



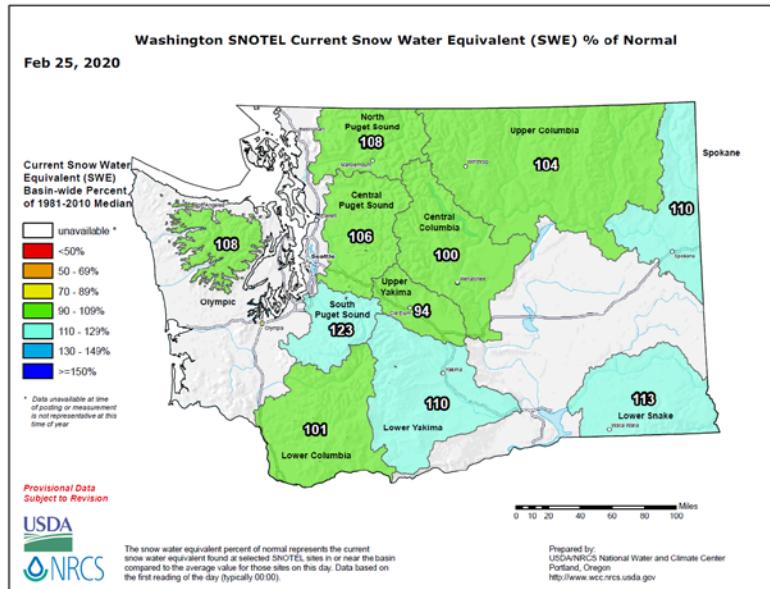
February 26, 2020

**TO:** Interested Parties  
**FROM:** Donelle Mahan, Forest Practices Assistant Division Manager, Operations  
**SUBJECT:** 2020 Fish Survey Season-Water Level and Streamflow Forecast

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR), in consultation with the Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), provides the following forecast for statewide water abundance for the 2020 fish survey season to focus appropriate attention on potential drought conditions when scheduling and conducting fish surveys.<sup>1</sup> Many factors influence the extent and distribution of fish species in a watershed. Drought conditions can alter how fish species occupy or access streams.

Under Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) definitions, drought conditions may be present where basins have 70 percent or less of the basin's snow water equivalent. Under Washington state statute, drought conditions can exist at 75 percent or less of the basin's normal water supply. The NRCS report estimated Washington State snow pack ("snow water equivalents") were at 96 percent of normal statewide as of February 1, 2020. The *Water Supply Outlook Report* reports basin percentages of normal ranging from 94 to 123 percent (Figure 1). Current snow pack and rainfall have saturated soils but as we move into the protocol survey season (March 1 – July 15) be aware that flow conditions can change. For example, June and July stream flows may be minimal and will be entirely dependent upon future temperatures and rainfall amounts.

Figure 1. Washington SNOTEL snow water equivalent percentage of normal by basin as of February 1, 2020.

