A review of the 2004 water year in Colorado

Nolan J. Doesken
Colorado Climate Center, Atmospheric Science Department, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colorado

Michael A. Gillespie
Snow Survey Division, Natural Resources Conservation Service, US Department of Agriculture, Lakewood, Colorado

Abstract. Drought concerns prevailed throughout the 2004 water year, as streamflow and soil moisture still lagged behind average following the extreme drought of 2002. The winter months were drier than average over much of Colorado, especially over the northern and central mountains and eastern plains. March 2004 was particularly warm and dry. Fortunately, April precipitation was much above average in some of the areas of Colorado that needed it most. The summer months were unusually cool and damp east of the mountains. Warm and very dry conditions prevailed in western Colorado until a series of storms in September brought generous moisture to the mountains and western valleys. Overall, 2004 water year precipitation totals were near average for the state as a whole. Streamflow from mountain snowpack was below average, particularly in the Colorado River basin, but good summer precipitation and cooler temperatures stretched water supplies and resulted in a lessening of drought severity in many areas while essentially ending the drought in others.