

The way snow is falling and melting is changing

By Daniel Rothberg, Bloomberg

Between droughts and floods, the last decade has offered water managers in the southwest a preview of how climate change could impact a supply largely dependent on winter snow. This year's disappointing snowpack has them worried again.

"Water and climate change are joined at the hip," said Brad Udall, a researcher at Colorado State University who published a paper earlier this year showing how climate change has reduced flows in the Colorado River. "One of the primary impacts of a warming atmosphere are changes to our water cycle."

Snowpack is 50 percent lower than the average at this point in the winter at dozens of basins in the region. It's a major concern in a region with a growing population where water supplies are often pushed to their limits, even in good years. In addition to fueling the West's winter tourism industry, the snow provides a steady supply of water for the Colorado River, which serves 40 million people spread from Denver to Los Angeles.

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