



Natural Resources Conservation Service
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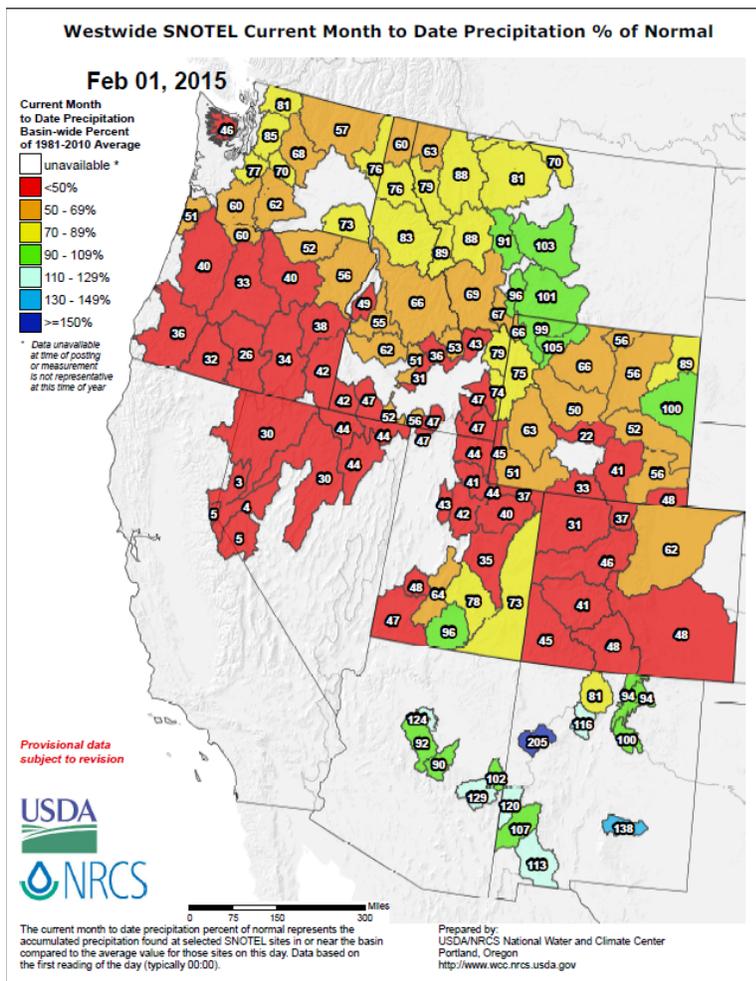
Western Snowpack and Water Supply Conditions February 2015

Overview

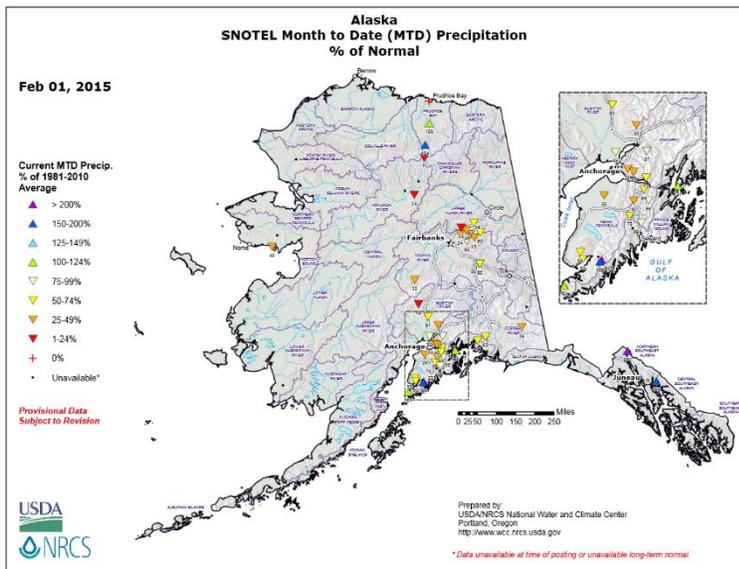
This report summarizes snow course and Snow Telemetry (SNOTEL) network data, streamflow forecasts, and reservoir storage data collected and analyzed by the [National Water and Climate Center](#).

