

Storms improve water content by 32 percentage points



Maddie Bowman is just as comfortable in powder at Sierra-at-Tahoe as she is in a halfpipe. Photo/Brian Walker

By Kathryn Reed

What a difference a week can make.

On Feb. 28 the snow water equivalent near Echo Summit was 1.7 inches, or 7 percent of average, while on March 5 it was 9.4 inches, for 39 percent of normal.

Frank Gehrke took the manual readings at Phillips Station for the Department of Water Resources. It's unusual to do back-to-back surveys, but officials wanted to record the impact of the storm and note what it would have been like without it.

While the storms in the last week that dropped several feet of snow at lake level and as much as 7 feet higher up were good news for a lot of reasons, the reality is the snowpack is still pretty dismal.

These surveys are taken throughout the Sierra from December-April, when the bulk of the snow falls. They give water regulators an idea of what the runoff will be like in the spring/summer so they can then predict what reservoir storage will be like. That water is then used by various municipalities and farmers in the state.

While skiers prefer the light, powdery snow, it's the wet, heavy snow that is best for water content.

Skiers flocked to Tahoe resorts last weekend for the deepest snow all winter. With temps staying relatively cool, the fresh snow should provide the needed boost to get through the season. That is assuming future storms are dumping snow on the slopes and not rain.

More snow is on its way to the Tahoe area. A storm is expected to arrive Wednesday night and provide moisture intermittently throughout the weekend.