

Streamflows forecast near average

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With a snowpack sitting at 100 percent of yearly average on March 1, streamflows for the Walker River Basin are forecast between 94 and 100 percent from March through July.

Those are the projections from the March 1 Nevada Water Supply Outlook Report issued by the Natural Resources Conservation Service. However, despite a wet start to the winter, the 2016 water year is not a drought buster, said federal watermaster Rob Martinez.

“The snowpack did not gain in a dry and very warm February,” Martinez said. “The miracle March storms are needed and are counted on for water supply in the upcoming spring and summer seasons.”

The good news was last weekend’s storms, which brought additional snow in the mountain and some rain in lower elevations, which could help the snowpack at least remain average, or climb back above.

The warm, dry weather for much of February began the snowmelt in some low elevation areas, which helped raise the levels of the basin’s reservoirs.

As of March 1, Bridgeport Reservoir on the East Walker River was 24.4 percent full with about 13,900 acre feet of water, while Topaz Reservoir on the West Walker River was 28.6 percent full with about 17,900 acre feet.

Both of those reservoirs have about twice as much water as they did at this time last year.

The Walker River Irrigation District put its storage water allocations for the year at 13 percent on the West Walker River, and 17.12 percent on the East Walker.

Bert Bryan, WRID general manager, said water users will have the option to decide when is best to call for their storage water.

In the past, Bryan said, users tended to hold off on their storage allocations until they had received their decreed surface water allocations.

“With the drought, they’ve kind of had to change practices,” Bryan said.

While the March streamflow forecasts are favorable compared to the past few years of drought, and disappointing after the good start to the winter, it’s the numbers on April 1 that many water users are awaiting.

The curtailment order on groundwater rights issued by the Nevada State Engineer's Office will be based on April 1 streamflow forecasts.