



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

The Liberator chair lift operates at Mission Ridge Ski Area south of Wenatchee, Wash., on New Year's Day. With a 29-inch snow base at the 6,820-foot summit, the resort needs more snow, as do the Cascade Mountains in general at 93 percent of normal.

## Washington snowpack, reservoirs in fair shape

By DAN WHEAT  
Capital Press

YAKIMA, Wash. — Washington state's overall snowpack is 93 percent of normal and Yakima Basin reservoir storage is more solid at 133 percent of average.

Those are Jan. 1 readings from the Natural Resources Conservation Service and U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.

While the five mountain reservoirs serving 464,000 acres of farmland in the Yakima Basin are doing well at 56 percent of their 1 million-acre-foot capacity, 700,000 acre-feet more will be needed from the snowpack to meet farmland irrigation needs.

Snowpack is a big deal and needs to be better, but Scott Pattee, the NRCS water supply specialist for Washington, isn't worried.

"It's early. During La Nina (warm, wet weather cycles) the season tends to start slow and then build and become closer to normal by the end of February," Pattee said.

The northern half of Washington is best in snowpack and northern Idaho and Montana are doing well, he said. But Oregon and California are more problematic, being below the jet stream and too warm for much snow, he said.

"The latest CPC (Climatic Prediction Center) models puts most of Washington on equal chances for normal precipitation and temperatures for January, and the three-month outlook is for below-normal temps and above-normal precip, which means good snow-

fall," Pattee said.

Snow water equivalent snowpack in the Spokane basin was 101 percent of normal on Jan. 2. The upper Columbia Basin (Okano-gan and Methow rivers) was 113 percent. The central Columbia (Chelan, Entiat and Wenatchee) was 88 percent, the upper Yakima was 81 percent and the lower Yakima 90 percent. Walla Walla was 61 percent, the lower Snake River was 92 percent, the lower Columbia was 77 percent, south Puget Sound (from Cascade crest to lowlands) was 84 percent, central Puget Sound 86 percent, north Puget Sound 123 percent and the Olympics 105 percent.

A storm right after Christmas dumped 20 inches of snow in the upper Chelan Basin putting Lyman Lake, 6,000 feet, at 90 percent of normal and Harts Pass, 6,500 feet between Methow and Skagit, at 126 percent.

Stevens Pass, at 3,950 feet elevation at the SNOTEL (snow telemetry site), is 104 percent of normal and Blewett Pass, 4,200 feet, is 74 percent of normal.

Chris Lynch, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation hydrologist in Yakima, said he's grateful for increased precipitation in the last days of December.

"We were kind of hurting before that. We'd been below 30 percent of average precipitation most of the month," he said.

While snowpack has been hurting Yakima Basin reservoirs have been doing well from rain, he said.

## Snowpack lagging statewide in Oregon

Forecast calls for average temperatures, precipitation

By GEORGE PLAGVEN  
Capital Press

Mother Nature has some catching up to do if Oregon expects to have adequate water supplies heading into summer.

Snowpack is lagging significantly across the state heading into 2018, at just 42 percent of normal levels. That is a stark contrast to last year, when January snowpacks surged to 124 percent of normal levels statewide.

Despite another La Niña winter — which usually predicts colder and wetter weather in the Pacific Northwest — temperatures are actually hovering above normal, especially in Southern Oregon. The highest levels of snowpack are in northeast Oregon, where the Umatilla, Walla Walla and Willow basins are just 55 percent of normal, and the Grande Ronde, Powder, Burnt and Imnaha basins are 53 percent of normal.

Scott Oviatt, snow survey supervisor for the Natural Resources Conservation Service, said it is still too early to tell what the water year will look like, but he would like to see more snow accumulating in the mountains.

"The closer to normal conditions, the more assurances you have adequate water supplies closer to irrigation season," Oviatt said. "Obviously as time passes, we'll have a better feel of what the trends and storm impacts look like."

