

Shrinking glaciers in Cascades a growing problem

By David Lester, Yakima Herald-Republic

YAKIMA, Wash. – Spectacular on a clear, sunny day, Mount Adams rises a scant 53 miles from Yakima.

But the mountain holds what until now has been pretty much a secret.

In the first comprehensive study of its kind, a Portland State University study has found Mount Adams' 12 glaciers have shrunk by nearly half since 1904 and are receding faster than those of nearby sister volcanoes Mount Hood and Mount Rainier.

It's another sign of gradually warming temperatures that – if continued as expected by researchers – will mean significant problems for the water-dependent Yakima Valley.

The study lends urgency to an earlier federal report that shows the water content of Cascade Mountain snowpacks could dwindle by as much as 50 percent by the 2070s.

More rain and smaller snowpacks will result in water shortages because less water is projected to be available to support the Valley's agriculture in the hot summer months, according to that congressionally ordered report by the Bureau of Reclamation, Army Corps of Engineers and the Bonneville Power Administration.

The Yakima Valley already has had five economically damaging droughts since 1992. And while the Valley's water supplies don't come from the flanks of Mount Adams, the study carries implications for other parts of the south Cascades that do provide water for the Valley.

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