

Snowpack near Echo Summit 153% of average



The deep snowpack could mean an extended ski season. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

By Lake Tahoe News

What a difference a month makes. The snowpack just keeps getting deeper and that's a good thing.

"We've got a very good snowpack, a very robust snowpack on the ground right now," Frank Gehrke said Thursday after taking a series of measurements in the field near the entrance to Sierra-at-Tahoe. He noted there is as much snow on the ground as there can be at the usual peak in April.

The water equivalency of the 90 inches of snow at Phillips Station measured 28.1 inches. The average this time of year is

11.3 inches, so this is 153 percent of the historical average at this location. This is the highest measurement for February in 12 years.

Under overcast skies and the promise by forecasters of more snow, the field was dramatically different than a month ago. At the Jan. 3 snow survey the water content was 6 inches, which is 53 percent of average for then.

The news is good statewide – the snowpack contains 31 inches of water, which is 173 percent of the Feb. 2 average of 18.1 inches.

The average annual precipitation at the eight-station Northern California index is 50 inches. That total was surpassed on Jan. 20. Since October, when the water year began, 58.22 inches of rain have been recorded in Northern California. The record for that same four-month period was set in 1997 – 58.22 inches.

The water content is critical because the snowpack supplies about 30 percent of California's water needs as it melts in the spring and early summer.

Shasta Lake, California's largest surface reservoir is at 114 percent of its historical average, while a year ago it was at 78 percent. Lake Oroville, the State Water Project's largest reservoir, is at 121 percent of its historical average today compared to 68 percent in 2016.

Indicators still show almost half of California in a drought, but that's all south of here.