

Water outlook remains good

By Keith E. Domke, Riverton Ranger Editor

Wyoming's depleted reservoirs, including Boysen north of Shoshoni, are filling faster than expected, thanks to hearty snowmelt and spring storms.

The Wyoming Area Office of the Bureau of Reclamation in Mills has prepared runoff forecasts for the Wind River portion of the Bighorn Basin. And the National Weather Service Riverton office said in its final 2008 water outlook that the supply looks very good heading into the summer.

"Above normal water supply numbers continue to be expected for the rest of June and into July for a majority of the large watersheds in Wyoming," the NWS report said. "Cooler than normal temperatures across Wyoming in May and into early June have maintained and/or increased the snow water equivalent of water measurements in the snowpack above 9,000 feet.

"Snowpack water numbers and/or snow water equivalents were averaging near 149 percent of normal by early June across Wyoming. Last year, by June 11, the snow water equivalents across the state were 16 percent of normal," the Riverton NWS office said.

The weather service report went on to say that record and/or near record May precipitation across the state has maintained and even increased the forecasted snowmelt streamflow volumes for the next two months across the majority of the basins.

Fremont County was blessed with abundant May precipitation. Lander received the most moisture ever for the month at 6.13 inches while Riverton got its second-highest May total in history at 4.87 inches. The Riverton amount for May 2008 ended up being the sixth wettest month in history dating back more than 100 years. Lander's May precipitation totals were 258 percent of normal numbers while Riverton's moisture last month was 270 percent of its 30-year average.

For the year, Riverton has received 5.95 inches of precipitation at the regional airport, which is 1.61 inches above the 30-year average. In Lander, the annual moisture amount is at 9.33 inches, or 2.01 inches above normal. So far in June, Riverton has gotten .27-inch of rain while Lander has received .82-inch.

As far as temperatures in both cities, Riverton averaged 2.4 degrees below normal last month as far as the average monthly temperature. Fremont County's largest city averaged a reading of 51.4 degrees in May. Lander averaged 50.7 degrees last month, which was 2.7 degrees below normal.

Conditions have been even cooler so far in June. In Riverton, no daily high temperatures have been above normal through Thursday, with the first two days of the month hitting the average high of 76 degrees. From June 4-12, the mercury was below the normal high by double digit amounts with the largest discrepancy being 22 degrees below normal on Wednesday. The high that day was 58 degrees. The norm for the day is 80. Thursday wasn't much better as the high at Riverton Regional Airport was 61 degrees, or 19 degrees below normal.

The story has been the same in Lander this month as the Hunt Field high on Tuesday, June 2, was the only one of the month so far to be above normal at 74. And that was by 1 degree. Eight of the last nine days have experienced highs at least 11 degrees below normal, with Wednesday's 56-degree reading being 21 degrees below the city's normal high of 77. On Thursday, the mercury topped out at 61, or 16 degrees below normal. Temperatures are forecasted to rebound through the weekend, however, as highs in both Riverton and Lander should be near 80 degrees both Saturday and Sunday.

Streamflows

Basinwide average precipitation in May was 110 to 270 percent of normal across Wyoming, the local NWS office reported. For the water year 2008, many basins in Wyoming were registering 85 to 120 percent of average precipitation. The normal to above normal precipitation numbers across the state have greatly helped increase the forecasted streamflow volumes in Wyoming.

Streamflow volumes for June and July along the Wind and Big Horn river drainages are expected to increase to 105 to 120 percent of normal. The inflows into Boysen Reservoir are forecasted to be 105 percent of normal — with an additional 540,000 acre-feet of water expected to flow into Boysen Reservoir during the rest of June and into July.

The forecasted inflow into Boysen for the April through July period is 710,000 acre-feet, or 129 percent of average, of which 158,000 acre-feet was received in April and May, leaving 552,000 acre-feet of runoff forecasted for June and July.

On May 1, only 500,000 acre feet was predicted.

An acre foot of water is 325,851 gallons — the amount of water it would take to cover an acre of land with 1 foot of water, the Bureau of Reclamation said.

John Lawson, Wyoming area manager for the Bureau of Reclamation, said he expects Boysen to fill during the runoff season.

Elsewhere in Fremont County, the April through July inflow forecast of snowmelt runoff into Bull Lake Reservoir from Bull Lake Creek is expected to be 140,000 acre-feet, or 100 percent of average, of which 27,000 acre-feet was received in April and May. The snowmelt runoff into the Wind River above Bull Lake Creek is expected to be 490,000 acre-feet, or 122 percent of average, of which 86,000 acre-feet was received in April and May.

The entire Bighorn Basin in Wyoming received well-above average precipitation during May, and snowmelt runoff conditions have improved substantially, Lawson said. The early June forecast indicates average or above average snowmelt runoff through July at all locations within the basin.