March 2016 Drought Update

Water Availability Task Force Co- Chairs

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Statewide precipitation, as of March 25, is at 97% of average. A warm and dry February delivered only 55% of average precipitation statewide and coupled with a warm and dry start to March resulted in the introduction of abnormally dry and moderate drought conditions across the southeastern portion of the state. Late March storms have helped to keep snowpack up by bringing 92% of average precipitation to the state to-date; northern basins have received markedly more precipitation this month than basins in the southern portion of the state. Reservoir storage remains strong and water providers have no immediate concerns.

- Three percent of the state is currently classified as experiencing moderate drought conditions according to the US Drought Monitor, while 31 percent of the state is classified as abnormally dry. This is predominantly concentrated in the southeastern portion of the state.

- Statewide SNOTEL water year-to-date precipitation is 97 percent of normal. The Upper Rio Grande has the lowest year-to-date precipitation at 83 percent of average, while the South Platte has the highest at 109 percent of average.

- The March 23rd snowstorm along the Front Range resulted in a "March" worth of precipitation in some areas but missed southern Colorado where conditions have been drier.

- Combination of above average temperatures in the first half of the month and seasonally expected strong March winds led to rapid drying at low elevations and on the eastern plains.

- Reservoir storage statewide remains above normal at 110 percent. The Arkansas basin has the highest storage levels in the state at 124 percent of average; the Upper Rio Grande has the lowest storage levels at 93 percent, just slightly below normal.

- The Surface Water Supply Index (SWSI) as of March 1st is near or above average across the majority of the state, with the southern half of the state faring better than the northern half. The lowest SWSI value is -1.69 in the Upper White Basin. At this time of year the index reflects reservoir storage and streamflow forecasts, given recent precipitation in the northern half of the state these values are likely to change going forward.

- Streamflow forecasts have fallen and now range from 107 percent to 65 percent of average with most forecasts near 90 percent of normal runoff expected this spring & early summer.

- The long term experimental forecast calls for above average probability of precipitation through spring, with eastern Colorado favored more than the rest of the state. The strong El Nino event is likely to dissipate over the coming months.

- The Colorado Flood Threat Bulletin will provide detailed 24 hr and long range 15 day forecasts April 1st through September 30th at http://www.coloradofloodthreat.com/

NOTE: There will be a Joint Water Availability & Flood Task Force Meeting on April 18, 2016 at Colorado Parks and Wildlife Broadway Office; Additional information can be found at www.cwcb.state.co.us or by contacting Ben Wade at Ben.Wade@state.co.us

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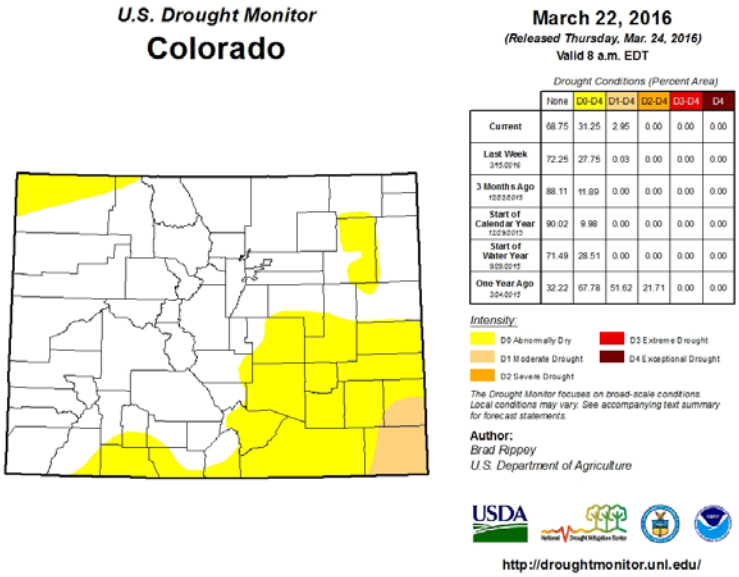
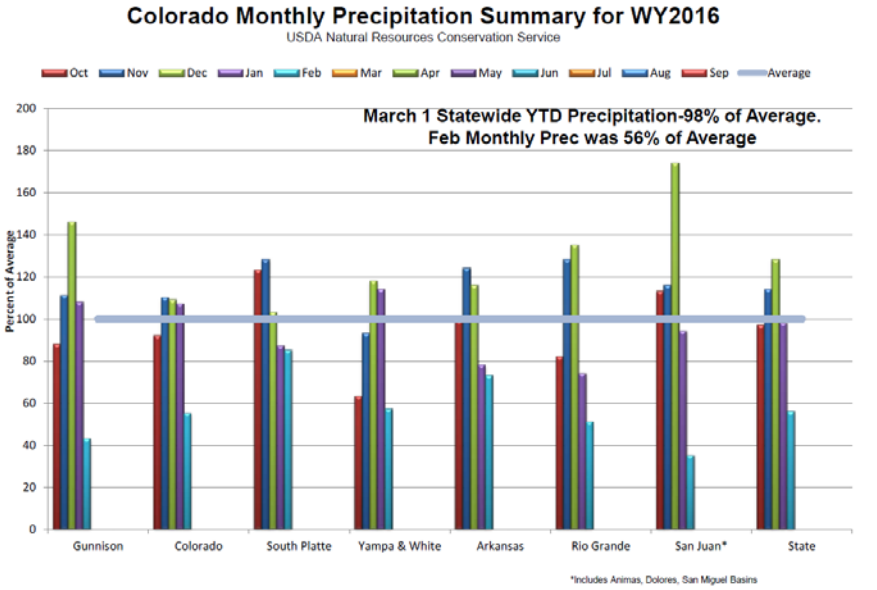
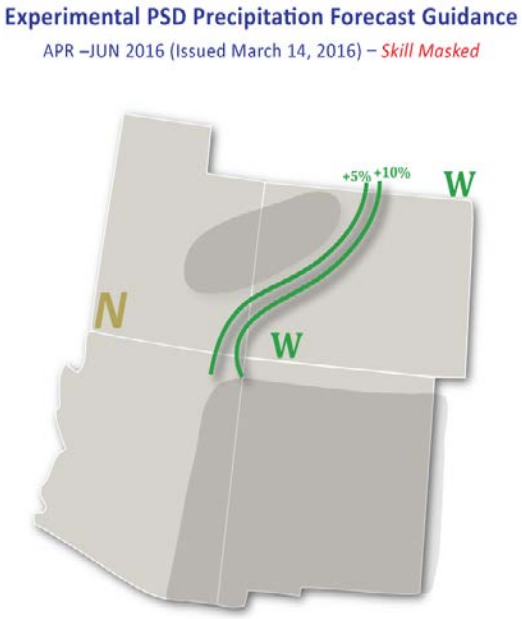


The US Drought Monitor illustrates current drought conditions across Colorado. D0, abnormally dry conditions have expanded across the southeastern portion of the state, as have D1, moderate drought conditions. Currently 3 percent of the state is classified as experiencing moderate drought, while 31 percent is classified as D0.

The bar graph to the right is the statewide precipitation summary as of March 1. All basins were well below average for precipitation in February, while many were also below average in January as well. March to-date remains well below normal in the southern half of the state while the northern portion has seen more favorable conditions.





The map to the left shows the long term experimental forecast that favors spring precipitation throughout the eastern half of the state through June; the Climate Prediction Center forecast on the right is consistent with this.