

A Review of the 2006 Water Year in Colorado

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Abstract. A widespread soaking rain in October 2005 got the 2006 water year off to a good start in Colorado. Heavy early and midwinter snows in the Northern and Central mountains provided excellent skiing conditions and visions of abundant water supplies for a state that has continued to suffer from water shortages since severe drought in 2002. Unfortunately, little snow fell across southern Colorado most of the winter and dry and very windy conditions with record warm January temperatures occurred east of the mountains. March brought beneficial snow and cool temperatures to much of the state, but a very dry and unseasonably warm spring (April - June) resulted in much less runoff from mountain rivers, and rapid drying at lower elevations. Agricultural conditions deteriorated rapidly. In July, moist air moved northward associated with the North American monsoon circulation. Much of southern and central Colorado, both in and east of the mountain, received above average precipitation in July, August and portions of September. There was sufficient runoff over portions of southern Colorado to increase reservoir levels in some areas. The anticipated severe wildfire season did not materialize thanks to the abundant summer rains. Northern areas of Colorado missed out on this summer moisture, and extreme drought conditions redeveloped near the Wyoming and Nebraska borders. The year ended with beneficial September rains, and finally some cooler than average temperatures. For the year as a whole, statewide precipitation was about 90% of average, temperatures were above average, and reservoirs levels ended up below average but with little overall change from the previous year.