



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Drought Update

SALT LAKE CITY (Mar. 21, 2023) – As spring runoff draws closer, Utah’s snowpack is holding strong and making steady gains as we reach the time of year when our snowpack typically peaks. While this is good news for our water supply, it may cause flooding. The state is working closely with counties and cities to mitigate the risk of flooding.

“We want a gradual melt off during the spring that will not overwhelm our rivers and streams,” Candice Hasenyager, director of the Division of Water Resources, said. “The way our snowpack melts is something our division and the Utah Division of Emergency Management is monitoring closely.”

Last month was one of the snowiest recorded Februarys in the state of Utah, and this month is looking to receive even more snowfall! Even though the freezing temperatures have been frustrating for some, this amount of water is significant for our dry state. In October of last year, 96% of Utah was in a severe drought. Today, [that number is only 39%](#).

“We have a chance to take full advantage of this year’s snowpack by taking steps to be drought resilient,” Hasenyager said. “If you’re a farmer, check out the [Agricultural Optimization Program](#) and if you’re a resident, look for tips and tricks on [SlowtheFlow.org](#). All the water provided by mother nature means we don’t need to irrigate as much to make things grow.”

At-a-glance highlights:

- According to the [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#) in their latest report, new records for snow water equivalent are being set at Utah’s SNOTEL sites. As of March 1st, 10 sites were reporting a record high amount of SWE compared with the last 30 years, and 7 more were second highest. The Vernon Creek SNOTEL at the south end of the Tooele watershed already has 231% of its typical peak snowpack! Four other SNOTEL sites also have around double the amount of snow that they would have at their typical peak. The vast majority of Utah’s 137 SNOTEL sites are at (or above) the 85th percentile for SWE compared to their period of record, with 31 in the top five percent.



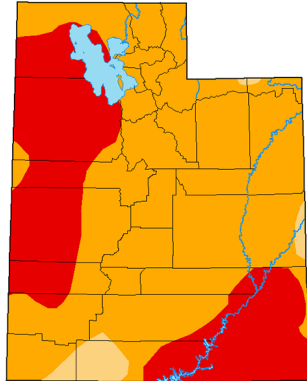
- The Utah Division of Emergency Management is encouraging community members to work with their local public works or emergency management office and help clear ditches, streambeds, canals and culverts of leaves, branches, trash and other debris. Often flooding happens due to debris rather than more water than could normally be handled. Residents can learn more about how to protect their property by visiting floodhazards.utah.gov
- The Utah Division of Water Rights is working with the owners and operators of each high-hazard dam to monitor the condition of each as water level increases within the reservoir. The hazard level of a dam is determined by the potential impact to life and property a failure would have. A high-hazard dam is one which, if it should fail, would result in loss of life or significant property damage. More info in full report.
- The Utah Division of Recreation is pushing responsible recreation this spring and summer. Swift water can be extremely dangerous, even for experienced swimmers, due to its strong currents and unpredictable nature. Always wear a life jacket when near rivers or streams, even if you do not plan to enter the water.
- **Great Salt Lake has risen about two feet** since its historic low two set in early November 2022. This is due to direct precipitation and inflows to the lake. For context, the lake hardly rose a foot all of last year. We are off to a good start as we look toward spring runoff!
- Twenty-four of the 47 [reservoirs](#) the division monitors are below 55%, which is about the same as last year but still about 10% lower than normal for this time of year.
- Of the 80 measured streams, 39 are currently flowing below normal. The number of streams measured has decreased due to ice on the stream gauges.
- Residents can find water-saving tips at SlowtheFlow.Org.

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FULL REPORT

U.S. Drought Monitor Utah

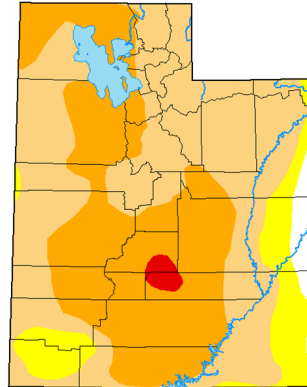
March 15, 2022



2022

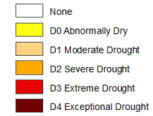
U.S. Drought Monitor Utah

March 14, 2023
(Released Thursday, Mar. 16, 2023)
Valid 8 a.m. EDT



2023

Intensity:



The Drought Monitor focuses on broad-scale conditions. Local conditions may vary. For more information on the Drought Monitor, go to <https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/About.aspx>

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U.S. Department of Agriculture



Graphic compares Utah's current drought situation to 2022. Currently, severe drought covers 39% of the state. Last year at this time, 96% of the state was in severe drought.

