

For Immediate Release: March 10, 2006

Snowpack below to much below average in Alberta's plains areas

Snowpack measurements indicate that as of March 1, 2006, plains snowpack in Alberta ranges from below to much below average. Snowfall that has occurred since measurements were taken has not been enough to change this significantly. As a result, spring snowmelt runoff is forecast to be much below average for Alberta's northern and central plains, and below average in the southern plains.

Snow accumulations in the mountains as of March 1, 2006 generally improve moving from north to south and at higher elevations. Measured snowpacks are generally below to much below average in the North Saskatchewan River basin, below average in the Red Deer and Athabasca River basins, below average to average in the Bow and Highwood River basins, average in the Oldman River basin, and average to above average in the Kananaskis, Elbow, Waterton and St. Mary River basins. Snowpack at lower elevations of many of these basins is below to much below average. The snowpack in the upper Peace River basin, in British Columbia, is generally below average.

The mountain snowpack is an important source of water supply to reservoirs in the spring. On average, the accumulation of snow at this time of the year accounts for nearly three-quarters of the seasonal total.

As of March 1, 2006, natural runoff volumes are forecast to be generally below average for the Milk, Red Deer and North Saskatchewan River basins for the March to September 2006 period. In the Bow and Oldman River basins, natural runoff volumes ranging from below average to average are expected. Forecasted volumes have increased since February 1 in most basins, however they have decreased slightly in the Red Deer River basin and for the Oldman River at Bocket.

Other Highlights (as of March 1, 2006):

- Precipitation during February 2006 varied widely. Most southern and west central areas recorded above to much above normal precipitation, and most of northern and east central Alberta recorded below to much below normal precipitation, although there are several localized areas which were exceptions
- So far this winter (November 1, 2005 to March 1, 2006), below to much below normal precipitation has been recorded in most of the province, with normal to above normal winter precipitation recorded in southern mountain areas and normal precipitation recorded in the Medicine Hat area and in Calgary.
- Water storage is above normal in the major irrigation reservoirs of the Oldman River basin, except the Waterton Reservoir, which is normal.
- Water storage is generally below normal in the major hydroelectric and irrigation reservoirs of the Bow River and North Saskatchewan River basins, except for the Barrier Reservoir, which is normal.
- Water storage in the major reservoir of the Red Deer River basin is normal.