

US ski season extended as record snowpack dents Western drought

April 12 2023, by Andrew MARSZAL



Arapahoe Basin, located on the western side of the Continental Divide, has a base elevation of 10,780 ft (3,286 m).

Record snowfall across much of the western United States has not only helped to alleviate drought—it has also brought a massive boon for the

region's ski resorts, with many hoping to keep their lifts running deep into summer.

Sitting more than 10,500 feet (3,200 meters) above sea level, Colorado's Arapahoe Basin has long been famous for its long seasons. The resort's frozen pistes were the state's first to open last fall, and typically don't close until June.

"I bet you, here, we might make it into July. I hope so," said local ski enthusiast Ian Burkle, 52.

"We always aim for July 4. If you can ski up here on the fourth, it's always great. It's been a couple years since that."

But this year, with mountains across California, Utah and Colorado reporting staggering snowfall, "A-Basin" has plenty of competition for spring skiing, in what is shaping up to be a bumper-sized season across the West.

While Colorado can thank consistent, steady snowfall and [low temperatures](#) for its positive ski and snowboard outlook, California's Mammoth Mountain has recorded its snowiest ever winter, with 704 inches (nearly 18 meters) and counting.

That shatters the previous record of 668 inches.

"It's going to be a legendary spring up here and we'll be open daily through at least July!" the resort wrote on Instagram.

Utah passed its statewide record for snowpack on March 24, according to the federal government's Natural Resources Conservation Service, with a number of ski resorts there pushing back their closing dates too.



With exceptional snow falling west of the Divide, several ski resorts from Colorado to California are anticipating extending ski seasons into the summer months.

One Utah resort, Little Cottonwood Canyon, even had to close for a day because of too much snow, which posed an avalanche risk.

It is all a stark contrast with Europe's Alps, where "extreme" warm winter weather left many hopeful skiers frustrated by the sight of brown hillsides with just slivers of snow in January.

Katherine Fuller, spokeswoman for Arapahoe, said the resort has received heightened interest from overseas travel agencies "reaching out

and seeing how to put together that last-minute US ski trip."

Of course, the wild swings and variations point to worrying long-term trends.

Human-caused global warming exacerbates existing [weather patterns](#), making the wet spells wetter and the dry spells drier.

And for many skiers interviewed by AFP, the excitement over snow conditions pales in comparison to the implications for the US West's decades-long drought.

"Having quality water and making sure it gets to the right spot, and there's enough for crops and everything is pretty important," said Jared Brower, from Denver.

"Skiing is a nice thing to do, but being able to eat is kinda more important in the long term, probably!"

But still, the chance to keep skiing is "awesome," said Fuller.

"It's kind of a party scene. The weather's beautiful. There's nothing like skiing in a t-shirt from the top of the mountain in late spring, even early summer."

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