

# Central Valley Business Times

It's official: Record low snowpack in Sierra Nevada

WASHINGTON, D.C.

March 11, 2015 8:14am

- Also record low in Cascades
- "The lowest snowpack ever measured"



Warm temperatures in February contributed to further snowpack decline in the Sierra Nevada, according to data from the third 2015 forecast by the United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service released Wednesday.

The Cascade mountain range also has a record low snowpack and snow depths in Nevada, Utah and Idaho also are behind normal, the report says.

"Nearly a third of our SnoTel sites in the Cascades and Sierra Nevada are reporting the lowest snowpack ever measured," says NRCS Hydrologist Cara McCarthy. "For the first time, some sites were snow-free on March 1. These areas can expect reduced summer streamflow."

Recent storms helped relieve dry conditions in the Southwest. However, drought conditions persist in California, Nevada and Utah, as well as in parts of Arizona, New Mexico, and Colorado. Areas in Washington and Oregon also remain in drought.

In Western states where snowmelt accounts for the majority of seasonal water supply, information about snowpack serves as an indicator of future water availability. Streamflow in the West consists largely of accumulated mountain snow that melts and flows into streams as temperatures warm in spring and summer. NWCC scientists analyze the snowpack, air temperature, soil moisture and other measurements taken from remote sites to develop the water supply forecasts.

The Cascades of Oregon and Washington have received near normal levels of precipitation this water year, but it's mostly fallen as rain instead of snow. Rainfall captured by reservoirs in those states will help mitigate dry spring and summer months.