

A Review of the 2011 Water Year in Colorado

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Abstract. The 2011 water year (October 1, 2010 – September 30, 2011) delivered large contrasts in weather and water conditions across Colorado. Heavy winter and spring snows in the northern mountains were followed by prolonged high streamflow with near-flood conditions into mid summer. Meanwhile southern portions of Colorado experienced drought or near drought conditions with exceptional drought (50-year return probability) in southeastern Colorado and portions of the San Luis Valley. During winter and early spring there were extreme east-west precipitation gradients with storms delivering moisture consistently to the high mountains but with almost no moisture spilling over to the Front Range foothills and eastern plains until April storms finally changed the pattern. For the rest of spring and summer, the gradient shifted to a sharp north-south pattern with very little moisture over southern Colorado but generous moisture across northern Colorado. Temperatures for the year were above average with late summer temperatures especially anomalously warm. However, winter brought two bouts of extreme cold to portions of northern and central Colorado where some mountain communities experience their first -35F or colder temperatures in close to 20 years. This presentation will detail how the 2011 water year evolved. Monthly and seasonal precipitation patterns for the state will be presented along with snow accumulation graphics and hydrographs for selected basins. 2012 has been proclaimed “The year of water” for Colorado. A short description of plans and opportunities to celebrate water and promote water education will be given.