Precipitation during January was below normal over most of the West. However, thus far in the water year (beginning October 1, 2014), precipitation has been near normal in northern and eastern areas but below normal in southwestern areas and Alaska. **Snowpack** shows sharp contrasts between the low levels in southwestern and far western areas, and higher but mixed levels elsewhere. **Streamflow forecasts** are somewhat below to near normal over the northern and eastern parts of the West, whereas the outlook for southwestern areas is well below normal. **Reservoir storage** is currently below normal for the Southwest and Oregon, and near to above normal elsewhere.

January Precipitation

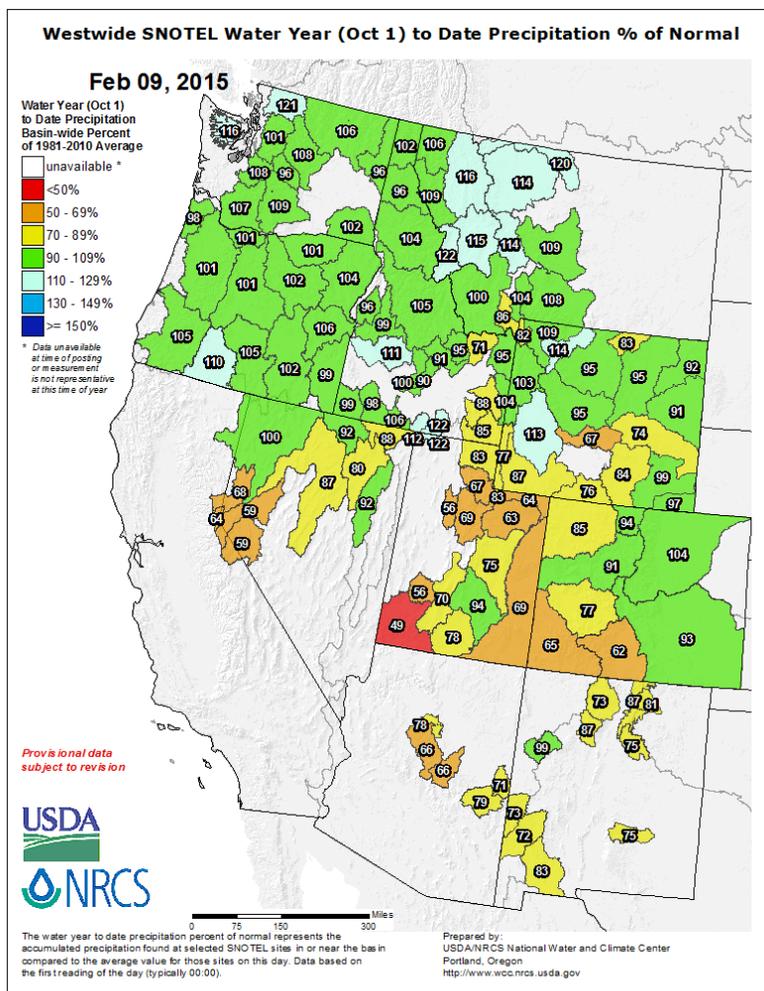


[Precipitation during January](#) was well below normal in much of the West and exceedingly dry in a swath from Oregon through Nevada and southern Idaho and on into Utah and Colorado. The only exceptions to this picture were a few areas in Montana, Wyoming, and the Southwest, which received near to above normal precipitation.



[Precipitation in Alaska during January](#) was below normal in most areas of the state except for a few locations in coastal areas and in the far north.

