

Subject: PRESS ENTERPRISE STORY

California snowpack skyrockets to two-decade high, putting ‘serious dent’ in drought

Wednesday's snow haul reached 226% of average for this time of year, beating out 2005.



Sean de Guzman left, Chief of the California Department of Water Resources Snow Surveys and Water Supply Forecasting Section, and Andy Reising, right, Water Resources Engineer in the Snow Surveys and Water Supply Forecasting Unit, work the measurement phase of the first media snow survey of the 2023 season at Phillips Station in the Sierra Nevada Mountains on Tuesday, Jan. 3, 2023. The survey is held approximately 90 miles east of Sacramento off Highway 50 in El Dorado County. (Ken James / California Department of Water Resources)

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The California snowpack is the largest we've seen at this time of year in over two decades, as yet another atmospheric river is forecast to dump several feet of additional snow in parts of the Sierra by Monday morning.

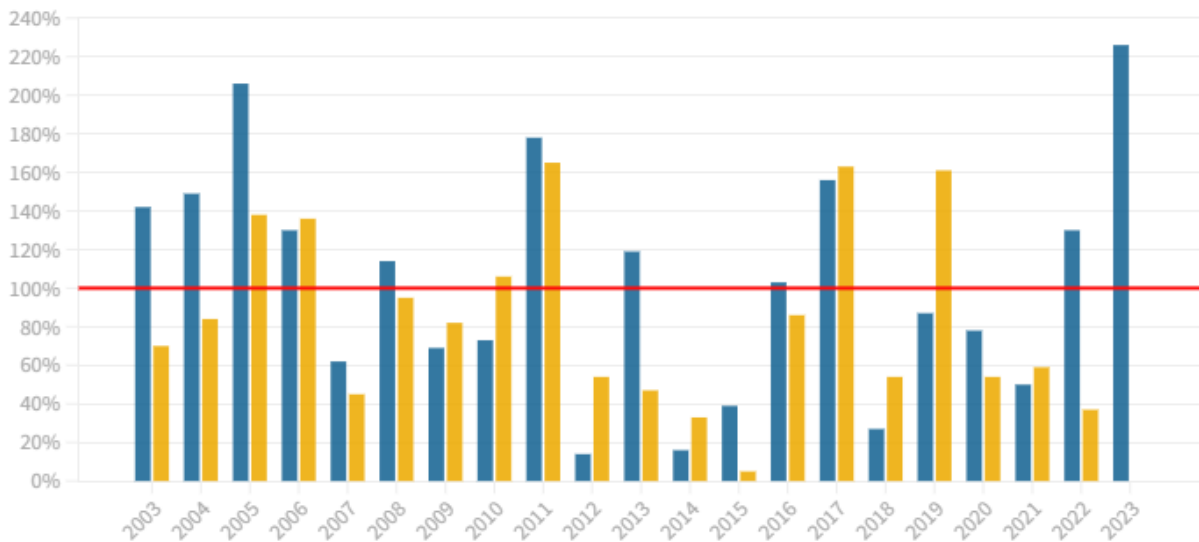
In the wake of all this fresh snow, experts are expressing increasing optimism that the drought conditions which have gripped the Golden State for three years could meaningfully ease by the end of the snowy season.

“The fact that we’re continuing to get this precipitation is just absolutely fantastic,” said Andrew Schwartz lead scientist at the UC Berkeley Central Sierra Snow Laboratory near Donner Summit. “It’s still unlikely that we’re going to get completely out of this drought in single year. But if the storm door stays open... we can put a serious dent in it.”

California snowpack at 2 decade high for this time of year.

Experts warn that a large amount of early-season snow doesn't guarantee plentiful end-of-season snowpack. But this year is already a big outlier.

- % Jan. 11 snowpack compared to avg for that day
- % end of season (Apr. 1) snowpack compared to avg for that day



Source: [California Department of Water Resources](#) • Scooty Nickerson, data journalist at Bay Area News Group

Wednesday’s snow haul reached 226% of average for this time of year, beating out 2005 which was 206% of average. But despite this year’s huge numbers, there’s still reason for caution. Of the 10 years in the last two decades where the state registered above average snowpack on Jan. 11, only four ended the season above average.

“I’m super excited and everybody in the water community is super excited,” said Schwartz. “But we don’t want to come out and talk about, you know, the impacts just yet because there is always the possibility of that super dry (February through April).”

In Tahoe, the impacts are already as clear as fresh snowmelt. Business is booming at some of the biggest ski resorts, as many in the Bay Area are driving up to take advantage of all the fresh snow.

“We love the snow up here... it keeps us in business,” said Patrick Lacey, Public Relations Manager for the Palisades Tahoe ski resort. If the snow continues to pile up, Lacey said the resort could stay open until July. Last year, they had to close in May when the snow reserves ran out early.

Though many Bay Area residents are giddy to get up and see all this snow during the holiday weekend, they’d better check the forecast first. Road conditions are expected to deteriorate quickly starting Friday evening and through the entire weekend.

“You can expect dangerous driving conditions (on the roads up to Tahoe): blowing snow from gusty winds, near zero visibility, likely travel delays and even road closures,” said Hannah Chandler-Cooley, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Sacramento.

“Check that Caltrans app before you even come up,” Lacey said. “Just be safe out there.”