

# Low snowpack a worry in Wash.

By DAN WHEAT  
Capital Press

MOUNT VERNON, Wash. — The mountain snowpack is 49 percent of normal in Washington compared with 44 percent a year ago.

While that seems to be an improvement it's actually more worrisome because the forecast for snow isn't as good, the state's top water supply expert says.

"The extended three-month forecast from the National Weather Service is for above-normal temperatures and below-normal precipitation," said Scott Pattee, water supply specialist of the Washington Snow Survey Office of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service in Mount Vernon.

"That's not a good deal. We want precipitation in the form of snow in the mountains this time of year," he said.

During the first full week of January and month of December record high temperatures were logged at 26 of the agency's 73 weather data collection sites.

"Temperatures are in the realm of 15 to 20 degrees above normal. That's warm. That's telling me the mountains aren't even freezing up at night," Pattee said.

He was referring to the 5,000- to 6,000-foot level. A site at 5,800 feet above the Skagit River had an overnight low of 40 degrees on Jan. 8, he said. Another at 5,200 feet at Cayuse Pass was at 46 degrees at 10 a.m. that day and had been as high as 52 in previous days.

"Our highest station at Harts Pass, above the Methow River, is just under 6,500 in elevation and it was 35 degrees for the low," he said.

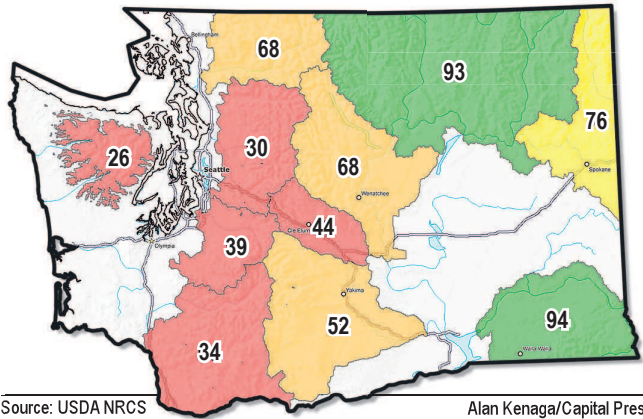
A year ago, Pattee was concerned about summer drought for irrigators in 2014.



Peshastin Creek, which empties into the Wenatchee River, flows at a good pace Dec. 9. Snowpack in that area is 69 percent of normal. The Wenatchee spring and summer streamflow is forecast at 84 percent of normal but that's factoring in a normal snowfall.

## Washington snow water equivalent

(As of Jan. 9) \*Average annual SWE, 1981-2010



Source: USDA NRCS

Alan Kenaga/Capital Press

But mountain snows came in February, March and April, correcting the situation. Pattee now is concerned there may not be as much of that this year because of an El Nino weather pattern.

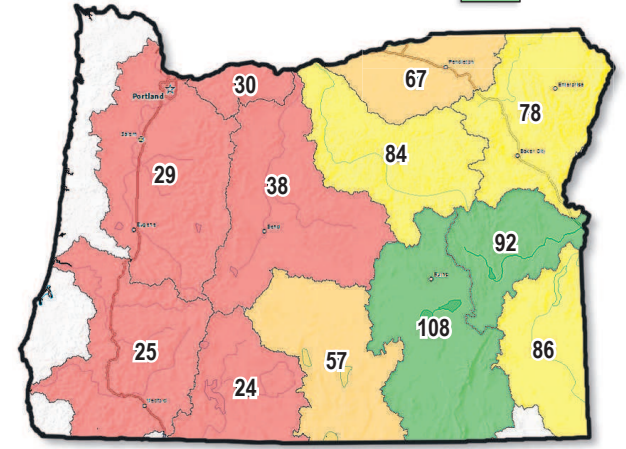
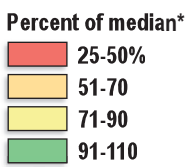
Tree fruit and row crop growers in Central Washington depend on irrigation. Some orchards were torn out for lack of water in the Yakima Valley in 2005 and pears

had insufficient water in the Wenatchee Valley. Water was short in the Methow River in the Okanogan.

