

Snowpack lagging for this time of year

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The snowpack in southeast Wyoming is lagging behind the seasonal average for this time of year, but it's doing a lot better than it was during the height of the recent drought.

As of Monday, the upper North Platte River basin was sitting at 81 percent of its average snow-water equivalent and 98 percent of its total precipitation for the 2009-10 water year, according to the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

The lower North Platte River basin was at 96 percent snow-water equivalent and 109 percent of total precipitation.

Jim Fahey, a hydrologist with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, said the snowpack is in pretty good shape, especially considering recent history.

"We've had drought years before where we've been at 50-60 percent of normal this time of year," he said.

Compared to that, "we're not doing too badly," he said.

According to a Wyoming drought report issued at the end of October by a multi-agency group, all of Wyoming received normal or above-normal precipitation, with normal or above-normal snowpack averages, for the 2008-09 water year $\frac{3}{4}$ October 2008 through the end of September.

Rangeland precipitation and reservoir water supplies also helped the state move away from drought conditions this summer.

However, for the past two years, the snowpack averages heading into early December have been below average, the report said.

"For the last couple years, even though they've been good years, we're always playing catch-up. In many years past, we've had a decent snowpack in late fall, beginning of winter," Fahey said. "Last year, things didn't get going east of the (Continental) Divide until early March."

An early October snowstorm got things off to a good start this year, though a drier November followed. The snowfall is picking up for this part of the state, however, and could continue for the next couple weeks.

"Maybe we'll get a decent snowpack before we hit the new year, and then into spring," Fahey said.

Elsewhere around Wyoming, the Little Snake River basin is at 96 percent of average precipitation of the 2009-10 water year. Most other river basins are close to 70 percent of average or higher.

The Snake River, upper Green River and upper Bear River basins are all below 50 percent.

Fahey cautioned that percentages at this early point in the water year $\frac{3}{4}$ the current water year started in October $\frac{3}{4}$ can fluctuate wildly because only a few weeks of data have been compiled.

He said meteorologists are predicting average precipitation and above-average temperatures for the coming winter.

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