



Natural Resources Conservation Service
Snow Survey Office
Denver Federal Center
PO Box 25426
Denver, CO 80225-0426
<http://www.co.nrcs.usda.gov>

NEWS

Mage Skordahl (720) 544-2855

SHALLOW SNOWPACK DWINDLES QUICKLY

Denver, May 3, 2012 — The month of April brought another significant drop in snowpack percentages across the state. Warm, dry conditions continued to prevail in the mountains of Colorado setting the stage for snowmelt to begin early and fast. "Statewide snowpack looks to have peaked around March 12, a month ahead of the average peak date, and began melting in late March at rates typically not observed until May," said Phyllis Ann Philipps, State Conservationist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The latest snow surveys conducted by the NRCS show that most low and mid elevation measurement locations have little or no snow and the higher elevation sites are well below average and rapidly melting. The May 1 statewide snowpack report reflects this; measuring just 19 percent of average. For the second month in row statewide snowpack conditions match those recorded during the record setting drought year of 2002.

The largest losses in snowpack percentage were measured in the Gunnison and the Upper Rio Grande basins; both reported drops of 38 percentage points from April 1 to May 1. The Upper Rio Grande basin now has the lowest snowpack percentage in the state, at just 15 percent of average as of May 1. The combined Yampa and White basins, while no longer the lowest in the state, are not far behind at 17 percent of average. The North Platte basin, still a dismal 27 percent of average, has the highest basin wide snowpack in the state. Snowpack reports in the other major basins range from 18 to 25 percent of average.

(MORE)

In an average year, the snowpack in Colorado continues to accumulate during the first half of April and then slowly begins to melt during the second half of the month. This year by April 1 the shallow snowpack had already advanced well into the melt season and melt continued progressing 4 to 6 weeks earlier than normal throughout the rest of the month. As of May 1, 55 percent of the snow survey locations throughout Colorado reported no snow.

Streamflow forecasts across Colorado have dropped significantly for the second consecutive month. At this point most forecast points in Colorado are expected to see streamflow volumes that are less than 50 percent of average for the May to July season.

The state's reservoir storage continues to provide a glimpse of hope this year, with total storage volumes across the state remaining above average. This stored water may help alleviate conditions early in the season; however water users should be aware of the potential for late season shortages

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

BASIN	% AVERAGE SNOWPACK	% LAST YR.'S SNOWPACK	% AVERAGE RESERVOIR STORAGE	% LAST YR.'S RESERVOIR STORAGE
GUNNISON	18	13	124	112
COLORADO	21	14	127	119
SOUTH PLATTE	25	16	102	103
NORTH PLATTE	27	16	---	---
YAMPA/WHITE	17	11	115	113
ARKANSAS	25	22	95	100
RIO GRANDE	15	20	70	89
SAN JUAN, ANIMAS, DOLORES	22	24	119	110
STATEWIDE	19	14	112	109

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W Whitten Building, 1400 Independence Avenue SW, Washington DC 20250-9410, or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

