

Water Supply Outlook Overview

For Immediate Release: February 10, 2004

January precipitation much above normal in most plains areas of Alberta

Much above normal precipitation was recorded during January 2004 in plains areas of northwestern, central and the majority of southern Alberta. During the same time period, northeastern and parts of southern Alberta received below normal precipitation. As a result, snowpack is average to above average in northwestern and central Alberta, below average in northeastern Alberta and below average to above average in southern Alberta.

Runoff from plains areas is estimated to be below average to much below average in northeastern Alberta and generally below average to average in other plains areas, because very dry soil moisture conditions exist in most of the province.

In the headwaters of the Red Deer and Oldman Rivers, snowpack is generally average to above average for this time of year. Mountain snowpack in the Waterton, St. Mary, Bow, North Saskatchewan and Athabasca River basins is below average to average. Accumulations at this time of year typically account for nearly two-thirds of the season's total.

As of February 1, 2004, below average natural runoff volumes are forecast for the March through September 2004 period for the Oldman, Bow, and Red Deer River basins, and below average to much below average volumes are forecast for the Milk and North Saskatchewan River basins. Forecasted volumes are much greater than the near-record low volumes recorded during the drought year of 2001.

Significant precipitation is needed to improve the overall water supply outlook. Environment Canada's current long-range weather forecast for Alberta is for above normal precipitation in February followed by below normal precipitation through May.

Other Highlights (As of February 1, 2004):

- Water storage in major irrigation reservoirs in the Oldman River basin is generally below average, except the Chain Lakes Reservoir, which is average.
- Water storage in the major reservoir of the Red Deer River basin is average for this time of year.
- Water storage is below average to average in the major hydroelectric and irrigation reservoirs of the Bow River basin, except in the Upper Kananaskis Lake Reservoir, which is above average.
- Water storage levels in the North Saskatchewan River basin are currently below average at the Brazeau Reservoir, and average at Lake Abraham.