

Oregon snowpack well below normal heading into 2020

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
Capital Press

SALEM — Early season snowfall is lagging again across Oregon, potentially foreshadowing another dry and difficult summer ahead for farmers and ranchers.

But as 2019 proved, things can turn around quickly, giving plenty of reason for hope.

According to the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Oregon's snow-water equivalent — the amount of water contained within snow — is just 45% of normal statewide. Every water basin is measuring below average for snow, with the exception of the Owyhee Basin in Southeast Oregon, which is holding up at 117% of normal.

The lowest totals are in the Hood, Sandy and Lower Deschutes basins at 25% of normal, and the Willamette Basin at 26%.

Mountain snowpack is crucial for replenishing streams and reservoirs for farms and fish, especially in Eastern Oregon. As snow melts, it trickles down into creeks and rivers, sustaining healthy stream flows while providing irrigation water for crops and livestock.

Scott Oviatt, snow survey supervisor for NRCS Oregon, said the agency will release its first water sup-



A skiff of snow covers the foothills of the Blue Mountains on Thanksgiving morning.

ply outlook report by Jan. 10. Based on the current lack of snow, Oviatt said he anticipates lower water availability earlier in the spring, though there is still time to rebound.

“We’re not in panic mode yet,” Oviatt said. “It is early in the (water) year. ... We can see some improvement, depending on conditions.”

The water year, as defined by hydrologists, begins on Oct. 1 and runs through Sept. 30 of the following calendar year. November and December are typically much cooler and wetter months for Oregon, Oviatt said, however, most of the state’s 90 snow monitoring sites are mea-

suring less than 8 inches of snow-water equivalent.

Perhaps more concerning, overall precipitation including rain is averaging just 50% of normal statewide. The Oregon Water Resources Department reports that November in particular was one of the top five driest months on record for Northwest Oregon.

Racquel Rancier, spokeswoman for OWRD, said that average stream flows were just 40% of normal statewide as of Dec. 30.

“We certainly would like to see better and more consistent stream flows and a greater snowpack at this

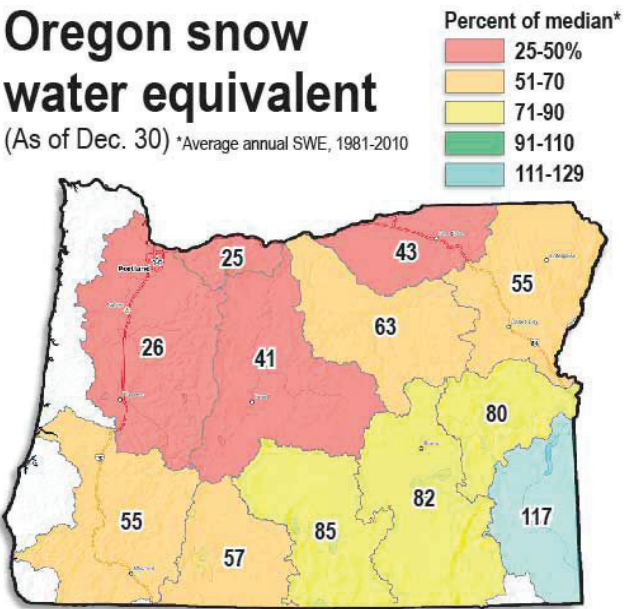
point,” Rancier said. “Conditions need to greatly improve in the coming months in order to have a more normal water year.”

The U.S. Drought Monitor shows nearly 98% of Oregon listed in some stage of drought, ranging from “abnormally dry” to “moderate.”

Conditions were much the same at this time last year, too, when snowpack was just 42% of normal levels in early January. Then came February, which brought drought-busting winter storms that dumped several feet of snow at higher elevations and boosted snow-water

Oregon snow water equivalent

(As of Dec. 30) *Average annual SWE, 1981-2010



Source: USDA NRCS

Alan Kenaga/Capital Press

equivalent by 20-30%.

With two-thirds of winter still to go, Oviatt said he is optimistic for improvement.

“At this point, our message will be to watch the conditions,” he said. “Let’s just hope for improvement at this point.”

