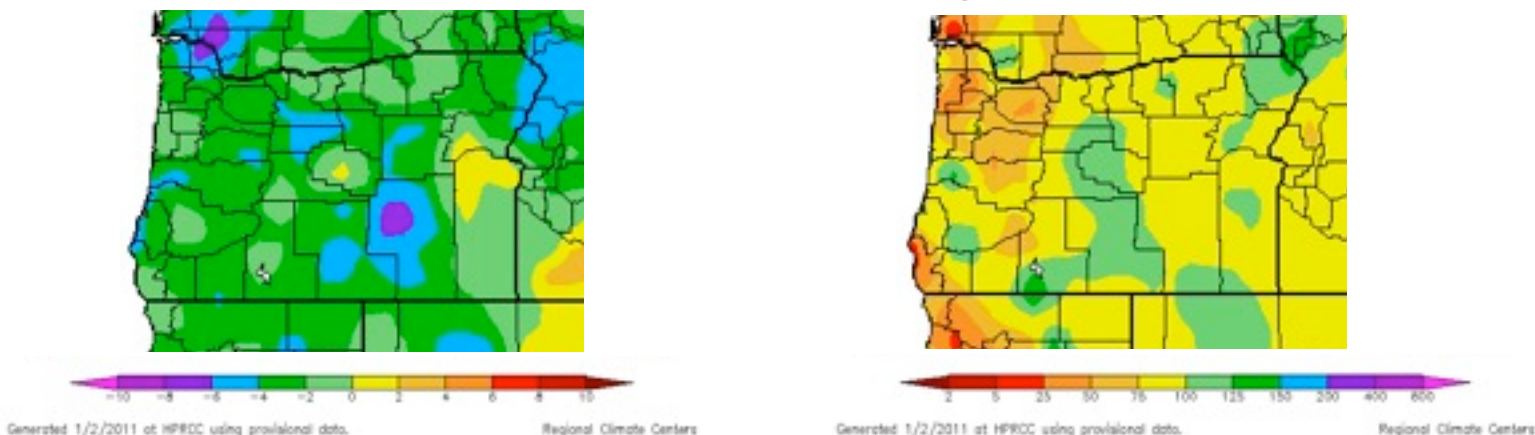


Winter returns to Oregon



Figures 1a and b: a) Departure from Normal Temperature (°F) and b) Percent of Normal Precipitation for March (source: HPRCC)

February started off warm and dry, as the mostly anemic weather from January continued. Mountain snowpack continued to degrade with above average temperatures and dry conditions. Mid-month marked a shift into a much more normal and active winter weather pattern for Oregon - a series of strong storms ushered in cold arctic air, and snow fell from the mountains all the way down to sea level in many places. The cold air not only facilitated low-elevation snow, it sent the mercury plummeting across the state and many minimum temperature records were broken at the end of the month.

Despite the warm start to the month, average monthly temperatures were a few degrees below normal across most of the state (Figure 1a), largely due to the frigid temps at the end of the month. The aforementioned winter storms weren't enough to bring monthly averaged precipitation totals above normal across most of the state.

A series of strong winter storms hit Oregon starting mid-month. The first storm ushered in cold air and brought a few feet of snow to Mt. Bachelor, much to the delight of skiers. Snowflakes managed to fall at sea level, though few significant accumulations were reported. The next round of storms, the following week, managed to bring snow all the way

down to sea level in Western Oregon. Accumulating snow was measured on the Ocean Beaches, and many students in the Willamette and Rogue Valleys woke up to a day off school.

Late February low-elevation snow west of the Cascades isn't uncommon, but it is a bit late in the season. At Hyslop Farm in Corvallis, the official reporting station for the city, 3" of snow was measured on February 24th. Corvallis has a lengthy, relatively complete record of snowfall measurements, and the last time February snow was measured was in 1999, when 2.8" fell that month. East of the Cascades, where snow in February is far more common, close to a foot (11.5") unofficially measured at Redmond Airport. Most of this came from 10.7", which fell over 24 hours, ending on February 15.

And if you're tired of the rain and snow, fear not - about 75% of the year's precipitation in Oregon falls in the period from October through March.

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La Niña weakening, return to neutral conditions possible by May-June

NOAA's Climate Prediction Center/National Center for Environmental Prediction/NWS issued a La Niña advisory on February 2011, indicating that the once strong La Niña has matured and is showing signs of weakening. SST anomalies are not as great as they were at the height of this event (Figure 2). Models project equal chances of a return to neutral conditions possible by late Spring/early Summer and a weaker La Niña persisting through summer.

