COLORADO
Department of Natural Resources

May 2021 Drought Update

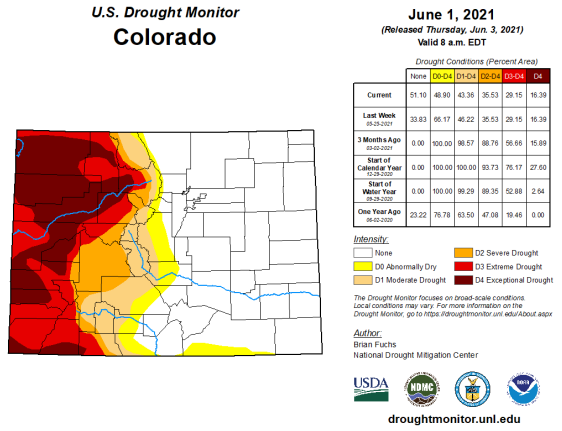
The U.S. Drought Monitor from June 1st reveals significant drought relief for nearly all counties east of the continental divide. In the "Class Change" map below, eastern Colorado has registered from 1 to 4 class improvements within the last eight weeks, while western Colorado has seen little to no drought relief. The June 1st monitor records 51% of the state free from active drought conditions, while 16% remains in exceptional (D4) conditions; 13% in extreme (D3); 6% in severe (D2) drought; 8% in moderate (D1); and 6% in abnormally dry (D0) areas.

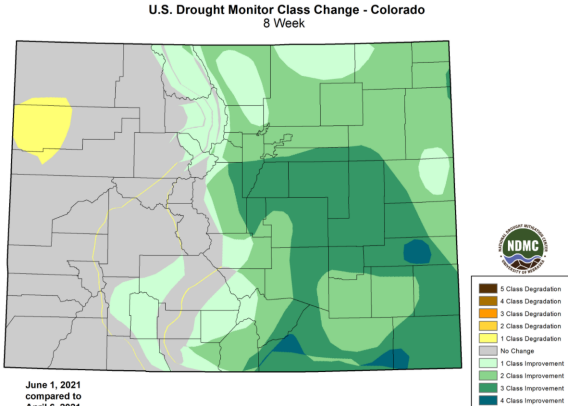
The 90-day Standardized Precipitation Index (SPI) values from Feb 28th to May 29th highlight the extreme east-west contrast of spring precipitation. Throughout May, the front range and northeast Colorado continued to experience above average precipitation while west of the divide continued drier than normal. The 12-month SPI map reveals the intensity of drought over the last year in northwestern Colorado and west of the divide as a whole.

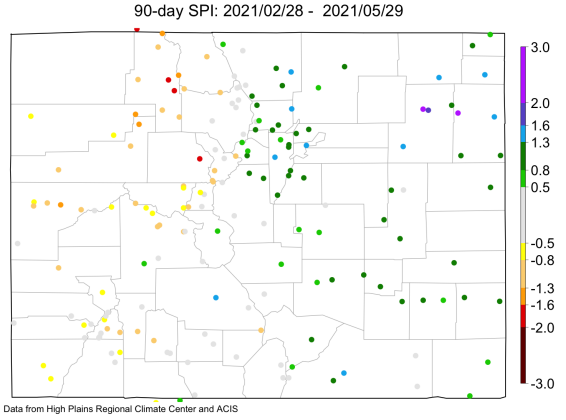
The NOAA Climate Prediction Center three month outlook indicates increased chances of above normal temperatures and below normal precipitation in the upcoming months. These forecasts are consistent with long-term temperature trends, while the monsoon season remains uncertain. The recent La Niña pattern ended and ENSO neutral conditions are likely throughout the summer months. There is a higher chance of re-entering La Niña in the fall than entering El Niño - these "double dip" La Niña patterns do not typically bode well for drought relief.

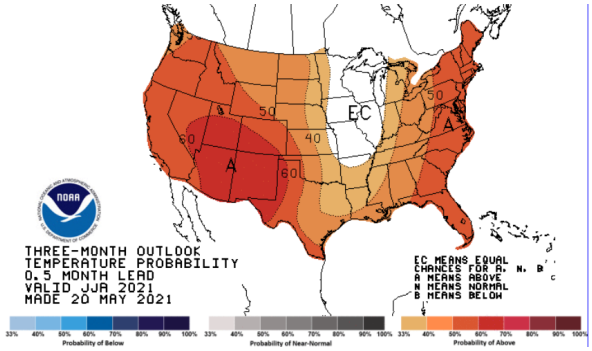
At the end of May, statewide snowpack fell to 69% of normal. However, with averages ranging from just 31% in the San Juans to 121% in the South Platte, statewide averages do not represent a full picture of conditions this spring. Statewide reservoir storage sat at 85% of average and 49% of total capacity as of May 25th. Last year at this time reservoirs sat at 104% of average. Most of the state has observed earlier than normal snowmelt. Below average April precipitation did lead to decreases in May streamflow forecasts, and extremely dry soils from the past year's drought have led to substantially lower streamflow forecasts than would commonly be expected with a similar snowpack.

Water providers across the front range report slightly below average storage levels and near normal demands. Drought management planning and potential restrictions are being discussed through multiple coordination groups. Stakeholders can follow along with state drought response actions and activities through public engagement pages for the Municipal Water Task Force and Agricultural Impact Task Force.









Next Water Availability Task Force Meeting:
JUNE 24, 2021 9:30 AM
Co-Chairs: Megan Holcomb, CWCB & Tracy Kosloff, DWR
Additional info at cwcb.colorado.gov/drought