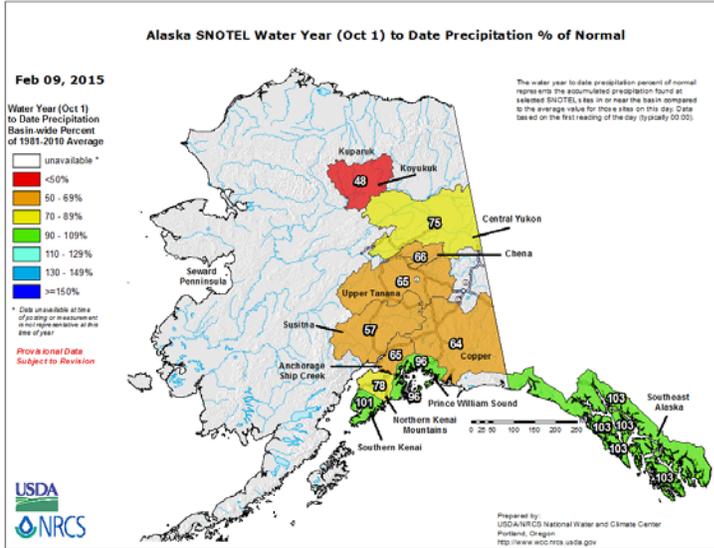
Water Year-To-Date Precipitation



[Precipitation for the 2015 water year-to-date](#) has been near normal over much of the northern and eastern parts of the West. Although individual months have been dry or wet, when considered as a water year total, these variations are smoothed out.

Exceptions to this pattern, however, are in southwestern areas, where it has been notably dry.

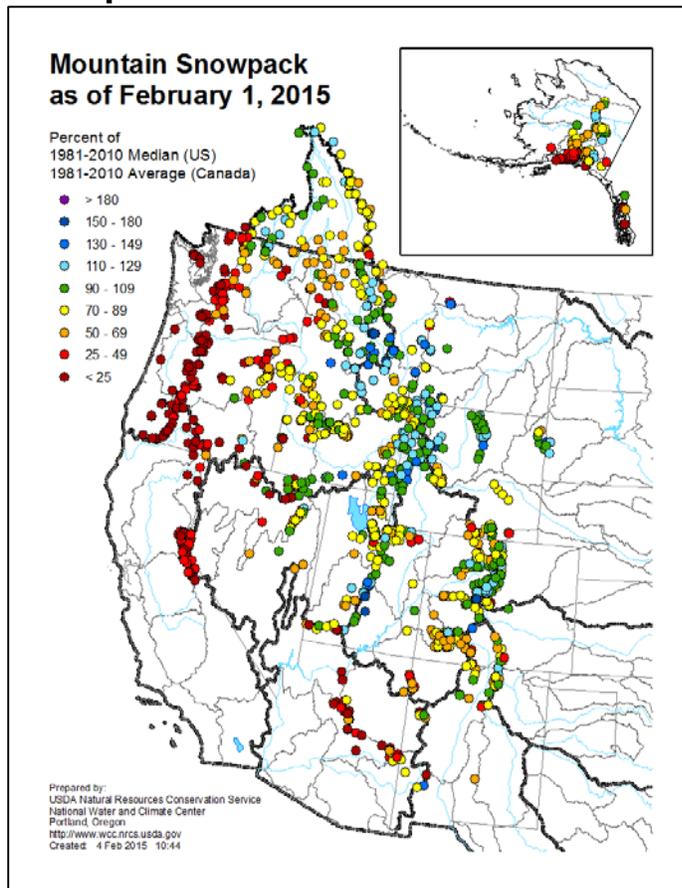
The water year-to-date precipitation is typically reflected in similar patterns in snowpack. This year, however, there is a big difference between these two in Washington and Oregon. While precipitation has been near normal, snowpack is at record low levels. This is due to unusually warm fall and winter temperatures, causing the precipitation to fall as rain rather than snow.



[Precipitation in Alaska for the 2015 water year-to-date](#) has been well below normal in the interior and near normal in the south coastal and Panhandle areas.

Maps containing monthly and daily updates of SNOTEL precipitation are available at: <http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/gis/precip.html>

Snowpack



[Snowpack at SNOTEL sites and snow courses as of February 1](#) in the western U.S. and the Columbia Basin in Canada shows some distinct regional contrasts. These regional patterns are similar to last month except that snowpack percents of normal have generally decreased.

