



Ellen Morris Bishop/EO Media Group

Despite snow, 32% of Washington and 24% of Oregon are in a “moderate” drought, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor.

## Region weathers moderate drought

By Don Jenkins  
Capital Press

SALEM — December snow in the Cascades hasn't been enough to make up for a dry fall in Oregon and Washington, the U.S. Drought Monitor reported.

Some 32% of Washington and 24% of Oregon are in a “moderate” drought, according to the monitor. There was widespread rain and high-elevation snow across the Pacific Northwest in mid-December, but streamflows and snowpacks were still far below normal.

Drought conditions in both states are mostly in the Cascades. The snowpack in the Willamette basin was only 29% of normal on Dec. 27, while it was 27% of normal in the Lower Columbia basin in Washington, according to the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

In Washington, the snowpack statewide on Dec. 27 was 47% of normal, almost as low for the date as the 46% in 2014, the winter of the “snowpack drought.”

NRCS water supply specialist Scott Pattee said that Washington typically has about half its snowpack by now.

The snowpack probably won't fully recover and be at full strength by the time it begins melting, but could reach about 80% of average if typical weather prevails for the next few months, he said.

“I think there's going to be some concern now, but not a lot,” Pattee said. “January and February can be huge snow months for us.”

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration reports that the Pacific Ocean along the equator remains slightly warmer than average.

The agency does not expect the warm water to turn this winter into an El Nino.

Nevertheless, the National Weather Service's Climate Prediction Center predicts January, February and March will be warmer than average in most of Washington, Oregon and Northern California. The odds favor normal precipitation, according to the center.

The snowpack never recovered in 2014. By April 1, it was a record-low 22% of normal. A dry and hot summer followed, and Washington suffered a severe drought.

Warm temperatures caused the 2014 low snowpack. Precipitation was above normal. This year, the low snowpack has been caused by dry weather. As of Dec. 27, Washington had received only 69% of its normal precipitation so far this winter.

## WITTEN

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most of the time the photos come out good.”

One of the models Witten has worked with is Britt McNeil of La Grande. McNeil has posed in costumes and cosplay with photographers including Witten, and said she enjoys the collaboration.

“I like a photographer who knows what they want and gives direction,” McNeil said. “I'm all for it. (They) are the one with the vision.”

Witten said their vision for photos is often whimsical and rooted in fantasy. While Witten would like to explore doing shoots closer to reality, they said

they will always keep an element of imagination in the work.

As a self-taught artist, Witten still is learning about how to take and edit photos and how to get their work out to the public. They have taken a class on digital photography, but they get most of their education through videos on YouTube and tutorials on skill-sharing websites. Witten said it is a cost-effective way to develop the craft and also allows for more creativity.

“I find work I admire and then I'll look up how to do what (that artist) did,” Witten said. “It is like building a college course for a lot less money. I am missing the critique I would get from classmates, but I am able to follow a path that makes sense to me. Rather than spend-

ing hours photographing architecture, which is interesting, I can focus on what is relevant to what I want to do.”

What Witten likes the most about photography, though, is the confidence it can build in them and especially in models.

“I hope (the models) look at themselves and feel that euphoria, joy and feel beautiful,” Witten said.

One of Witten's favorite experiences was working with a model who said Witten truly captured them.

“I see a lot of beauty in the world,” Witten said, “lot of beauty in people, and I want to show people that.”

To view Shay Witten's photos on social media visit @shay.c.photo on Instagram.

## APPEAL

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decision. He said he was not against the warming station but found the location a bad fit because of its proximity to downtown. He also expressed concerns about how the station operated.

Before the shelter can open in suite B at 2008 Third St., the building requires some renovations to meet city codes. The firewall now in place needs to be extended to the ceiling, Vela said, and a sprinkler system for fire prevention must be installed. The place also needs illuminated emergency exit signs and better outdoor lighting, which is to accommodate neighbors. Improved lighting, Vela said, “will provide peace of mind by helping people view dark areas around the facility.”

Vela explained contractors did not want to start to work while a threat of an appeal hung overhead, and the shelter board was not willing to spend money on work that could be for naught.

“We want to be good stewards of our money,” he said.

Vela said he does not know when the Union County Warming Station will open. Better Homes Construction of La Grande is handling the renovations. The company did building work for the Union County Warming Station when it operated on Willow Street a

year ago.

