



Natural Resources Conservation Service
P.O. Box 2890
Washington, D.C. 20013

Date: **March 12, 2012**

Subject: **March 1, 2012 Western Snowpack Conditions and Water Supply Forecasts**

The following information is provided for your use in describing western climate and water supply conditions as of March 1, 2012.

OVERVIEW

A weakening “La Niña” persists, however, we have seen excessive precipitation fall over the Northeastern Tier States of the West in February (Fig. A). The Pacific Northwest unexpectedly fared poorly while the eastern Great Basin (Utah) and San Juan Mountains in Colorado unexpectedly fared much better than expected. The limited amount of precipitation over the far west was still enough to improve snowpack from worse levels to just plain old bad levels.

SNOWPACK

March opened with the driest regions over much of the Great Basin, California, and central Arizona (Fig. 1). The Northern Cascades, Northern Rockies, and widely scattered basins over the Southern Rockies and Southwest Mountains had near to above average conditions. All but the Northern Slope of Alaska had average or above average snow cover. Because much of the Northern Tier States, the Great Basin, and the Sierra had marginal snowpack in December and January, much of this area recovered nicely as noted in Fig. 2. While the Southwest had surplus snow cover in December, the lack of significant precipitation since then has resulted in substantial losses.

A map containing a daily update of the westwide snowpack may be obtained from the following URL - <http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/gis/snow.html>

SEASONAL PRECIPITATION

In a typical La Niña winter, the Western States usually experience above normal precipitation north of latitude of 41°N and below normal south of 41°N. However, thus far during the 2012 Water Year, this La Niña has delivered excess moisture over the Eastern Slope of the Rockies and especially over much of Alaska (Fig. 3). The Northern Cascades (Washington) has also followed a typical La Niña seasonal weather pattern with abundant moisture.

Monthly and seasonal precipitation maps are available from the following location - <http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/gis/precip.html> and <http://www.cbrfc.noaa.gov/wsup/westwide/westwide.cgi>.

SPRING AND SUMMER STREAMFLOW FORECASTS

The spring and summer streamflow forecasts as of March 1, 2012 are calling for normal flows scattered across the Northern Tier States and below normal flows over the Southern Tier

States; including the Great Basin, California, and Arizona (Fig. 4). Exception include above flows over the Upper Columbia River (Canada), Northernmost Cascades (Washington), and Bighorns (Wyoming). With February's precipitation, the Northern Tier States flow forecasts improved this month (except for the Oregon Cascades) while lack of precipitation over California, the Southwest, and Great Basin resulted in a general deteriorated flow forecast (Fig. 5).

State Basin Outlook Reports can be accessed at: <http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/cqibin/bor.pl>.

RESERVOIR STORAGE

Statewide (average) reservoir levels (Fig. 6) shows all but New Mexico and Arizona with normal or above normal storage. Oregon is near normal despite its red depiction.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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

/s/

Micheal L. Golden

Acting Deputy Chief, Soil Survey and Resource Assessment

Monthly Precipitation for February 2012

(Averaged by Hydrologic Unit)

