

Oregon water supply in better shape than before 2015 drought

Snowpack levels below average but reservoir levels still decent

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

Oregon's current water supply outlook doesn't evoke optimism but early spring conditions were even worse before the severe drought of 2015, experts say.

The average snowpack level is now at about 64 percent of average statewide, compared to about 17 percent of average three years ago, said Scott Oviatt, Oregon snow survey supervisor for USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service.

"We really had no snow, especially in the northwest part of the state," he said.

Oregon got off to an excellent start last autumn — with snowpack levels at 236 percent of average statewide before Thanksgiving — but the situation has since deteriorated, Oviatt said during the March 15 meeting of the Oregon Water Resources Commission.

Precipitation is at 90 percent of average, which is similar to 2015, he said.

The water supply outlook would have been gloomier this year if not for below-average temperatures in Feb-



Natural Resources Conservation Service
A heavy early snowpack drapes Oregon's Mount Hood. While the snowpack in Oregon got off to a promising start, it is now just 64 percent of average statewide.

ruary, which allowed snow levels to build up somewhat, said Andy Bryant, hydrologist with the National Weather Service.

Snow accumulation is much better in the northern Columbia River basin of Washington and British Columbia, Bryant said. "We've been kind of left out of the storm activity for most of winter."

Looking to future weather conditions, there's "not a lot to hang your hat on" in Oregon's long-range forecast, Bryant said.

There's an equal likelihood that temperatures and precipitation will be above average, average or below average in April, May and June, he said. In July, August and September, though, the projection is for rainfall to be below average and temperatures to be above average.

Fortunately, major water storage reservoirs across Oregon are in respectable shape — from about 81 percent of average in the Willamette basin to 131 percent of average in the Owyhee basin, said Ken Stahr, OWRD's surface water and hydrology manager.

"Through wise management, we had a decent amount of carryover," Stahr said.

Diminishing snowpacks are a long-term trend in the West, said Kathie Dello, associate director of the Oregon Climate Change Research Institute at Oregon State University.

Since 1955, the region's snowpack level on April 1 has fallen by the equivalent of Lake Mead — a major storage reservoir on the Colorado River — as measured in water content, she said.

Federal spring outlook favors S. Oregon drought deepening

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

Drought likely will intensify in Southern Oregon and California over the next three months, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration reported March 15.

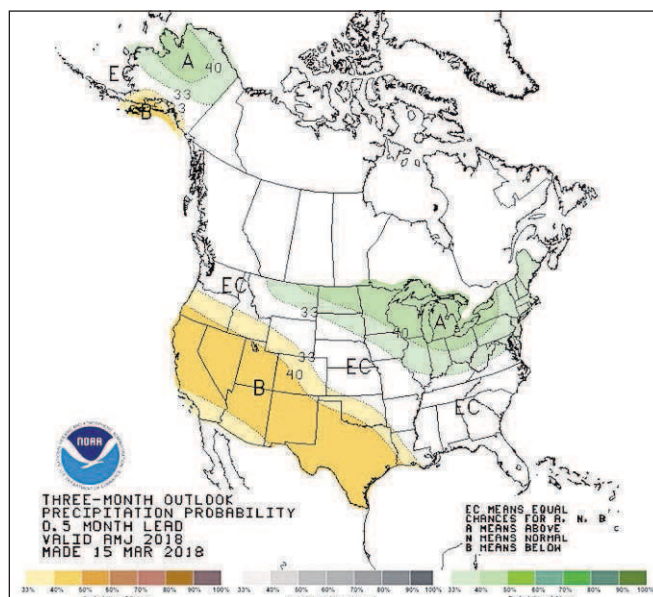
The odds favor warm and dry weather for the next three months in the two states, according to NOAA's Climate Prediction Center.

Some 38 percent of Oregon and 47 percent of California are already in a drought, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor. Oregon Gov. Kate Brown declared a drought emergency in Klamath County on March 12.

NOAA said drought, while worsening, probably will be modified by a wet second half of March. Also, Oregon and Northern California are enjoying carryover from the 2016-17 water year. While snowpacks are small, most reservoirs are at or above historical averages for mid-March, forecasters noted.

NOAA's three-month outlook assesses the chances that a region's precipitation and temperatures will fall below, above or within a normal range. Washington, for example, has an equal, or 33 percent, chance of having a wet, dry or average spring. In some other places, the odds are tilted one way or the other.

The new outlook pegs the odds at 40 to 50 percent that



NOAA
Shades of green mean that odds favor a wet spring and shades of brown indicate that chances are spring will be dry on this map released March 15 by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

the next three months in Oregon will be drier than average. There is a 40 percent chance the temperatures will be above normal in Southern Oregon, according to NOAA.

