



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Drought Update

SALT LAKE CITY (Feb. 21, 2022) – Utah’s snowpack is currently above the April peak. More snowstorms, such as the one forecasted this week, are needed to keep our snowpack above average. Many reservoirs are expected to fill, while larger water bodies will take multiple years of above-average snowpack to fill. Cold temperatures and an effective melt are needed to begin refilling reservoirs.

“This is our opportunity year!,” Candice Hasenyager, director of the Division of Water Resources, said. “In order to take full advantage of our plentiful snowpack, we must continue to use our water wisely. One good snow year won’t pull the state out of drought. And by using less water, we will become more drought resilient.”

The Department of Natural Resources and the Department of Environmental Quality recently partnered to create greatsaltlake.utah.gov. The website serves as a one-stop-shop for all things Great Salt Lake. The site can springboard visitors to activities such as the [Great Salt Lake Basin Integrated Plan](#), [Growing Smart Initiative](#) and [current conditions](#) on the lake.

“Before the website, we didn’t have a central place to direct people for Great Salt Lake information,” Hasenyager said. “Now, we have this important tool for Utahns to check out what is being done and why the lake matters.”

At-a-glance highlights:

- According to the [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#) in their latest report, Utah is now guaranteed to have an above-normal snowpack! From now until the onset of snowmelt, every additional inch of snow will push the state farther above normal. The only years that have had more snow at the beginning of February since the SNOTEL network was installed were 1984 and 1997.
- January precipitation in Utah was well above normal at 196%, making it one of the best winters in the past 20 years! 2017 and 2005 were slightly better than 2023.



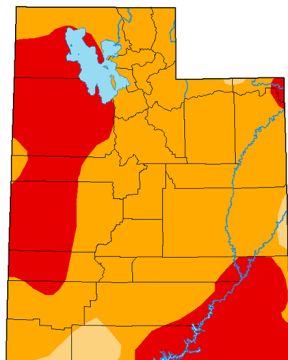
- **Great Salt Lake has risen a foot and a half** since its historic low two set in early November 2022. This is due to direct precipitation and inflows to the lake. For context, the lake rose just over a foot all of last year. We are off to a good start as we look toward spring runoff!
- On Feb. 3, Gov. Cox issued an [executive order](#) to raise the Great Salt Lake causeway berm from 4,187 feet to 4,192 feet. The purpose of raising the earth fill berm is to take advantage of the above normal snowpack this year and capture as much water from the spring runoff as possible. Raising the berm helps prevent hyper saline water in the north arm of the lake from flowing into the less salty south arm. This temporary measure will have impacts to the lake level of the north arm. However, the north arm does not support the same ecosystem and is already at or near saturation of salinity. The north arm has a thicker mineral crust that is not as prone to erosion. It is very likely that the berm management plan, which is part of the governor's executive order, will include periodic strategic releases of water to the north arm when conditions support the release.
- 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 63 measured streams, 24 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

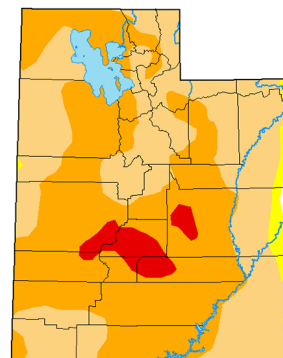
February 15, 2022



2022

U.S. Drought Monitor
Utah

February 14, 2023
(Released Thursday, Feb. 16, 2023)
Valid 7 a.m. EST



2023

Intensity:

- None
- D0 Abnormally Dry
- D1 Moderate Drought
- D2 Severe Drought
- D3 Extreme Drought
- D4 Exceptional Drought

