

# WALLOWA COUNTY CHIEFTAIN

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## Snowpack percents increasing

By Steve Tool  
Wallowa County Chieftain

If the present snowpack is any indication, things are looking up for Wallowa County and the surrounding regions this year.

As of Feb. 7, the region is holding at 107 percent of normal. Those statistics come from the National Water and Climate Center, part of the U.S. government's Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Locally, the NRCS Snow Telemetry reports show Mt. Howard snowpack at 118 percent of average snowpack and Aneroid Lake No. 2 at 131 percent of the average snowpack. The water year-to-date precipitation for the two sites is 21.8 inches and 26.9 inches respectively, compared to the averages of 18.5 and 20.5 inches of the two sites.

Wallowa County extension agent John Williams said the numbers look good for the moment. "A good snowpack really helps irrigators, which helps all of agriculture – ranchers, everybody."

However, Williams also sounded a note of caution:

"It's February, and it's awful early to be talking about it. Normal in February just means that we're holding our own, you know," he said.

The news is also looking good in the nearby Owyhee River Basin.

"The Owyhee looks really, really good. It's incredible," said Malheur County farmer Bruce Corn, a member of the Owyhee Irrigation District's board of directors.

Snow melt from the basin flows into the reservoir, which provides water for 118,000 acres of irrigated farmland in Eastern Oregon and part of Southwestern Idaho.

Average snowpack was 164 percent of normal as of Jan. 30, but that only tells part of the story, Corn said.

"The whole watershed has snow in it right now," he said. "There is a lot of snow where we normally don't get any."

There are significant amounts of snow in parts of the 11,000-square-mile basin that usually don't receive much, said OID Manager Jay Chamberlin.



The historic J. Herbert Bate Lumber planing mill in Wallowa fell due to heavy snow.

Kathleen Ellyn/Chieftain

# SNOW CLAIMS PLANING MILL

Long-lasting snow causing more than inconvenience around the region

By Kathleen Ellyn  
Wallowa County Chieftain

**A**s Wallowa County heads into yet another snowstorm, the snow damage is mounting. Reports of buildings partially or fully collapsing and houses being damaged are coming in to insurance agents across the county.

Kay Hunkapillar, president of Wheatland Insurance, said that they had about 18 collapse claims involving both residential and farm structures, and 21 water damage claims in Wallowa County as of Feb. 5.

Farmers Group Insurance agent Les Bridges of Enterprise said that he had six collapsed buildings reported.

"So far, thank God, none of them have been homes," he said. "The damages are fairly significant. We had a building that collapsed on three cars, another that collapsed on a logging truck and another that collapsed on a log skidder." Bridges said. "Our adjuster is a very busy boy right now."

The building that collapsed on the skidder belongs to Mike Mahon of Wallowa.

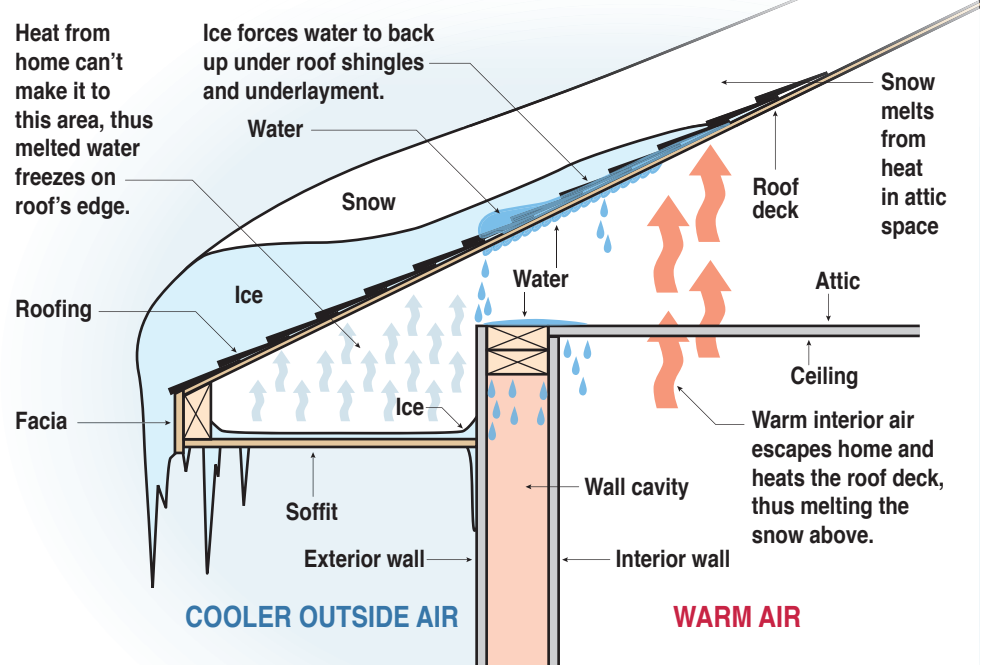
"We're going to have to take the building down," Mahon said.

It was an all-steel building favored by farmers and ranchers in snow country. Generally steel roofs simply shed their snow, but this year many steel roofs never warmed sufficiently to allow the tiny bit of melt needed to start the snow sliding.

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## Ice dams can cause damage to your home

Insurance companies are advising Wallowa County residents to break the ice dams on the eaves of their roofs to avoid water backup and damage to shingles.



Source: www.theicedamcompany.com

Alan Kenaga/EO Media Group



The Bate planing mill as it appeared earlier this year.

Contributed photo

# Snow, cold cause stress for workers, budgets

By Katy Nesbitt  
For The Chieftain

The toughest winter in decades has road maintenance crews scrambling to keep ahead of the next storm, but it may be too early to know how much of a burden it's toll will be on local government budgets.

From mid-December to the early days of February, Wallowa County was locked in a cold spell. Accumulations from snowstorms piled up. City, county and state road crews have done little else for several weeks but move snow and spread gravel to help motorists get around the county.

To deal with the full-time job of snow removal, Ronnie Neal, public works director for Enterprise, said his crew's schedule was moved to a 4 a.m. start time. For the most part, this has alleviated having to pay overtime.



Photo by Katy Nesbitt

Members of the Enterprise City public works crew loads snow from the middle of Main Street following one of many storms to hit Wallowa County over the past two months.

"Usually we have town cleaned up by 7 a.m. because by 7:30 traffic gets pretty hectic," Neal said.

Some of the snow piled up at intersections has been hauled to Jensen Fields next to Safeway and if the city runs out of room the next stop will be the Little League Fields along School

and Residence streets, Neal said.

Snow removal costs come out of Enterprise's general street maintenance budget, Neal said, and a little more than halfway through the city's fiscal year only 56 percent of the budget has been spent on streets. So far the only overtime charged this winter

has been to deal with frozen water meters and service lines.

At the end of January Neal said his department had more than 150 service calls.

"The cold weather hit us harder than normal," Neal said. "One of the things we try to stress to people is that all the cities are requesting people run their water as a precautionary measure so our big main lines don't freeze up," Neal said.

Stacey Karvoski, Enterprise's newly elected mayor, said one thing that could help out the city is moving cars off Main Street over night so crews can plow in the early morning.

In Joseph, Donna Warnock, city administrator, said, "We are in the same situation as a lot of the cities trying to stay on top of snow removal."

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