

Paltry snowpack leaves Prineville reservoir low

By DYLAN J. DARLING
The (Bend) Bulletin

BEND — Prineville Reservoir, largely fed by snowmelt and rainfall, typically fills to the brim this time of year. Not this year, after a winter with light snowfall left a paltry snowpack above the reservoir.

“It’s looking like, unless we have a sudden change in the weather, Prineville Reservoir is at its peak of the season,” said Jeremy Giffin, Deschutes Basin watermaster for the Oregon Water Resources Department. As of Thursday the 148,640 acre-foot reservoir was 83 percent full. An acre-foot is enough water to submerge an acre of ground a foot deep in water.

The agency determines how much water should be released to meet water rights held downstream by farmers, ranchers and others. Giffin went to Prineville Reservoir on Thursday to check just how much water was flowing in from the Crooked River, which feeds the reservoir. Not much.

Normally this time of year the Crooked River is running at about 1,000 cubic feet per second upstream of Prineville Reservoir. Giffin went to a check an automated gauge near Post on Thursday and found the river to be flowing at 195 cfs.

“We are running about 20 percent of normal into the reservoir,” Giffin said, “for this day.”

The inflow into Prineville Reservoir is expected to remain low through summer, with the Natural Resources Conservation Service predicting 16 percent of the normal inflow there from this month to September.

Concern about the low flows and short water supply for agriculture upstream of reservoirs prompted Crook County leaders to ask the state for an emergency drought declaration last month, the second year in a row. Earlier this week, Gov. Kate Brown declared the emergency, opening the way for state assistance for people affected by the scarcity of water.

“This year there is going to be a lot less water than last year,” Giffin said regarding ranchers who rely on snowmelt for their operations near Post and Paulina, upstream from Prineville Reservoir.

He said the low stream flow could cause ranchers to get in only one cutting of hay this year. In a good water year they may get two or three cuttings.



AP Photo/The Bulletin, Joe Kline

Jeremy Giffin, Deschutes Basin watermaster, takes a measurement with his current meter at a spot in the Crooked River approximately 2.5 miles from Prineville Reservoir on Thursday.

Giffin said there are about 40,000 acres of irrigated land above Prineville Reservoir.

The Crooked River is not the only river, creek or stream likely to see just a fraction of normal flows this summer, according to the recent federal forecast. The slight or absent snowpack around Oregon this year means spring and summer snowmelt will not provide the typical boost of water, said Julie Koeberle, a snow hydrologist for the Conservation Service.

“Without that snow we don’t have anything to sustain streams later in the season, so that is kind of that problem,” she said Wednesday.

While the snowpack is also poor near Bend, it may not show in rivers and streams around Deschutes County. Koeberle said springs feed the Deschutes River and many of the other streams around the county, making them less affected by fluctuations in snowmelt.

The size of the aquifer feeding the springs buffers the river they supply from drought, Giffin said. Consecutive years of drought can start to take a toll and this year — a second drought year — springs could be flowing less than normal, but still better than the snowmelt feeding the Crooked River.

The snowmelt this year should be much less than normal, with spotty snowpack around the Deschutes/Crooked River Basin below 5,000 feet. Of the 14 automated snow survey sites around the basin, Koeberle said five al-

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— Jeremy Giffin, Deschutes Basin watermaster

ready had no snow.

Oregon also saw poor snowpack numbers last year, but Koeberle said this year is worse. Around the state, three-quarters of the 147 automated snow sites monitored by the Conservation Service are at record lows.

“This is new territory,” Koeberle said.

Spring rains can bring some reprieve from a low snow year, but this year that is not looking likely. The three-month climate outlook for the Bend and Redmond area is for below normal precipitation and above normal temperatures, said Stephen Bieda, meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Pendleton.

This follows a winter that brought nearly normal precipitation, but warm temperatures caused much of what would have been snowfall to come down as rain except at the highest elevations. The average temperature statewide during the first three months of the year was the highest in 121 years of records.

“That’s the big reason why our snowpack suffered,” Bieda said.

BRIEFLY

Suspected tsunami debris boat towed to Oregon port

NEWPORT (AP) — A 30-foot section of a fiberglass boat believed to be debris from the 2011 Japanese tsunami has been towed to an Oregon port and is headed for the dump once scientists make sure it poses no threat of spreading invasive species.

Chris Havel of the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department says the boat was towed to Newport Harbor late Thursday night and was tied up at a marina until it can be dismantled and dumped at the landfill.

He says biologists examined the boat at sea and felt it posed little threat, despite having several fish native to the western Pacific inside. The scientists will have another look now that it is in port.

The fish, yellowtail jacks, will be delivered into the care of the Oregon Coast Aquarium.

Cat survives shock, 25-foot fall from power pole

GRANTS PASS (AP) — The owner of a 17-pound Siamese cat named Liam says he has nearly used up his nine lives after getting shocked on a power pole in Grants Pass and falling 25 feet.

Jennifer Kagay tells *The Grants Pass Daily Courier* she and her husband were lying in bed early Tuesday when they heard a “bang” and the power went out.

Her husband, Jeff, went outside and the cat was lying still on the transformer at the top of the pole. They were relieved when Liam started to move, but horrified when he fell 25 feet to the ground. On the way down, he snagged a wire with a claw, then landed softly in some brush.

The Kagays took him to the vet, where he may have to have one leg amputated.

Oregon mom says son saved her from being killed

MEDFORD (AP) — A Medford woman says her 6-year-old son saved her from death when he disrupted an attack last fall.

Abigail Beers’ boyfriend, Matthew Hopkins, threw her off a roof, tried to snap her neck and then had her in a chokehold. That’s when the boy ran up and started hitting Hopkins, telling him to stop. Hopkins loosened his grip to push the boy away, and the woman escaped.

The Mail Tribune reports that Hopkins was sentenced Thursday to nearly six years in prison. He pleaded guilty to assault and strangulation in exchange for having an attempted murder charge dropped.

Judge Kelly Ravassipour told Hopkins he should be grateful that Beers lived, saying she was “one breath away” from this being a 25-year-to-life sentence.

A sobbing Hopkins apologized.

High court reinstates Walla Walla murder conviction

WALLA WALLA, Wash. (AP) — The Washington State Supreme Court has reinstated the murder conviction of a gang member serving a life sentence for a fatal shooting in Walla Walla.

The *Walla Walla Union-Bulletin* says Benito Gomez was convicted of gunning down rival gang member Julio Cesar Martinez in May 2011. A state appeals court reversed his convictions for second-degree murder and assault in 2014 and ordered a new trial.

Blue Mountain Community College

Student Spotlight: Did You Know?



Jaylin Throop
BMCC Diesel Student/Rodeo Team Member

Jaylin Throop is one busy man! The second year diesel technologies student is active in student government, is a student senator, and participates as a team roper on the BMCC rodeo team. In addition, Jaylin just began working as a diesel tech three days a week for Cummins Northwest in Pendleton. Despite his very busy schedule, Jaylin still manages to make his studies a priority and is on the Dean's List. Jaylin will graduate from BMCC this spring with his Associate's Degree in Diesel Technologies, and hopes to continue his education with welding classes in the future.



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Featured Speaker
Judy Hill Lovins of Aspen Colorado, a fine art photographer and “homegrown” native of Hermiston, will share her life story.