



# COLORADO

## Department of Natural Resources

# March 2021 Drought Update

A cold February came to a close as the first below average temperature month since October 2019 and the 25th coldest month on record in 127 years. The eastern side of the continental divide benefited more than the rest of Colorado from recent March snowstorms. The last 11 months (Apr 2020 to Feb 2021) are the driest on record for Colorado as a whole (when compared to the same 11 months for the period of record). The dryness will reduce springtime runoff, especially in western Colorado. While a warm and dry pattern has continued this winter, conditions are not as severe as they were in the fall with localized drought monitor improvements due to recent precipitation.

The [U.S. Drought Monitor](#) from March 23rd recorded recent improvements. Notably, a 2-category change in a one week period was observed in north and central areas of eastern Colorado between March 9-16th. The last 2-category improvement was recorded during the September 2013 floods. Exceptional (D4) drought currently covers 15% of the state; extreme (D3) drought covers 17%; severe (D2) drought covers 30%; moderate (D1) drought covers 30%; and recent precipitation created patches of abnormally dry (D0) areas in 7% of the state.

The 90-day [Standardized Precipitation Index](#) (SPI) values from Dec. 14 to Mar. 15 highlight continued dry conditions on the western slope. Eastern Colorado's SPI data points reflect areas of above average precipitation after January and March snowstorms. The [12-month SPI map](#) depicts the long-term drought conditions due to precipitation deficits of 2020 across the state.

The NOAA Climate Prediction Center [three month outlook](#) indicates the current La Niña pattern may weaken by the spring and revert to neutral conditions in the summer. Above normal temperatures and below average precipitation are anticipated in the upcoming months. In contrast, March was expected to bring below average precipitation, which was not the case.

As of March 17th, [statewide snowpack](#) is 83% of normal. Statewide [reservoir storage](#) is currently at 85% of average. Extreme soil moisture deficits and below normal precipitation means all basins should prepare for a low runoff year. The continuance of drought is expected through 2021 and the State Drought Plan remains in [Phase 3 activation](#).

Water providers across the state report average to slightly below average storage levels and near normal winter 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 Meeting: Water Availability Task Force Webinar

**APRIL 20, 2021 9:30a - 11:30a**

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

Questions? Contact [ben.wade@state.co.us](mailto:ben.wade@state.co.us)

Additional info at [cwcb.colorado.gov/drought](http://cwcb.colorado.gov/drought)

