

# Oregon snowpack remains below average heading into April

## NRCS releases latest report

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**  
Capital Press

While Oregon's mountain snowpack is in much better shape than it was just two months ago, it is likely too little, too late.

April is usually the time when snow peaks around the state, though the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service reports all basins are still behind on snowpack, with most measuring between 40 and 70 percent of normal levels. The news does not bode well for stream flows or drought conditions heading into summer, said Scott Oviatt, NRCS snow survey supervisor.

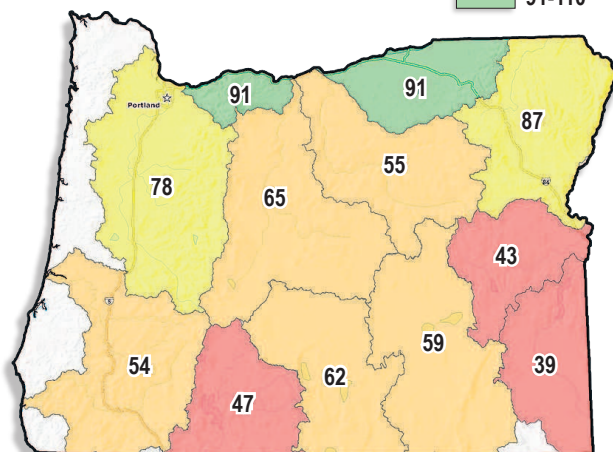
"Snow and cooler weather in March was not enough to bring snowpack levels up to normal," Oviatt said. "Mountain snowpack peaked well below normal this winter at most locations in Oregon."

Areas closest to the Columbia River seemed to fare best over the winter, with the Hood River, Sandy and Lower Deschutes basins at 91 percent of normal. The Umatilla, Walla Walla and Willow basins also reached 91 percent of normal.

Southern Oregon, and especially southeast Oregon, are in much rougher shape. The Malheur and Owyhee basins both received less than half their usual snowpack, and the Klamath Basin is sitting at just 47 percent. Gov. Kate Brown has already declared a drought in Klamath County.

## Oregon snow water equivalent

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



Source: USDA NRCS

Alan Kenaga/Capital Press

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is not forecasting much in terms of relief. The next three

months will more than likely see average to above-average temperatures across the state, with below-average precipitation.

"Our best hope is a cool spring that helps to prolong the snow we have further into the season," Oviatt said. The NRCS released its April stream flow forecast on Friday. Not surprisingly, it predicts that rivers closest to the Columbia River are expected to have average to near average flows. Others may be "well below normal," depending on their location.

"Water users that are not able to take advantage of reservoir storage will likely experience significantly reduced water supplies this summer, especially in the southern and southeastern

basins of Oregon," the report states. "The governor declared a drought emergency in Klamath County in March and more counties may follow."

Summer stream flows could be as low as 30-60 percent of average in the Klamath, Harney, Crooked, Owyhee, Malheur, Lake and Goose Lake basins. The silver lining for Eastern Oregon irrigators is the status of reservoirs, which are storing close to normal amounts of water. Once again, the Umatilla, Walla Walla and Willow basins are at the top of the heap with reservoirs at a collective 123 percent of normal.

The lowest reservoir levels can be found in the Rogue and Umpqua basins of western Oregon, at 88 percent of average.

# Deal brings Phytelligence fruit technology to India

By **DAN WHEAT**  
Capital Press

SEATTLE — Phytelligence, an agricultural biotechnology company, has announced a partnership with the Indian company Mahyco Grow to provide farmers in that southern Asia nation with advanced horticultural technology.

Plants produced by Seven Star Fruits, a subsidiary of Mahyco Grow, will use the Phytelligence MultiPHY process for higher density plantings, higher yields and more sustainable production.

The partnership will also enable the delivery of new varieties of apples, cherries, peaches, plums, berries, grapes, nuts, oranges and tropical fruits to Mahyco Grow's customers and the region's farmers, Phytelligence said.

Phytelligence uses micropropagation protocols, techniques and software, developed by Washington State University Professor Amit Dhingra, to produce rootstocks, fruit trees and grapes faster and cheaper than traditional nursery methods and ensure their correct identity through high-resolution genetic fingerprinting.

