

Drought returning after back-to-back dry months

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A storm is moving into Northern California, but will it be too little, too late to help the Sierra snowpack?

The Department of Water Resources on Tuesday conducted the third snow survey of the season at Phillips Station. Following a January and February that will enter records as the driest documented in state history, the manual survey recorded 35 inches of snow depth and a snow water equivalent of 16 inches, which is 68 percent of average for this location for March.

The snow water equivalent measures the amount of water contained in the snowpack and is a key component of DWR's water supply forecast. Statewide, the snowpack is 63 percent of average for this date.

"With only one month left in California's wet season and no major storms in the forecast, California should plan for a third year of drought conditions," said DWR Director Karla Nemeth. "A significantly below-average snowpack combined with already low reservoir levels make it critical that all Californians step up and conserve water every day to help the state meet the challenges of severe drought."

The National Weather Service in Sacramento issued a Hazardous Mountain Travel warning for Friday and Saturday with the latest storm.

Showers are likely Friday in the Valley Springs area and predicted to last until Saturday.

The chance of precipitation on Friday is listed at 60 percent with thunderstorms possible after 1 p.m. The chance of precipitation Friday night is 50 percent and 40 percent on Saturday.

Sunny skies are expected to appear Sunday and last at least until Wednesday.

Although early season storms helped alleviate some drought impacts, **a lack of storms in January and February heightens the need for conservation.** The governor has asked all Californians to **cut back water use at least 15 percent** compared to 2020 levels. Regionally, the Northern, Central, and Southern Sierra snowpacks are all standing at just above 59 percent to 66 percent of average for this date, impacting watersheds across the state.

"With below average precipitation and snowpack up until this point, our latest statewide snowmelt forecasts are only 66 percent of average," said Sean de Guzman, manager of DWR's Snow Surveys and Water Supply Forecasting Unit. "That is not enough to fill up our reservoirs. Without any significant storms on the horizon, it's safe to say we'll end this year dry and extend this drought a third year."

Locally, New Hogan Lake is at 41.8 percent of capacity with 132,482 acre-feet behind the dam.