

Water content near Echo Summit 190% of average



Frank Gehrke on May 1 measures the water content along Highway 50. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

PHILLIPS STATION – Water is not going to be a problem in California this summer and fall.

At the final snow survey of the season near Echo Summit on Monday the numbers showed 27.8 inches of snow, with a water content of 14.6 inches. This is 190 percent of average.

The last reading along the snow field near the entrance to Sierra-at-Tahoe could not be obtained because it was under water. This isn't unusual for the May reading. But the river of water flowing in the area was more widespread, a little deeper and flowing faster than most years.

During the drought there were times when there was no snow to measure in May.

Frank Gehrke, who does the manual readings for the Department of Water Resources, said the snow is melting at a rate of about one-tenth of an inch a day. At peak snowmelt, it will be about 1 inch a day. That should come later this month.

“The snowmelt is driven by the angle of the sun in the sky and how dirty the snow is,” Gehrke said.

With temperatures supposed to be in the 60s this week, the rate of melt will increase.

Statewide, the readings show the water content for May 1 being 42.5 inches, 196 percent of the average. The numbers compare to 2005 and 2011.

“It’s encouraging news in terms of surface water supply,” Gehrke said. With the abundance of water in reservoirs, it will give many areas the opportunity to allow the groundwater to recharge.

About one-third of Californians rely on this snowmelt for their drinking water or irrigation.

The important thing now is for water managers to monitor storage and flow to avoid flooding issues. Lake Oroville in Butte County is 91 percent of average for the date, Shasta Lake north of Redding is at 109 percent of average.