

Snowpack little help to Western drought

Latest surveys of mountain snowpack offer little encouragement to western states facing the worst summer water shortage in years, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Soil Conservation Service (SCS).

Snow surveys conducted earlier this month by SCS show the lightest snowpack ever recorded on most watersheds in the West. Spring and summer streamflow from the snowbelt may be the region's lowest since the late 1800's.

Some parts of the West had rain and snow last week, but it was too little to help.

The situation is most critical in California, where this year's record light snowpack will bring no relief to prolonged drought.

The outlook by states follows:

Arizona: Snowpack is half to two-thirds of normal. Streamflow is expected to be 20 to 65 percent of normal, but reservoir storage is good.

California: The California Department of Water Resources reports that snowpack is 20 to 40 percent of normal. Reservoir supplies are down to 60 percent of normal.

Colorado: Snowpack is 30 to 40 percent of normal. Most streams will yield 50 to 60 percent of their normal flow.

Idaho: Snowpack ranges from 5 percent of normal in the south to 30 percent in the north. Some south-central rivers will yield only 25 percent of their normal streamflow.

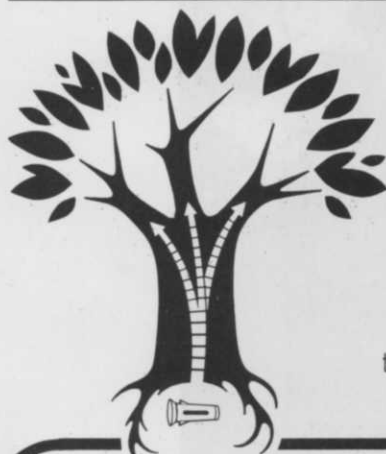
Montana: Snowpack is one-third of normal on the Columbia Basin drainage area and half of normal on the Missouri River drainage. Streamflow in most of the state will be 50 to 60 percent of normal, but the Milk River will yield 90 percent of its normal flow.

Nevada: Snowpack is 5 to 25 percent of normal, and streamflow is expected to be 20 to 30 percent of normal.

Utah: Snowpack is 15 to 40 percent of normal, and some rivers are expected to yield only 15 percent of their normal streamflow.

The streamflow forecasts assume that storms will follow their normal spring patterns. However, if this winter's dry weather continues through March, virtually all western rivers will have record low flows, the conservation agency said.

Snowpack accumulated in winter and spring provides about 70 percent of the western water supply during the year.



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