Not only is snowpack below normal, but overall precipitation is also down statewide at 89 percent of normal, compared to 105 percent of normal three weeks ago. The difference between this year and last year's "snowpocalypse" has left Oviatt and weather forecasters scratching their heads.

"We're really seeing this extreme variability in the last five to 10 years, where these trends don't represent what we've seen historically," Oviatt said.

Marilyn Lohmann, hydrologist with the National Weather Service in Pendleton, Ore., said each La Niña has its own spin, and the odds of having two winters like 2017 back to back are usually pretty slim.

Over the next three months, Lohmann said, the weather should shift back to normal temperatures and precipitation. "Sometimes we do get the bulk of our snow in that February and March time frame in the mountains," Lohmann said. "It does look like hopefully we will be able to regain some of what we've lost."

While statewide stream flows were less than 65 percent of normal at the end of December, the Oregon Water Resources Department says reservoir levels are above normal for this time of year, which may mitigate some impacts of a drier-than-usual winter.

According to OWRD, central Oregon reservoirs, between 44 and 88 percent of capacity, and eastern Oregon reservoirs continue to hover between 36 and 65 percent of capacity. Willamette and Rogue basin reservoirs also remain on track to fill.

# USDA supports forced cranberry cutbacks

Agency proposes 15 percent reduction

By DON JENKINS  
Capital Press

The USDA proposes to let the cranberry industry withhold 15 percent of the 2017 crop to halt a slide in prices paid farmers and handlers.

Cranberries, whole and in juice concentrate, would be diverted to charities, animal feed and other uses that won't add to a supply that's roughly twice the demand.

"With the laws of economics, it has to help. How much it helps is another question," Bandon, Ore., cranberry grower Charlie Ruddell said.

The proposal, published Tuesday in the Federal Register, is based on a recommendation by the Cranberry Marketing Committee, made up of growers and handlers. The order would apply to about 1,100 farmers and 65 handlers, mostly in Oregon, Washington, Massachusetts, New Jersey and Wisconsin.

The marketing committee also has asked the USDA to mandate a 25 percent reduction in the 2018 crop. A USDA spokesman said the agency is still considering the request.

Since the 2017 crop has been harvested, handlers would be charged with disposing of excess fruit. Handlers would be able to meet up to half their obligation by diverting fruit concentrate, a byproduct of making sweetened, dried cranberries.

The marketing order would not apply to organic cranberries, a small percentage of the market. Handlers who receive fewer than 12.5 million pounds of cranberries or dispose of all their fruit also would be exempt.

Cranberry farmers have been producing record crops, but demand has been fairly flat. The cranberry surplus



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Blane Saunders harvests cranberries Sept. 19 on Washington's Long Beach Peninsula. The USDA proposes volume controls to reduce the supply of cranberries and increase prices for farmers and handlers.

has doubled in the past five years. Without volume controls, the 2017 crop would swell the inventory to 115 percent of the yearly demand of approximately 950 million pounds, the committee estimated.

Some farmers who were receiving 30 cents a pound in 2011 are now getting 10 cents a pound, while the cost of production has risen to 35 cents a pound, according to the marketing committee.

Neither the committee nor the USDA projected how a 15 percent cut in the 2017 crop would impact prices.

Long Beach, Wash., farmer Malcolm McPhail said the reduction could boost prices by \$1 or \$2 a barrel. A barrel equals 100 pounds.

"I'm all for it. We've got to do something to get things under control," he said. "It'll

take doing something for next year's crop, too."

Even with the a 15 percent reduction in the 2017 crop, the surplus would remain large. The volume reduction would not apply to about 210 million pounds of foreign-grown cranberries expected to be imported into the U.S.

Volume reduction is a short-term step to cut the surplus, said Tom Lochner, executive director of the Wisconsin Cranberry Growers Association, whose state produces roughly two-thirds of U.S. cranberries.

