



**DEPARTMENT OF
NATURAL RESOURCES**

FOREST REGULATION DIVISION

1111 WASHINGTON ST SE
MAIL STOP 47012
OLYMPIA, WA 98504-7012

360-902-1400

FAX 360-902-1428

FPD@DNR.WA.GOV

WWW.DNR.WA.GOV

February 24, 2025

TO: Interested Parties

FROM: Kelly Childers, Region-Operations Outreach Manager

SUBJECT: 2025 Fish Survey Season – Water Level and Streamflow Forecast

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR), in consultation with the Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), has collated information on water abundance. The following analysis of statewide water abundance for the 2025 fish survey season is to focus appropriate attention on potential drought conditions when scheduling and conducting fish surveys.¹ Many factors influence the extent and distribution of fish species in a watershed. This includes drought conditions, which alter how fish species occupy or access streams. While drought conditions also play a role in typing of non-fish perennial versus non-fish seasonal streams, the focus of this memo is to provide information for protocol surveys with the intent of differentiating Type F streams from non-fish streams.

Under Washington state statute, undue hardship is likely when the water supply of a basin is below 75 percent of normal.² The February 2025 NRCS Report estimated that the Washington state snowpack (“snow water equivalents”) ranges from 70 to 129 percent of normal statewide as of February 17, 2025 (Figure 1). The February 2025 *Water Supply Outlook Report* displays basin precipitation percentages of slightly below normal for most major basins, except for below normal conditions in the Upper Yakima and Central Puget Sound basins and near normal conditions for some basins in the southern Cascades and for several subbasins in the Upper Columbia. Snowpack is currently variable statewide, ranging from mostly above normal in the southern Cascades and across much of the northern Blue Mountains and northern Washington east of the Methow River, to above normal in the lower Wenatchee Mountains and along the eastern part of the Olympic Mountains, to generally trending below normal in the central and northern Cascades.³

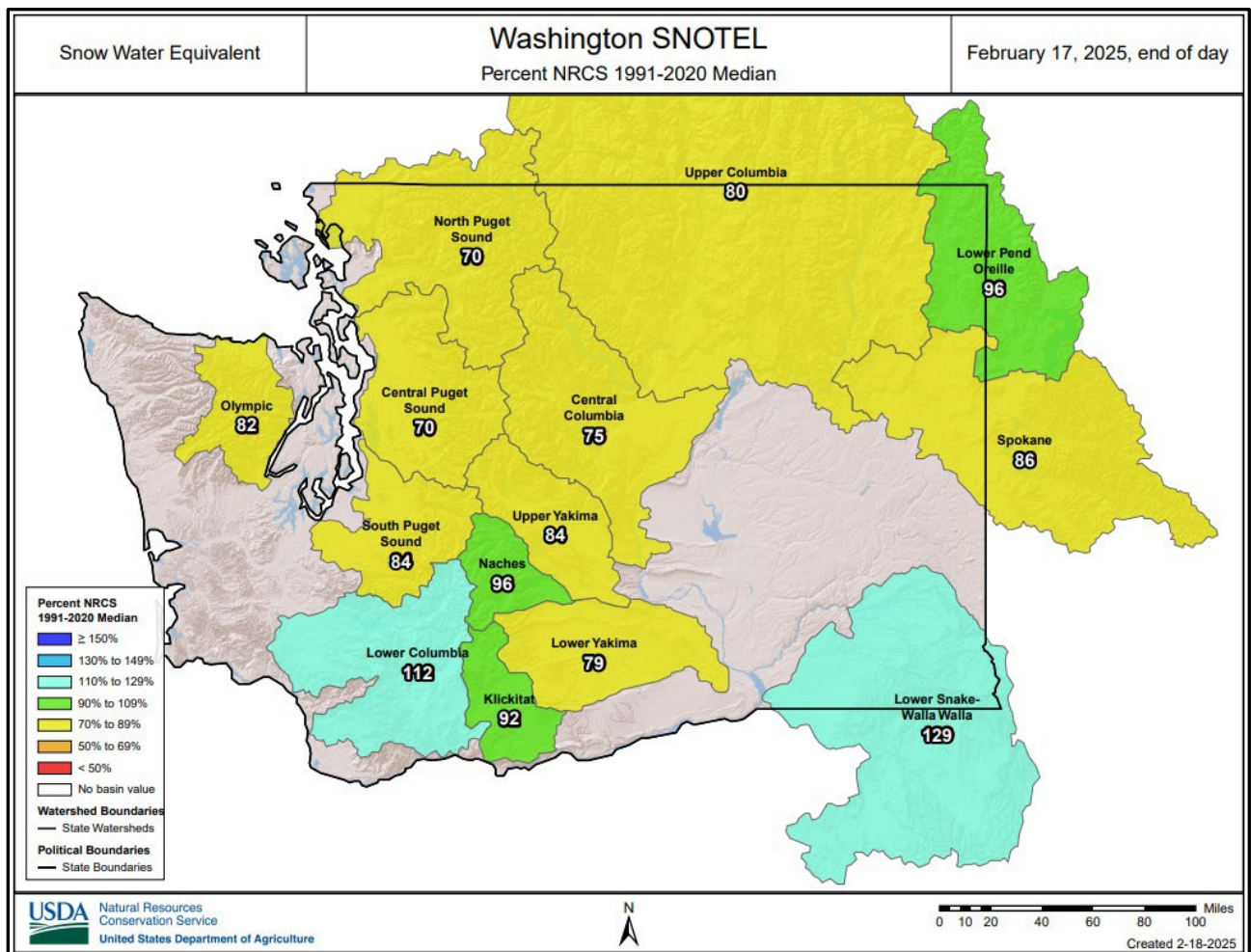
¹ Forest Practices Board Manual [Section 13, Part 2](#) “*Guidelines for Determining Fish Use for the Purpose of Typing Waters*” (see also WAC [222-16-031](#) *Interim Water Typing System*).