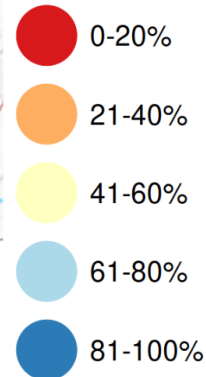
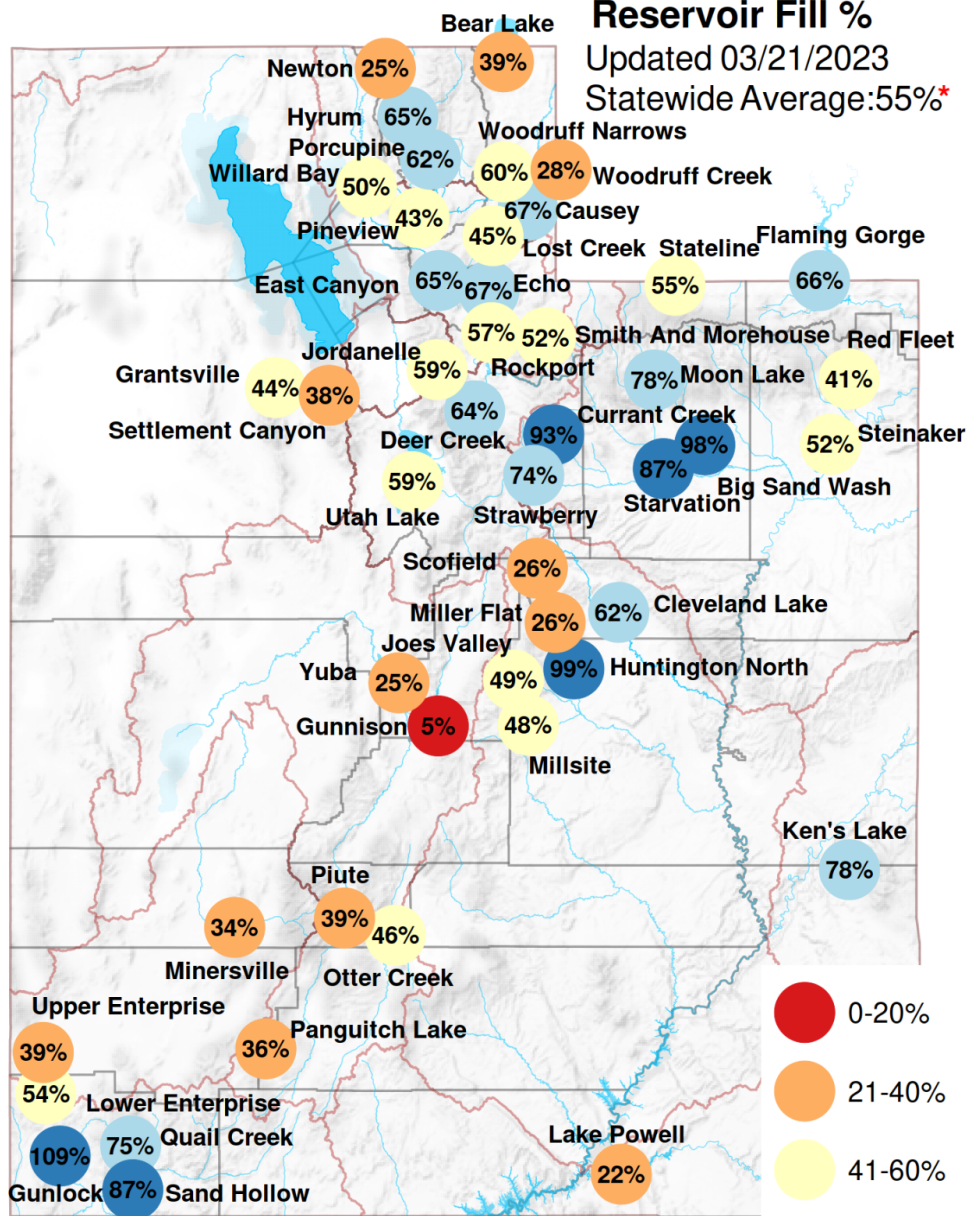
U.S. Drought Monitor

- According to the latest information released by the [U.S. Drought Monitor](#), 39% of Utah is experiencing extreme drought. This is an improvement compared to last year when 96% of the state was experiencing extreme drought.
- Residents looking to report drought impacts can use the U.S. Drought Monitor's [Condition Monitoring Observer Report](#) system. The report will become part of the permanent record, appearing immediately on an interactive map visible to the public, including authors of the U.S. Drought Monitor and the media.

