

## Sierra Nevada snowpack levels are greater than a year ago

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### LOCAL CALIFORNIA



Mel Turner tows his grandsons, Myles, 5, and Dylon Mike, 6, to a sledding run at the Adventure Mountain snow park near Echo Summit, Calif. (Rich Pedroncelli, Associated Press)

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'This year's survey shows a deeper snowpack than last year,' but we're far from an end to the Calif. drought  
Snowpack accounts for about a third of California's water supply when it melts and replenishes reservoirs

Measurements of Sierra Nevada snowpack on Tuesday showed more snow than surveyors recorded a year ago. But state water officials said it was far from enough to signal a potential end to California's continuing drought.

"Although this year's survey shows a deeper snowpack than last year, California needs much more rain and snow than we've experienced over the past two years to end the drought," Department of Water Resources Director Mark Cowin said.

Snowpack accounts for about a third of the state's water supply when it melts in the late spring and summer and replenishes reservoirs. Another year of reduced snowpack levels leaves water officials worried that agricultural areas could face another difficult, dry year in 2015.



At Phillips Station snow course, about 90 miles east of Sacramento, surveys on Tuesday found about 21.3 inches of snow. If melted, the amount of snow in that area would contain about 4 inches of water, the Department of Water Resources said.

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Last year, only 9.3 inches of snow covered the ground, or about 2.3 inches of water, according to state data. On average, though, Jan. 1 snowpack water content there is about triple Tuesday's reading.

The snowpack is constantly monitored by electronic sensors at about 100 points across the Sierra. Manual checks like Tuesday's will be conducted once a month through the beginning of May to supplement and verify the electronic readings, DWR officials said.

Tuesday's manual readings of about 33% of average were less than electronic readings had generated. Electronic readings estimated that snowpack statewide was as much as 50% of normal.

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"It came in looking even more dismal," Doug Carlson, a state Department of Water Resources spokesman, said of the manual measurement. "The snow isn't as wet as we'd like; there's not enough of the snow to give us confidence that we're having an exceptionally wet year."

The 2014 water year, which ended in September, was one of the warmest and driest on record. Much of California's snow melted before it could accumulate into a healthy snowpack, Carlson said. In each of the last three years, snowpack was essentially depleted by early May, according to state data.

"It's early in the season with plenty of time for the snowpack to build," DWR said in a statement. "The concern, however, is that ... farms and some other areas will be hard hit if Water Year 2015 ends as the fourth full year of drought."

A sizable snowpack will be necessary to keep reservoirs filled when temperatures rise and rain becomes scarce. Recent storms, though, have brought some hope for relief, dumping unusually large amounts of rain on California.

The water resources department measures precipitation at eight stations in the Northern Sierra, and had recorded 22.8 inches of rain as of Tuesday morning — or 131% of normal for the date. Water experts have said the state would need about 75 inches of rain at the eight stations by Sept. 30, 2015, to end the drought.

Water officials said they would have a better idea of whether the drought could end by the end of February — halfway through the winter rain season.

"Seeing rain and snow isn't necessarily believing that we're out of the drought," Carlson said. "The drought continues until our measurements and our eyeballs tell us that we're out."

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