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

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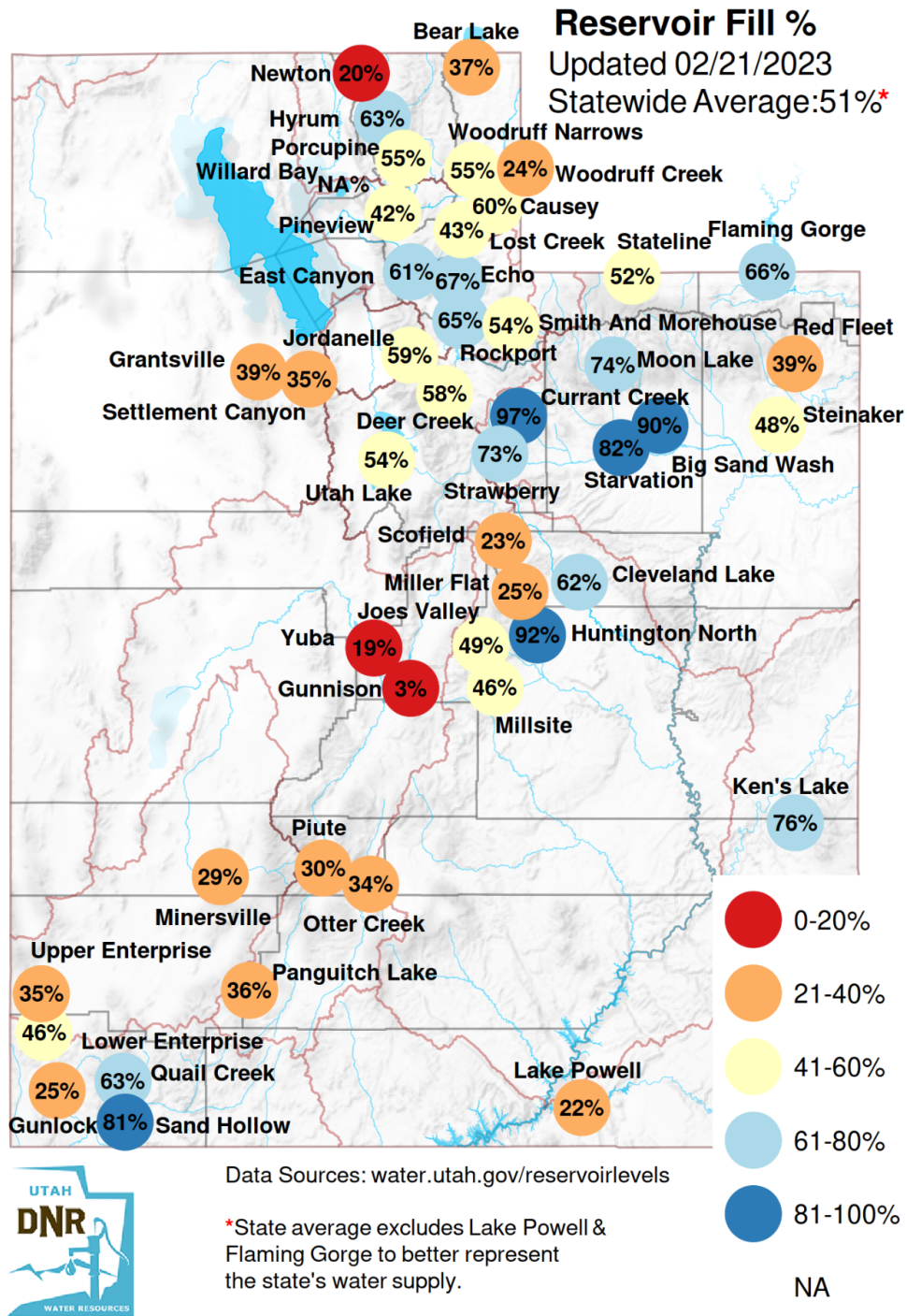


droughtmonitor.unl.edu

Graphic compares Utah's current drought situation to 2022. Currently, extreme drought covers 4% of the state. Last year at this time, 34% of the state was in extreme drought.

