

Above average streamflows forecast

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The Walker River might have run dry this fall, but with a snowpack more than double this time last year, it won't be long until it is running full again.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service is projecting Walker River streamflows this spring to run between 105 and 112 percent of average.

According to the NRCS Nevada Water Supply Outlook Report published Jan. 1, the early winter outlook for Nevada, including the Walker River, is hopeful.

“Above normal precipitation combined with cold temperatures produced first-rate snow from the valleys to the mountaintops in time for Christmas,” the report summary states. “Now it appears the storm door is opening again for January.”

January historically is the biggest month of winter but has been well below average in recent years.

“A good January could unlock the path to an above average winter, something not seen since 2011 and something desperately needed to begin Nevada's climb out of the drought,” the report states.

As of Jan. 1, snowpack in the Walker River Basin was much above normal at 140 percent of median, compared to 67 percent at the beginning of last January. Precipitation in December was above average at 123 percent, which brings the seasonal accumulation (October to December) to 121 percent of average, according to the NRCS report.

Soil moisture is 32 percent compared to 57 percent last year. Combined reservoir storage is 15 percent of capacity, compared to 7 percent last year, but still leaves plenty of room for storage in the event of flooding. Bridgeport and Topaz reservoirs had fallen to less than 5,000 acre feet in December, but both have begun to fill in recent weeks. As of Feb. 2, Bridgeport Reservoir had 11,070 acre feet of water, slightly more than 25 percent of its capacity of 42,500. Topaz Reservoir held 12,440 acre feet, or a little more than 20 percent of its capacity of 59,439.

Despite a strong storm over the past weekend, the Walker River basin's snowpack had declined to 118 percent of yearly median as of Feb. 2.

Of the seven NRCS Snotel sites in the Walker River basin, Summit Meadow was closest to the yearly average at 111 percent, while the Lobdell lake site was at 163 percent of its yearly median.