

STATE OF UTAH GENERAL OUTLOOK

Feb 1, 2003

SUMMARY

January 2003 will be a month that water users will want to forget. The month had record setting warm days with very little snowpack accumulation. In fact, many low elevation stations lost snow or completely melted out. Melt out in January! There were temperatures in the mid 50's at the 11,000 foot elevation in the Uintahs – an unbelievably warm month. A water year that had started out with high hopes for a reversal of the continuing drought, one that initially had near average snowpacks has gone in one short month, to a status that will require maximum observed historical snowpack accumulation in order to just get back to normal! The Bear, Weber, Provo, and the Uintahs all have 3% or less chance of getting enough snow accumulation over the next 2 months to get back to normal by April 1. Southeast Utah, the Sevier and southwest Utah each have a 6%, 13% and 22% probability of reaching average by April 1. These are exceptionally poor odds, especially in northern Utah. Given average snowpack accumulations, most areas will end up in the 60% to 75% of average range, which is a little better than current conditions. Snowpacks across the state are fairly consistent at 50% to 60% of average, except for southwest Utah which has only 39% of normal. The current water supply outlook is a continuation of the past four years – much below average. Soil moisture condition remains in relatively good shape over most of the state that is currently monitored. This should improve snowmelt runoff efficiency over what we have seen the past few years, where much of the snowpack has been lost to soil moisture replacement. Reservoir storage in 41 major reservoirs across the state is at 47% of capacity, down 656,000 acre feet from last year, out of a total capacity of 5, 470,000, or about 12 %. The amount of water represented by 650,000 acre feet is a little more than 2 completely full Jordanelle reservoirs, a substantial deficit of reservoir storage. Some larger reservoirs, such as Bear Lake and Utah Lake would take several years of at least average runoff to fill to capacity. Streamflow continues to be much below average over most of the state, and won't improve significantly until snowmelt season. Thus there will be little reservoir recharge over the winter months.

SNOWPACK

February first snowpacks as measured by the NRCS SNOTEL system are near 55% to 60% of average in northern Utah. Southeast Utah has the highest snowpack at 62% of average and southwest Utah has the lowest at 39% of average. Northern Utah has very little chance of accumulating enough snowpack over the next two months to get back to average conditions by April 1. On the Weber and over the Uintah Mountains, it would take a new record maximum snowpack accumulation. The Bear and the Provo watersheds are not far behind and would need the maximum February-March accumulation to reach average by April 1. Another drought year appears to be at the door.

PRECIPITATION

Mountain precipitation during January was much below normal (30%-40%) in the north and much below normal (15%-30%) in southern Utah. This brings the seasonal accumulation (Oct-Jan) to 66% of average statewide.

RESERVOIRS

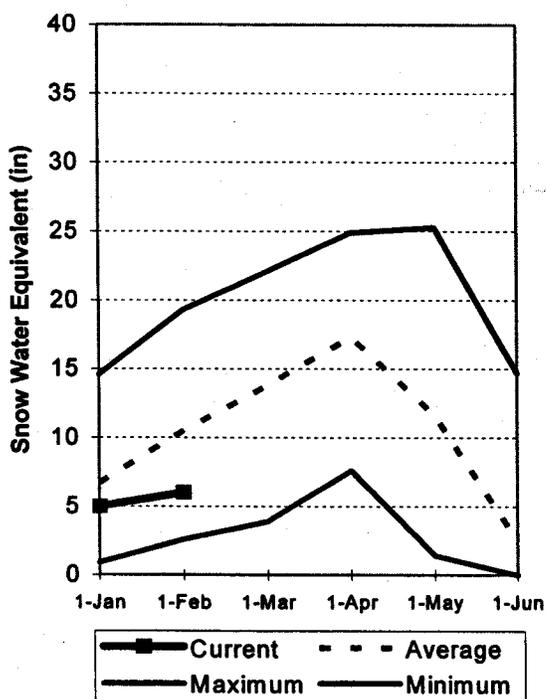
Storage in 41 of Utah's key irrigation reservoirs is at 47% of capacity. This is down substantially from last year indicating heavy use of reservoir storage to make up the streamflow deficit. Most reservoir operators are utilizing a conservative strategy, storing as much water as possible.

STREAMFLOW

Snowmelt streamflows are expected to be much below average across the entire state of Utah this year. Low snowpacks tend to melt earlier and produce proportionately less runoff. Streams may peak early, have significantly less volume and have short recessions back to base flow. Overall water supply conditions are below normal.

Mountain Snowpack

2/1/2003



Precipitation

2/1/2003

