

Wyoming snowmelt runoff flood potential low to moderate

By JEFF GEARINO - Southwest Wyoming bureau | Posted: Sunday, March 21, 2010

GREEN RIVER -- Hold onto your hats and get ready for another Wyoming spring, albeit maybe not quite as wet as last year, state hydrologists say.

Many of the state's watersheds can expect a generally low potential for flooding due to springtime snowmelt, according to National Weather Service officials.

Weathermen said even with Friday's snow storm spreading much-needed moisture across the Cowboy State, the potential for snowmelt runoff flooding is much lower than the outlook a year ago.

Officials with the agency's advanced hydrologic prediction service in Riverton said Friday the worst flooding -- if any occurs this spring -- most likely would come on the eastern side of the state, where there is a moderate potential for snowmelt flooding.

"We're not up to par as we were the last couple of years in regards to (flooding potential)," particularly in the Little Snake River drainage, the Upper North Platte River above Saratoga and the Middle Fork of the Popo Agie River, hydrologist Jim Fahey said.

"We're just not seeing as much (snow-water equivalents) from the data thus far in each of the basins," he said.

"The southeast part of the state (including) the Medicine Bow and the Snowy Range ... have the best snowpack in the state, but it doesn't equal what we had the last two years down there," said Fahey.

The service is predicting moderate potential runoff flooding along the North Platte River, the Encampment River, the Laramie River, the Little Laramie River and the Little Snake River above Dixon, according to agency data.

There is also moderate potential for snowmelt flooding along the Middle Fork of the Popo Agie River.

Fahey said all of the headwater locations along those watersheds had near normal to above normal snow-water equivalents at the beginning of March.

All other headwater basins in Wyoming had below-normal snow-water equivalents by the middle of March.

The key to minimal flooding potential this spring "is if we can keep that low-elevation snow that sits around 8,000-9,000 feet elevation until the first of May," Fahey said.

"If that goes away in April, usually we won't have such a high runoff ... it will be high, but the flood potential will be low," he said. "But last June, we got that June deluge of rain that nobody saw coming, so we've still got a lot of time."

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