

MAY 2011 DROUGHT UPDATE

Water Availability Task Force Co-Chairs

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Executive Summary

Based on the data and information provided to the WATF by the State Climatologist, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the National Weather Service, and other experts, the WATF recommended the activation of Phase 2 of the State Drought Mitigation and Response Plan, and recommended the activation of the Agricultural Impact Task Force. These recommendations were necessary to respond to serious concerns about drought conditions on the Eastern Plains south of the I-70 corridor, in southeastern Colorado, and in the Rio Grande Basin.

The southeastern plains of Colorado continue to deal with deteriorating drought conditions, while the Rio Grande and the Southwestern corner of the state are also experiencing below average precipitation. The National Weather Service has issued drought statements for much of eastern Colorado, and the US drought monitor has introduced D3 - extreme drought conditions in all of Baca county and portions of Las Animas, Bent and Prowers counties.

In the mountains, La Niña conditions continue to influence weather with above average moisture; new snow water equivalent records have been reported at 46 measuring sites within the central and northern mountains. Statewide, reservoir storage is near average, with many operators across northern and central Colorado preparing for reservoirs to spill during the runoff season.

- The eastern plains of Colorado have received well below normal precipitation since the beginning of the water year in October 2010. In many southeastern communities, conditions continue to deteriorate.
- The USDA has designated the Colorado counties of Baca, Cheyenne, Kiowa, Kit Carson, & Prowers as contiguous counties to Kansas counties that were declared primary natural disaster areas, due to losses caused by drought. This designation qualifies these counties for natural disaster assistance.
- The Colorado counties of Baca, Bent, Las Animas, & Prowers also met the trigger – D3 on the US Drought Monitor - for the USDA Livestock Forage Disaster Program, which provides cash payments to eligible producers who suffered grazing losses for eligible livestock because of drought on federally-managed grazing land.
- According to the U.S. Drought Monitor, 60% of the State is now experiencing D0, D1, D2 or D3 status, which represents abnormally dry, moderate, severe and extreme drought conditions respectively. The drought conditions that have covered the eastern plains of the state throughout the fall/winter have continued to deteriorate with D1 and D2 covering much of Colorado east of the divide. D3 conditions have been introduced in far southeast corner of the State near Baca County.
- Despite relatively normal precipitation levels in April, the basins in the south and west part of the state: the San Miguel, Dolores, Animas, and San Juan as well as the Rio Grande remain just below average for the water year to date (Oct 2010-present).
- Recent precipitation along the Front Range has helped to alleviate, but not eliminate, dryer than normal conditions.
- Statewide, snowpack is 147%, with six of eight basins above 100% of average. The Yampa/ White has the highest percent snowpack at 179% of average; the Colorado, Gunnison, Arkansas, North Platte and South Platte sit at 165%, 145%, 116%, 172%, and 153% of average, respectively. The basins in the southwest corner of the state: the San Miguel, Dolores, Animas, and San Juan, are near normal at 94% of average. The Rio Grande remains below normal at 85%.

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U.S. Drought Monitor

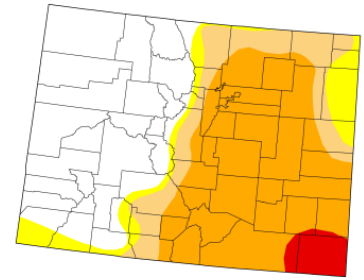
May 10, 2011
Valid 7 a.m. EST

Colorado

	Drought Conditions (Percent Area)					
	None	D0-D4	D1-D4	D2-D4	D3-D4	D4
Current	39.59	60.41	52.58	40.72	3.25	0.00
Last Week (05/03/2011 mias)	39.57	60.43	52.55	40.72	3.24	0.00
3 Months Ago (02/08/2011 mias)	41.65	58.35	49.57	10.13	0.00	0.00
Start of Calendar Year (12/25/2010 mias)	40.40	59.60	49.57	10.13	0.00	0.00
Start of Water Year (09/25/2010 mias)	28.86	71.14	10.70	0.00	0.00	0.00
One Year Ago (05/04/2010 mias)	82.75	17.25	2.25	0.00	0.00	0.00

Intensity:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> D0 Abnormally Dry D1 Drought - Moderate D2 Drought - Severe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> D3 Drought - Extreme D4 Drought - Exceptional
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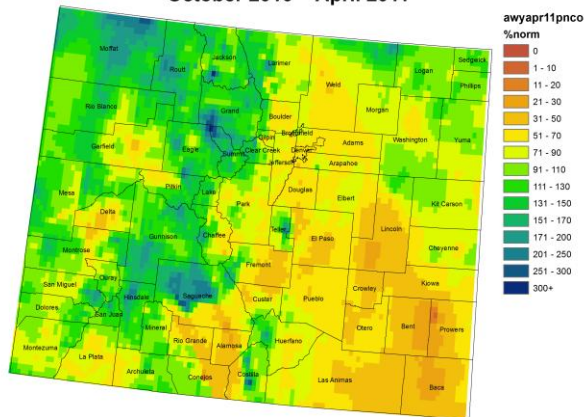
The Drought Monitor focuses on broad-scale conditions. Local conditions may vary. See accompanying text summary for forecast statements.

<http://drought.unl.edu/dm>



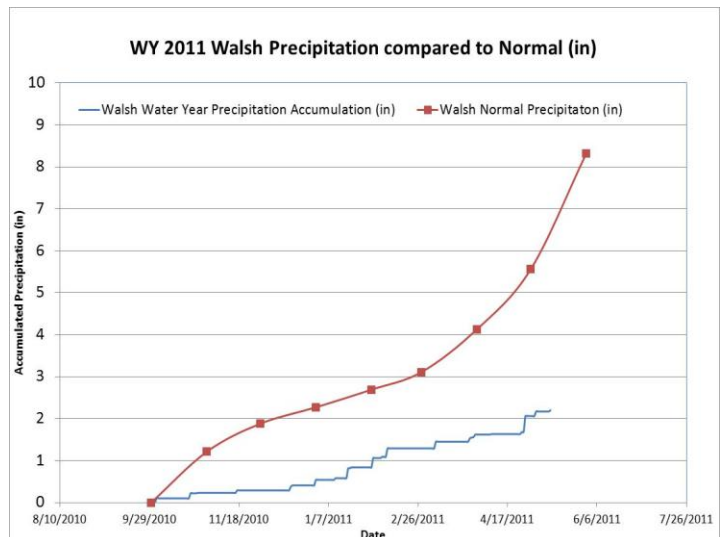
Released Thursday, May 12, 2011
Rich Tinker, NOAA/NWS/NCEP/CPC

**Colorado Water Year Precipitation as Percentage of Normal
October 2010 - April 2011**



The map to the right shows data from a weather station in Southeastern Colorado comparing water year to date precipitation with normal precipitation. Current conditions are well below normal.

The adjacent map shows precipitation for the water year through April. The eastern plains of Colorado remain well below normal, as does the Upper Rio Grande Basin. Continued monitoring of this region will be critical throughout the summer months.



NOTE:

The next WATF meeting is scheduled for June 17, 2011, 1 - 3pm at the Colorado Division of Wildlife, 6060 Broadway, Denver, CO.