What does this mean for Oregon for the next few months? NOAA indicates that expected La Niña impacts through April of this year for the Western US include an increased chance of below average temperatures (see below).

Three-month outlook



Figures 3 a and b. Three-Month Outlook (January, February, March) for a) temperature and b) Precipitation for the Pacific Northwest from Climate Prediction Center/NOAA

NOAA's three month outlook from the Climate Prediction Center for the months of March, April and May reveals a greater chance for below average temperatures statewide. The greatest chance, corresponding to the darker blue color, covers most of the state with the exception of southwest Oregon (Figure 3a). The entire state shows an equal chance of above below or above average precipitation during the time period (MAM).

New OCS website!

Our new website is now live!

Thank you for your patience over the last year and a half as we rebuilt the website, which fell victim to an unfortunate server crash. We listened to your feedback and restored your favorite part - the satellite loops!

Check it out:

www.ocs.oregonstate.edu



Blizzard conditions at ski areas

Travel conditions along U.S. 26 were treacherous on the weekend of February 26-27th as a blizzard dumped snow in the northern Oregon Cascades. Ski areas reported poor visibility. At Mount Hood Meadows, too much snow had fallen too quickly to manage.

Highway 26 was the scene of several minor crashes and slow traffic as heavy snow fell in the area between Estacada to Sandy. Winds between 30 and 40 miles per hour were reported at Timberline Lodge. Other parts of Mount Hood saw gusts up to 60 miles per hour.



Photo and story credit: KGW staff

Despite the weather, lower chair lifts remained open at Timberline for the most hardy winter sports enthusiasts.

Fremont Bridge in Portland, other Routes closed during Icy Conditions

ODOT reported that a number of vehicles spun-out on the Fremont Bridge in Portland on February 24th. The westbound ramp was closed temporarily to remove crashed vehicles on the bridge that serves as the Interstate 5 and Interstate 405 North Interchange. Motorists were advised to use alternative routes.

In Eastern Oregon, Interstate 84 westbound was closed about one mile west of North Powder after a commercial truck crashed in the early morning hours. The truck was carrying unspecified hazardous material but the containers were not breached. Another crash closed I-84 traffic in both directions between La Grande and Baker City near milepost 284.

Story credit: The Oregonian

Mt. Bachelor gets boost from snow in two ways: fresh powder and stranded tourists

The winter storms brought feet of much-needed snow to Mt. Bachelor ski area, but a winter storm in the High Desert also helped keep tourists around for a few extra days.

Rather than brave dicey road conditions, people decided to stay in Central Oregon a day or two later than planned. Some of these tourists made it up to the mountain for another day in the snow.

President's Day weekend coupled with the snow brought numbers up at the Mountain, and officials expected them to climb higher. While the winter storm incapacitated some with power outages, officials at the mountain said that they "enjoy it."

Story from KTVZ.com

February Station Records

Precipitation (liquid water equivalent)

station	date	new record (in.)	old record (yr)	yrs in record
Pendleton	February 16	0.84"	0.62"	78
Redmond	February 16	0.99"	0.38"	63

Minimum Temperatures

station	date	new record (°F)	old record (yr)	yrs in record
Meacham	February 10	2 (tied)	2 (2006)	63
Astoria	February 20	25 (tied)	25 (2006)	121
Burns	February 26	-18	-12 (1993)	72
Condon	February 26	-3 (tied)	-3 (1993)	83
John Day	February 26	-4	-3 (1962)	53
Joseph	February 26	-10	0 (1942)	113
Meacham	February 26	-25	-3 (1962)	63
Moro	February 26	0	4 (1962)	61
Pelton Dam	February 26	6 (tied)	6 (1962)	61
Redmond	February 26	-7	-6 (1993)	62
The Dalles	February 26	4	13 (1993)	63

Maximum Temperatures

station	date	new record (°F)	old record (yr)	yrs in record
Eugene	February 4	60 (tied)	60 (2001)	121
Redmond	February 12	40	30 (1971)	62
Meacham	February 13	37 (tied)	37 (1957)	63
Meacham	February 14	59	58 (1957)	63
Astoria	February 25	40	38 (1970)	121
Hillsboro	February 25	37 (tied)	37 (1957)	63
The Dalles	February 25	59	58 (1967)	63

Tables 1, 2, 3. Individual station records for maximum temperature, minimum temperature and precipitation for selected stations in Oregon (via NWS and OSU)

Snowpack

A series of winter storms in mid-late February helped boost the declining mountain snowpack. The 147% figure in the Coast Range only includes that one watershed with 2 SNOTEL sites and Mary's Peak (highest point) is not included. Much of the state remains slightly below average, early Spring storms often come along and give one final boost as we head toward April 1.

