

Snowpack below average west of Continental Divide, normal on east side

Two sides to the story

By JOAN BARRON - Star-Tribune staff writer | Posted: Wednesday, January 13, 2010 12:00 am |



Fresh snow blankets the prominent 13,745-foot Fremont Peak in the Wind River Range north of Pinedale recently. The mountain provides water for the Upper Green River Basin, and it currently has a below-average snowpack level. (Mark Gocke/Star-Tribune correspondent)

[Wyoming snowpack](#)

These numbers show the percentages of water content in snowpack around Wyoming when compared with the historical average as of Wednesday:

Snake River Basin 93

Upper Yellowstone/Madison 93

Wind River Basin 79

Big Horn Basin 102

Shoshone River Basin 95

Powder-Tongue Basin 117

Belle Fourche Basin 124

Upper N. Platte Basin 106

Lower N Platte/Sweetwater 83

Little Snake River Basin 111

Upper Green River Basin 89

Lower Green River Basin 73

Upper Bear River Basin 90

Source: National Resources Conservation Service

CHEYENNE -- East of the Continental Divide, Wyoming is in better snowpack shape than the western part of the state, weather experts said Tuesday.

But they said there is still time for the land west of the divide to catch up.

"We're starting out slow for the winter but it does not mean the end will be below average," said Bill Murrell, meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Riverton.

Western Wyoming by far, he said, has the most below-average snowpack, ranging from 50 to 75 percent. Also below average are the Upper Green, the Upper Bear and the Upper Yellowstone basins.

Murrell said there's a better than normal chance of above-average temperatures for the next couple of months.

But precipitation, he said, cannot be predicted at this time, according to the national climate predicting center.

"It's still early on and sometimes we get the most significant precipitation in early spring, especially in the eastern side," he said.

"There's plenty of time to bounce back," Morrell added.

"If we get one or two spring storms we'll fare well east of the divide but west of the divide is where the main concern will be."

Don Day, president and climatologist with Dayweather, Inc., likened the winter to a football game.

"If this were a football game, this would maybe be halftime. There's a lot of snow season left," he said. "December and January are the two driest months of the year."

He also noted the below-normal snowpacks in the southwest and northwest regions of the state.

"The good news is that we're forecasting an increasing threat of mountain snow for about a two-week period starting the middle to the end of next week that will probably go into early February," Day said.

Meanwhile, tourists continue to visit Jackson Hole in northwest Wyoming for skiing.

At the Jackson Hole Ski Resort, the snowpack is 177 inches so far this season. The average annual snowpack per year is 459 inches.

"It's a little bit below average but nothing drastic," said Courtney Ludden of the resort's marketing office.

"Business has been quite good. People are still traveling, still want to see the mountains," she said.

Day, meanwhile, said having a cooler and wetter season the past two winters helped with precipitation levels and eased the drought.

He pointed out another type of drought is hydrological drought, determined by reservoir storage.

Although Wyoming reservoirs are not 100 percent full, conditions have improved markedly since 2001 to 2003, he said.

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