



## Reno-Tahoe water supplies look healthy thanks to snowpack

By Jeff DeLong • [jdelong@rgj.com](mailto:jdelong@rgj.com) • March 16, 2011

Lake Tahoe could approach its brim by early this summer while all of the other Truckee River reservoirs are expected to fill completely -- Stampede Reservoir for the first time since 2006.

A powerful winter with plentiful mountain snow has the region's water supplies looking healthy in the wake of a string of previously dry years, a situation water suppliers characterized Wednesday as decidedly welcome.

"We're sitting in a wonderful spot, particularly compared to what we've been looking at the last several years," said Chad Blanchard, chief deputy water master.

Despite a dry January, this winter was generally a strong snow producer. On Wednesday, the snowpack at the Lake Tahoe Basin was nearly 150 percent of average for the date, with more snow in the forecast.

The situation follows a string of dry winters beginning in 2007. Last year was an exception of sorts: A series of spring storms boosted snowpack levels late in the season, but the gain was lost over the summer as water levels at Lake Tahoe and other reservoirs dropped.

This winter appears to be providing a needed turnaround.

"With arguably four years consecutively below average, this is exactly the kind of winter we needed to get back in the right direction," said Mark Foree, general manager of the Truckee Meadows Water Authority. The utility, jointly operated by Reno, Sparks and Washoe County, serves about 93,000 homes and businesses across the Truckee Meadows.

"It's looking really good at this point," Foree said.

On Wednesday, Lake Tahoe's water level was at 6,225.27 feet above sea level, more than 2 feet above the natural rim of the lake and the highest it's

been in nearly three years. The lake rose 2 inches overnight Tuesday because of heavy rain and snow.

When completely full, the top 6 feet of water at Tahoe is stored by the Tahoe City dam for use by TMWA and other downstream users, including agriculture.

One foot of water in Tahoe amounts to 120,000 acre-feet, or 39 billion gallons.

Tahoe has risen more than 1.5 feet since its low point Oct. 22, when it lapped at its natural rim. Foree said he expects the lake to rise by at least another 2 feet from spring runoff. Should the spring be wetter than usual, it's possible the lake could rise by another 3 feet, which would put it only 1 foot below maximum capacity, Foree said.

"I think we'll see Tahoe fill to at least 4 of the 6 feet (of possible storage), and that's very good for the water supply," Foree said.

All of the river's other reservoirs -- Boca, Prosser, Donner Lake and Independence Lake -- are expected to fill. Stampede Reservoir should fill for the first time since 2006, Blanchard said.

April 1 is typically considered to be the cutoff date for the formal snow season and the time at which the mountain snowpack peaks before starting to melt. In most locations, the snowpack is already beyond typical readings for early April.

### Regional snowpack

percent of average

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YES, at least she's dressed!

NO, I have some rules!

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- 2011
    - » Truckee River Basin: 133 percent
    - » Lake Tahoe Basin: 149 percent
  - 2010
    - » Truckee River Basin: 89 percent
    - » Lake Tahoe Basin: 93 percent
  - 2009
    - » Truckee River Basin: 85 percent
    - » Lake Tahoe Basin: 85 percent
  - 2008
    - » Truckee River Basin: 92 percent
    - » Lake Tahoe Basin: 101 percent
- Wednesday morning snowfall totals
- » Homewood: 8 inches
  - » Incline Village: 8 inches
  - » Tahoe Donner: 12 inches
  - » Boreal: 28 inches
  - » Squaw Valley: 22 inches
  - » Alpine Meadows: 28 inches
  - » Mount Rose: 21 inches

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