

Info lacking on mountain snowpack, runoff

By Matt Weiser, Water Deeply

Most Americans may not realize it, but we really don't know with a lot of accuracy how much snow there is sitting in the mountains during winter. We also don't always have a precise picture of where the snow level is when a storm moves in, or how much will run off when the snow melts.

One reason for this is that, in most areas, the weather sensor network in the mountains simply isn't very dense. Gauges that measure rain and snow are often placed for convenient access. The highest elevations and forested areas often have no sensors, leaving huge data gaps in many watersheds.

This creates a host of problems, from estimating flood risk accurately to figuring out how much water is available for summer farm irrigation.

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