

**DROUGHT:** More moisture is needed to overcome dry years

*Continued from page 1*

water collection. Observed data on January 9 by Natural Resources Conservation Service, a unit of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, puts the Upper Deschutes-Crooked River Basin at 91 percent of normal.

Whychus Creek peaked on January 6 at 98 CFS (cubic feet per second) and sat at 67.9 on Sunday. That's nearly five times normal, but five times a small number. Since the start of the water year, October 1, the basin is only at 111 percent of normal, not statistically important. The snow water equivalent is 132 percent, again not

meaningful in turning the tide on the deep hole in which water users find themselves.

In an upcoming edition of *The Nugget* we will cover the ongoing problems of dry wells in Sisters Country.

"The recent rains, while a great start to the water year, has done little to quench the drought," Larry O'Neill, an associate professor in the Oregon State University College of Earth, Ocean and Atmospheric Sciences said at the end of November.

O'Neill, who is Oregon's state climatologist, told reporters: "Precipitation in Deschutes County has been below normal in 16 out of the last 22 years, and well below normal in three out of the last four water years... last year was the eighth-lowest water year on record."

Summaries from the

National Weather Service in Pendleton tell us that Water Year 2021 precipitation through December was below normal across much of Oregon and Washington. Currently, precipitation since October 1 ranges from 75 to 110 percent of normal over most of central and northeast Oregon.

Average temperatures for this period have been above normal as well. Most areas have been two to four degrees above normal. Average streamflow at the majority of USGS gaging stations across central and north-central Oregon continue to be below normal to much below normal.

The snowpack has seen a lot of variability through the fall. There were some storms that produced good amounts of mountain snow, followed by some warm rain events that washed some of the snow away. Since December 1, it has been more consistent and showing improvement.

For the East Slopes of the Cascades, snow water equivalent is 70 to 80 percent of normal.

Most of us take water, snow, and rain for granted, and observe snow-packed mountains as a good sign. For those in Central Oregon who rely on water for their livelihood, it's an entirely different picture. Some dairy-men are already culling their herds in anticipation of not enough grass this summer from lack of water. This is a



PHOTO BY BILL BARTLETT

Whychus Creek is rolling high after snow and rainstorms over the past couple of weeks.

compounding problem that will lead to even higher milk prices.

Alfalfa, orchard grass, and hay farmers are still deeply concerned. Several are considering taking part in a drastic, albeit voluntary Water Bank Pilot Program funded by a partnership between Deschutes River Conservancy and North Unit Irrigation District. (See related story, page 9.) Volunteers will not use their water allotment in the 2022 irrigation system.

According to Kate Fitzpatrick, executive director of the conservancy, the unused water will be allocated to North Unit Irrigation District, a junior water rights holder that has battled limited water levels throughout the current drought.

Fitzpatrick said the program will be evaluated after a year and possibly extended, depending on interest from irrigation district patrons. She

said the program is temporary and Central Oregon Irrigation District patrons will retain their water right and can use the water in 2023.

"The point of the program is to help with drought relief for North Unit Irrigation District, as well as to restore flows in the Upper Deschutes River," said Fitzpatrick.

Livestock operators are already paying record dollars for hay. Beef prices are at a point of national concern, so much so that the White House is holding emergency meetings in an effort to ameliorate family worries.

On the flip side, the Climate Prediction Center, a unit of the National Weather Service, is forecasting a 33-40 percent increase in precipitation for the part of Oregon that just touches us here in Sisters. The other side of that line indicates an equal chance of no increase in precipitation for the next three months.

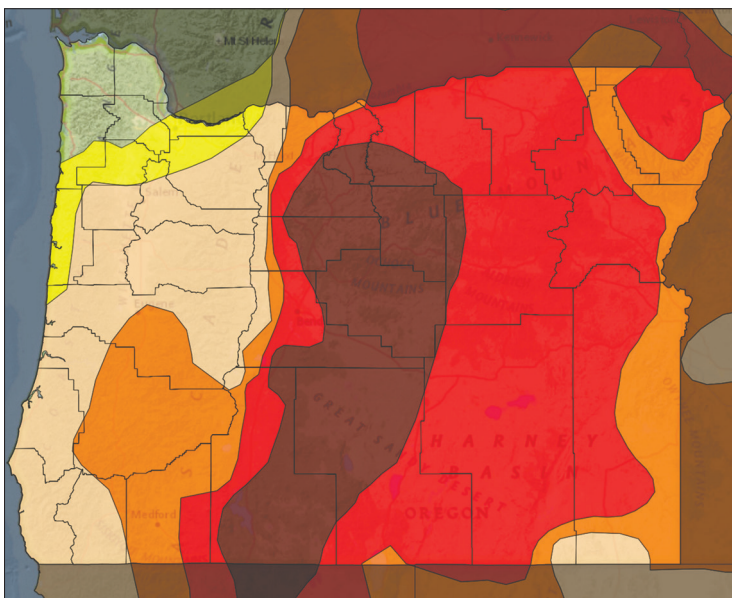


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Central Oregon remains under drought conditions.

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