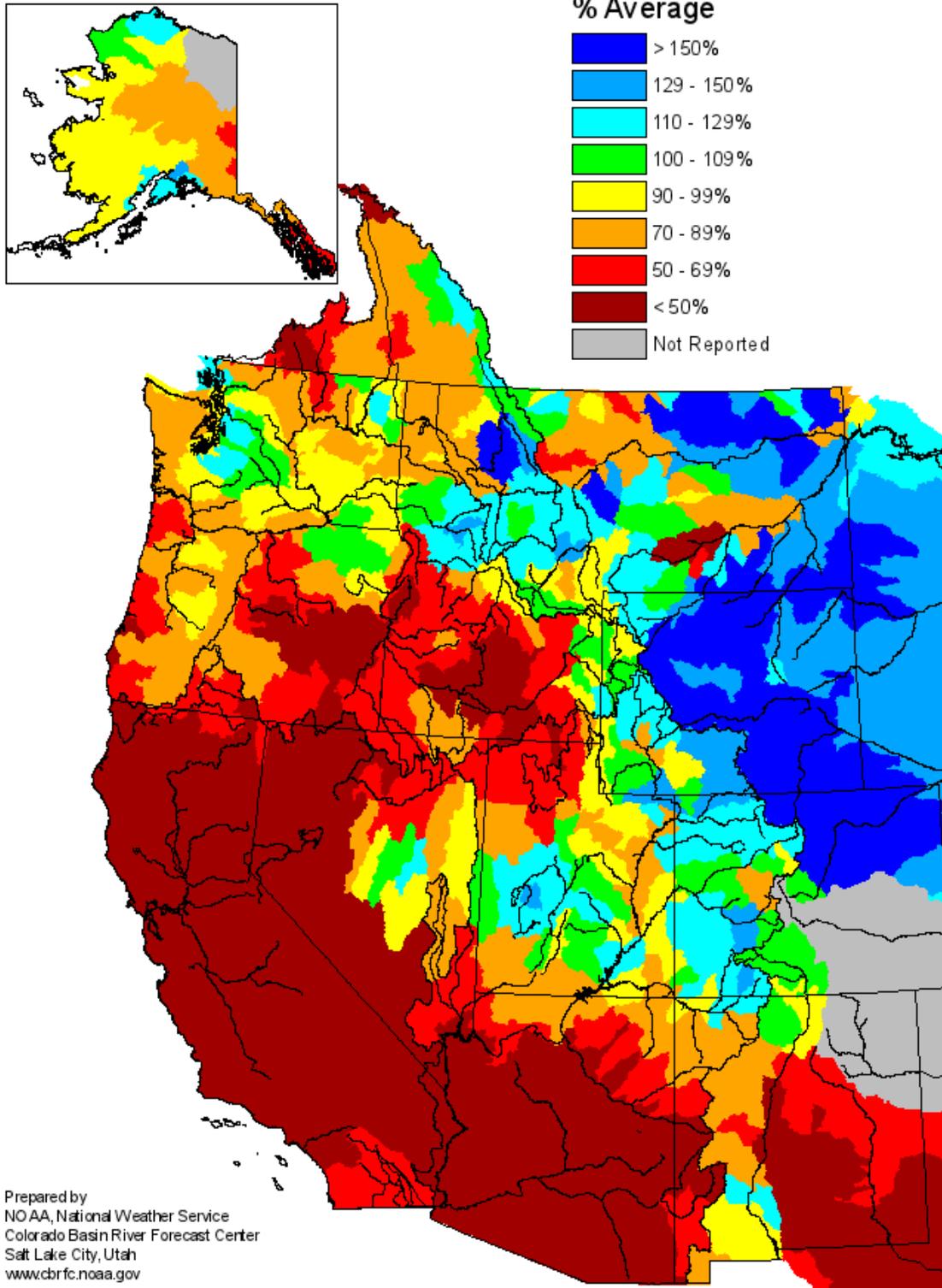


Figure A. February 2012 Precipitation

<http://www.cbrfc.noaa.gov/wsup/westwide/precip/westM201202.png>

Mountain Snowpack as of March 1, 2012