Most notable is the extremely low -- record low at many sites -- snowpack all along the west coastal mountains. While the Sierra Nevada is low because of low precipitation all water year, the Cascades, in contrast, are low because of unusually warm temperatures, causing the near normal water year precipitation to fall mostly as rain rather than snow.

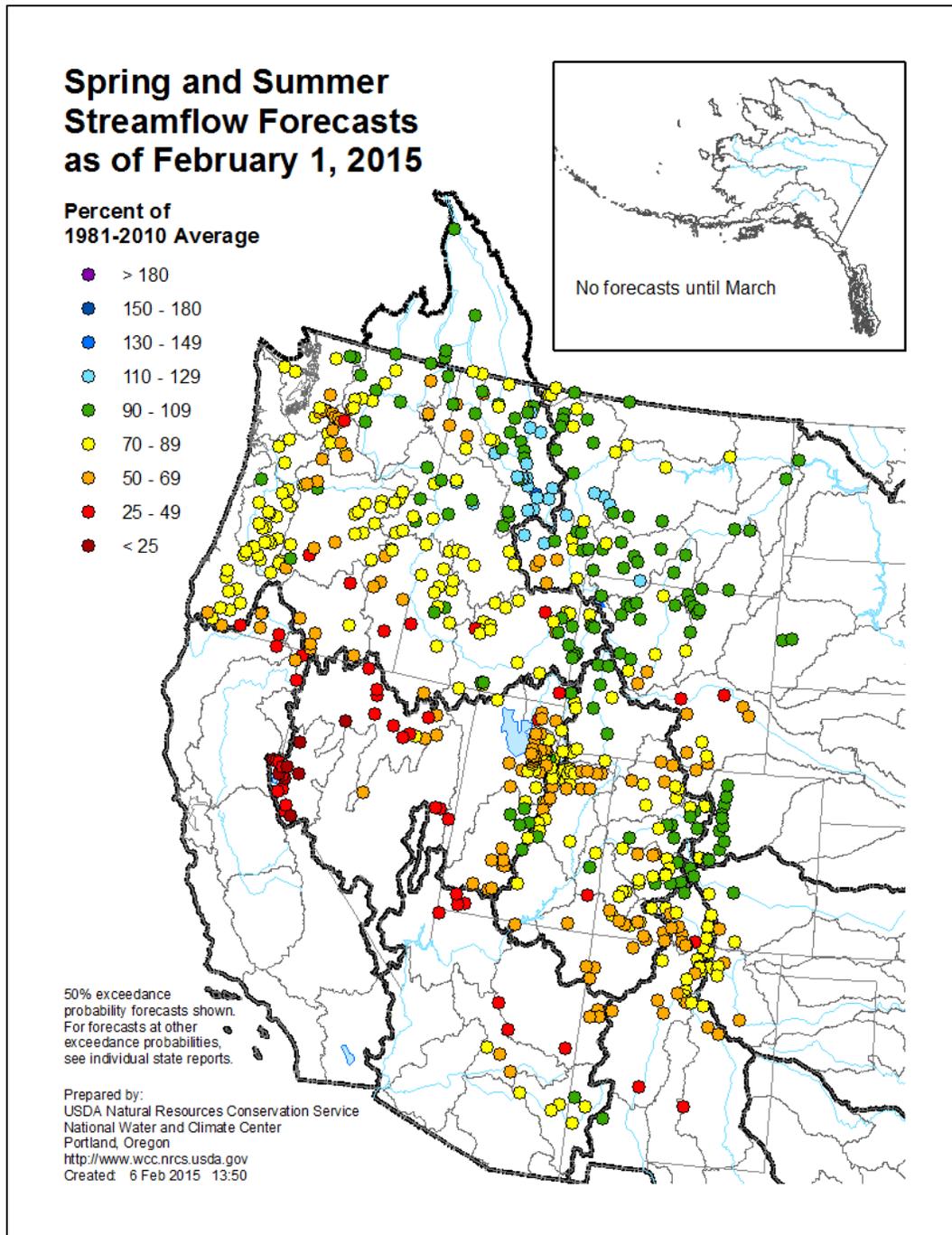
Arizona also has well below normal snowpack. Otherwise, generally near normal snowpack is found in most of the Rocky Mountains, from Colorado north into British Columbia.

