



News for Immediate Release

December 30, 2008

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DWR Announces Snow Survey Results

SACRAMENTO – The Department of Water Resources (DWR) first snow survey of the 2008/2009 winter season indicates snow water content is 76 percent of normal for the date, statewide. This time last year, snow water content was 60 percent of normal statewide.

“While today’s conditions are an improvement over last year’s initial snow survey figures, the strain on California’s water supply persists,” said DWR Director Lester Snow. “Recent regulatory actions that further limit pumping through the Delta and deficits from the previous two dry years will require a very wet year to relieve the drought. We must take immediate steps to protect the Delta ecosystem, conserve more water and develop additional groundwater and surface storage facilities to meet our future needs.”

Governor Schwarzenegger has outlined steps to safeguard the state’s water supply through a comprehensive plan that includes water conservation, more surface and groundwater storage, new investments in the state’s aging water infrastructure, and improved water conveyance to protect the environment and provide a reliable water supply.

While this year’s water content is higher than last, winter storms arrived late. It is too early to tell whether improved figures will translate into a better water year than the state experienced last year, when winter storms ended early leading to California’s driest spring on record.

Electronic sensor readings show northern Sierra snow water equivalents at 54 percent of normal for this date, central Sierra at 76 percent, and southern Sierra at 99 percent. The sensor readings are posted at <http://cdec.water.ca.gov/cgi-progs/snow/DLYSWEQ>.

Storage in California’s major reservoirs is low. Lake Oroville, the principal storage reservoir for the State Water Project (SWP), is at 28 percent of capacity, and 44 percent of average storage for this time of year.

Continuing dry conditions and court-ordered restrictions on Delta water exports are limiting water deliveries to farms and urban areas. DWR’s early estimate is that it will only be able to deliver 15 percent of requested State Water Project water this year to the Bay Area, San Joaquin Valley, Central Coast and Southern California. Increased precipitation this winter could increase this figure.

In December 2008, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service released a Delta smelt Biological Opinion which

could reduce Delta exports by 20-50 percent. In December 2007, Judge Oliver Wanger restricted pumping to protect the Delta smelt, resulting in a 25 percent reduction in water deliveries. In a November 2008 decision, the California Fish and Game Commission implemented take restrictions for the longfin smelt which also could reduce water delivery pumping. And a Biological Opinion from the National Marine Fisheries Service to protect salmon and steelhead is expected in March. These regulatory actions have and will continue to significantly decrease deliveries to homes, farms, cities and industry by both the State Water Project and the federal Central Valley Project.

Results of today’s manual survey by DWR off Highway 50 near Echo Summit are as follow:

Location	Elevation	Snow Depth	Water Content	% of Long Term Average
Phillips Station	6,800 feet	41 inches	10 inches	83%

Importance of Snow Surveying

Snow water content is important in determining the coming year's water supply. The measurements help hydrologists prepare water supply forecasts as well as provide others, such as hydroelectric power companies and the recreation industry, with needed data.

Monitoring is coordinated by the Department of Water Resources as part of the multi-agency California Cooperative Snow Surveys Program. Surveyors from more than 50 agencies and utilities visit hundreds of snow measurement courses in California’s mountains to gauge the amount of water in the snowpack.

The Department of Water Resources operates and maintains the State Water Project, provides dam safety and flood control and inspection services, assists local water districts in water management and water conservation planning, and plans for future statewide water needs.