

Calif. on course for another drought year



Lake Tahoe is rising. The photo on the left was taken Nov. 9, 2015, and the one on the right on March 1, 2016. Photos/LTN

By Kathryn Reed

Even though the region is going into a wet cycle, that news isn't enough to lift California out of its four-year drought.

While the snow survey at Phillips Station today was the best March reading since 2011, statewide the water content is below average.

At the field adjacent to the road leading to Sierra-at-Tahoe the snow depth on March 1 was 58.3 inches, water content 27.1

inches, which is 105 percent of the long-term average. Statewide the snowpack is 83 percent of average.

Frank Gehrke, who takes the measurements near the top of Echo Summit, said even though conditions are better than a year ago, what is on the ground is not enough for officials to say the state is out of danger.

Historically, half of the state's annual water comes as rain or snow during December, January and February. The importance of this is that the Sierra snowpack provides the water downstream for about one-third of California.

It will take a "March miracle" like 1991 and 1995 to lift the state out of the drought. The forecast for now at least looks like this month will be wetter than February, but only time will tell if a miracle is brewing.

"We are looking to enter a very active pattern this weekend and into next week," Tony Fuentes, meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Reno, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

It's too soon to forecast what the moisture totals will be, but he said to expect rain at lake level to begin with and then snow. Snow levels will start at about 7,000 feet. The rain is expected to start Thursday night in the basin.

The moisture this winter has caused the lake to rise. The natural rim is at 6,223 feet. As of March 1, Lake Tahoe's level was at 6,222.25 feet.

"That is a huge volume of water to make up that 1 foot," Fuentes said.

On March 22, 2015, the lake was at 6,222.83 feet. When it fell below the rim in October 2014, this was the first time in five years. Other times it was below the rim were 1977-78, 1961-62 and 1930-36. The record low of 6,220.25 feet was set in 1992. (Records have been kept since 1900.)