² [Chapter 43.83B.011](#) RCW; Drought Conditions Definition

³ NRCS February 1, 2025, Water Supply Outlook Report, page 4; Washington Water Supply Outlook report | NRCS Washington ([usda.gov](https://www.usda.gov))

Washington water and fish managers review several forecasting products when considering a drought declaration under state statute and rule.⁴ In addition, Washington references the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s (NOAA) Northwest River Forecast Center (NWRFC) to estimate water supply for a given year. Figure 2 depicts the NWRFC water supply prediction for the period April – September 2025. As of February 18, 2025, statewide water supplies are predicted to range between 52 and 104 percent of normal during April – September 2025 but are expected to average about 86 percent of normal for Washington streams.

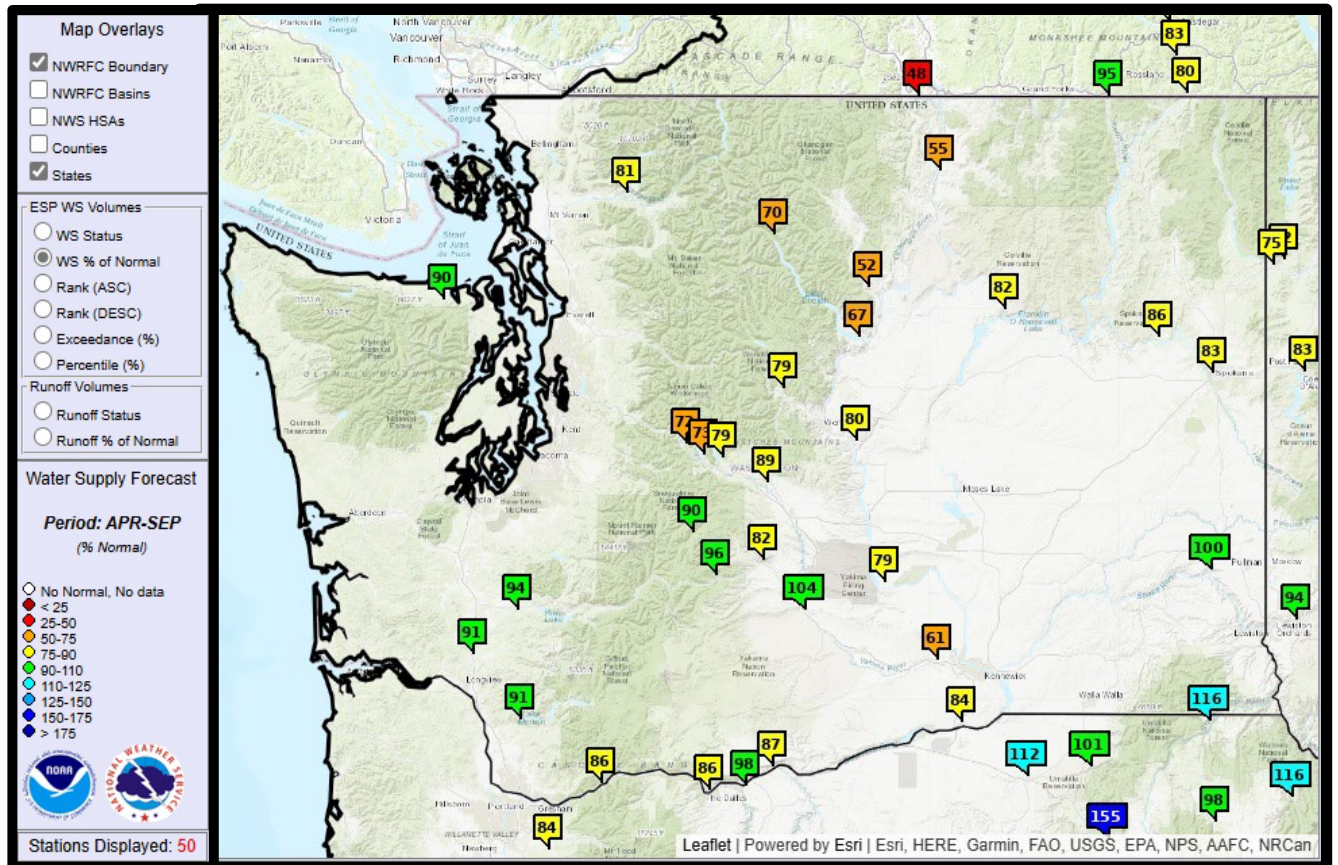
Figure 1. Washington SNOTEL snow water equivalent percentage of normal monthly outlook by basin as of February 17, 2025.



