What snowpack says about the water year

By Ian Evans, Water Deeply

The most significant reservoirs in the West are not stored behind concrete dams, but on top of mountains as snowpack. This year, however, snowpack has been alarmingly low throughout most of the West.

“If you look at the overall flow of the Colorado River – at Lake Powell, the main measurement point for the entire Colorado River Basin, it’s less than half of normal,” said John Fleck, director of water resources at the University of New Mexico.

That low flow impacts cities, agriculture and Western ecosystems for the rest of the year, if not longer. Already the Rio Grande River is so low that researchers are rescuing stranded fish by carrying them to wetter parts of the river. In California, instead of snow, the state experienced record-breaking wildfires and floods. Throughout most of the winter rainy season the state looked like it was headed for another devastating drought after only one year of relief.

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