Colorado Basin River Forecast Center (CBRFC) Overview

Kevin Werner

NWS Colorado Basin River Forecast Center

JPL
May 9, 2012

Outline

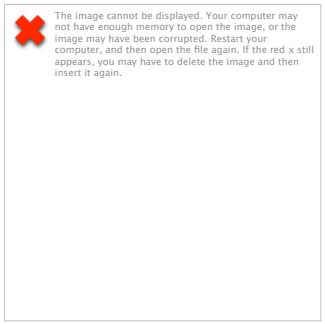
Colorado River Overview

CBRFC Forecast Challenge

2011 and 2012: Two Extremes

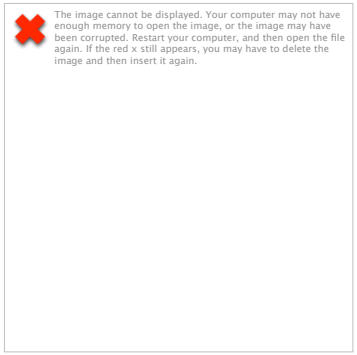
Research Opportunities

Who we are…



Mission: To understand and predict changes in the Earth's environment … to meet our Nation's economic, social, and environmental needs

Mission: The NWS provides weather, hydrologic, and climate forecasts and warnings … for the protection of life and property and the enhancement of the national economy



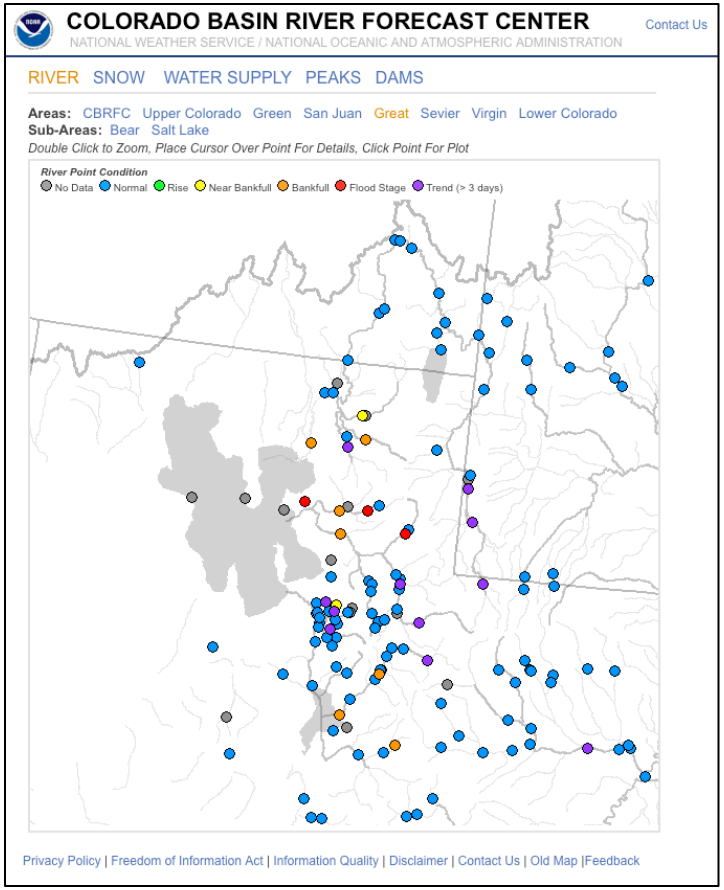
The Colorado Basin River Forecast Center generates streamflow forecasts and related datasets for the Colorado and eastern Great Basins

Colorado Basin River Forecast Center

The Colorado Basin River Forecast Center (CBRFC) generates streamflow forecasts across the Colorado Basin and Utah. The latest forecasts, data, and more are available online:

- **Daily streamflow forecasts**
- **Long lead peak flow forecasts**
- **Water supply forecasts**
- **Webinar briefings**
- **Email updates**
- **And More….**

www.cbrfc.noaa.gov



Why the Colorado River Stopped Flowing -All Things Considered, July 14, 2011

Colorado River

- 25 million people in US rely on Colorado River water
- 3.5 million acres of irrigation in US
- 85% of runoff comes from above 9000 feet
- Total mean annual flow is 15 MAF
- Storage capacity is about 60 MAF (4 times mean annual flow)
- River is fully used and little flows to ocean

