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NEWS

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WARM, DRY MARCH DEPLETES COLORADO'S SNOWPACK

Denver, April 4, 2012 — The reprieve due to average or above average snow accumulation in February and the resulting boost in snowpack totals across the state was short lived. March brought dry, warm and windy weather to Colorado resulting in significant declines in the snowpack. According to Phyllis Ann Philipps, State Conservationist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the latest snow surveys conducted on April 1, show that statewide snowpack has fallen to a paltry 52 percent of average. This is a decrease of 29 percentage points from the 81 percent of average measured on March 1. Statewide snowpack conditions have not been this low since 2002 when the snowpack on April 1 was also reported to be just 52 percent of average. Luckily Colorado's reservoir storage is in better condition than it was in 2002; storage volumes statewide were reported at 108 percent of average at the end of March.

All major basins in the state reported significant drops in snowpack percentages over the last month, resulting from well below average snowfall and precipitation and warmer than average temperatures. The combined Yampa and White River basins and the Colorado River basin are both reporting snowpack's that are less than 50 percent of average; 47 and 49 percent of average respectively. The South Platte River basin's snowpack, while still above the statewide average, saw the largest decrease from conditions reported at the beginning of March. The basin's snowpack dropped a substantial 34 percentage points from 89 percent of average on March 1 to 55 percent of average on April 1. Snowpack totals in the rest of the major basins ranged from 53 to 57 percent of average.

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In an average winter the state receives around 20 percent of its seasonal snow accumulation in March. This winter however, March precipitation recorded at SNOTEL sites was well below average with monthly statewide totals at just 29 percent of average and instead of continuing to accumulate snow, data from SNOTEL sites revealed a snowpack beginning to melt. With April 12, the average date the snowpack reaches its peak, just around the corner there is very little hope for significant improvements to snowpack conditions prior to the spring-summer runoff season.

As of April 1, streamflow forecasts across Colorado have decreased by 20 to 40 percent of average from those issued last month. This closely mirrors the decline in snowpack percentages observed across the state. At this point all major basins in Colorado are expected to receive well below average runoff this spring and summer.

The bright spot in this month's water supply report is that reservoir storage continues to track at near to above average volumes across the state. This stored water should help alleviate late-summer shortages.

The table below shows Colorado's snowpack and reservoir storage as of April 1, 2012.

BASIN	% AVERAGE SNOWPACK	% LAST YR.'S SNOWPACK	% AVERAGE RESERVOIR STORAGE	% LAST YR.'S RESERVOIR STORAGE
GUNNISON	56	49	122	106
COLORADO	49	38	120	106
SOUTH PLATTE	55	45	104	105
NORTH PLATTE	57	42	---	---
YAMPA/WHITE	47	36	128	137
ARKANSAS	56	54	86	95
RIO GRANDE	53	69	73	89
SAN JUAN, ANIMAS, DOLORES	54	62	111	106
STATEWIDE	52	46	108	104

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