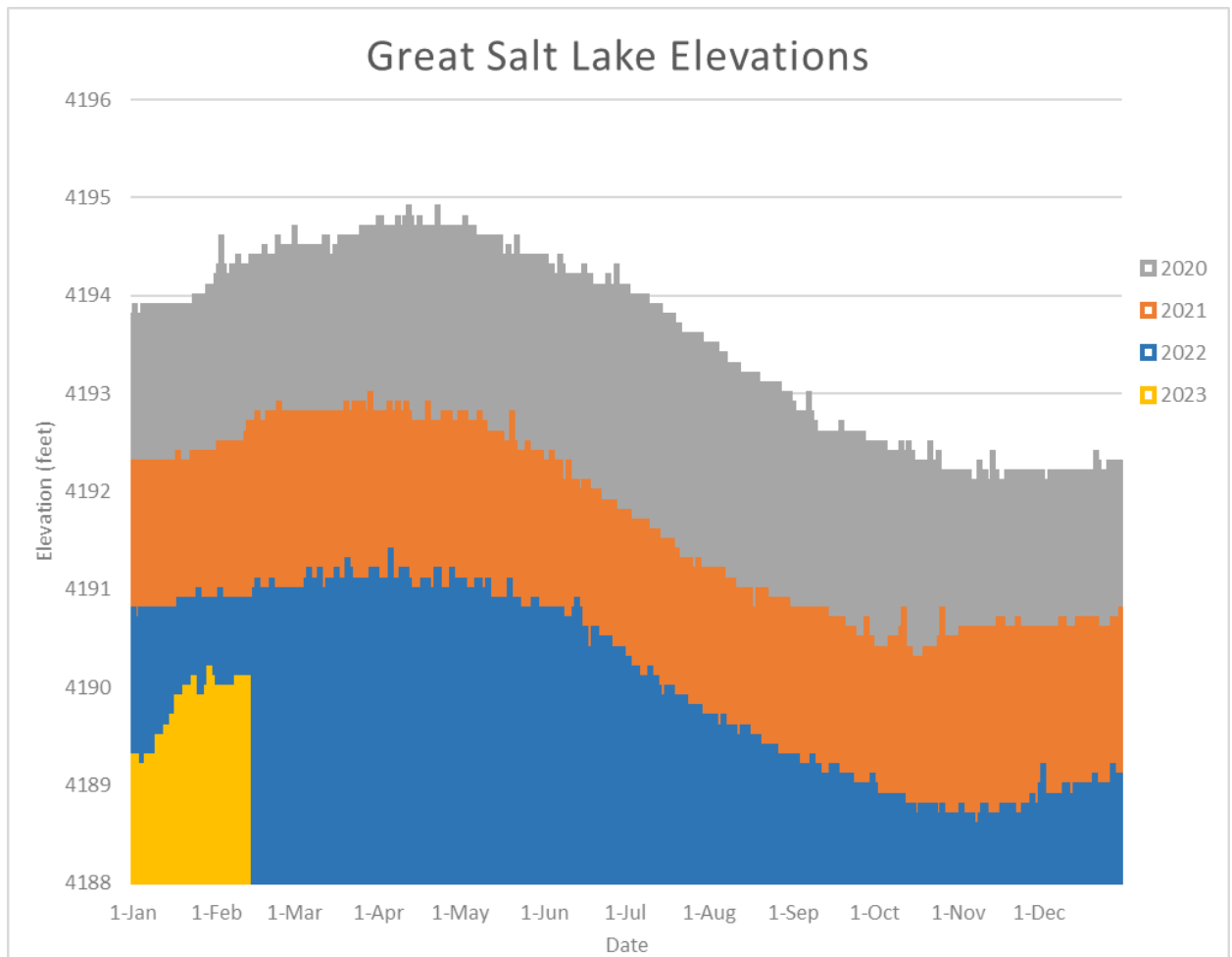
U.S. Drought Monitor

- According to the latest information released by the [U.S. Drought Monitor](#), 4% of Utah is experiencing extreme drought. This is an improvement compared to last year when 34% 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 and Lake Levels

