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Today's news

## Regional snowpack below average

Measurements show state above average



Water peeks through the ice and snow on the Yampa River, near Loudy-Simpson Park, on Monday afternoon. Heavy early winter snowfalls have created at or above average snowpack percentages across the state. However, the Yampa/White basin is below the average snowpack percentage, at 85 percent of average. [Enlarge photo](#) — Photo by Jerry Raehal

By **Bridget Manley**

January 8, 2008

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### By the numbers

Percentage of average snowpack accumulated in state river basins:

- Arkansas: 141
- Rio Grande: 137
- San Juan, Animas, Dolores: 129
- Gunnison: 117
- Colorado: 105
- South Platte: 93
- North Platte: 90
- Yampa/White: 85
- Statewide: 110

Source: Natural Resources Conservation Service

CRAIG — Almost average.

That's the status of Northwest Colorado snowfall accumulation, according to the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Recent measurements taken throughout Colorado indicate that the state's average snowpack is tracking above average, the NRCS reported in a press release.

The bad news?

Northwest Colorado doesn't follow that trend.

Measurements taken Jan. 1 show the Yampa and White river basins didn't benefit from December snowstorms as much as the state's southern regions, leaving the local area with below-average snowpack.

The situation may change. Future snowstorms could turn the tables, one NRCS official said.

"An average of 92 reporting sites across the Colorado mountains indicated that the state's snowpack was 110 percent of average and was 113 percent of last year's reading" on Jan. 1, the conservation

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### QUESTION OF THE WEEK

Given the controversy of the Colorado Constitution, and how critics argue that it has placed unintended limits on government funding, what is the best course of action?

- Rewrite the constitution. Look at what the spirit of the law intended and rewrite it to meet that, avoiding all the loopholes the letter of the law creates.
- Rewrite the constitution. Start it from scratch.
- No changes are necessary. Voters have exactly what they intended.
- Small changes to clarify some of the loopholes.

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service reported.

These results were influenced by early December storms that increased snowpack readings from “near-record lows to near-record highs,” according to the press release.

These storms missed the northern mountains, leaving the Yampa and White river basins with 85 percent of their average snowpack — the lowest in the state.

That percentage could affect the region later this year.

“With as much as 80 percent of the state’s surface water originating from the melting snowpack, it’s critical that the state receive adequate winter snowfall,” the NRCS reported.

Based on current measurements, the Yampa and White river basins are “predicted to have a little less spring and summer runoff,” said Chris Pacheco, NRCS assistant snow survey supervisor.

Still, the region has surpassed last year’s snowfall and its snowpack has increased since Jan. 1.

Northwest Colorado has achieved 118 percent of last year’s snowpack, Pacheco said.

Six days after its initial study, the conservation service found the Yampa and White river basins had accumulated 95 percent of their average snowpack — a situation that, “unless something unusual happens,” is unlikely to change soon, Pacheco said.

Northwest Colorado receives 40 percent of its average snowfall by Jan. 1, he said.

“We still have a lot of time to make up any deficiencies,” Pacheco added. “I still think it’s a little early to think of things in terms of drought.”

Catching up will depend heavily on this month’s snowfall, University of Colorado climatologist Klaus Wolter said.

His three-month forecast indicates that Northwest Colorado could remain dry throughout the spring — and the rest of the year.

“I hope I’m wrong,” Wolter said.

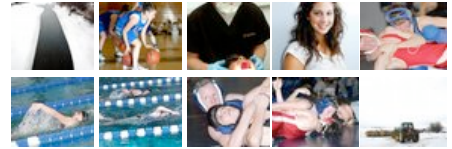
Still, there’s a chance that spring snowstorms could create an average or above-average snowpack, he said.

Recent snowstorms have improved the region’s forecast.

“Consider yourself lucky in getting that much snow,” Wolter said, referring to December snowstorms in Northwest Colorado.

“We’ve really come a long way compared to” fall 2007, he added.

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