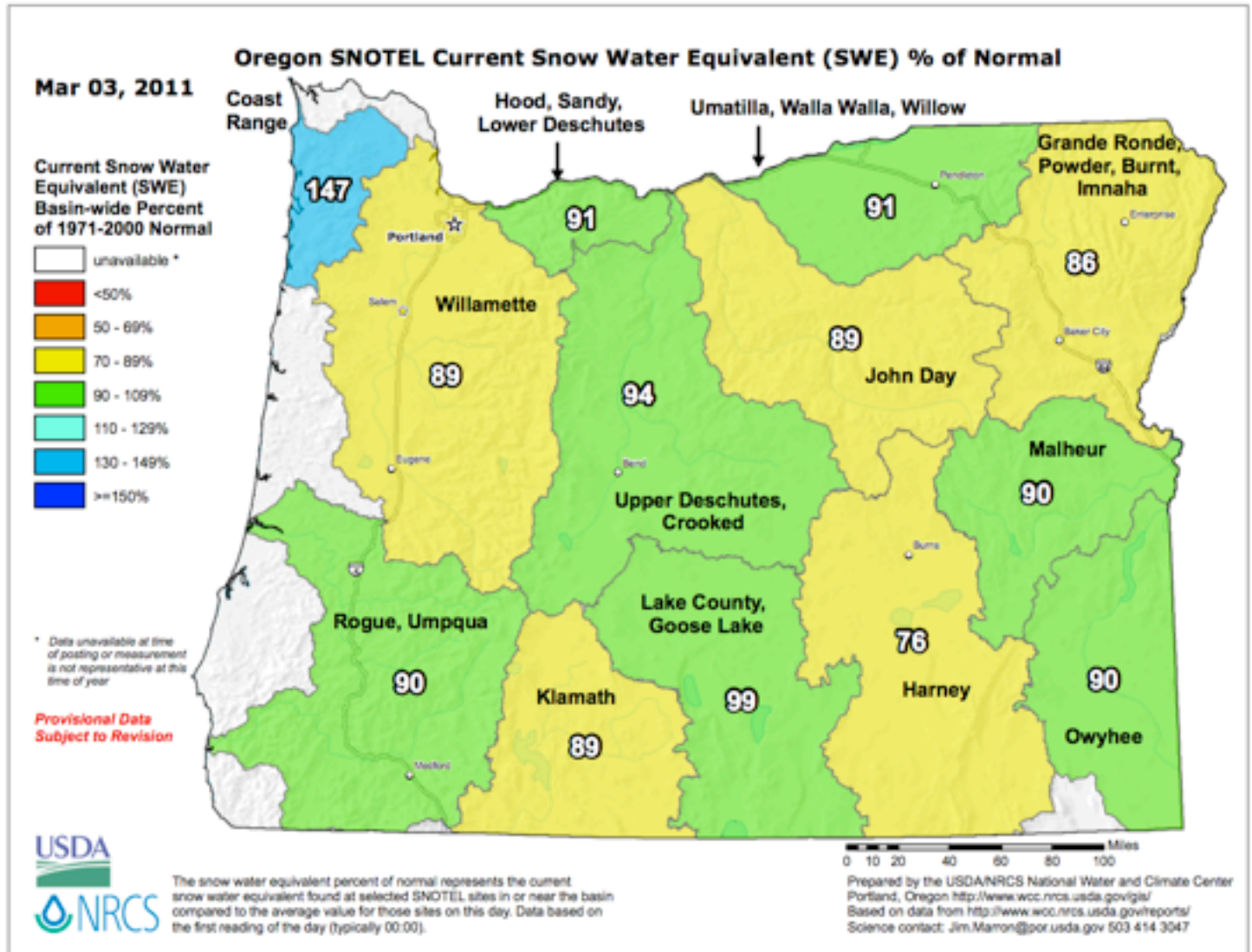


Figure 4. Oregon SNOTEL measurements as of February 3, 2011 by major river basin (credit: NRCS)