Snowpack numbers good, so far

Mason Valley News
January 5, 2016
By: Robert Perea

A series of storms in December have the Walker River Basin’s snowpack ahead of the average yearly pace at the beginning of January.

But water users are not ready to get excited yet.

The Walker River Basin’s snowpack was 123 percent of yearly average for Jan. 4, with more storms expected this week. However, much more snow is needed over the next three months before water rights holders can raise their hopes for something close to a full allocation for the coming irrigation season.

All seven of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service SNOTEL sites in the Walker River Basin had above average levels of snow as of Jan. 4.

The best numbers so far are at the Monitor Pass measuring site, which was at 175 percent of its yearly average, with a snow depth of 35 inches, containing 8.4 inches of snow water equivalent, compared to an annual median of 4.8 inches of snow water equivalent.

The Lobdell Lake measuring site is at 150 percent of average with 8.4 inches of snow water equivalent, ahead of that site’s median of 5.6.

The rest of the sites are closer to normal, ranging from 109 percent of average at Virginia Lakes Ridge, the only one of the seven sites that feeds into the East Walker River to 122 percent at Summit Meadow.

Leavitt Lake, which is the highest of the seven sites in elevation at 9,617 feet, has 21.1 inches of snow water equivalent, where 78 inches of snow was on the ground as of Monday.

That is 133 percent of its yearly average for that date.

Leavitt Meadows, which is the lowest elevation of the six sites at 7,198 feet, has just 18 inches of snow with 4.6 inches of snow water equivalent, which is 110 percent of its yearly average.

Total precipitation on the Walker River Basin is 112 percent of yearly average as of Jan. 4.

More snow is needed, however, because reservoir storage is still extremely low on the Walker River system.

Topaz Lake on the West Walker River had 8,240 acre feet of water as of Monday, while Bridgeport Reservoir, on the East Walker River, had 7,970 acre feet.
“I’ll feel more confident come April 1, with numbers above normal and the reservoirs, Topaz and Bridgeport, reaching normal levels,” Walker River watermaster Rob Martinez said.