In California, the odds range from 40 percent in the north to 60 percent in the south that temperatures will be above normal. There's a 50 percent chance that most of the state will be drier than average.

NOAA's outlook leans heavily on higher sea-surface temperatures along the equator in the Pacific Ocean.

Temperatures are still low-

er than usual, but La Nina is giving way to temperatures in the normal range, according to NOAA.

Average, or neutral, ocean temperatures are expected to last at least through the winter.

After that, forecasting models disagree about whether the ocean will warm, cool or stay average, according to NOAA.

La Nina generally brings colder and wetter weather to the northern U.S. and the opposite to the southern tier. La Nina conditions have prevailed the past two winters.

State agency wants to boost dam inspection authority

Current dam safety laws are considered to be outdated, OWRD says

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

Laws governing dam safety in Oregon have become outdated, prompting state regulators to seek upgraded authority to inspect and order repairs to the structures.

In the next legislative session, the Oregon Water Resources Department plans to ask lawmakers to revise dam safety statutes that were originally written nearly 90 years ago.

The ability to enter property without a warrant to conduct dam inspections is one request the agency is considering, said Racquel Rancier, senior policy coordinator for OWRD.

Currently about a dozen dams in Oregon haven't been inspected by OWRD in recent years because the landowners denied entry to their property, said Keith Mills, the department's dam safety engineer.

Oregon has jurisdiction over dams that are at least 10 feet high and store more than 9.2 acre-feet of water, he said. The state inspects 969 such structures, while the federal government inspects 285 dams.

More than 25 percent of state- and federally-inspected dams in Oregon are rated as high or significant hazards, which is based on their potential to cause lost life and property damage, rather than physical condition.

Following are other dam safety laws under consideration:

- Landowners may be required to obtain OWRD's permission to modify or remove dams under the supervision of an engineer, to ensure such



EO Media Group File
An excavator breaks a log jam in April 2013 above the Three Mile Dam on the Umatilla River north of Hermiston, Ore. The Oregon Water Resources Department is considering seeking tougher dam inspection laws.

changes are done safely.

- The agency may impose a requirement for people building lagoons — such as those storing manure or wastewater — to submit their final designs to OWRD before starting construction. The department now lacks authority for structures that don't involve water rights.

Currently, OWRD must automatically schedule an administrative hearing when dam repairs are needed, which the agency considers a time-consuming process that could endanger public safety.

The agency may instead require the dam owner to get an "engineering analysis" of the structure without scheduling a hearing, or to hold a hearing only if the owner objects to the repair plans.

Under another proposal,

the agency may order the immediate correction of unsafe conditions at potentially hazardous dams by reducing water levels, opening valves or taking similar actions.

"That is something we can't currently do if we know it needs to be done," Rancier said.

Imposing civil penalties for dam safety problems

would provide an "intermediary" approach to induce needed repairs, rather than the only current option of imposing an order, she said.

"They really only provide a hammer," Rancier said of current laws.

At this point, these ideas are only in draft form and will be refined based on feedback, she said.



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press
Karen Sowers, right, Washington State University Extension outreach specialist for oilseed crops, is serving as executive director of the new Pacific Northwest Canola Association.

Sowers serves as canola association executive director

New organization seeking members

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

RITZVILLE, Wash. — Karen Sowers, Washington State University Extension outreach specialist for oilseeds, is the executive director of the new Pacific Northwest Canola Association. For now.

The job does not affect her position with the university. Sowers works roughly 85 percent of full-time for WSU, and will work 20 hours a month as the asso-

ciation's executive director. A full-time executive director is being sought for the association, Sowers said.

The association is also looking for members. Membership levels range from producers at \$75 per year, agencies at \$100 per year to various industry levels, from associate at \$500 to platinum at \$5,000. Platinum level membership entitles the member to a voting seat on the association's board of directors.

The association became operational at the end of 2017.

Contact the association at pnwcanola@gmail.com

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Tires LES SCHWAB Weekly fieldwork report

Item/description	Ore.	Wash.	Idaho	Calif.
• Snow water equivalent*	64.8%	107.7%	93.5%	63.2%
• Percent area in drought	76.1%	11.7%	44.3%	88.9%
• Avg. temperature, 6-10 day outlook (Percent chance deviation from normal)	Normal/ 50% below	Normal/ 40% below	40-50% below	Normal/ 40% below
• Precipitation, 6-10 day outlook (Percent chance deviation from normal)	40-50% below	33-40% below	33-40% below	40-60% below
• Soil moisture anomaly (Monthly deviation from normal)	Normal/ Below normal	Normal/ Above normal	Normal/ Above normal	Below normal

*Aggregate average percent of median as of March 13. Medians calculated for the period from 1981-2010. Sources: USDA, NRCS, NOAA, www.ca.gov; www.drought.gov/

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