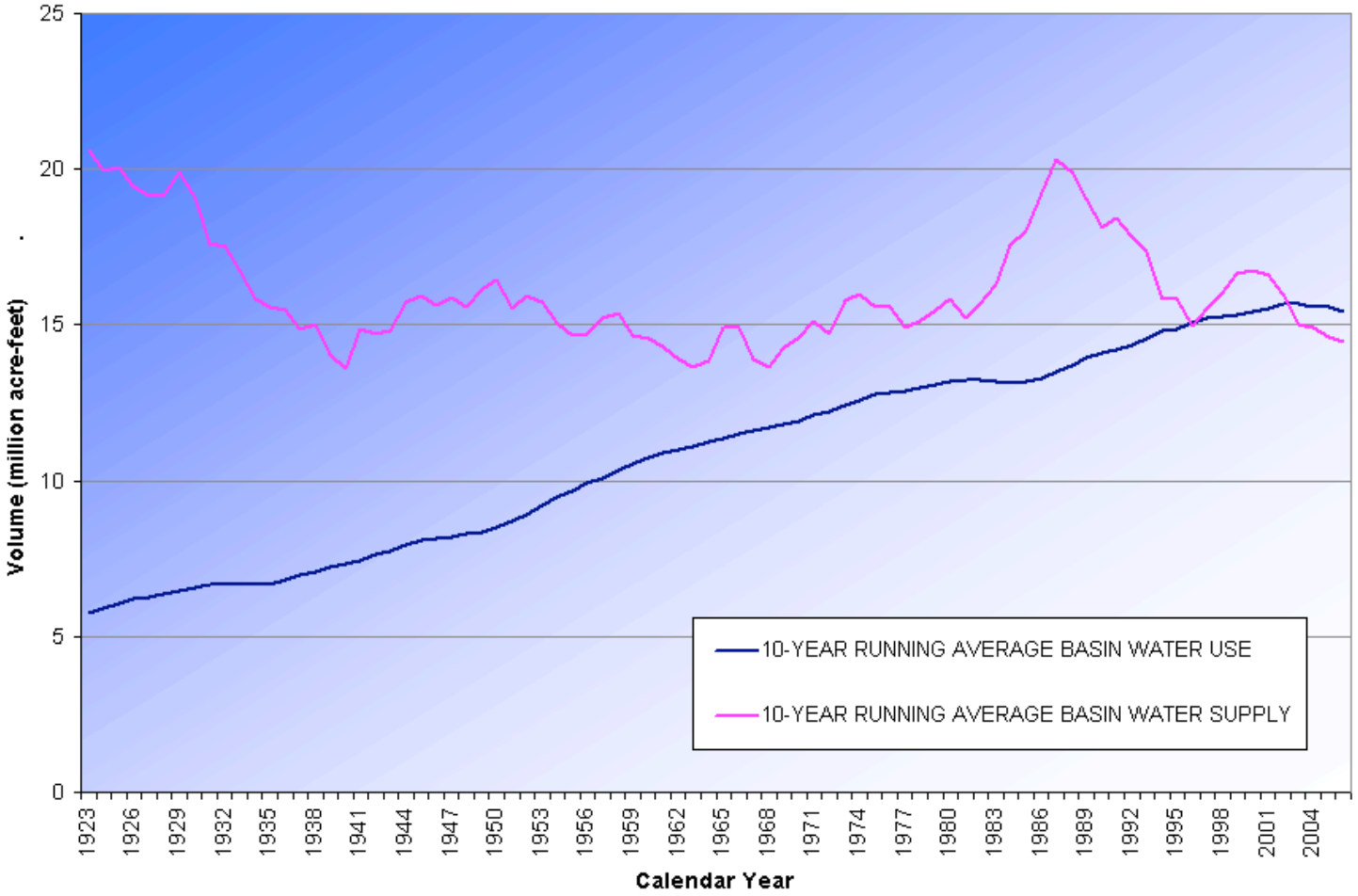
Upper Basin

- Distribution of Average Runoff in Lake Powell:
  - ½ Upper Colorado including Gunnison, Dolores
  - 1/3 Green River including Yampa, Duchesne
  - 1/6 San Juan River

Colorado River Allocation

- Colorado Compact (1922) divided water between the upper basin and lower basin – 7.5 MAF each
- Mexican Water Treaty (1944) allocated Mexico 1.5 MAF
- Arizona v. California (1964) allocated water among lower basin states
- Interim Guidelines (2007) specify shortages and surpluses through 2026 that are tied to forecasts
- Key facts:
  - River is over-allocated: original allocation (16.5 MAF) was based on a series of wet years. Actual average flow is ~15 MAF
  - Lower basin states (AZ, CA, NV) use full 7.5 MAF each year
  - Mexico uses its full 1.5 MAF
  - Upper basin states (CO, WY, UT, NM) are still “developing” their 7.5 MAF
  - No shortage has ever been declared on the river
  - Shortages would affect lower basin states first (and AZ first of all)

Long Term Supply / Demand



Interim Operating Guidelines

- Guidelines specify how shortages and surpluses will be distributed among the basin states
- USBR directed to operate reservoirs based, to a large extent, on CBRFC/NRCS official forecasts
- Most years 8.23 MAF released from Lake Powell to Lake Mead
- In wet years when Lake Mead is low (such as 2011), “extra” water can be released. This is called equalization and/or balancing.

