

For Immediate Release: March 9, 2004

Significant precipitation needed to make up for February's dry skies

Most areas of Alberta received less than 35 per cent of normal precipitation during February. Much below normal precipitation was recorded in all but northeastern Alberta, which received normal to below normal precipitation.

For the March through September 2004 period, Alberta Environment is forecasting below average natural runoff volumes for the Red Deer River basin, below average to much below average volumes for the Oldman, Bow, and North Saskatchewan River basins, and much below average volumes for the Milk River basin. Forecasted volumes are still much greater than the near-record low volumes recorded during the drought year of 2001.

Spring snowmelt runoff from plains areas is estimated to be generally average to above average in west-central Alberta, below average in northern Alberta and much below average in southern and east-central Alberta. Very dry soil moisture conditions exist in most of the province.

Significant precipitation is needed to improve the overall water supply outlook. Environment Canada's current long-range weather forecast for Alberta is for normal precipitation during the March through May 2004 period in most areas.

Other Highlights (As of March 1, 2004):

- **Mountain snowpack:** In the headwaters of the Oldman River, snowpack is generally below average to average for this time of year. Mountain snowpack in the Waterton, St. Mary, Bow, and Red Deer River basins is below average, and in the North Saskatchewan and Athabasca River basins is below average to much below average. Accumulations at this time of year typically account for nearly three quarters of the season's total.
- **Plains snowpack:** In west-central Alberta, plains snowpack is generally above average to much above average, below average to average in northern Alberta, and varies from much below average to average in east-central areas. In southern Alberta, snow cover is generally patchy, however pockets of deeper snowpack exist around Calgary, and near record high snowpack was measured on the top and south slopes of the Cypress Hills.
- 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 is below average in the major hydroelectric and irrigation reservoirs of the Bow River basin, except in the Upper Kananaskis Lake Reservoir, which is average, and the Ghost Reservoir, which is above average.
- Water storage levels in the North Saskatchewan and Red Deer River basins are currently below average at the Brazeau Reservoir, and average at Lake Abraham and Glennifer Lake.