



Water Supply Outlook Overview

For immediate release: April 8, 2002

Significant snow helps soil moisture in Central/Western Plains

Soil moisture conditions in much of the province are forecast to improve as a result of substantial March snow, Alberta Environment forecasters say.

Soil moisture in late spring is a key ingredient for good seed germination.

However, runoff is still expected to be below normal in most parts of the province, as much of the existing snowpack is expected to be absorbed in the soil. The exception is the Grande Prairie/Peace River area, where above average to much above average snowpack and better soil moisture conditions could result in above normal spring runoff.

Water supply conditions also continue to improve as a result of above-normal precipitation in the southern two thirds of the province. Average to above average mountain snowpack conditions above 6,000 feet will significantly help restore levels in Alberta reservoirs, which will help boost river flows and provide irrigation water, particularly in Southern Alberta.

However, while the natural runoff flows are a significant improvement over last year and what was forecast earlier this winter for Southern Alberta, they are still forecast to be below normal in the Oldman, Bow, Red Deer and North Saskatchewan river basins and much below average for the Milk River basin. This is due in large part to the fact that much of the snow melt will be absorbed in the ground, rather than running off.

Other highlights of April's water supply forecast include:

- Overall winter precipitation (November 1, 2001 to March 31, 2002) and snowpack is still much-below-normal to below-normal east of a line from Lethbridge to Edmonton to High Level.
- Snowpack and precipitation to date is near normal in most western areas. Higher mountain elevations have recorded near-normal to above-normal values.
- Snow accumulations in the Highwood and Kananaskis headwaters are much-above-average for this time of the year.
- Current snow accumulations in the Bow River basin are one-and-a-half times to two times the seasonal maximum recorded last year.
- Water storage as of April 1, 2002 in the major irrigation and hydroelectric reservoirs in the Oldman and Red Deer River basins are below-normal for this time of the season with the exception of Keho Lake, which is normal. Water storage in the major reservoirs in the Bow and North Saskatchewan River basins is normal for the season, except for Spray Lake, Lake McGregor and Travers Reservoir, which are below-normal.

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- Colder than normal temperatures during March has delayed spring snowmelt throughout the province, which has allowed snow accumulations to remain constant or increase during the month.

Environment Canada's long-lead precipitation forecast issued March 1 indicates above-normal precipitation for the March to May period for the entire province. The forecast for the summer period (June to August) is for above-normal precipitation in southern areas of Alberta and normal precipitation elsewhere.

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