

Paltry snowpack leaves Prineville Reservoir low

By Dylan J. Darling
The Bulletin

BEND (AP) — Prineville Reservoir, largely fed by snowmelt and rainfall, typically fills to the brim this time of year. Not this year, after a winter with light snowfall left a paltry snowpack above the reservoir.

“It’s looking like, unless we have a sudden change in the weather, Prineville Reservoir is at its peak of the season,” said Jeremy Giffin, Deschutes Basin watermaster for the Oregon Water Resources Department. As of Thursday the 148,640 acre-foot reservoir was 83 percent full. An acre-foot is enough water to submerge an acre of ground a foot deep in water.

The agency determines how much water should be released to meet water rights held downstream by farmers, ranchers and others. Giffin went to Prineville Reservoir on Thursday to check just how much water was flowing in from the Crooked River, which feeds the reservoir. Not much.

Normally this time of year the Crooked River is running at about 1,000 cubic feet per second upstream of Prineville Reservoir. Giffin went to check an automated gauge near Post on Thursday and found the river to be flowing at 195 cfs.

“We are running about 20 percent of normal into the reservoir,” Giffin said, “for

this day.”

The inflow into Prineville Reservoir is expected to remain low through summer, with the Natural Resources Conservation Service predicting 16 percent of the normal inflow there from this month to September.

Concern about the low flows and short water supply for agriculture upstream of reservoirs prompted Crook County leaders to ask the state for an emergency drought declaration last month, the second year in a row. Earlier this week, Gov. Kate Brown declared the emergency, opening the way for state assistance for people affected by the scarcity of water.

“This year there is going to be a lot less water than last year,” Giffin said regarding ranchers who rely on snowmelt for their operations near Post and Paulina, upstream from Prineville Reservoir.

He said the low stream flow could cause ranchers to get in only one cutting of hay this year. In a good water year they may get two or three cuttings. Giffin said there are about 40,000 acres of irrigated land above Prineville Reservoir.

The Crooked River is not the only river, creek or stream likely to see just a fraction of normal flows this summer, according to the recent

federal forecast. The slight or absent snowpack around Oregon this year means spring and summer snowmelt will not provide the typical boost of water, said Julie Koeberle, a snow hydrologist for the Conservation Service.

“Without that snow we don’t have anything to sustain streams later in the season, so that is kind of that problem,” she said Wednesday.

While the snowpack is also poor near Bend, it may not show in rivers and streams around Deschutes County. Koeberle said springs feed the Deschutes River and many of the other streams around the county, making them less affected by fluctuations in snowmelt.

The size of the aquifer feeding the springs buffers the river they supply from drought, Giffin said. Consecutive years of drought can start to take a toll and this year — a second drought year — springs could be flowing less than normal, but still better than the snowmelt feeding the Crooked River.

The snowmelt this year should be much less than normal, with spotty snowpack around the Deschutes/Crooked River Basin below 5,000 feet. Of the 14 automated snow survey sites around the basin, Koeberle said five already had no

snow.

Oregon also saw poor snowpack numbers last year, but Koeberle said this year is worse. Around the state, three-quarters of the 147 automated snow sites monitored by the Conservation Service are at record lows.

“This is new territory,” Koeberle said.

Spring rains can bring some reprieve from a low-snow year, but this year that is not looking likely. The three-month climate outlook for the Bend and Redmond area is for below-normal precipitation and above-normal temperatures, said Stephen Bieda, meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Pendleton.

This follows a winter that brought nearly normal precipitation, but warm temperatures caused much of what would have been snowfall to come down as rain except at the highest elevations.

The average temperature statewide during the first three months of the year was the highest in 121 years of records. For the first time, Bend recorded highs of 70 degrees at least once in each of the three months the weather service labels winter, December, January and February.

“That’s the big reason why our snowpack suffered,” Bieda said.

Man accused of trespassing arrested after pasture chase

COTTAGE GROVE (AP) — It was more entertainment than the cows usually see. After a Cottage Grove woman called to say a stranger was driving a red pickup truck through her pastures, a Lane County sheriff’s deputy confronted the man and ordered him to the ground.

The man initially followed directions, then got up and ran. The deputy used a stun gun but the man broke contact and ran to his truck, driving off across the farm. After a second deputy joined the chase, the man parked and fled on foot, at one point jumping into a fork of the Willamette River.

More deputies showed up, as did Oregon State Police. Deputies finally confronted the man in a cow pasture, where he kicked one of them in the chest several times before being subdued as more than a dozen cattle looked on.

Authorities say 55-year-old Kevin D. Crook was arrested for investigation of trespassing, methamphetamine possession, eluding and resisting arrest.

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