

---

## INFORMATION BULLETIN

2010ENV0008-000238  
March 8, 2010

Ministry of Environment

### **SNOWPACK AND WATER SUPPLY BULLETIN**

VICTORIA – Environment Minister Barry Penner says there has been a decrease in snowpacks across the province over the past two months, following the warm and dry January and February.

#### **Synopsis:**

Weather across B.C. over the past two months has been dominated by the effects of a moderate to strong El Niño, producing warm and dry conditions. For some locations in B.C., the January and/or February average temperature was the warmest on record, or close to the warmest on record. The South Coast and Vancouver Island received near normal precipitation during January and February, but most of the rest of the province has been dry. For example, Castlegar in the West Kootenays experienced the lowest February snowfall ever recorded (based on a 45-year record), and Terrace in the Skeena River basin experienced the driest October to February period ever recorded (based on a 55-year record).

#### **Current Snowpack:**

Snowpacks in all major river basins across B.C. are below normal, varying from a low of 65 per cent of normal in the East Kootenay basin to a high of 95 per cent of normal in the North Thompson. In most areas, low-elevation snow is generally absent and mid-elevation snow throughout Interior valleys is well below normal. Basin snow-water indices for individual basins stand at 92 per cent in the Upper Fraser, 95 per cent in the Nechako, 91 per cent in the Middle Fraser, 88 per cent in the Lower Fraser, 95 per cent in the North Thompson, 94 per cent in the South Thompson, 83 per cent in the Columbia, 71 per cent in the Kootenays, 86 per cent in the Okanagan-Kettle, 67 per cent in the Similkameen, 84 per cent in the South Coast, 89 per cent on Vancouver Island, 79 per cent in the Peace and 73 per cent in the Skeena-Nass.

#### **Water Supply Outlook:**

By this date, generally about 80 per cent of the B.C. mountain snowpack has accumulated, and there is only four to six weeks of winter remaining to accumulate additional snow.

Minister Penner says while cooler weather and lower freezing levels this week are welcome, the below average snowpack conditions across much of the Interior (Okanagan, Nicola, Kettle, Similkameen, South Thompson, Kootenay, Skeena, Nass, Peace) indicate the potential for water-supply challenges to develop this summer.

There is also a likelihood of below-normal freshet runoff during May and June, and thus a low risk for freshet flooding in the major river basins (Fraser, Thompson, Skeena, Nass, Peace, etc.).

To reduce the potential for summer low flow or drought problems, spring rainfall (April, May and June) will need to be at or above normal. In the case of the South Interior (Okanagan, Nicola, Kettle, Similkameen, South Thompson), current snow conditions suggest the potential to redevelop conditions similar to the 2009 summer drought (which resulted in very low river levels, with reduced lake, reservoir and groundwater storage in the South Interior and in other parts of the province), should the spring weather remain dry. If El Niño conditions persist through spring, continuation of above-normal temperatures and below-normal precipitation can be expected.

For additional information, including a summary of snow pillow data and conditions, and graphs of snow-water equivalents, go to: <http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/rfc/index.htm>.

In December 2009, the B.C. government officially embarked on a process of modernizing B.C.'s Water Act with the launch of the Living Water Smart blog. Living Water Smart: B.C.'s Water Plan outlines the B.C. government's vision and plan to keep B.C.'s water healthy and secure for the future. The plan uses a variety of measures including planning, regulatory change, education and incentives to ensure B.C.'s water resources are protected and sustainable. To check out the site or post a comment on the blog, go to: <http://www.livingwatersmart.ca/>.

-30-

Media Contact:       Suntanu Dalal  
                              Ministry of Environment  
                              250 387-9745

For more information on government services or to subscribe to the Province's news feeds using RSS, visit the Province's website at [www.gov.bc.ca](http://www.gov.bc.ca).