

Wet December brings nearly double the mountain snow pack

Rong-Gong Lin II, Los Angeles Times, 12-28-10

Helped by one of the wettest Decembers in history, California's mountain snow pack is 198% of normal, the state Department of Water Resources said Tuesday.

"Hydrologically, we're off to what promises to be a very good water supply year," said Ted Thomas, a spokesman for the Department of Water Resources. "This is the best early water supply start since 2006."

"This boosts our hopes that we will have an adequate water supply for our cities and farms as we continue to shake off effects of the 2007-09 drought," Mark Cowin, the director of the Department of Water Resources, said in a statement.

According to the agency, Pyramid Lake is at 98% of total capacity, and Castaic Lake is at 90% of total capacity. Both reservoirs in northern Los Angeles County are at above-average levels for this time of year.

The rains were also helping to fill up reservoirs in Northern California, which are key to the State Water Project, which in turn is critical to supplying the water needs of Southern California. Lake Oroville, the water project's principal reservoir, has climbed to 59% of capacity, which is just short of being average for this time of year.

Also helping is that demand for water fell in 2010, as homeowners and businesses sought to conserve water to cut costs, and as gardeners saw less need to irrigate their lawns with the cooler-than-average weather this summer, said Bob Muir, spokesman for the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California.

The reduced demand has caused reservoir levels at one of the Metropolitan Water District's most important reservoirs, Diamond Valley Lake outside Hemet, to rise. The reservoir, critical to supplying water to Orange, Riverside and San Diego counties, is now more than 75% full -- the highest it has been since January 2008, Muir said. Diamond Valley Lake was less than half full earlier this year.

Southland water reserves had been dwindling since 2007, Muir said, the result of dry rainy seasons and restrictions of pumping water out of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, the state's biggest river, to southbound aqueducts.