Map courtesy of [NWCC iMap](#)

⁴ Title [43.83B](#) (400-901) RCW; Chapter [173-166](#) WAC

Figure 2. NOAA Northwest River Forecast Center water supply forecast for the period April through September 2025.



Map courtesy of <https://www.nwrfc.noaa.gov/ws/>

The current snowpack levels (Figure 1) and water supply forecast (Figure 2) are predominantly near normal to below normal. The February 1, 2025 NRCS *Water Supply Outlook Report* issued in mid-February indicates the snow-accumulation season is off to a poor start in Washington. Due to a persistent ridge of high pressure off the Northwest coast throughout much of January, record or near-record low precipitation was measured for the month, in some basins exacerbating snowpack and precipitation deficits. However, as the full winter snowpack becomes clear over the next couple months, forecast precision will significantly improve for most locations.⁵ It is important to note that the data presented in this memo are from a point in time and are unlikely to accurately reflect conditions later on during the survey season. Surveyors should review specific stream flow conditions (using the links provided below) prior to conducting surveys in

⁵ NRCS February 1, 2025, Water Supply Outlook Report, pages 3 & 7; Washington Water Supply Outlook report | NRCS (www.nrcs.usda.gov)

low flow affected areas. Landowners should consult with their DNR Forest Practices Forester, DNR Small Forest Landowner Regulation Assistance Fish and Wildlife Biologist, a WDFW habitat biologist, and/or tribal biologist prior to conducting a protocol survey during low-flow conditions.

A new version of the Water Type Modification Form (WTMF) with a slight wording clarification change to Block 11 accompanies this memo and is posted to DNR's website. The previous version asked whether a drought warning was issued by DNR. This question was clarified to reflect the actual process and authority for drought declaration issuance per RCW 43.83B. This form version is expected to be used for the protocol survey season starting March 1, 2025. Proponents of water type changes must answer all questions on the WTMF and should provide specific information (pictures are strongly encouraged) demonstrating whether stream flows and fish use determinations were affected by low-flow or drought conditions, if present. If applicable, proponents should also provide information demonstrating whether fish use determinations were affected by mass wasting or stream scouring events. DNR will process water type modifications only when complete information is provided on the water type modification form in support of the proponent's request (for example, justification solely on a phrase such as "*flow was good*" is considered insufficient). In certain cases, WTMF processing may be delayed until conditions are conducive for proper review.

Landowners and interested parties can find details regarding drought effects in specific basins by reviewing the following water supply forecast and stream flow resources:

- The Natural Resource Conservation Service *Current Water Supply Outlook Reports*:
[NRCS January 1, 2025 Washington Water Supply Outlook Report](#)
[NRCS February 1, 2025 Washington Water Supply Outlook Report](#)
- Washington State Statute and Rules:
[Chapter 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:
Statewide Conditions: <https://ecology.wa.gov/Water-Shorelines/Water-supply/Water-availability/Statewide-conditions>
- Department of Ecology provides links to a variety of water supply data and forecasting resources at this page:
<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 areas that may be affected by low flow. Review flows of specific Washington locations at:
 - Freshwater DataStream data map:
<https://fortress.wa.gov/ecy/eap/flows/regions/state.asp>
 - WA Current Streamflow Summary (USGS & Dept. of Ecology):
<https://waecy.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Viewer/index.html?appid=832e254169e640fba6e117780e137e7b>

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

c:

Forest Regulation Division

Saboor Jawad, Division Manager

J. Mack McEntyre, Assistant Division Manager – Operations

DNR Regions

Pat Ryan, Region Manager – Northeast Region

Jay Guthrie, Region Manager – Northwest Region

Bill Wells, Region Manager – Olympic Region

Scott Sargent, Region Manager – Pacific Cascade Region

Larry Leach, Acting Region Manager – Southeast Region

Don Melton, Region Manager – South Puget Sound Region