February 2019 Drought Update

Water Availability Task Force Co- Chairs

Taryn Finnessey, CWCB
303.866.3441 ext. 3231
Taryn.Finnessey@state.co.us

Tracy Kosloff, DWR
303-866-3581 ext. 8211
Tracy.Kosloff@state.co.us

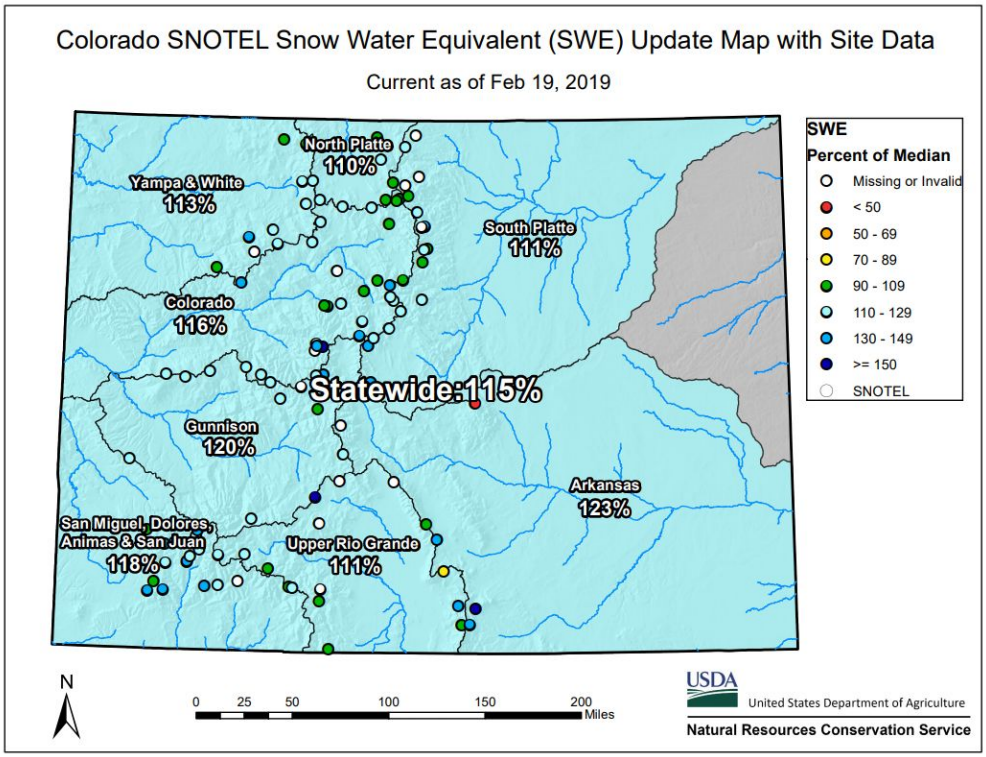
In response to persistent and prolonged drought conditions throughout the southern half of the state and along the western border, ***the Colorado Drought Mitigation and Response Plan was activated for the agricultural sector on May 2, 2018****, additional counties in northwest Colorado were added in September and activation remains in effect; information can be found HERE.*

Calendar year 2019 has brought with it beneficial moisture that has nearly eliminated all exceptional drought conditions in Colorado and increased snowpack to above normal conditions. As a result, streamflow forecasts have increased in some areas and water providers looking ahead to the 2019 demand season are cautiously optimistic given current conditions. However, much of the snow accumulation season remains and reservoir storage and soil moisture will take time to rebound to pre-drought levels.