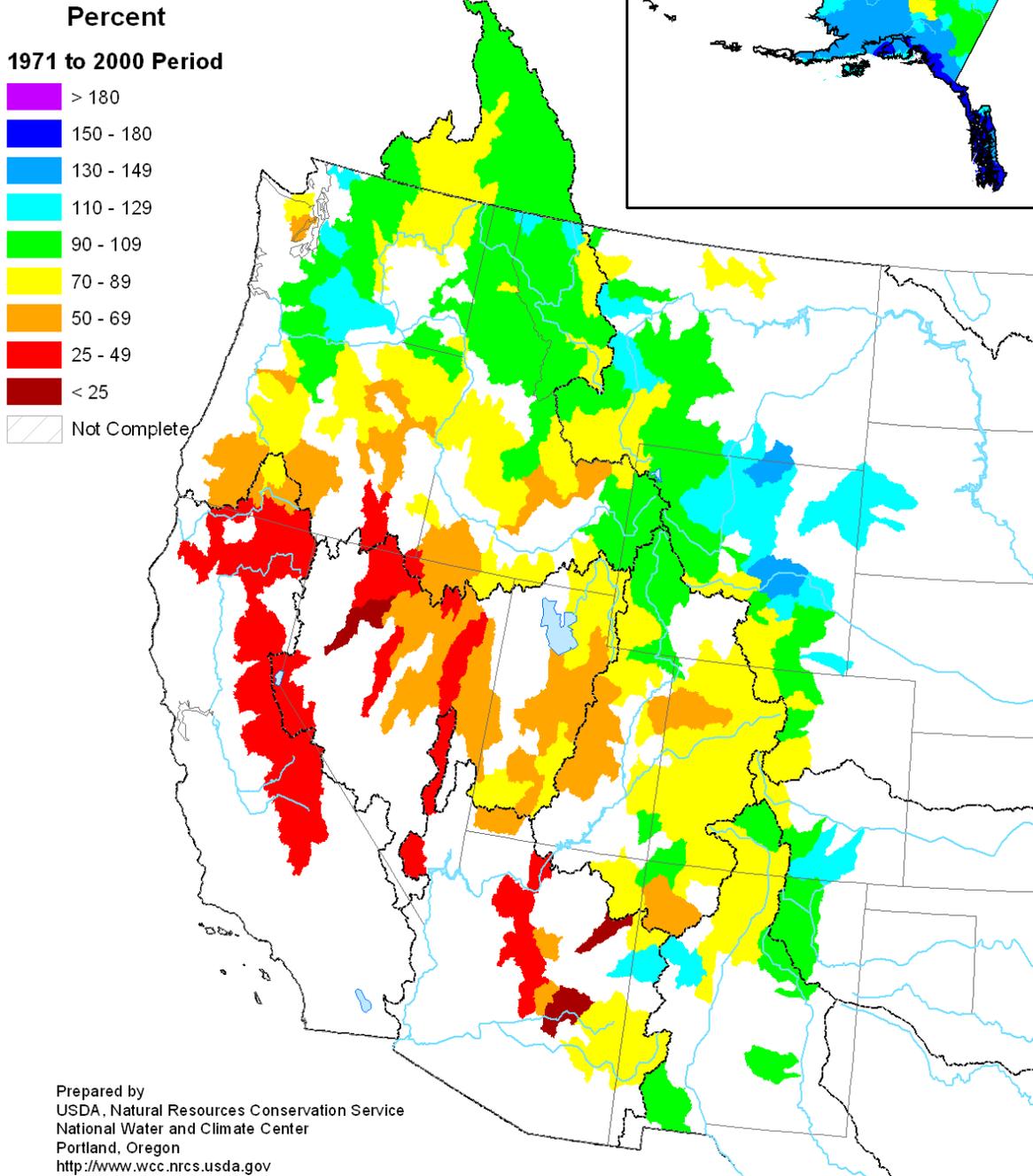


Figure 1. Mountain Snowpack, March 1, 2012

<http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/ftpref/support/water/westwide/snowpack/wy2012/snow1203.gif>