The renovation plans must first acquire city permits. Boquist said the process of approving and issuing the building permits normally takes about two weeks.

Adelsberger recently said he decided against pressing the issue to the state land use board when Mayor Steve Clements made a commitment at the Dec. 4 hearing to involve the city council in working toward a more comprehensive solution to address homelessness in the community.

Adelsberger, Mountain Life Church Pastor Jared Upwall and others at a meeting Dec. 16 unveiled their proposal for a transitional housing facility. Upwall said the church, which is near the Island City Walmart, owns about 20 acres that would be a good fit for such housing. Other members of the local faith community said they were on board with the idea, including Hanna Voetberg, co-founder and president of the charity Neighbors Together of Union County.

Adelsberger at that meeting said while the proposal has no funding, the early stages are getting people involved and sharing a common vision to tackle homelessness.

No matter when the warming station opens, La Grande Police Chief Brian Harvey recently said his department

is preparing to handle the possibly higher call load the shelter will generate.

The department responded to 25 calls to or near the warming station when it operated at 1609 N. Willow St. during the winter of 2018-19, Harvey said, while that same location a year before drew zero calls for police.

Some calls were innocuous, such as letting police know guests who no longer were welcome at the shelter were trespassing. Other calls demanded more caution or effort.

In one instance, three officers responded to the shelter on a report of a guest with a gun. The weapon turned out to be a BB gun, but Harvey said police did not know that until they arrived. And a check revealed a warning out of Washington state flagged that person as violent and a threat to law enforcement.

Harvey stressed he understands the need for the shelter, but the volunteers and board need to understand he has to keep the city safe, and 25 calls for service in the span of a few months is a significant spike for La Grande police.

“So what we look at is we now have an additional burden on public safety with no additional resources to address it,” he said.

Harvey and representatives of the Union County Warming Station met again after mid-December to

further discuss the situation. The police chief said the meeting was productive. He said the station adopted some police suggestions and is continuing to refine its procedures.

Observer editor Phil Wright contributed to this report.

## DAMS

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farms coming online, Miller said they can't fill the gap created by coal plant closures because wind and solar sources generate power intermittently, and power use and supply have to be kept in balance.

The advantage of using hydropower, along with solar and wind, is what Miller called the “second-by-second gap filling regulation.” Hydroelectric dams fulfill this requirement by holding back water, and then releasing it through power-producing turbines as needed.

Although the new report doesn't guide policy, Miller said it does recommend continued regional stakeholder discussions.

Greg Haller, executive director of Pacific Rivers, is closely following the rising tide of concern around breaching or keeping the dams. He said he didn't feel the report moved the conversation.

“I feel like we didn't need a \$750,000 report to tell us it's a divided issue,” Haller said. “It offered no solutions. Hopefully, our elected leaders will build on or move toward a solution rather than rehashing the issues that are the sticking points.”

When Haller mentioned elected officials, he said he was specifically referring to the House of Representatives and momentum created by Rep. Mike Simpson, R-Idaho, who broached the topic of how the region can meet its energy needs while

maintaining transportation, irrigation and securing the future of Bonneville Power Administration, which markets power produced by the four lower Snake dams. Haller said Simpson looked at the transportation concerns about dam removal and suggested making the railroads farmer-owned.

“I am disappointed in our elected leaders in Oregon and Washington didn't use Simpson's opening to bring together a legislative solution,” Haller said. “Only Congress can make the dams go away.”

With the ultimate authority residing in Washington, D.C., Haller said elected leaders need to forge a solution that everyone can live with because the status quo isn't working.

“We still have a steelhead run in the toilet, chinook on a trajectory toward extinction and sockeye aren't faring any better,” he said.

As fish runs continue to decline, Haller said BPA struggles as well.

“We are in a new kind of energy environment,” he said. “Meanwhile, I think the salmon have given all they can give. Something else has to give, now.”

The pivotal release of the Draft Columbia River System Operations Environmental Impact Statement by the federal action agencies is due in February. The report will analyze the societal, environmental and economic costs and benefits of breaching the four lower Snake River dams.



Associated Press file photo

The Lower Granite Dam is on the Snake River near Pomeroy, Washington. A \$750,000 report, which looked at the possible effects of breaching the four lower Snake River dams, summarized the issues around protecting endangered species while maintaining renewable energy supplies, riverine transportation and irrigation.

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