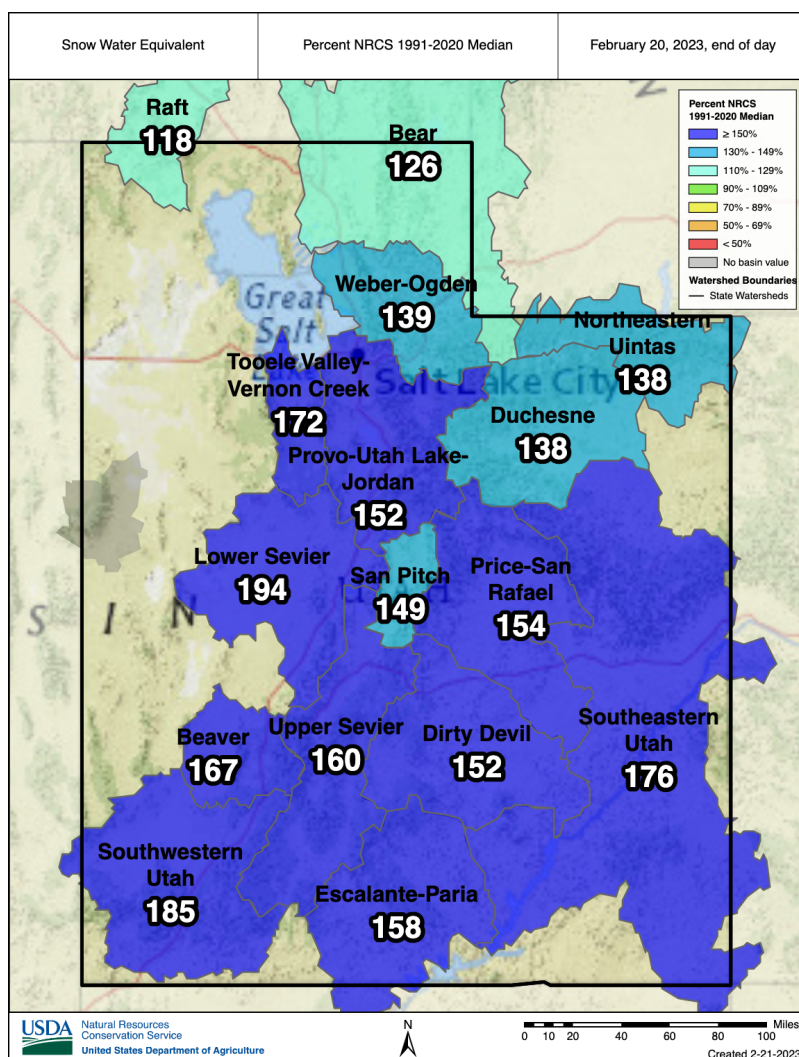
- Reservoir storage statewide now averages 51%. Twenty-four of Utah's 47 reservoirs are below 55% of available capacity.
- Current statewide reservoir levels are about the same as they were last year at this time.
- **Great Salt Lake has risen a foot and a half** since its historic low two set in early 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!
- On Feb. 3, Gov. Cox issued an [executive order](#) to raise the Great Salt Lake causeway berm from 4,187 feet to 4,192 feet. The purpose of raising the earth fill berm is to take advantage of the above normal snowpack this year and capture as much water from the spring runoff as possible. Raising the berm helps prevent hyper saline water in the north arm of the lake from flowing into the less salty south arm. This temporary measure will have impacts to the lake level of the north arm. However, the north arm does not support the same ecosystem and is already at or near saturation of salinity. The north arm has a thicker mineral crust that is not as prone to erosion. It is very likely that the berm management plan, which is part of the governor's executive order, will include periodic strategic releases of water to the north arm when conditions support the release.



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 16.3 inches, the state has received more snow water equivalent this water year than the entire last winter season.
- Soil moisture is 55%, about 7% 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 118% of normal snowpack.

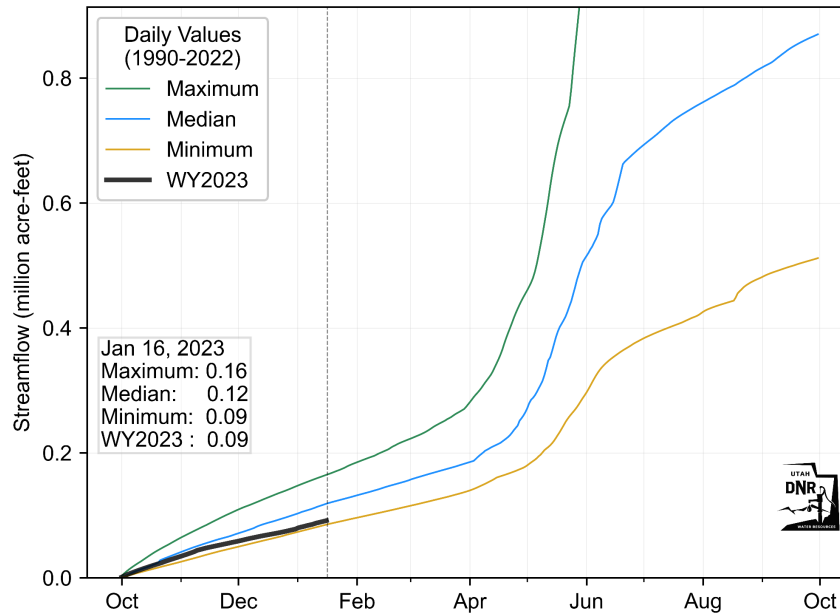
Temperature and Evaporation

- Temperatures have been nearly 3 degrees warmer than average for the last two weeks. This has resulted in rain in lower elevations rather than snow. The temperatures haven't affected the higher elevation snow that contributes to mountain snowpack.
- Evaporation has been typical for this time of year.

Streamflows

- Of the 71 measured streams, 18 are currently flowing below normal. The number of streams measured has decreased due to ice on the stream gauges.
- None of the 71 measured streams are flowing at record low. This is due to above average precipitation across the state.

Cumulative Flow of 26 Headwater Streams



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.