

California's snowless winter worsening; Oregon also in trouble

By Carolyn
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Photo: Scott Sonner / Associated Press

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The dismal snow pack in the Sierra visible southwest of Reno, Nev., on Wednesday, Feb. 18, 2015, has forecasters predicting a fourth consecutive year of drought and prompted Nevada Department of Wildlife officials to release thousands of hatchery trout into the Truckee River in Reno a month earlier than usual as highs approached 70 degrees. (AP Photo/Scott Sonner)

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Co-owner John Vars waters plants in a green house at Fifth Crow Farm Jan. 15, 2015 in Pescadero, Calif. The farm

uses water from Butano Creek to irrigate. Last year the creek got so low that they had to pump at night and store the water in massive tanks to use in the daytime in order to keep their normal production levels.

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WASHINGTON — California’s unusually high temperatures and shortage of precipitation — especially snow — will probably continue into the spring, federal scientists said Thursday.

And it isn’t just California that is experiencing growing problems, the scientists said: An unusually warm winter in Oregon is creating alarm there about the lack of snowpack to fill reservoirs.

The California drought, now in its fourth year, is “likely to persist or even intensify over a large portion of the Far West,” said [Anthony Artusa](#), seasonal forecaster for the [Climate Prediction Center](#) at the [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration](#).

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The “ridiculously resilient ridge” of high pressure off California that has been blocking winter storms for three years is reinforcing California’s record-high temperatures, including “very warm sea surface temperatures off the coast of California,” added [Jake Crouch](#), a climate scientist at NOAA’s [National Climatic Data Center](#).

Crouch said it was “unprecedented that two of California’s winters are back-to-back this warm.” San Francisco saw its driest January on record, with no precipitation in what is historically its wettest month, and temperatures in January hit record warm levels for the second consecutive year.

The entire West has been exceptionally warm from Alaska to California and inland to the Continental Divide, Crouch said. The central Rockies have been warm through much of the winter, leading to expectations of a worsening drought in the Western states. The scientists said Hawaii is also now in drought.

The unusually high winter temperatures are part of what the scientists said will be the second-warmest winter ever worldwide, despite frigid temperatures in the Eastern United States.

The strange juxtaposition of a freezing East Coast and a hot West Coast has produced more snow in Boston at sea level than Oregon’s Crater Lake received at 6,400 feet elevation, the scientists said.

“Southern Oregon has been in bad shape for two years, but then it spread to eastern Oregon and now we’re looking at the whole state,” said [Kathie Dello](#), deputy director of the [Oregon Climate Service](#) at [Oregon State University](#).

Like much of Northern and Central California, Oregon has had fairly normal precipitation this winter, but almost no snowfall in the mountains.

And like California, Oregon’s reservoirs rely heavily on snowpack to recharge during the spring.

“Precipitation is close to normal, so it doesn’t look like a drought” in Oregon, Dello said. “But we need the precipitation in winter, we need it to be snow in the mountains and we need it to melt out.”



What's causing the problem, she said, is high temperatures.

The latest data show record warmth in Seattle, Portland, Medford and Klamath Falls. "We have our daffodils blooming already, people have to mow their lawns, and a lot of people know that this is certainly a strange situation," Dello said.

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