Mountain Snowpack Change between February 1 and March 1

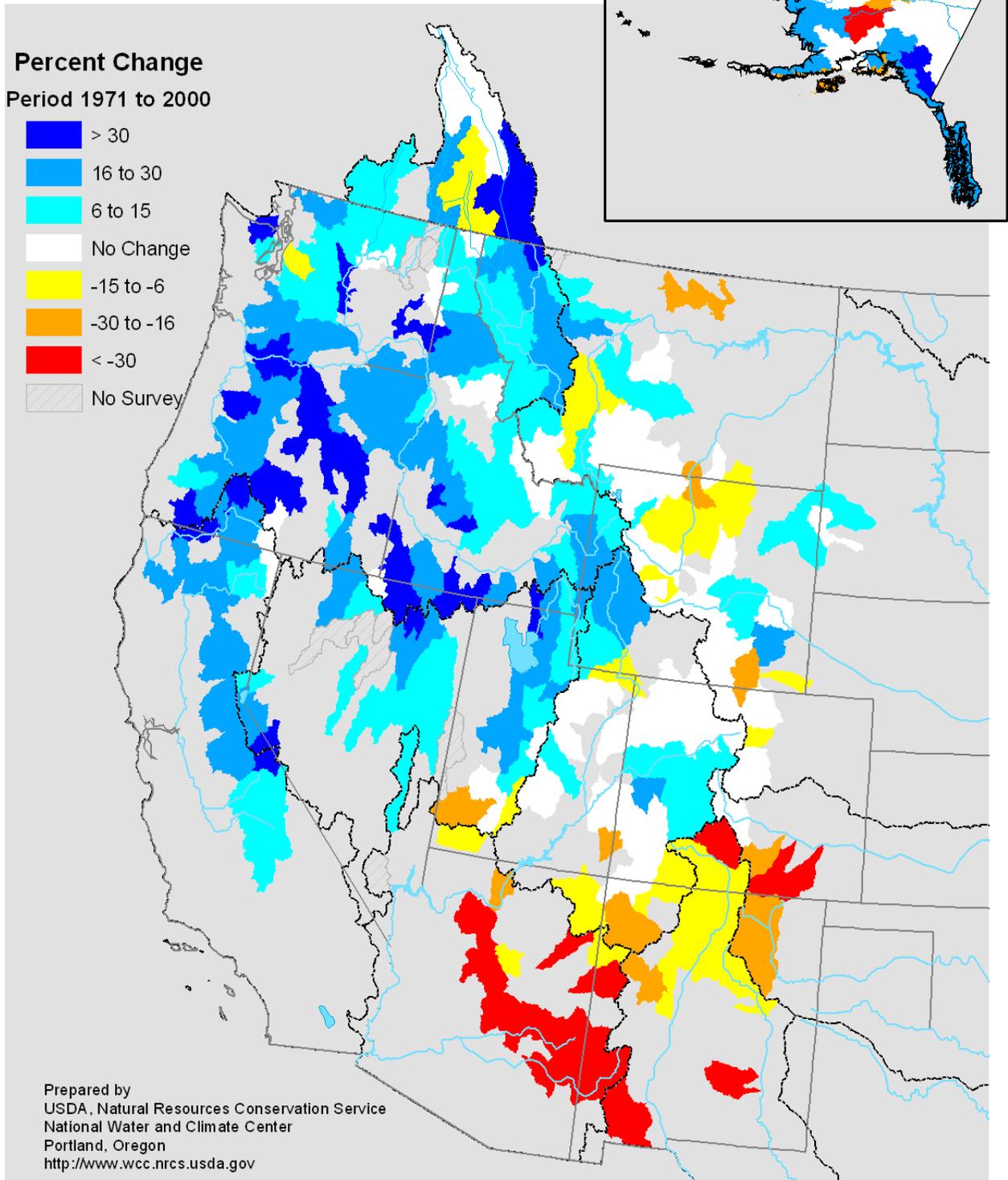


Fig. 2. Mountain Snowpack **Difference** between, February 1 to March 1, 2012

Seasonal Precipitation, October 2011 - February 2012

(Averaged by Hydrologic Unit)

