



WESTERN WATER ASSESSMENT

A NOAA RISA TEAM

June 2026 Newsletter

In this newsletter...

- June 17 WWA Webinar
- New Report: 2025-26 Extreme Snow Drought
- New Research and Tool: Western Drought Perspectives
- Impact Video with Cortez, Colorado
- Featured News Articles

WWA Webinar

On **June 17**, WWA is hosting a **webinar** to provide an overview of our new 2025-2026 extreme snow drought rapid assessment, followed by an overview of the Western Drought Perspective Tool and the research supporting it. In this webinar, Seth Arens will begin with a discussion of the magnitude of extreme low snow-water equivalent (SWE) conditions in early 2026, the snow drought's historical context, likely causes of the snow drought, and early impacts from record-low regional SWE. Nels Bjarke will follow with an overview of the Western Drought Perspective Tool and present the supporting research that reveals how drying trends in the West change our perspectives on drought.

[Register here](#)

Research and Products

2025-2026 Extreme Snow Drought in the Intermountain West

We are excited to share our latest rapid assessment, focused on the ongoing snow drought across the Intermountain West.

The report provides information about the magnitude of extreme low snow-water equivalent (SWE) conditions in early 2026, the snow drought's historical context, likely causes of the snow drought, and early impacts from record-low regional SWE.

Key Findings:

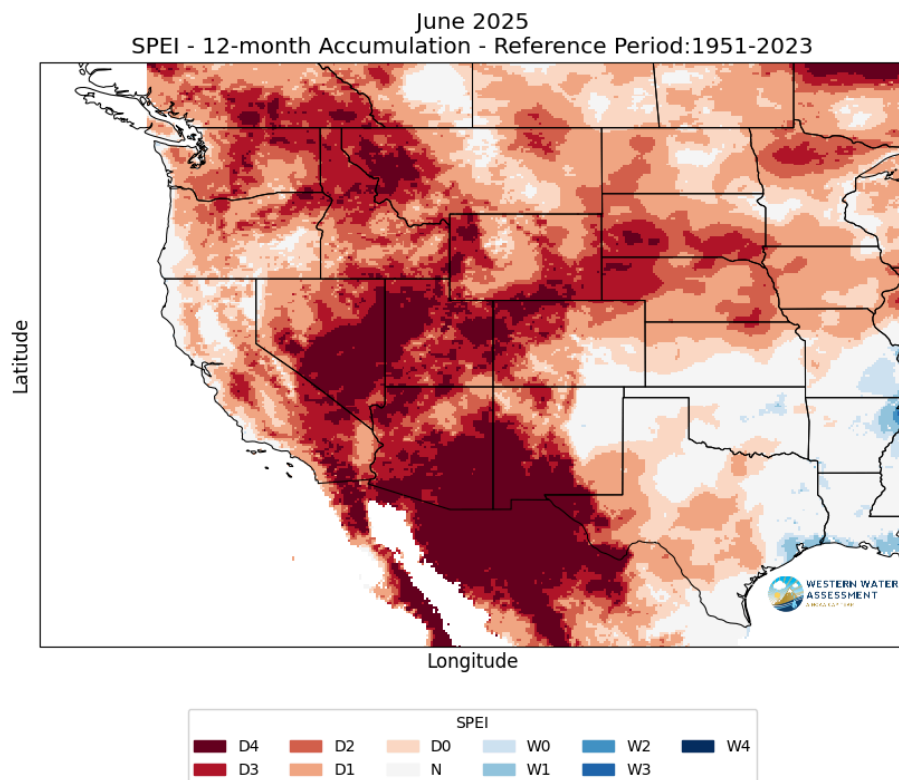
- The 2026 water year was the worst winter on record for snow accumulation with record low (since 1980) April 1 SWE in Colorado (22% of average), Utah (19% of average), Wyoming (50% of average) and UCRB (23% of average).
- Record warm October-March temperatures caused frequent rain events below 8,000 feet and record warm March temperatures caused snowpack to peak one month early and rapidly melt.
- Statewide water year precipitation was below average in Colorado (74% of median) and Utah (88%) but near average in Wyoming (96%).
- Manual snow collection data available since 1931 reveals 2026 as the year of lowest April 1 SWE but 1934 and 1977 also experienced significant snow drought.
- Streamflow volume forecasts for May 1 range from 10-60% of average in the UCRB and Utah portion of the Great Basin, with record low streamflow volumes forecasted for the Colorado and Yampa Rivers.
- Relatively cooler April temperatures and additional snowfall slowed snowmelt during April and an early May storm brought regional SWE conditions out of record low conditions.
- Early impacts of snow drought include emergency actions by the Bureau of Reclamation to keep Lake Powell from declining to critically low storage, activation of drought plans in by Denver Water and Salt Lake City, reductions to irrigation season length in Utah, an order to stop diversions by junior water rights holders on the North Platte River, and reduced revenue for ski areas due to lower visitation.

