United States Department of Agriculture

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News Release

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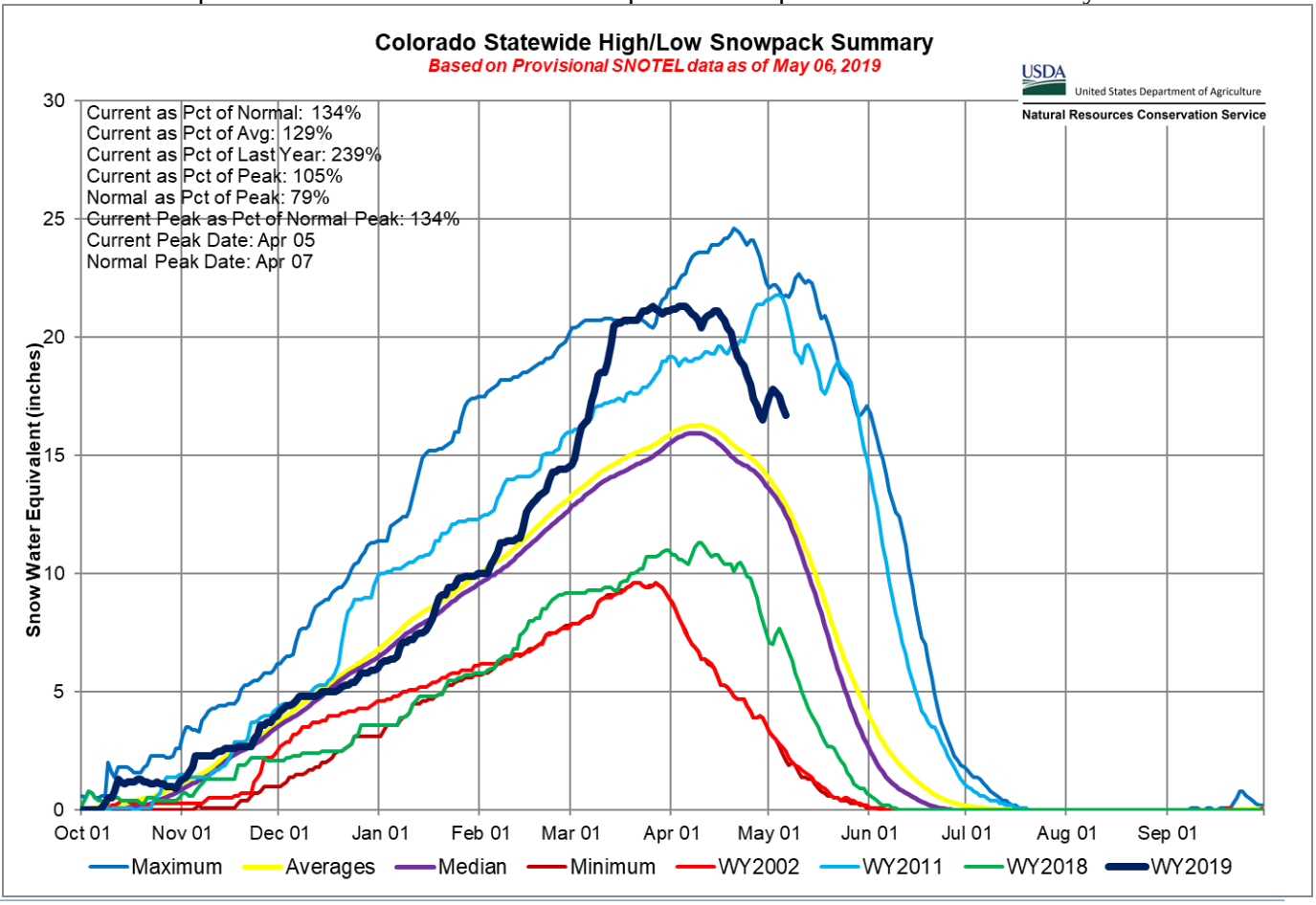
Mountain Snowmelt Ramping Up in Colorado

Denver, CO – May 7th, 2019 – Automated snowpack monitoring stations called SNOw TELemety (SNOTEL) sites scattered across the mountains of the Western United States and specifically in Colorado are indicating various stages of snowmelt in the lower and mid-elevations. As is typically the case, most sites at higher elevations are not yet experiencing pronounced melt. "At all elevation bands snowmelt continues to develop normally across Colorado," comments Brian Domonkos, Colorado Snow Survey Supervisor. Domonkos continues, "this is a good start to spring snowmelt in a year that saw above normal annual snowpack peaks, particularly in southern Colorado." Between late March and early April, the Upper Rio Grande, Gunnison, Arkansas and combined Southwest river basins posted some of the highest snowpack annual peaks, each of which rank in the top five since records began in the 1980's. Subsequently, a dramatic change in weather patterns mid-April brought warm, dry conditions and resulted in a 13 percent decrease in statewide snowpack to 123 percent of normal on May 1.



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For some a dry April was a welcome reprieve after a record high snowpack accumulation in March. Statewide April precipitation accumulation was 90 percent of normal ranging from 72 percent of normal in the combined San Miguel, Dolores, Animas and San Juan River basins to 102 percent of normal in the combined Yampa, White and North Platte River basins. Statewide water year-to-date precipitation stands at 118 percent of normal. The various basins across the state show a rather tight grouping of basin-wide year-to-date totals ranging from 113 percent of average in the Arkansas up to 127 percent of normal in the Gunnison.

Snowpack remains near normal in Colorado's northern basins while southern basins carry well above normal conditions. In the southern watersheds the snowpack this year presented in the table below as a "% Last Year's Snowpack" appear exaggerated, however are mathematically correct. This occurs because this year's above average snowpack divided by last year's extremely low snowpack values produce values that look extreme. From a numbers standpoint, in the combined San Miguel, Dolores, Animas and San Juan River basins, last year's 1.8 inches of total snow water equivalent on May 1st, compared to this year's 21.7 inches is a big difference.

Reservoir storage levels remain slightly below normal at 90 percent statewide. But indicators of improvements to come have surfaced in both the Gunnison and combined San Miguel, Dolores, Animas and San Juan River basins. In these basins, storage levels increased 14 and 18 percentage points over last month to 81 and 76 percent of average, respectively.

Colorado's Snowpack and Reservoir Storage as of May 1, 2019

BASIN	% MEDIAN SNOWPACK	% LAST YR.'S SNOWPACK	% AVERAGE RESERVOIR STORAGE	LAST YEAR'S % AVERAGE RESERVOIR STORAGE
GUNNISON	148	413	81	106
COLORADO	118	150	93	118
SOUTH PLATTE	108	135	103	107
NORTH PLATTE	108	117	--	--
YAMPA/WHITE	105	133	104	121
ARKANSAS	127	261	92	129
RIO GRANDE	124	1,079	79	115
SMDASJ*	164	1,189	76	91
STATEWIDE	123	211	90	111

*Combined San Miguel, Dolores, Animas and San Juan Basins

For more detailed information about May 1 mountain snowpack refer to the May 1, 2019 Colorado Water Supply Outlook Report. For the most up to date information about Colorado snowpack and water supply related information, refer to the Colorado Snow Survey website.