Lake Powell

Elevation (feet)	Opertaions According to Interim Guidelines	Live Storage (MAF)
3,700	**Equalization Tier** Equalize, Avoid Spills or Release 8.23 MAF	24.3
3,636 - 3,666 (2008-2026)		15.5 - 19.3 (2008-2026)
	Upper Elevation Balancing Tier[1] Release 8.23 MAF; if Lake Mead < 1,075 feet, balance contents with a min/max release of 7.0 and 9.0 MAF	
3,575		9.5
	Mid-Elevation Release Tier Release 7.48 MAF; if Lake Mead < 1,025 feet, Release 8.23 MAF;	
3,525		5.9
3,490	**Lower Elevation Balancing Tier** Balance contents with a min/max release of 7.0 and 9.5 MAF	
3,370		

15.5 MAF
3,636
4/1/2012

Lake Mead

Elevation (feet)	Opertaions According to Interim Guidelines	Live Storage (MAF)
1,220	Flood Control, 70R or ICS Surplus	25.9
1,200		22.9
	Domestic or ICS Surplus	
1,145		15.9
1,105	Normal Operations or ICS Surplus	11.9
1,075		9.4
	Shortage 333 KAF[2]	
1,050		7.5
	Shortage 417 KAF[2]	
1,025		5.8
	Shortage 500 KAF[2] and Consultation[3]	
1,000		4.3
895		0

14.5 MAF
1,129
4/1/2012

Value

Damage from 1/10 AZ storm:	$11m[a]
Damage from 6/10 UT flooding:	$6.5m[a]
Damage from 12/10 UT/NV storm:	$35m[a]
Damage from spring 2011 UT/CO/WY flooding:	<$200m

Colorado River average runoff: 12.4 MAF

Replacement value of $330/AF -> $4b[b]

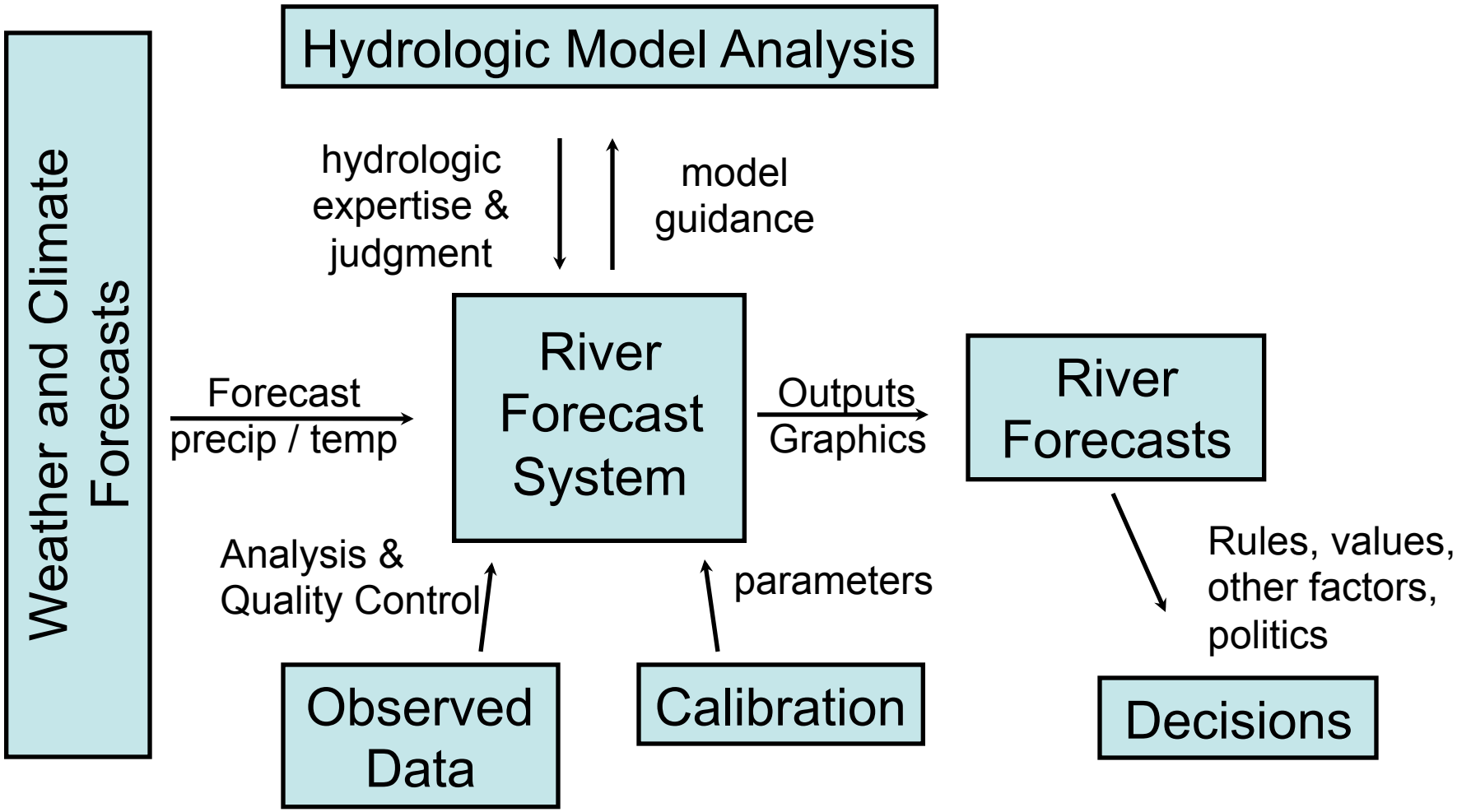
**Economic value of water resources far greater than flooding damages

