Notable Weather & Climate in Nevada: January - March

The second half of the winter did not deliver. October - December brought above normal precipitation to most of the state, and parts of northwestern Nevada had a record-wet start to the winter. In striking contrast, January - March was drier than normal statewide. Large portions of the state received less than 20% of the average January - March precipitation. Parts of northern Nevada had a record-dry end to the winter. The far northeastern corner of the state received reasonable amounts of precipitation in January -- up to 200% of normal. Western Nevada got almost no rain or snow that month. February was dry statewide. March was also dry, though closer to normal.

Average temperatures during the second half of the winter were near or just slightly above normal. January had above normal temperatures over most of the state. February tended cooler than usual, and March was warmer than normal. It hit 90°F in Las Vegas for the first time this year on March 25. This is only the sixth year time that the (newly re-named) Harry Reid International Airport has reported its first 90°F day in March. Late March was much warmer than normal in northern Nevada, too. Also on the 25th, Reno hit 81°F at the airport and Elko hit 76°F.

Drought worsened over southern Nevada, with D3 - Extreme Drought expanding across more of Esmeralda, Nye, Lincoln and Clark Counties. Drought also deepened over northern Nevada. Nevada has now been entirely in D1 - Moderate or more significant drought since early February 2021, and there has been D4 - Exceptional Drought present since mid-September 2020.
I was hoping for a nice cool, wet spring, but it's not looking like my wishes are going to be granted (at least there are some showers this week). Over most of Nevada, the Climate Prediction Center's seasonal outlook suggests that there are roughly even odds of cool, normal or warm conditions over far northwestern Nevada. Elsewhere in the state, cooler than normal temperatures are less likely. From northwest to southeast the odds of a cooler than normal spring decrease from about 30% to about 15%. And the odds of above normal temperatures increase from about 33% to over 50%. The precipitation outlook for the far southern tip of Nevada is the most promising, with only about a 33% chance of below normal precipitation and a roughly two-thirds chance of normal or above normal precipitation. Far northeastern Nevada has only about a 10% chance of seeing a wet spring, with a roughly 33% chance of normal precipitation and an almost 60% chance of below normal rain and mountain snow.

**In depth - what would it take to get out of drought?**

The easy answer to this question is more rain and snow. As with most things, it's not quite that simple. One of the things that makes it not so simple, especially here in the West, is what time frame you use to figure gage drought. A farmer without much irrigation capacity could be impacted by a short drought, but most municipal water suppliers plan for multiple dry years in a row.

For those of us here in the Reno area, it's been a wet water year so far. Since the start of October, the Reno-Tahoe International Airport has gotten almost two and half inches more precipitation than normal -- not bad for a place that averages a bit less than 7.5" a year.

If we take a longer view, the situation doesn't look so promising. Since the start of the 2020 water year in October 2019, we're short just over six inches of precipitation. So as you start wondering when we'll be out of drought, remember that a good answer considers the time scale.