Snowstorm makes ski resorts happy, but water content in Sierra at 12% of normal

A layer of fresh snow cannot disguise the fact that the snowpack is in dismal shape.

The second snow survey of the season on Jan. 30 revealed the snowpack water content statewide is at 12 percent of normal. This sets a record.



A Caltrans plow maneuvers Jan. 30 around stalled cars on Echo Summit. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Prior to Thursday, the lowest snowpack water content readings for this time of year were 21 percent of average in 1991 and 1963, 22 percent in 1976, 25 percent in 1977 and 35 percent in 2012. Recordkeeping started in 1960.

At the Echo Summit reading near the entrance of Sierra-at-Tahoe the measurements were even worse. The water content is 7 percent of normal, with 12.4 inches of snow containing 1.4 inches of water.

“This winter remains dry, making it very unlikely our record drought will be broken this year,” Mark Cowin, Department of

Water Resources director, said in a press release. “Now more than ever, we all need to save every drop we can in our homes and places of work.”

While water officials found nothing to celebrate on Thursday, ski resorts were thrilled. With the initial white stuff being heavy and wet, it will make for a good base. What has fallen since the predawn snowfall has been lighter – giving skiers something to be joyful about.



Power and cable lines are sagging in South Lake Tahoe.

The conditions, though, are ripe for avalanches to occur. The Sierra Avalanche Center issued a “high” level threat. This comes after weeks of it being at “low”.

Some ski resorts were waiting for the snow to settle before allowing riders everywhere.

Roads have been a mess. Late-morning spin outs on Echo Summit had the road closed temporarily. The commute into Carson City felt like driving over a washboard.

Power lines are sagging from the weight of the wet snow, but Liberty Utilities is reporting no problems as of 1pm.

Some tree limbs have also fallen because of the added weight.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report