Snow-water equivalent is measured using what is known as a “snow pillow,” made out of a synthetic rubber and filled with an organic antifreeze solution. As snow falls, it compresses the pillow and a sensor measures the pressure in real time, which is used to calculate the amount of water in the snow.

The data is then com-

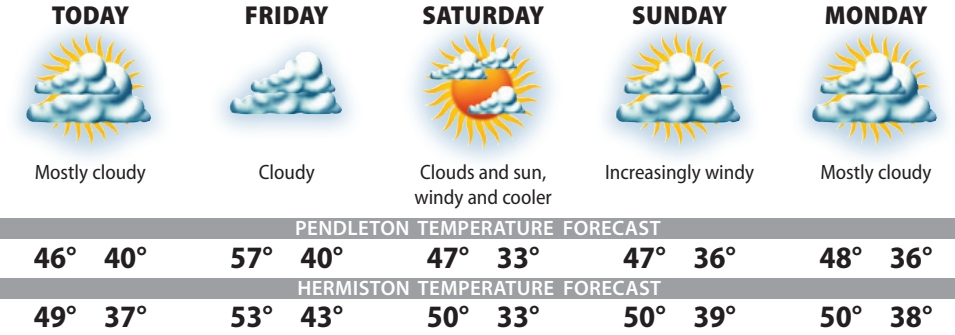
pared with a 30-year average between 1981-2010 to come up with a percent of normal.

Between the “snow-mageddon” of February and drier-than-usual November, Oviatt said increasingly large and unpredictable swings in weather variability are making it harder for the NRCS to accurately predict water supplies until later in the season.

That could lead to changes in modeling, Oviatt said, though he did not elaborate.

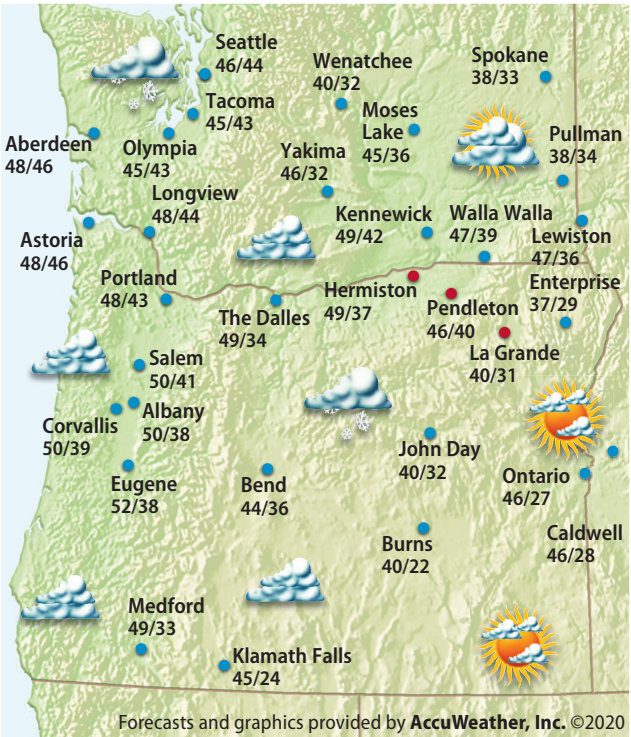
“It’s a changing world,” he said. “We’re trying to keep up with technology as our partner agencies are doing. It’s an ongoing process at this point.”

Forecast for Pendleton Area



OREGON FORECAST

Shown is today's weather. Temperatures are today's highs and tonight's lows.



ALMANAC

PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.

TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	55°	48°
Normals	40°	26°
Records	67° (1939)	-12° (1979)

PRECIPITATION 24 hours ending 3 p.m.

Month to date	Trace
Normal month to date	0.06"
Year to date	Trace
Last year to date	0.00"
Normal year to date	0.06"

HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.

TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	57°	49°
Normals	39°	27°
Records	60° (1959)	-13° (1979)

PRECIPITATION 24 hours ending 3 p.m.

