



COLORADO

Department of
Natural Resources

January 2021 Drought Update

Current drought conditions for Colorado can be summed up as “status quo” since October 2020 with a warm and dry pattern projected to hold for the remainder of winter and favored into spring and summer. January 2020 through December 2020 marked the 8th warmest year and 2nd driest calendar year on record trailing 2002. Since October 13th, persistent drought conditions have covered 100% of the state (15 weeks running).

Snowpack is currently under 75% of normal for much of the western slope and likely to peak well below normal. On top of extreme soil moisture deficits accumulating since fall 2019, forecasts confirm all basins should be prepared for a low runoff year. It is strongly recommended that water providers, local governments, agricultural producers, and water- and open space-based businesses proactively plan for the continuance of drought through 2021. 2020’s record drought and wildfire seasons already resulted in direct ecological and economic impacts on agricultural viability and watershed health. Without above average precipitation for the remaining winter months, hydrologic impacts will be more pronounced this year than in 2020.

State drought response remains in [Phase 3 activation](#) with agricultural and municipal water provider task forces convened to review mitigation and response opportunities across agencies and industries. These coordination groups, outlined in the Colorado Drought Plan, aim to support drought-impacted communities by helping to elevate active problems and adaptation recommendations. Learn more at cwc.colorado.gov/drought.

The January 19 [U.S. Drought Monitor](#) recorded exceptional (D4) drought conditions across 28% of the state, primarily on the western slope and around Douglas and Kiowa counties. Extreme (D3) drought extends to all four corners, reaching 62 of Colorado’s 64 counties. Severe (D2) drought covers only 17% while moderate (D1) drought holds in 9% of the state.

The 90-day [Standardized Precipitation Index](#) (SPI) values from Oct 19 to Jan 16 highlight dry conditions on both sides of the divide with the Rio Grande and upper Arkansas basins fairs slightly better from December snowfall. The 12-month SPI map provides a clear picture of 2020 deficits.

The NOAA Climate Prediction Center [three month outlook](#) maps indicate increased chances for above average temperatures into February, March, and April with below average precipitation probabilities. While La Niña conditions remain, we are not experiencing typical La Niña patterns across the country.

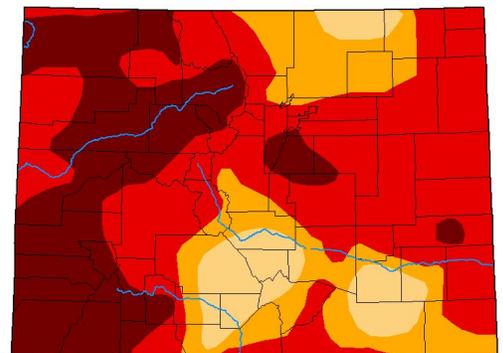
Statewide [reservoir storage](#) is currently at 82% of average. Now halfway through the usual snowpack accumulation season, [statewide snowpack](#) is 73% of normal.

Water providers are reporting elevated water supply concerns for 2021, slightly below average storage levels, and near normal winter demands. Over 120 providers completed a needs survey to inform continued drought coordination statewide and near-term [Municipal Water Task Force](#) efforts.

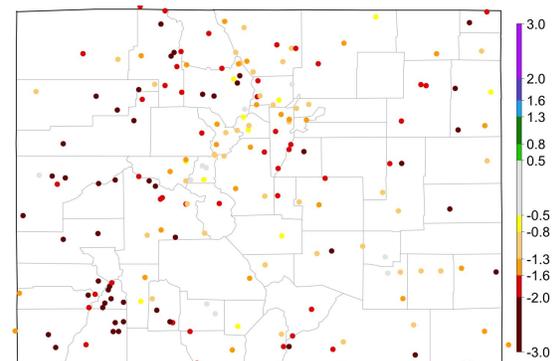
Next Water Availability Task Force Webinar:

FEBRUARY 16, 2021 9:30a - 11:30a

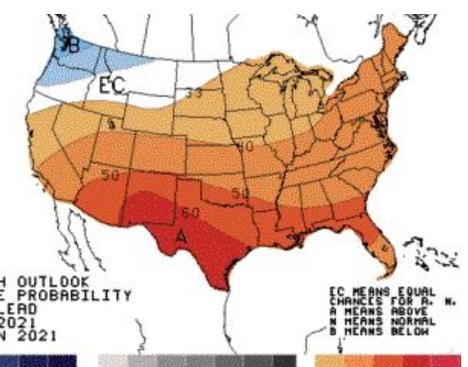
Co-Chairs: Megan Holcomb, CWCB & Tracy Kosloff, DWR



12-month SPI: 2020/01/17 - 2021/01/16



Data from High Plains Regional Climate Center and ACIS



THREE-MONTH OUTLOOK
TEMPERATURE PROBABILITY
0-5 MONTH LEAD
VALID FMR 2021
MADE 21 JAN 2021

EC MEANS EQUAL
CHANCES FOR A.
A MEANS ABOVE
N MEANS NORMAL
B MEANS BELOW

Questions? Contact ben.wade@state.co.us

Additional info at cwb.colorado.gov/drought