- As of February 19th, exceptional drought, D4, has been almost entirely removed from the state. Only a small sliver remains in Archuleta county, covering about a tenth of a percent of the state. Extreme drought, D3, has also decreased and now covers 10 percent of the state; severe drought 29 percent and 27 percent is classified as moderate drought. An additional quarter of the state is currently experiencing abnormally dry conditions (see image below).
- El Niño conditions are now present, and may continue through spring (55 percent chance). This is a weak event and given the timing it is unclear the impact that it will have.
- SNOTEL snow water equivalent statewide is 115 percent of average with all basins above average. The highest snowpack is in the Arkansas basin at 123 percent of median, while the lowest is the Rio Grande at 111 percent of median (see image below).
- Reservoir storage, statewide is at 83 percent of normal, with the South Platte, Colorado, and Yampa-White, all above 90 percent of average as of February 1st. Storage in the Arkansas and Upper Rio Grande basins are at 89 and 79 percent of normal, respectively. The Southwest basins of the San Miguel, Dolores, Animas & San Juan, and Gunnison remain the lowest in the state at 57 and 61 percent of normal, respectively.
- Individual reservoir storage levels are highly variable statewide, some reservoirs have strong storage while storage in other reservoirs remain at low levels for this time of year. Historically, reservoirs take a long time to refill following a drought event.
- March through May is an important period for annual average precipitation in Colorado, many regions receive a large portion of total precipitation during these spring months.
- Outlooks for the spring season do not show a clear direction. There is a slightly increased chance of above-normal precipitation for the spring across Colorado, and equal chances of above, below, and near-normal temperature.

NOTE: A Joint Water Availability & Flood Task Force Meeting will be held on March 19, 2019 at Colorado Parks and Wildlife; Additional information can be found at www.cwcb.state.co.us or by contacting Ben Wade at Ben.Wade@state.co.us

February 2019 Drought Update

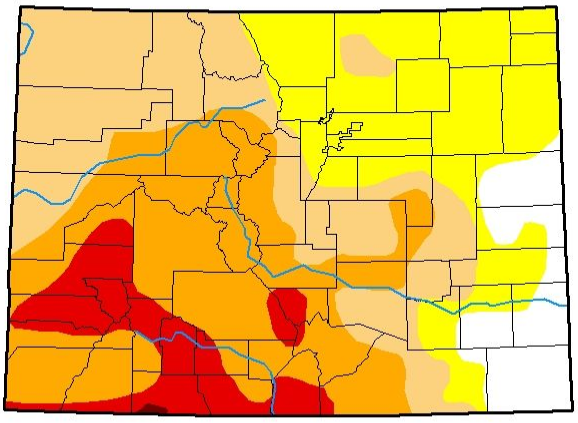


Recent storms have increased snowpack levels to above normal conditions. Statewide snow accumulation totals to-date for WY2019 already exceed total accumulation seen in all of WY2018.

Storm tracks continue to bring much needed moisture into southwestern Colorado, which has seen improvements in drought conditions over the last few weeks. Northeastern Colorado is being monitored closely, however, this time of year is not typically wet in this corner of the state and one or two good storms could alleviate dry conditions.

U.S. Drought Monitor

Colorado



February 19, 2019

(Released Thursday, Feb. 21, 2019)

Valid 7 a.m. EST

Drought Conditions (Percent Area)

	None	D0-D4	D1-D4	D2-D4	D3-D4	D4
Current	8.15	91.85	67.16	39.69	10.21	0.11
Last Week 02-12-2019	8.15	91.85	67.16	39.69	21.84	0.11
3 Months Ago 11-20-2018	17.10	82.90	66.26	54.82	34.13	13.35
Start of Calendar Year 01-01-2019	17.94	82.06	66.26	54.91	27.11	11.22
Start of Water Year 09-25-2018	14.19	85.81	72.30	64.41	48.47	16.21
One Year Ago 02-20-2018	8.59	91.41	71.18	33.51	7.62	0.00

Intensity:

- D0 Abnormally Dry
- D1 Moderate Drought
- D2 Severe Drought
- D3 Extreme Drought
- D4 Exceptional Drought

The Drought Monitor focuses on broad-scale conditions. Local conditions may vary. See accompanying text summary for forecast statements.

Author:
Brad Rippey
U.S. Department of Agriculture

http://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/