Reservoir Fill %

Updated 03/21/2023

Statewide Average: 55%*



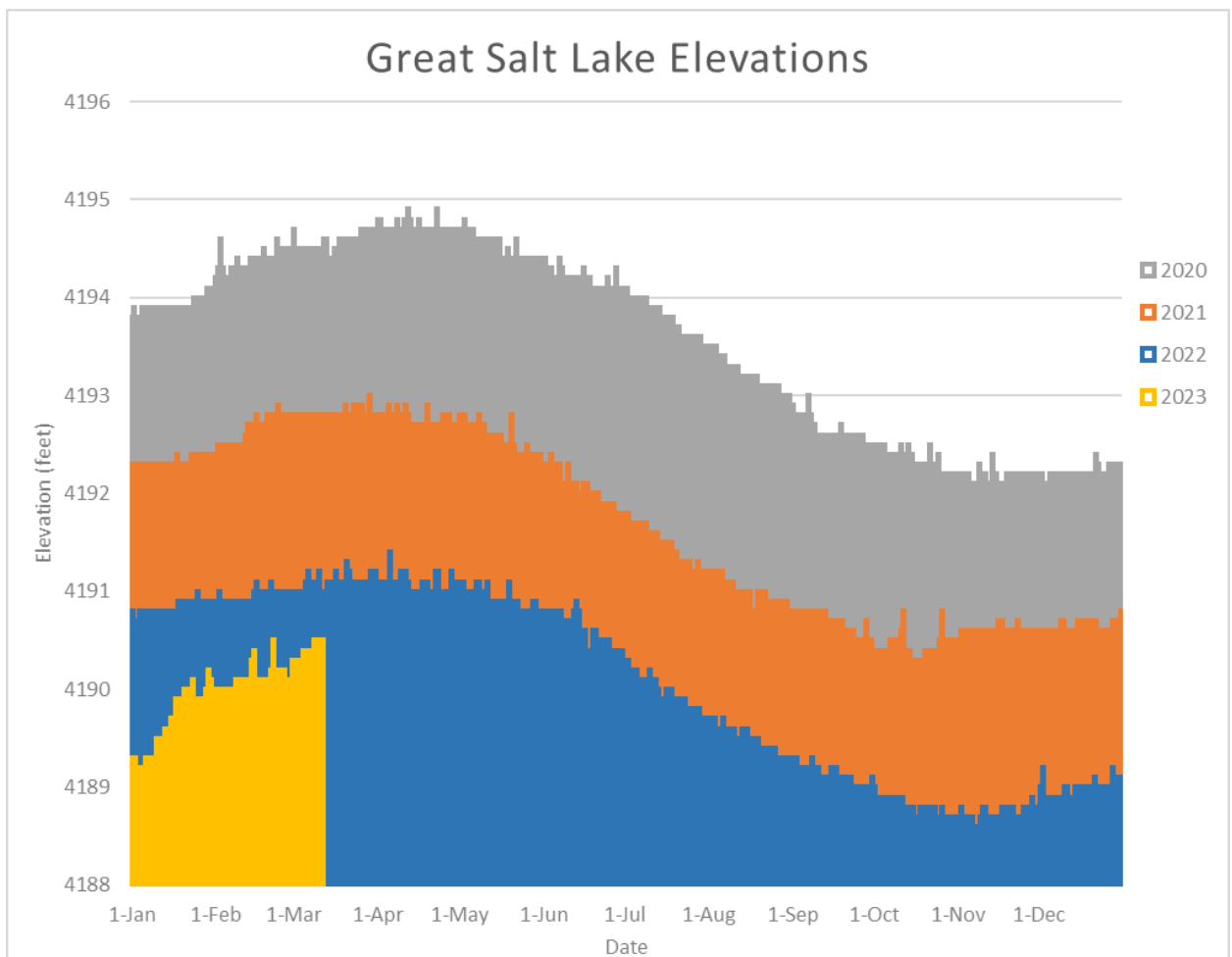
Data Sources: water.utah.gov/reservoirlevels

*State average excludes Lake Powell & Flaming Gorge to better represent the state's water supply.

