



# THE TAOS NEWS

Best U.S. Weekly Paper- NNA 2007, 2008, 2010  
Inland Press Nation's Best Weekly Newspaper 2009

## Drought deepens across state, despite storms

By Staci Matlock

*The New Mexican*

reprinted in *The Taos News*, 3/13/2014

Though it was slowed by recent storms, drought continued to deepen across New Mexico, according to the latest U.S. Drought Monitor.

Last weekend's storm added a few inches of snow in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, bringing the snowpack at the Santa Fe snow telemetry site to 39 inches. Melted down, the snow would equal 7 inches of water. The site gained 11 inches of snow March 2.

"It's bad," said Wayne Sleep, the state's snow surveyor with the Natural Resources Conservation Service. "We're so far behind at this point that the recent storms are helping but not bringing us anywhere near where we need to be."

While New Mexico currently has no areas in exceptional drought conditions, the amount of the state in extreme drought increased to 23 percent from 14.8 percent in one week.

The short-term forecast indicates another storm is headed for New Mexico over the weekend, with potential for more snow and rain in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. But the drought forecast through May 31 still shows the drought persisting or getting worse, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said.

The U.S. Drought Monitor is a compilation of data from several agencies. It rates drought weekly in the United States, based on a variety of factors such as soil moisture, precipitation, snowpack and reservoir levels. The six rating levels range from no drought to exceptional drought.

The drought monitor map is jointly produced by the National Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the NOAA, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and 350 drought observers nationwide.

Sleep said the latest supply forecast for the Rio Grande from March to July is continuing to decline.

Total flows in the Upper Rio Grande through June are projected at 50 percent to 70 percent of average, Sleep said. The further south the river flows, the worse the situation looks. North of Santa Fe, flows past the Otowi Bridge gauge near San Ildefonso Pueblo are expected to be 40 percent of normal. Flows past the San Marcial gauge near Elephant Butte are predicted to hit only 13 percent of normal.

The Sangre de Cristo Mountain Range Basin was at about 77 percent of total average pre-

precipitation for the water year dating to October. The snow-water equivalent was 59 percent of normal on March 6. The Rio Chama River Basin had 50 percent to 70 percent of average total precipitation since October.

Outside of New Mexico, some of the crop and pasture states are drying up rapidly.

One-fourth of the nation's corn crops and hay are in regions hit by drought this winter. More than 40 percent of the cattle-growing and winter wheat regions are in drought.

More than half of Texas' rangeland and pastures were rated poor to very poor. Topsoil moisture was rated as very short across 78 percent of the state.

A massive storm in late February brought a reprieve to drought-stricken California, where more than a dozen towns have been in danger of running out of water. Central California, part of the nation's bread basket, remains critically dry.