Month to date	0.00"
Normal month to date	0.00"
Year to date	0.04"
Last year to date	0.00"
Normal year to date	0.04"

WINDS (in mph)

	Today	Fri.
Boardman	WSW 7-14	SE 3-6
Pendleton	WSW 7-14	SSE 7-14

SUN AND MOON

Sunrise today	7:36 a.m.
Sunset tonight	4:22 p.m.
Moonrise today	11:52 a.m.
Moonset today	none

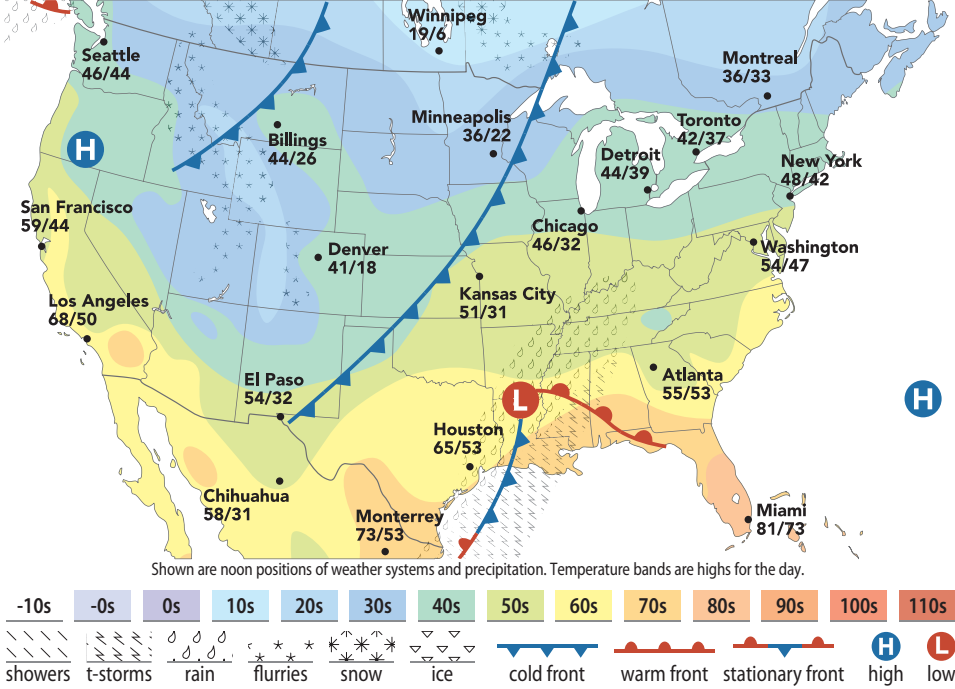


NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)

High 81° in Hollywood, Fla. Low -32° in Waverly, Colo.

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



New Congressional seat for Oregon likely after 2020 census

By **JEFF MAPES**
Oregon Public Broadcasting

SALEM — As the nation heads into the 2020 census, Oregon appears more likely than ever to gain a sixth congressional seat, according to new population estimates.

The Census Bureau estimates released Monday show that Oregon's population growth — while slowing in the past year — remains strong enough to put the state in line for another seat.

“I think you’re probably looking good” to gain an additional seat, said Kimball Brace, president of Election Data Services of Virginia. His firm uses several different models to project how congressional seats may be apportioned, and he said all of them show

a sixth seat for Oregon.

However, he and other forecasters caution that some uncertainties remain. There's been controversy over whether some immigrant communities will be hesitant to participate in the 2020 census given the Trump administration's moves to crack down on illegal immigration. And a major natural disaster or big economic shock could also have a sudden impact on the state's population. Brace said California is on the verge of losing a congressional seat for the first time in that state's history, particularly if there's an undercount among immigrants there.

The new estimates show Oregon grew by 0.9% between July 1, 2018, and July 1, 2019, to a total popu-

lation of 4,217,737. The state came close to gaining a sixth seat in 2010, and the state's growth since then has been relatively strong.

Under current law, it's the job of the Oregon Legislature and Gov. Kate Brown to redraw district lines for both Congress and for legislative seats. However, the Oregon League of Women Voters and several other groups want to put an initiative on the ballot next year that would turn the job over to an independent commission.

Four of Oregon's five congressional seats are now held by Democrats. Both major political parties have been looking at how they could draw the lines of a new district to maximize their chances of winning an additional seat.

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