



WESTERN RESOURCE
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Snow May Fall Today...But the Sky Will Not ***Water Policy Expert Says 2012 Drought Concerns May Be Overblown***

BOULDER (Feb. 2, 1012) – In recent weeks proponents of large infrastructure projects have exaggerated the consequences of low snowpack levels to justify elaborate, and unnecessary, water storage plans, but it's too early to suggest that Colorado is in danger of facing a significant drought in 2012.

“Conservation groups are often inaccurately accused of having a ‘sky is falling’ mentality when it comes to environmental issues, so it’s interesting to be on the other side of the argument now,” says Drew Beckwith, Water Policy Manager for Western Resource Advocates in Boulder. “Climate change and water availability are long-term problems that we must continually address, but it’s too early to ring alarms over drought conditions in 2012.”

Most recently, the *Ft. Collins Coloradoan* (2/1/12) discussed conditions in Colorado with an ominous tone, citing: “a tepid snowpack,” and “abnormally dry or drought conditions.” While current precipitation totals may be slightly low compared to previous years, the majority of Colorado’s snowpack is built up in late winter and early spring. On Jan. 23, Denver Water’s ‘Water Watch Report’ charted cumulative precipitation totals for the South Platte River Watershed (84% of average) and the Colorado River Watershed (78% of average). Those percentages may seem troubling at first glance, but they are magnified because the comparison is between very small numbers. For example, the Colorado River Watershed had a cumulative precipitation level of 7.4 inches on Jan. 23. To be at 100% of average, total cumulative precipitation would only need to reach 9.5 inches – an increase of just 2.1 inches. **Colorado could exceed those levels with one big snowstorm.**

Because Colorado receives most of its annual snowfall in February, March and April, Beckwith says that we shouldn’t overreact to current precipitation levels. **“Water managers don’t make major water decisions based on snowpack levels in early February,” he says. “We can discuss potential drought responses for 2012 if we still have significantly low snowpack levels in mid-March. Remember: There is no such thing as an ‘average’ precipitation year in Colorado because conditions change all the time.”**

In order to ensure adequate water supplies and guard against climate change, Western Resource Advocates has long proposed that, instead of building expensive, large new reservoirs, Colorado water providers rely on flexible water solutions. Some of these include conservation, re-use of existing supplies, smart storage, and sharing with agriculture (such as ag-to-urban water transfers) that don’t trap users into long-term investments which may not fit future conditions. This approach is also important to ensure healthy rivers and ecosystems.

For more information on how Colorado can meet its long-term water needs with existing programs and without building new large storage projects such as the Northern Integrated Supply Project (NISP), check out the WRA Report [*Filling the Gap: Commonsense Solutions for Meeting Front Range Water Needs.*](#)

Western Resource Advocates is a regional nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to protecting the West's land, air, and water. Offices or staff are located in Boulder (CO), Phoenix and Tucson (AZ), Pocatello (ID), Santa Fe (NM), Carson City (NV) and Salt Lake City (UT). Visit www.WesternResourceAdvocates.org.