"The long-term solution has to be increasing markets to match the supply and demand," he said.

The USDA said it does not expect volume reduction to reduce consumption. Retail prices have little effect

on consumer demand for cranberries, according to the agency.

The cranberry industry, which can't easily wind down production in bogs to fit the market, has turned to volume controls before, most recently in 2001. The USDA rejected the marketing committee's recommendation to withhold a portion of the 2014 crop. The agency said it was concerned the committee was colluding with Canadian producers.

USDA-approved volume reductions are intended to stabilize prices for farmers. Critics, such as the Heritage Foundation, contend volume controls interfere with the marketplace and amount to price fixing.

The USDA will take public comments on the proposal until Feb. 1.

## Oregon governor 'confident' in wolf shooting investigation

By GEORGE PLAGVEN  
Capital Press

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown will apparently not ask state agencies to reopen their investigation into the killing of a female wolf Oct. 27 in Union County, despite concerns from several conservation groups.

Brian Scott, 38, of Clackamas, reported that he shot the wolf in self-defense while elk hunting in the Starkey Wildlife Management Unit west of La Grande. The wolf, he said, was charging at him. Wildlife advocates dispute his claim, pointing to the bullet's trajectory and other discrepancies in the physical evidence.

A coalition of groups — 18 in all — wrote to Gov. Brown asking her to reopen the state's investigation. In her reply, dated Dec. 1, Brown said she has confidence in the outcome after consulting with the Oregon State Police, Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife and Union County District Attorney's Office.

"While Oregon is working toward wolf recovery, any wolf mortality is a serious concern that deserves a full



ODFW

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown has told conservation groups that she is confident of the thoroughness of a state investigation into the shooting of a wolf near La Grande.

and rigorous investigation," Brown wrote.

Scott told investigators he feared for his life when he shot the wolf at a distance of 27 yards. He described seeing two animals flank behind him, while a third came running directly toward him.

The groups, however, argue that the bullet passed through the wolf's shoulders, perhaps indicating it was standing broadside to Scott and not charging. Scott has said he cannot explain the

trajectory, and does not know if the wolf veered sideways before he shot. The Union County District Attorney's Office declined to press charges.

Steve Pedery, conservation director for Oregon Wild, said the group will continue to put pressure on the governor and agencies regarding wolf poaching investigations, and ensure those protections are taken seriously.

"We now have, I think by anyone's standards, an

epidemic of wolf poaching around the state," Pedery said. "That's a situation that should be deeply concerning for anyone who cares about wildlife in this state."

In her letter, Gov. Brown reiterated that killing wolves is illegal everywhere in Oregon, and remains a federal crime west of highways 395, 78 and 95.

"Too many wolves have been found shot in Oregon where the shooters have not been identified," she wrote. "Oregon State Police is appropriately investigating those cases, supporting their federal counterparts, identifying poachers and ready to assist in their prosecution."

ODFW is also in the process of revising its Wolf Conservation and Management Plan, which Brown said will "keep wolves on the path to recovery across the entire state, focus on efforts to reduce wolf-livestock conflict rather than merely responding to it, and incorporate the best current science into its management practices." Oregon had 112 confirmed wolves as of the end of 2016. An updated 2017 population report is expected in March.

## Weekly fieldwork report

Item/description (Source: USDA, NASS; NOAA)	Ore.	Wash.	Idaho	Calif.
• Days suitable for fieldwork (As of Nov. 26, 2017)	3.6	3.9	4.1	6.7
• Topsoil moisture, surplus	15%	13%	7%	NA
• Topsoil moisture, percent short	24%	12%	6%	25%
• Subsoil moisture, surplus	4%	6%	4%	NA
• Subsoil moisture, percent short	25%	13%	32%	35%
• Precipitation probability (6-10 day outlook as of Jan. 2)	Normal/above normal	Normal/above normal	Above normal	Above normal

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