Total capacity including these is 32%

Reservoir and Lake Levels

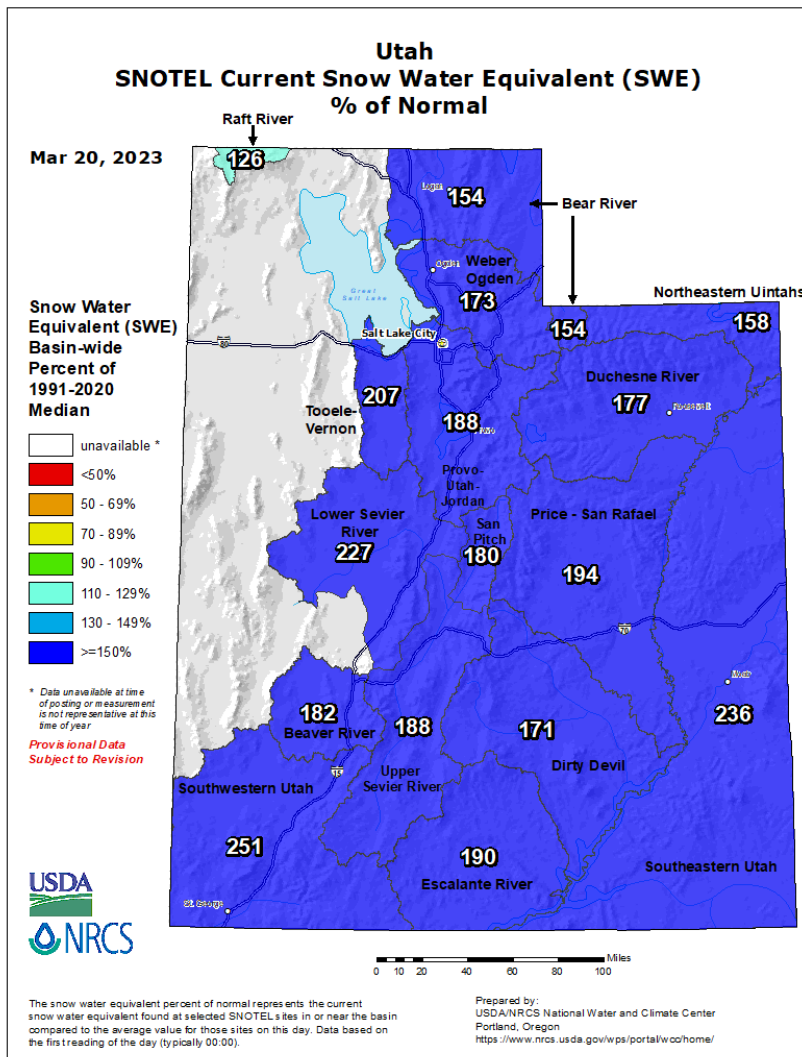
- Reservoir storage statewide now averages 55%. Twenty-four of Utah’s 47 reservoirs are below 55% of available capacity.
- Current statewide reservoir levels are about the same as they were last year at this time.
- **Great Salt Lake has risen about two feet** since its historic low two set in early November 2022. This is due to direct precipitation and inflows to the lake. For context, the lake hardly rose a foot all of last year. We are off to a good start as we look toward spring runoff!



The graph compares elevations of Great Salt Lake from 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023.

Precipitation and soil moisture

- Snow water equivalent, or the amount of water in the snowpack, across the state has been well above average. Currently at 24.7 inches, the state has received more snow water equivalent this water year than the entire last winter season. The snowpack is officially record breaking, our SWE is higher for this date than we have seen in the past thirty years.
- Soil moisture is 56%, about 4% above normal levels for this time of year. Higher soil moisture will assist in spring runoff getting to reservoirs.



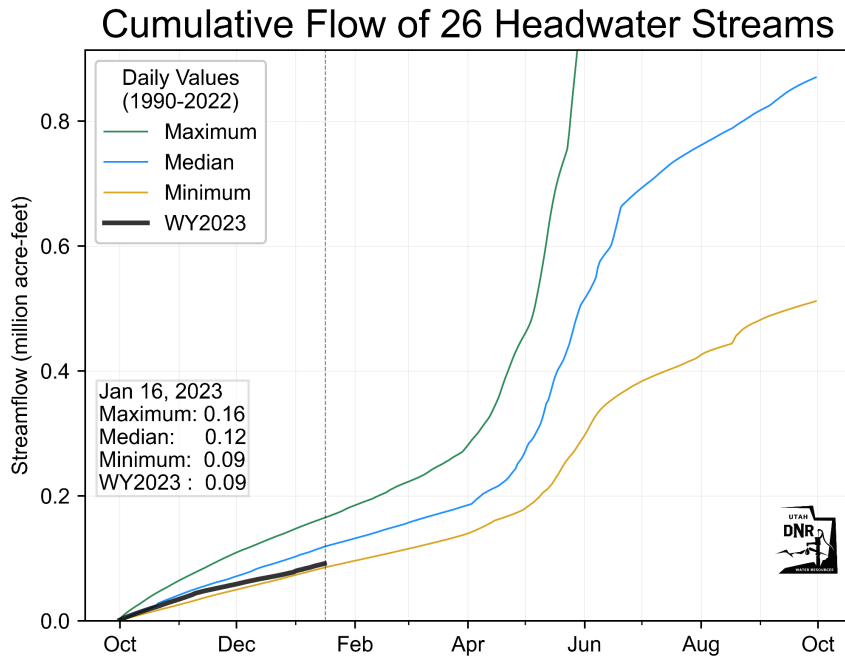
Snow water equivalent based on regions as compared to other recorded years (Period of Record). Every basin in Utah is reporting over 120% of normal snowpack.