[Learn more](#)



Very low snowpack near Chasm Lake in Rocky Mountain National Park in mid-February 2026. Photo credit: Nels Bjarke.

Western Drought Perspective Tool



Drought is a unique hazard, as the answer to the question of "How dry are current conditions?" is relative, often quantified comparatively to a record of historical observations. As the Western U.S. has experienced drying trends in the past several decades, research by the Western Water Assessment team reveals how the methodology used in the relative estimation of drought severity influences the answer to the question of "how dry". From this research, another question arises: "What is a drought in a drier west?" The **Western Drought Perspective Tool** provides a platform for users to explore how perspectives on drought severity and extent are sensitive to the choice of data used for the reference period. From this, users can identify where the decision of reference period should be critically examined and is likely to impact how we respond to drought events in the future.

[Go to tool](#)

Huge thanks to all of our partners and collaborators who have already contributed written stories and participated in video interviews about WWA's impact. We are excited to share our most recent impact video, which highlights our collaboration with Cortez, Colorado.



Western Water Assessment's impact in Cortez, Colorado



Go to the [WWA Impacts](#) page to see more videos and written testimonials on WWA's impact in the region!

[Impacts page](#)

Would you like to provide a testimonial for WWA so we can show the impact of our program to our funders?

[Email us here](#)

WWA Features



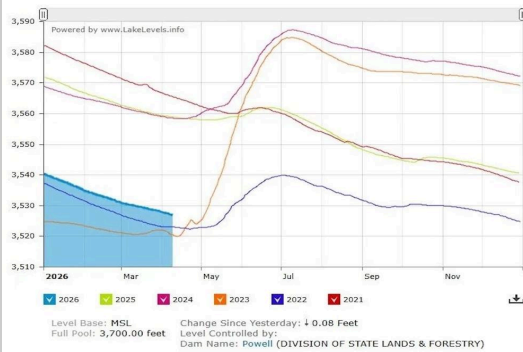
Severe Colorado River drought leads to water releases from Upper



Colorado wildfires threaten to devastate the state's long-term

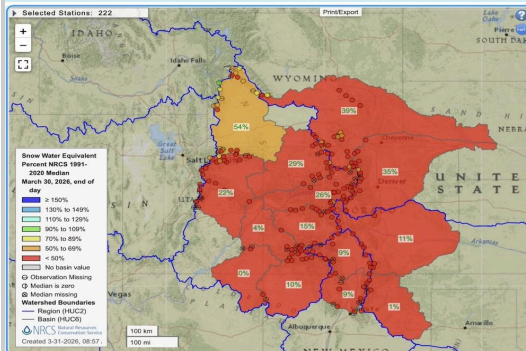
Basin reservoirs and reduced flows from Lake Powell

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Warmest winter's impact on Colorado River deepens, Lake Powell concerns grow

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Winter never came to Colorado. What does it mean for water supplies?

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water supply and reservoir storage

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Heat Wipes Out Western Snowpack, Raising Fears of Drought, Wildfire

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Colorado's early snowmelt is a preview of a hotter future

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Background photo by [Ethan Knight](#)

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