As of Jan. 8, snowpack in the Spokane basin was 76 percent of normal, Pattee said. The upper Columbia (Okanogan and Methow rivers) was 93 percent. The central Columbia (Chelan, Entiat and Wenatchee) was 68 and the upper Yakima was 44.

## Oregon snow water equivalent

(As of Jan. 9) \*Average annual SWE, 1981-2010



Source: USDA NRCS

Alan Kenaga/Capital Press

## Low W. Oregon snowpack may impact summer irrigation

By MITCH LIES  
For the Capital Press

With half of the season past, snowpack levels in Western Oregon are dangerously low.

The good news is the levels could rebound before the snowfall season ends, and in Eastern Oregon, where farmer fortunes are more closely tied to snowpack, the levels are fine.

Still, with the warm, wet conditions of an El Nino permeating Western Oregon at a time when the snowpack is typically building, concerns are mounting that Western Oregon farmers could face water shortages come irrigation season.

"We've seen years where snowpack levels rebounded," said Scott Oviatt, snow program manager for the Natural Resources Conservation Service in Portland. "We've also seen years where the tap just shut off."

Last year, Oviatt said, snowpack levels were below even this year's in the January survey. But heavy, late-season snowfall created near normal snowpack levels by May.

Oviatt said the NRCS attri-

butes the low snowfall levels in Western Oregon this year to "climate variability" and not climate change.

"Climate variability is the key here, and that is the case every year," he said.

The lowest levels in the first NRCS Oregon snow survey of the year are in the Klamath Basin, which is at 24 percent of normal; the Rogue Umpqua Basin, which is at 25 percent of normal; and the Willamette, which is at 29 percent of normal. Also dangerously low are the Hood, Sandy, Lower Deschutes Basin at 30 percent of normal; and the Upper Deschutes, Crooked Basin registers 38 percent of normal.

Snowpack conditions improve dramatically to the east, with Harney Basin at 108 percent of normal; Malheur at 92 percent of normal; and Owyhee at 86 percent of normal. The Umatilla, Walla Walla, Willow Basin is at 68 percent of normal; the Grande Ronde, Powder, Burnt, Imnaha Basin is at 78 percent of normal; while the Lake County, Goose Lake Basin is at 57 percent of normal.

## Idaho anti-GMO labeling talk concerns Farm Bureau

By JOHN O'CONNELL  
Capital Press

BOISE, Idaho — Idaho Farm Bureau Federation officials worry any proposal to legislatively block state or county labeling requirements for genetically modified organisms would needlessly bring negative attention to Idaho agriculture.

Idaho's sugar industry has started discussions about such a bill and assigned its lobbyist, Roy Eiguren, to draft various proposals for industry consideration.

"We're not to the point of really making a decision as to how we're going to approach the labeling issues and GMOs in general in the upcoming Legislature," said Vic Jaro, president and CEO of Amalgamated Sugar Co. "In general concepts, we as a company are opposed to labeling biotech ingredients on food packaging."

Mark Duffin, executive director of the Idaho Sugarbeet Growers Association, said several different drafts and concepts have been discussed, but nothing is "ready for public consumption."

"We've been kind of working with a group of agricultural representatives to look at the tactics one could take to

forestall these local initiatives like there's been in Oregon and Washington and Colorado," Duffin said. "We're in the process of discussions on that."

Idaho Farm Bureau spokesman John Thompson said his organization voiced its concerns earlier this month during a meeting of agricultural representatives and lobbyists with Food Producers of Idaho, which hosts weekly meetings during the legislative session to address issues related to agriculture and natural resources.

Thompson said Farm Bureau reasons there's no risk of a GMO labeling initiative passing in conservative Idaho anyway, and the timing is bad, given that the state just finished a high-profile debate during the last session about its so-called ag gag law, which prohibits secret recordings of farming operations.

"It puts pressure on the legislators. We don't see any reason for that now," Thompson said of proposing anti-labeling legislation. "If it were a pressing issue, yes, we'd do it. But there's so much going on this year, especially related to transportation and new taxes and education, we don't see good reasons to take the spotlight away from those issues."

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