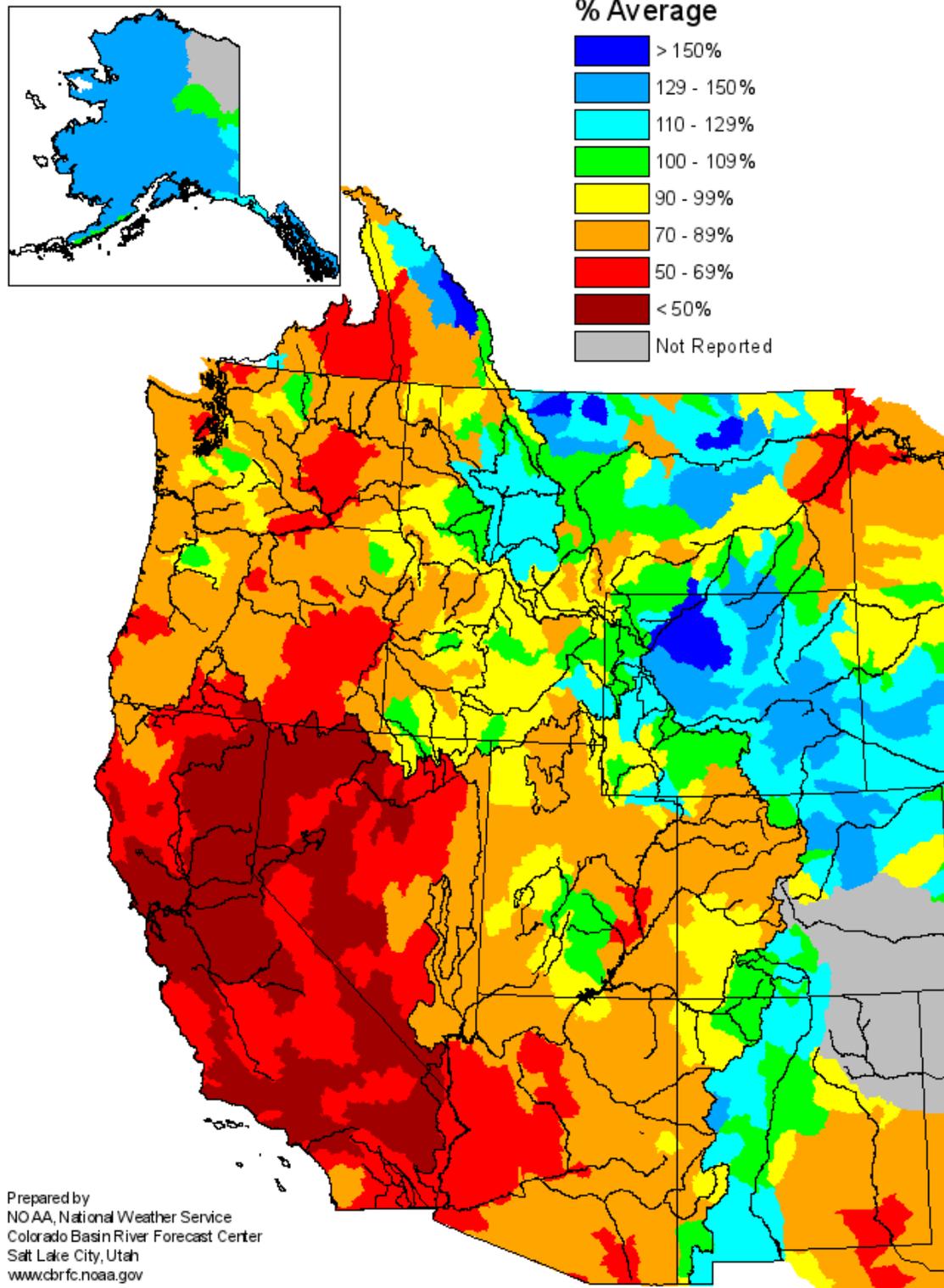
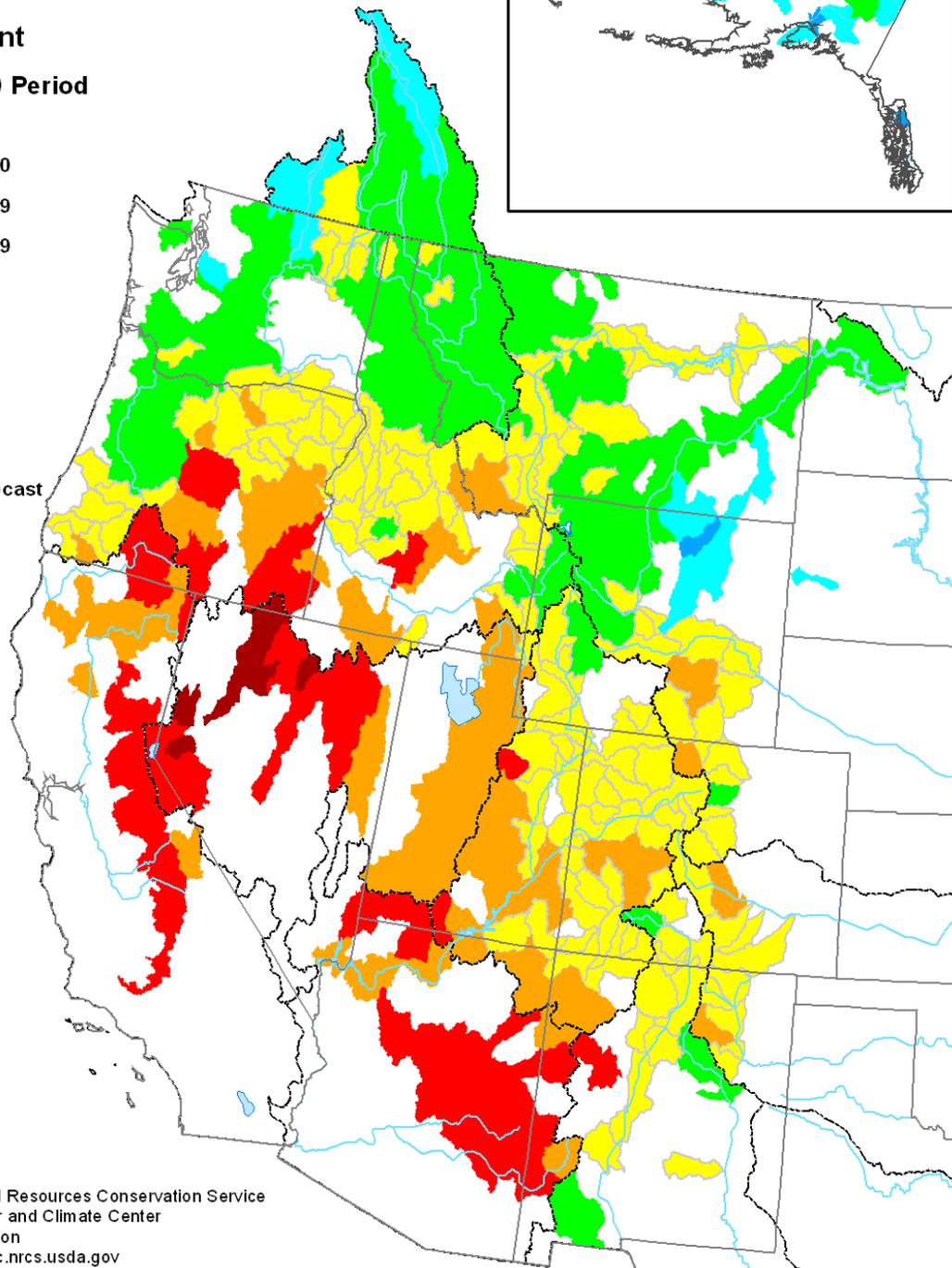
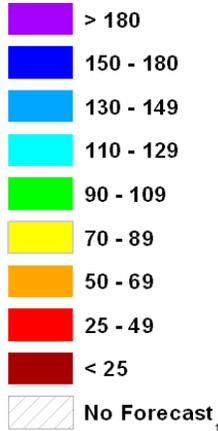