Snowpack in Alaska is below normal in coastal areas and near normal in the interior.

Maps with daily updates of the snowpack (SNOTEL data only) for the entire West, as well as for individual states, are available at: <http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/gis/snow.html>

Streamflow Forecasts

[Streamflow forecasts](#) range, in a west-to-east gradient across the West, from below to near normal. Areas of notable dryness stretch from southeastern Oregon into Nevada and parts of the Southwest. Despite the record low snowpack in the Cascades of Washington and Oregon, streamflow forecasts in this region are not extremely low, due to the effects of the near normal water year precipitation plus the fact that these rivers are not strongly snowmelt-driven.



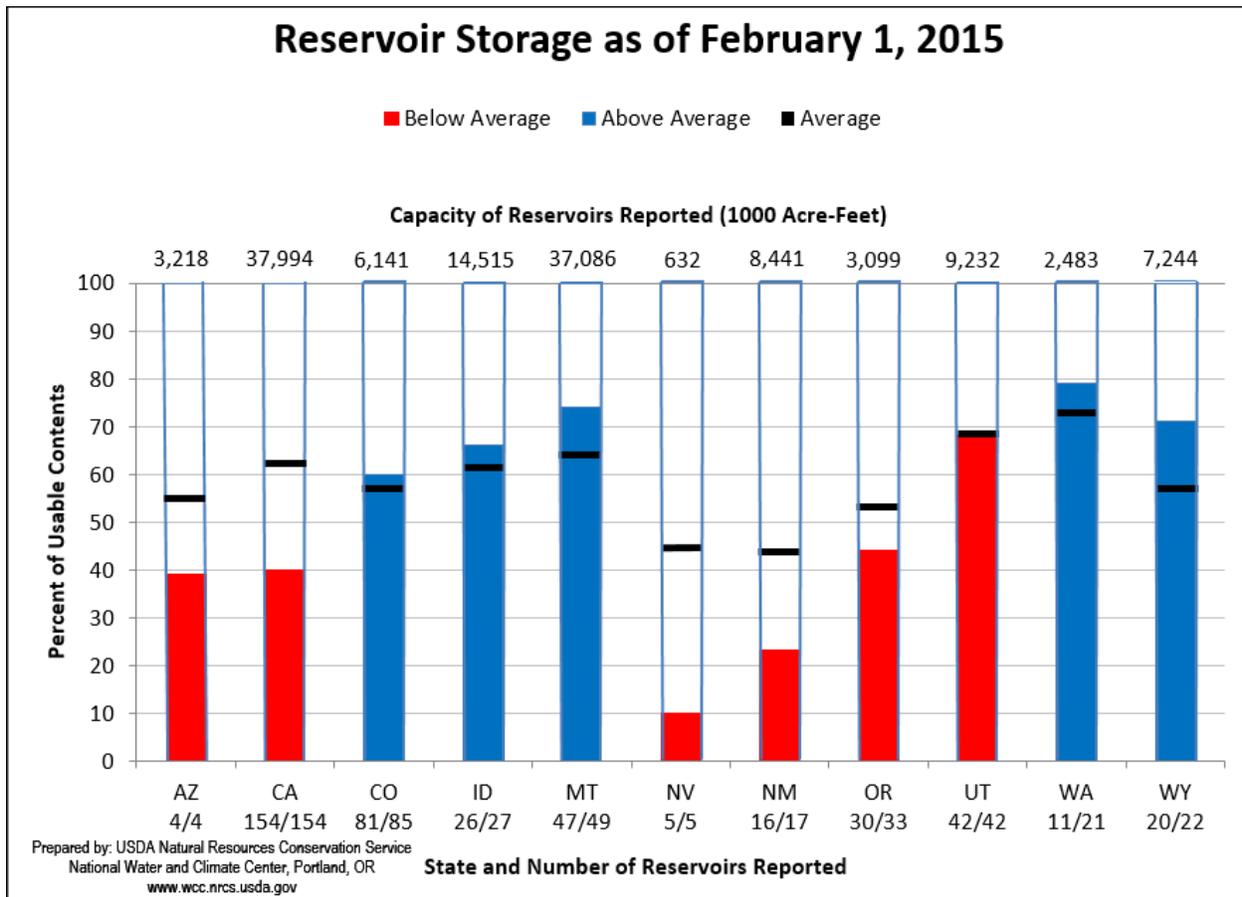
Trends in streamflow forecasts in basins for which daily water supply forecast models are available are located at: http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/wsf/daily_forecasts.html