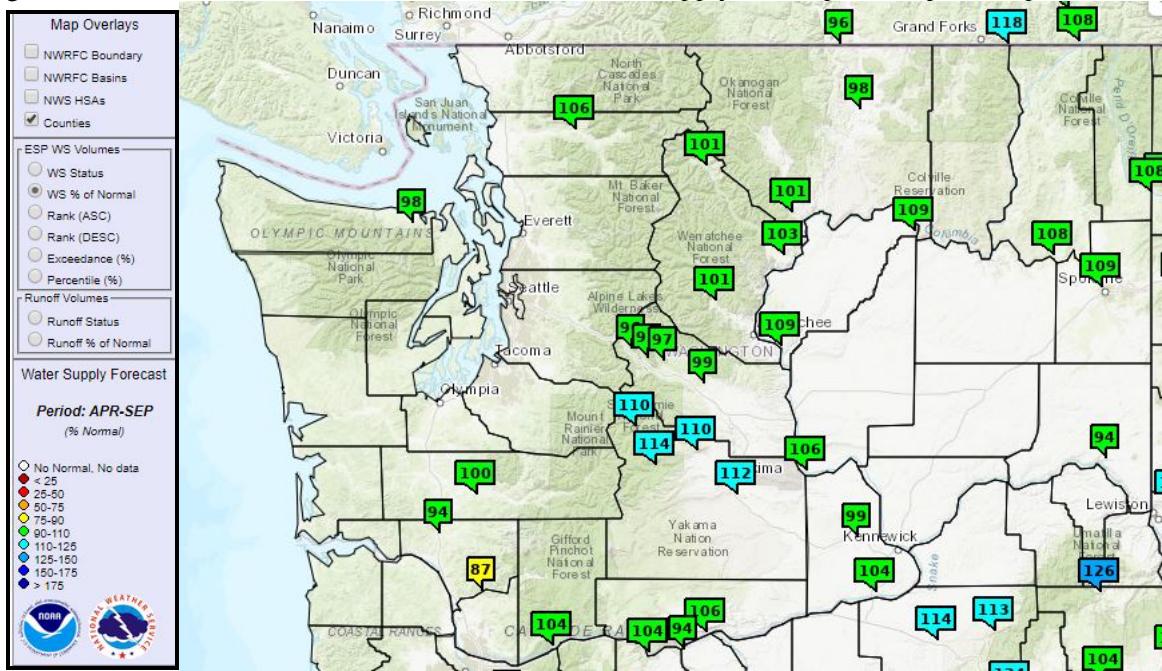


[https://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/ftpref/data/water/wcs/gis/maps/wa\\_sweptnormal\\_update.pdf](https://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/ftpref/data/water/wcs/gis/maps/wa_sweptnormal_update.pdf)

<sup>1</sup> Forest Practices Board Manual Section 13, Part 2 "Guidelines for Determining Fish Use for the Purpose of Typing Waters" (see WAC 222-16-031 *Interim Water Typing System*)

Washington water and fish managers review several forecasting products when considering a drought declaration under state statute and rule.<sup>2</sup> In addition to the aforementioned NRCS information, Washington references the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Northwest River Forecast Center (NWRFC) forecast for water supply. Figure 2 depicts the NWRFC February 25, 2020 water supply prediction for the period April - September 2020. As of this week, water supplies are predicted to range between 87-118% of normal during April-September 2020 but are predominantly expected to be at ~100% of normal for Washington streams.

Figure 2. NOAA Northwest River Forecast Center water supply for the period April – September, 2020



The current snow pack levels (Figure 1) and predictions for streamflow (Figure 2) are predominantly at or above normal. As well, the most recent NRCS *Water Supply Outlook Report* is for below normal temperatures and near normal precipitation. Surveyors should review specific stream flow conditions (using the links provided below) prior to conducting your surveys in low-flow affected areas. Landowners should consult with their DNR forest practices forester, WDFW habitat biologist, and/or tribal biologist prior to conducting a protocol survey during low-flow conditions.

Proponents of water type changes should provide specific information (pictures are strongly encouraged) demonstrating how stream flows and fish use determinations were unaffected by low-flow conditions, if present. If applicable, proponents should also provide information demonstrating how fish use determinations were unaffected by mass wasting or stream scouring events. DNR will process water type modifications only when adequate information is provided to support the proponent's request (for example, justification solely on a phrase like "flow was good" is considered insufficient). Landowners and interested parties can find details regarding drought effects in specific basins by reviewing the following water supply forecast and stream flow resources:

<sup>2</sup> Title 43.83B(400-901) RCW; Chapter 173-166 WAC

- The Natural Resource Conservation Service *Current Water Supply Outlook Report*:  
<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/wa/snow/waterproducts/>  
2 Title 43.83B (400-901) RCW; Chapter 173-166 WAC
- For drought status under the Washington State definition, as well as information about the state drought declaration process, review Ecology's drought information:  
<https://ecology.wa.gov/Regulations-Permits/Laws-rules-rulemaking/Closed-rulemaking/WAC-173-166-Aug17>
- Ecology also provides links to a variety of water supply data and forecasting web sites:  
<https://ecology.wa.gov/Water-Shorelines/Water-supply>
- For details regarding whether or not drought may affect a specific basin, please review the Northwest River Forecast Center (NWRFC) "Ensemble Streamflow Prediction (ESP) Water Supply Forecast as Percent of Average": <http://www.nwrfc.noaa.gov/ws/>.
- Please review stream flow conditions prior to conducting surveys in low-flow-affected areas. Review flows at specific Washington locations: <http://waterdata.usgs.gov/wa/nwis/rt> and <https://ecology.wa.gov/Research-Data/Monitoring-assessment/River-stream-monitoring/Flow-monitoring>.

If you have questions about conducting protocol fish presence surveys or water typing in general, please contact Forest Practices staff at one of the six DNR region offices:

- Northeast: (509) 684-7474
- Northwest: (360) 856-3500
- Olympic: (360) 374-2800
- Pacific Cascade: (360) 577-2025
- Southeast: (509) 925-8510
- South Puget Sound: (360) 825-1631