

## Storm leaves California with half of usual snow for year

March 5 2018, by Ellen Knickmeyer And Richard Pedroncelli

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In this March 2, 2018, file photo provided by the Heavenly Mountain Resort, fresh snow covers most of a table and chairs in South Lake Tahoe, Calif. Welcome drifts of fresh snow awaited California's water managers on their late-winter survey of the vital Sierra Nevada snowpack Monday, March 5, 2018, after a massive winter storm slowed the state's plunge back into drought. The storm piled up to 8 feet of new snow in the mountains from late last week through the weekend, forcing Department of Water Resources officials to postpone the measurement for a few days. (Heavenly Mountain Resort via AP, File)

California water officials tromped through long-awaited fresh snowdrifts in the Sierra Nevada mountains Monday, but a welcome late-winter storm still left the state with less than half the usual snow for this late point in the state's important rain and snow season.

Runoff from snow in the mountains historically provides Californians with nearly a third of their water for the whole year. Monday's snow surveys in the mountains by state water officials, with news crews in tow, is one of several closely watched gauges of how much water California cities and farms will have.

Plunging a rod into a snow drift, snow-survey chief Frank Gehrke measured 41.1 inches (104.4 centimeters) of snow Monday, almost all of it laid down by a heavy winter [storm](#) that rolled in Wednesday.

That same spot had just 7 percent of its usual snow before the storm hit, dropping up to 8 feet (2.4 meters) of snow. On Monday, the Phillips Station measuring location was up to 39 percent of the historical average for the date, Gehrke said. Across the Sierras, the state was at 37 percent of normal snowfall as of Monday.

"Of course we don't know what the rest of the month is going to bring," Gehrke said. "But it is a much rosier, happier picture than it was a week ago."

California had accumulated less than a quarter of its normal snowpack for the year before last week's storm. By February, most of Southern California was back in drought, owing to a dud of a [rain](#) and [snow season](#) so far this year.



In this Jan. 3, 2018 file photo, Frank Gehrke, chief of the California Cooperative Snow Surveys Program for the Department of Water Resources, walks across the nearly snow barren meadow while conducting the first snow survey of the season at the Phillips Station snow course near Echo Summit, Calif. Welcome drifts of fresh snow await California's water managers on their late-winter survey of the Sierra Nevada snowpack. California water officials were trooping into the mountains Monday, March 5, for the latest in their regular manual measurements of the year's snowfall. (AP Photo/Rich Pedroncelli, File)

It would take six more storms to bring the state up to its normal winter precipitation by April. The odds of that happening are about one-in-50, the National Weather Service cautioned.

March is typically the last month of the rain and [snow](#) season in the state.

California emerged only last year from a historic five-year drought that forced mandatory water conservation for cities and towns, dried wells,

and caused massive die-offs of trees and many other native species.

The Los Angeles-based Metropolitan Water District, the country's largest urban supplier of water, plans to vote in April on increased funding for conservation programs, spokeswoman Rebecca Kimitch said.

"One storm isn't going to ... make up for what has been a very dry few months," Kimitch said.



In this Feb. 1, 2018 file photo, Frank Gehrke, chief of the California Cooperative Snow Surveys Program for the Department of Water Resources, leaves a snow covered meadow after conducting the second snow survey of the season near Echo Summit, Calif. Welcome drifts of fresh snow await California's water managers on their late-winter survey of the Sierra Nevada snowpack. California water officials were trooping into the mountains Monday, March 5, for the latest in their regular manual measurements of the year's snowfall. (AP Photo/Rich Pedroncelli, File)

California's rainy season is often this kind of a cliffhanger, Daniel Swain, a climate scientist at the University of California, Los Angeles, said last month.

The state is dependent on a handful of significant storms for its [water](#), so things can turn around quickly, he said.

California's reservoirs are at 106 percent of their historical average for this point in the year thanks to last year's rains, said Chris Orrock, a spokesman for the state Department of Water Resources.

While the heavy snows in the Sierra Nevada are the main gift from the latest storm, it helps that arid Southern California got doused as well, Orrock said.

Rain in Southern California rain means reservoirs get filled and vital below-ground natural reservoirs depleted during the drought are replenished.

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Citation: Storm leaves California with half of usual snow for year (2018, March 5) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-03-storm-california-usual-year.html>

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