

Water content in Sierra remains above average

As skiers were enjoying fresh powder today at Sierra-at-Tahoe, state snow surveyors were at the entrance to the resort on Highway 50 measuring the water content.

The readings are much better than last year when the water content was at 80 percent of normal. On Wednesday they came in at 107 percent of normal. At the January reading the water content was at 115 percent and in December it was 75 percent.



John Deam and Frank Gehrke measure the water content.
Photo/LTN file

“Today’s readings boost our hope that we will be able to increase the State Water Project allocation by this spring to deliver more water to our cities and farms,” Department of Water Resources Director Mark Cowin said in a press release. “But we must remember that even a wet winter will not fully offset three consecutive dry years or pumping restrictions to protect Delta fish so we must continue to conserve and protect our water resources.”

Lake Oroville, the State Water Project’s principal storage reservoir, is recovering slowly after three dry years. Despite recent storms, its storage level today is only 55 percent

average for this time of year. It is also expected that dry soil conditions will absorb much of the snowpack's water content that otherwise would help to replenish streams and reservoirs during the spring and early summer melt.

On Feb. 26, the State Water Project allocation was increased from 5 to 15 percent of requested amounts. If wet weather continues, the final allocation this spring likely will be in the range of 35-45 percent of requested amounts. The figure will partially be determined by how the fishery agency restrictions on pumping are applied, which will determine how much flexibility DWR has to export water from the Delta.

In 2009, the State Water Project delivered 40 percent of customer requests. The federal Central Valley Project in 2009 was able to deliver 10 percent of contracted amounts to some agricultural areas in the San Joaquin Valley. The reduced deliveries were due to dry weather and fishery agency pumping restrictions to protect fish species; principally Delta smelt, salmon, and longfin smelt.

Results of today's manual snow survey by the Department of Water resources off Highway 50 near Echo Summit are as follows:

Location	Elevation	Snow Depth	Water Content	% of Long Term Average
Alpha	7,600 feet	74.3 inches	26.2 inches	94
Phillips Station	6,800 feet	76.3 inches	25.1 inches	102
Lyons Creek	6,700 feet	79.4 inches	26.9 inches	105
Tamarack Flat	6,500 feet	77.8 inches	26.2 inches	112

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