Temperature and Evaporation

Warming spring temperatures have resulted in a few low elevation rain on snow events. These storms had rain up to about 8,000 feet elevation. Having lower elevation rain helped melt some low snow and could help with future flooding concerns. Short warming periods with colder periods between is optimal for an effective and safe melt.

Streamflows

- Of the 80 measured streams, 39 are currently flowing below normal. The number of streams measured has decreased due to ice on the stream gauges.
- None of the 4 measured streams are flowing at record low. This is due to above average precipitation across the state.



Total volume of streamflow water for the water year for headwater streams is below average. This could be due to water being locked in the snowpack, ice impacting gauges, or lingering low flows from drought conditions. Headwater streams are unregulated and represent natural runoff conditions. The current year black line is significantly below the median blue line.

Utah Division of Outdoor Recreation Tips:

- Swift water can be extremely dangerous, even for experienced swimmers, due to its strong currents and unpredictable nature.
- Always wear a life jacket when near rivers or streams, even if you do not plan to enter the water.
- Do not enter the water if it appears fast-moving or discolored, as this can indicate strong currents or hazards beneath the surface.
- Stay at least 15 feet away from the edge of a river or stream, as banks can be unstable and give way underfoot.
- Be aware of weather conditions and avoid entering the water during storms or periods of heavy rain, as water levels can rise quickly and without warning.
- Avoid alcohol or drugs when near or in the water, as they can impair your judgment and coordination.
- If you do enter the water and find yourself caught in a current, try to float on your back and point your feet downstream, as this can help you avoid obstacles and keep your head above water.
- Always be prepared for an emergency by carrying a whistle, cell phone, or other

signaling device that can alert others to your location.

- Never enter the water to rescue an individual caught in swift water, leave that to the trained professionals.

Utah Division of Water Rights

Dam Safety

The Dam Safety section of the Division of Water Rights monitors dams throughout the state and annually inspects Utah's nearly 200 high-hazard dams. In anticipation of increased water flow into state reservoirs as snow begins to melt, the Dam Safety section has been taking steps to ensure the integrity of dams and allow for the safe filling of reservoirs. These steps include:

- Working with the owners and operators of each high-hazard dam to monitor the condition of each as water level increases within the reservoir. The hazard level of a dam is determined by the potential impact to life and property a failure would have. A high-hazard dam is one which, if it should fail, would result in loss of life or significant property damage.
- Monitoring inflow to reservoirs and working with dam owners to release appropriate amounts of water to ensure the safety of individuals and properties downstream from the dam, ensure the well-being of the stream bed, and ensure the safe operation of the dam.
- Working with communities downstream of dams, as well as with dam owners and operators, to ensure communities are aware of and prepared for releases from the dam.

Stream Bed Preservation

The Stream Alteration section of the Division of Water Rights works to protect the natural resource value of Utah's stream, including aquatic wildlife, vested water rights, recreational opportunities, and the flood carrying capacity associated with the stream. Increased water flow has the potential to impact the natural resource value of a stream and the potential to lead to a flood event that can damage property and impact lives. As a result, the Stream Alteration section is taking the following steps:

- Encouraging those who administer and maintain water courses to anticipate changes that are needed to prevent flooding and file alteration requests as early as possible.
- Reminding those who maintain water courses that they should be kept free from debris to allow for the efficient flow of water, but any debris removal that requires heavy equipment within a stream bed needs to be permitted by the Division of Water Rights.
- Preparing to work with those who have to make an emergency alteration to a stream bed in the case of flooding or immediate threat of flood. Utah code allows a stream bed to be

altered in such a situation without prior authorization but the Division of Water Rights must be notified within two days of such a change.

If a stream bed must be altered in an emergency situation to address flooding, once the flooding has passed, the Stream Alteration section works with those who administer the water course to implement a long-term change that will help avoid future flooding while protecting the natural resource value of the stream.