A Review Of The 2003 Water Year In Colorado

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Abstract.
During water year 2003, Colorado remained in the grasp of a significant drought. Throughout the year drought conditions improved in portions of the state, while other areas experienced worsening drought conditions. Water year precipitation ranged from well below average across southwestern Colorado, to above average in north central Colorado. Winter snowpack accumulations followed a similar pattern, and were dominated by a single March storm which brought 3 to 5 feet of snow to northeastern Colorado. This storm provided most of the drought relief to the state by improving streamflow volumes to near average and allowing water managers to improve reservoir storage volumes. The state experience a warm and dry spring which produced a rapid snowmelt and high peak flows which were short lived. As summer developed streamflow volumes dropped back below average for the remainder of the year. While the 2003 water year brought improved water supplies to much of the state over those of 2002, drought impacts continue to be felt statewide. The water year ended with well below average reservoir storage in all basins of the state, with statewide volumes of 74% of average.