The Mahyco Grow-Phytelligence partnership aims to help growers plant modern rootstocks and varieties, improve farm incomes and increase fruit quality. The first trees of the partnership will be available for sale in 2018 and delivered in the spring of 2019.



Courtesy of Amit Dhingra/WSU

Phytelligence founder Amit Dhingra of Washington State University.

Dhingra, a genomist and biotechnologist, founded Phytelligence in 2012 and is its chief science officer.

Mahyco Grow, formerly Barwale Group, was founded in 1964 and is a leading agricultural innovator and major seed producer in India.

# S. Idaho water supply gets a boost

By **BRAD CARLSON**  
Capital Press

Heavy precipitation across much of Idaho's midsection during March bodes well for water users such as Galen Lee, who farms between Caldwell, Idaho, and Ontario, Ore.

"We haven't had to make a change for the current year or in recent years," said Lee, who operates Sunnyside Farm LLC near New Plymouth, Idaho.

Strong recent precipitation coupled with ample carry-over storage in reservoirs in the wake of the high-water 2017 help ensure many Idaho farmers can move forward as planned.

March precipitation totaled about 165 percent of the 30-year average across a swath of central Idaho encompassing the Boise River system to the west and the Big Wood, Little Wood, Big Lost and Little Lost rivers to the east, said Ron Abramovich, a water supply specialist with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service in Boise.

These basins are now up to about 75 percent of their average snowpack compared to 45 to 70 percent a month earlier.



Courtesy of Galen Lee

Galen Lee of Sunnyside Farm LLC, New Plymouth, Idaho, says adequate water supply means no on-field changes to his crop lineup are needed.

Snowpack totaled 50 to 80 percent of the 30-year average for March across southern Idaho including the Owyhee drainage to the west, the Bear River Basin to the east, and the Bruneau, Salmon Falls and Oakley basins in the middle.

Owyhee was on the low end of the range, and the Bear River Basin was on the high end. Abramovich said streamflow forecasts across the area call for 40 to 70 percent of normal runoff.

"Water supplies will be adequate this year across Idaho due

to carryover storage and the snowpack we currently have in the mountains," Abramovich said.

Lee said the Black Canyon Reservoir, in the Emmett-Horseshoe Bend area, is well-supplied. That benefits Sunnyside and other farms served by associated canal companies.

"If there were a predicted shortage, we would make a change. We would have to," said Lee, board member and past president of the American Sugarbeet Growers Association.

For example, he would consider planting more wheat and less corn, which uses more water.

He said crops suited to year-to-year changes include wheat, corn and even sugar beets, subject to growers' minimum targets. Crops that stay in the field long-term — and offer less flexibility — include mint, alfalfa and asparagus.

Sunnyside Farm grows about 500 acres of corn and 229 acres of beets. Other acreage totals include peppermint at 200, alfalfa hay at 180 and asparagus at 35.

# Simplot CEO announces his retirement

By **CAROL RYAN DUMAS**  
Capital Press

Bill Whitacre, CEO of the J.R. Simplot Co., is retiring after 18 years with the company.

Whitacre was the company's sixth CEO since founder Jack Simplot stepped down in 1973, and has served in that position for the past nine years.

"Bill has been a highly successful and visionary leader who has helped the J.R. Simplot Company reach new heights and expand our global presence," Scott Simplot, chairman of the board of directors, said in a press release.

"The company, the board and the extended Simplot family thank him for his leadership and commitment," he said.

Whitacre joined the company in March 2000 as president of Simplot's turf and horticulture business. In 2002, he was appointed president of the Simplot AgriBusiness Group and was named CEO in 2009.

As CEO, Whitacre expanded the company's international footprint and enhanced its position with communities, industries, customers and employees.

By strengthening the company's competitive position and growing its global presence, he has overseen an increase in revenues from approximately \$4.5 billion to \$6 billion today.

"It has been an honor to lead this great company," Whitacre said. "The agriculture industry continues to offer significant opportunities, and the J.R. Simplot Company is well positioned to continue its leadership position earned over the past 90 years."



Bill Whitacre

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