Reservoir Storage

[Reservoir levels](#) remain well below average in the Southwest and in Oregon, while they are near to above average elsewhere in the West.

Further data and charts are available at: <http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/wsf/wsf-reservoir.html>

Data for California are summarized at: <http://cdec.water.ca.gov/cgi-progs/reservoirs/STORSUM>



State Reports

Click a state name to view the full report

Alaska: Snowpack across Alaska continues to be very low. The exception is a band of snow reaching from the center of the Copper Valley up through the middle Tanana and into the north slope of the White Mountains, which remains near normal. Low elevation sites and coastal areas see the most marginal conditions, as precipitation came primarily as rain.

Arizona: In general, spring streamflow forecasts are slightly improved from last month, primarily due to a major storm that hit portions of the state at the end of January.

California:

Colorado: Throughout January, Colorado snowpack experienced the lowest accumulation dating back to 1992, decreasing many snowpack totals from normal to below normal. The South Platte, Arkansas, and

Colorado river basins are near normal between 90%-100%, the Gunnison and Yampa/White/North Platte basins are below normal near 80%, whereas the Rio Grande and combined San Juan basins are well below normal near 63%.

Idaho: Dry conditions in January throughout Idaho have reduced the water supply outlook since last month. Most of central, southern, and eastern Idaho were looking very good a month ago, so those areas are still in the “marginally optimistic” zone with near or slightly below normal snowpacks. Northern Idaho, however, was below normal in snowpack last month and has dropped even further, making that part of the state the area of most concern for a very low runoff season.

Montana: Snowpack percentages dropped from above normal to near normal due to lack of snow and above average temperatures during January.

Nevada: The drought strengthened its grip on Nevada. January precipitation totals in the Sierra were at new record lows. Snowpack is 20-50% of normal for the western half of Nevada, making a recovery to normal by April unlikely.

New Mexico: Precipitation during January ranged from well above normal in the east and parts of the south to below normal in the northwest part of the state. However, temperatures were well above average, and snow accumulation remains below normal. The prospect of a decent spring runoff remains dependent on the future storm tracks.

Oregon: For the second year in a row, Oregon’s mountains are experiencing record low snowpack levels. Across the state, near normal precipitation has fallen since the water year began on October 1, but mountain temperatures have been unusually warm. As a result, 44 out of 110 long-term monitoring sites in Oregon measured record or near record low levels for snowpack on February 1, with some areas snow-free for the first time since measurements began. Without significant snowfall in February and March, many streams and rivers that are typically fed by snowmelt will likely be well below normal this summer.

Utah: Snow accumulation was meager during January. Southern Utah snowpacks are now at 50% of normal, with the remainder of the state having below to near normal conditions.

Washington: Again rain and warm temperatures dominated the region over the desired snow. With mountain temperatures once again reaching new highs and setting new records, our already meager snowpack saw losses in terms of percent of normal of over 15% from last month. Streamflow forecast percents of normal also declined by 10-20%. Snow surveyors from around the state reported many long-term snow sites showing little or no snow. Several sites that normally are only accessible by helicopter were driven or walked to in order to collect samples. Washington would have to receive well over 200% of normal snowfall between now and April 1 to even have a chance of catching up. The February 1 statewide SNOTEL readings were 39% of normal.

Wyoming: January precipitation was generally below average. Statewide, snowpack is at 94% of normal, and streamflow forecasts call for an overall 92% of average spring runoff.

For More Information

The USDA-NRCS National Water and Climate Center website provides the latest available snowpack and water supply information. Please visit us at: <http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov>