

California has topped last season's rainfall. Will trend continue in 2022?

January 3 2022, by Aldo Toledo



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California begins the new year in much better shape for escaping its drought thanks to a massive October atmospheric river and wet December that delivered more rain and snow so far than the state saw in all of its last paltry precipitation season.

But this season's hardly over, and California needs the skies to keep delivering.

According to the National Weather Service in Sacramento, 33.9 trillion gallons of water have fallen on California in the current "water year," the period running from Oct. 1 through the following September. That's more than the 33.6 trillion gallons that fell during all of the previous water year. To put it in perspective, the [weather service](#) added that the entire volume of Lake Tahoe is 40 trillion gallons.

"This means that the state has received more precip than last year," the weather service said in a New Year's Day tweet.

But California needs more storms to pull out of its punishing two-year drought.

"We still have a long ways to go," said Jan Null, a meteorologist with Golden Gate Weather Services in Half Moon Bay. "Let's hope the storm door reopens and stays open. We have to keep the storms coming."

December was the 21st wettest on record for San Francisco—which holds the state's oldest climate record dating back to the Gold Rush—and experts say the Sierra has had the top five snowiest months on record.

Weeks of snow and rain have helped push the state almost completely out of the "exceptional" drought category, according to the most recent U.S. Drought Monitor's report.

The portion of the state still in what is known as "extreme drought" also shrank from nearly 80% to 33%. Still, it will take sustained precipitation over the next few months for conditions to finally return to normal, experts said.

Along with making everything a little greener, experts are hoping that this season's abundant rain and snowfall will help replenish reservoirs and groundwater tables, which have fallen low during the past two years.

But Cory Mueller, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Monterey, said it's unclear whether the unusually [wet weather](#) will continue.

"There's no signal of a dry January," Mueller said, "but no signal for a wet one either."

Forecasters say two storm systems are on their way this week.

The first storm is set to dig along the Northern California coast late Sunday night and into Monday, bringing more beneficial rain to the region for mainly Monday and Tuesday.

Coastal mountains of the North Bay could see upwards of an inch, but most areas are looking at anywhere between a tenth and a half-inch over the two-day period.

Forecasters also expect another system to take aim at the region Friday, with more widespread rain possible across the region, including in Monterey Bay.

Those storm systems aren't like the ones that dumped rain and snow that made holiday travel difficult and wreaked havoc on vacationers in the Sierra Nevada last month.

Mueller said it's a weak system that will bring a small amount of [rain](#) and snow, but much of it is trending further north, with heavier precipitation likely near the Oregon border.

Mueller said there are about equal chances of above or below precipitation for the rest of January, with better chances for above-[normal levels](#) in the northern part of the state.

"I doubt we'll see a multi-day event as we did in December, but I can't guarantee that either," Mueller said. "It's tough to predict out that far."

Mueller said it's "very normal" to have extremely wet years in California following multiple dry years in a row, and the last time a single rainy season broke a drought was in 2016-2017. Right now, the eight-station index in the northern Sierra note similar snow levels to 2016-2017 season when it was extremely wet.

But Mueller said he's "not seeing that kind of pattern" for more moisture in the near future.

Right now we're on pace with 2016-2017," Mueller said. "It doesn't tell us much about the rest of the winter."

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