Figure 3. Seasonal Precipitation, October 1, 2011 to February 2012

<http://www.cbrfc.noaa.gov/wsup/westwide/precip/westS201202.png>

Spring and Summer Streamflow Forecasts as of March 1, 2012

Percent
1971 to 2000 Period



Prepared by
USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service
National Water and Climate Center
Portland, Oregon
<http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov>

Figure 4. Seasonal Water Supply Forecasts - March 1, 2012

<http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/ftpref/support/water/westwide/streamflow/wy2012/strm1203.gif>

Change in Spring and Summer Streamflow Forecasts from February 1 to March 1, 2012

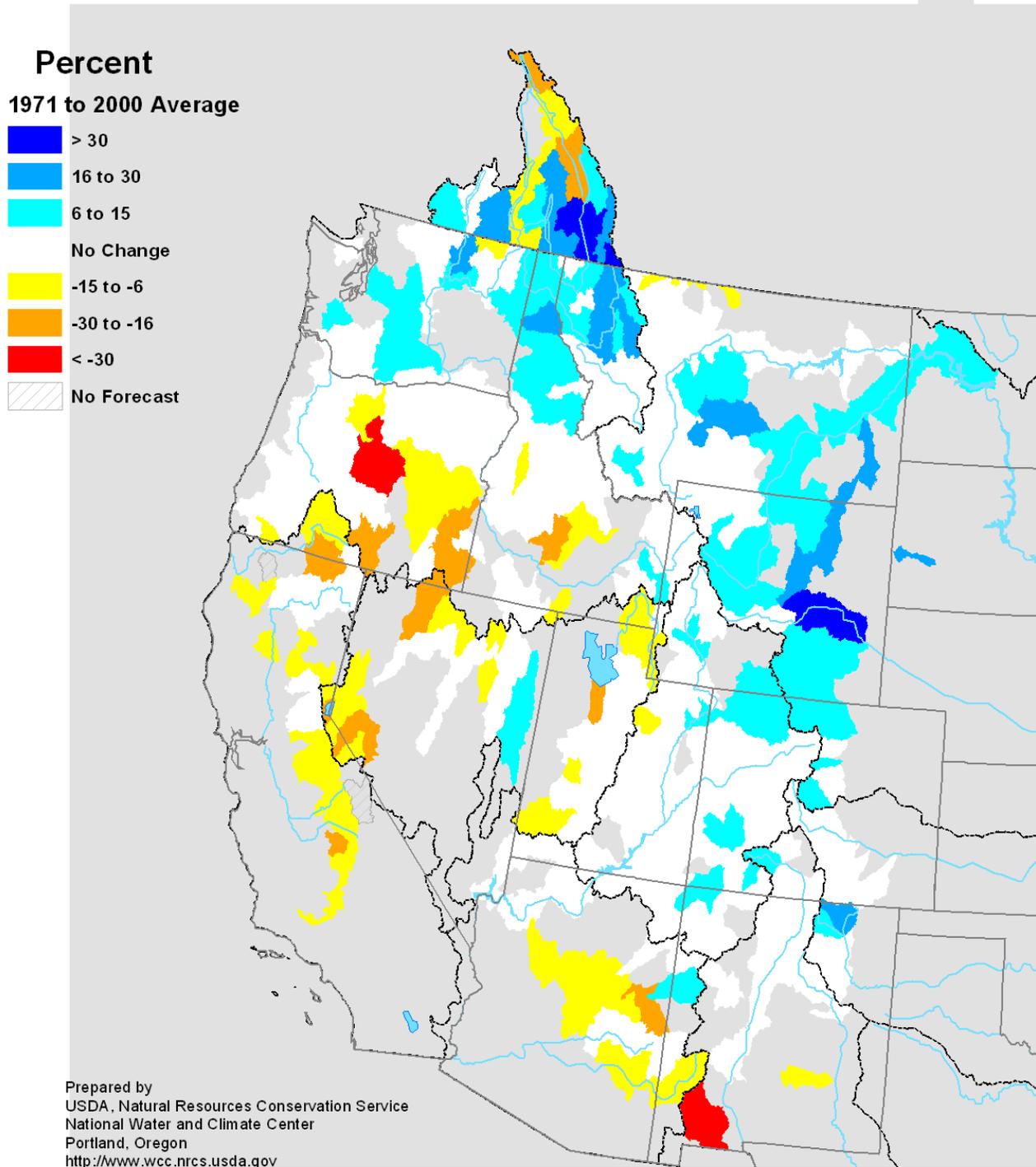
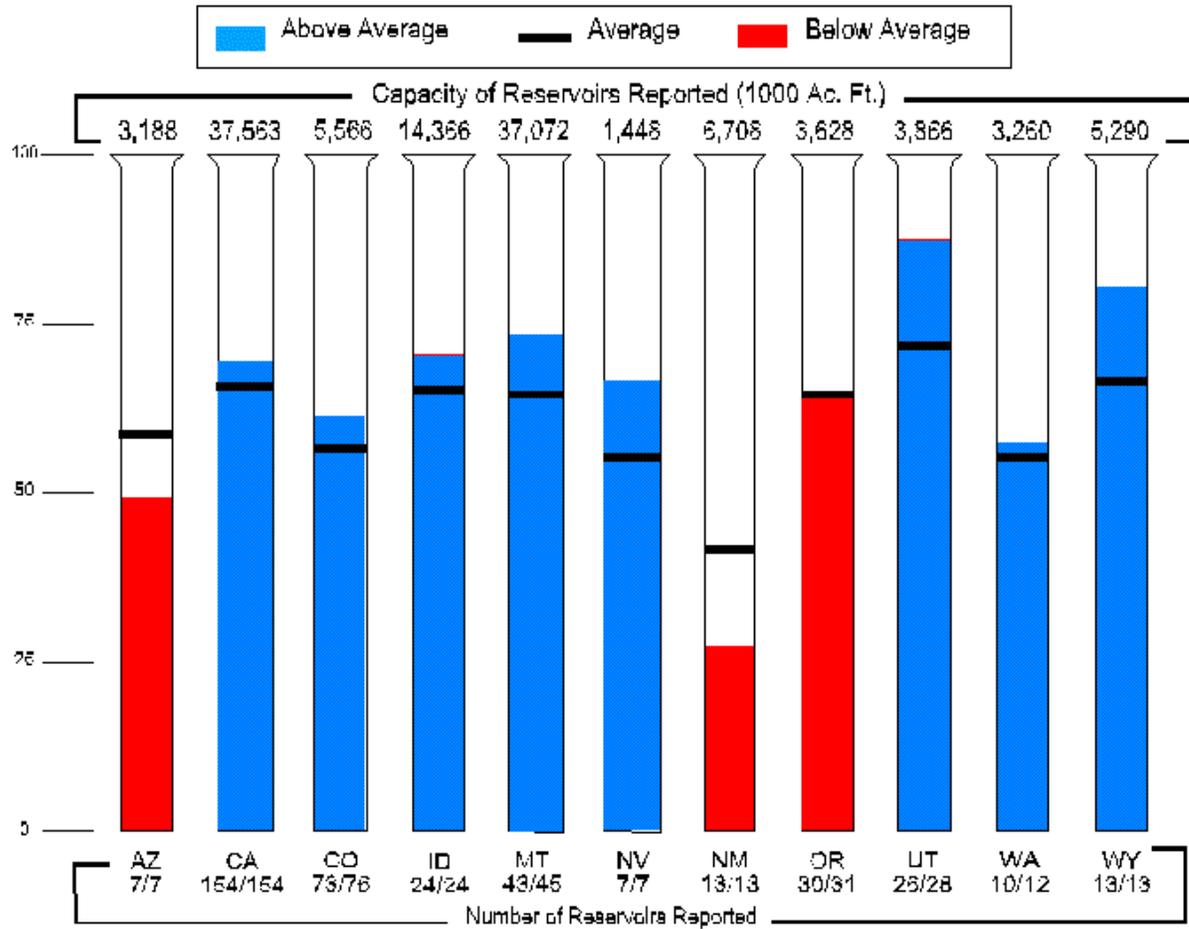


Fig. 5. Change in streamflow forecast between February 1 and March 1, 2012.

Reservoir Storage as of March 1, 2012



Prepared by: USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service, National Water and Climate Center, Portland, OR
<http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov>

Figure 6. Reservoir Storage - March 1, 2012.

<http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/ftpref/support/water/westwide/reservoir/wy2012/revs1203.gif>