even though many ski resorts can make snow, it's not enough to cover the entire mountain. Fewer skiers mean less hotel rooms booked, restaurants aren't as full and locals don't have jobs.

Elsewhere in California it means reservoirs aren't as full. Snowpack supplies about one-third of the state's water for municipalities and farmers.

State Climatologist Michael Anderson said to have a chance at ending the drought, California would have to record precipitation that is at least 150 percent of normal by the end of the water year on Sept. 30, or 75 inches. As of Jan. 29, 23.1 inches have been recorded at the stations.