

THE SACRAMENTO BEE

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Sierra snowpack's water is no drought-buster this year

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California's crucial mountain snowpack stands at 81 percent of average after a monthly snow survey conducted today. That's essentially unchanged from the March survey and a long way from breaking the state's three-year drought.

The snow survey measures water content of the snowpack, mostly in the Sierra Nevada, the natural water bank for most of the state's farms and cities.

"A below-average snowpack at this time of year, especially following two consecutive dry years, is a cause for concern," Lester Snow, director of the state Department of Water Resources, said in a statement. "Californians must continue to save water at home and in their businesses."

March was relatively wet across the state, enabling DWR to increase its water delivery forecast from 15 percent to 20 percent of normal. Federal officials, who also rely on the snow survey, increased their forecast in some areas as well. But federal water users south of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta continue to face the prospect of zero water deliveries this summer.

Winter is effectively over, and it was dry overall. The state needed an extra-wet winter to overcome two preceding dry years. That's because reservoirs are depleted and soil conditions are very dry. Lake Oroville, the largest reservoir in the State Water Project system, stands at 72 percent of average capacity. Lake Shasta, the largest federal reservoir, is at 77 percent of average.

Officials later this month will make a runoff forecast based on the snow survey, which will determine whether they can again increase the water delivery forecast.

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