Sources:

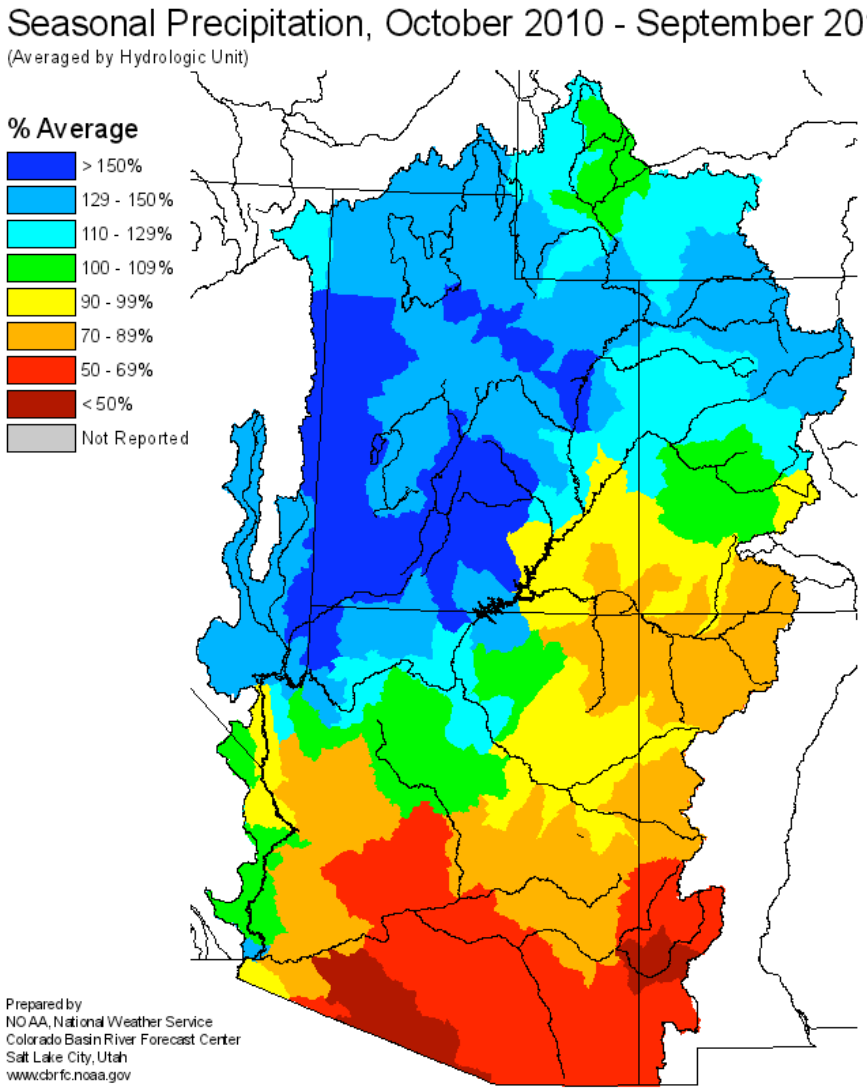
a: WFO, FEMA (via stormdata); b: MWD (via Hasencamp, private communication

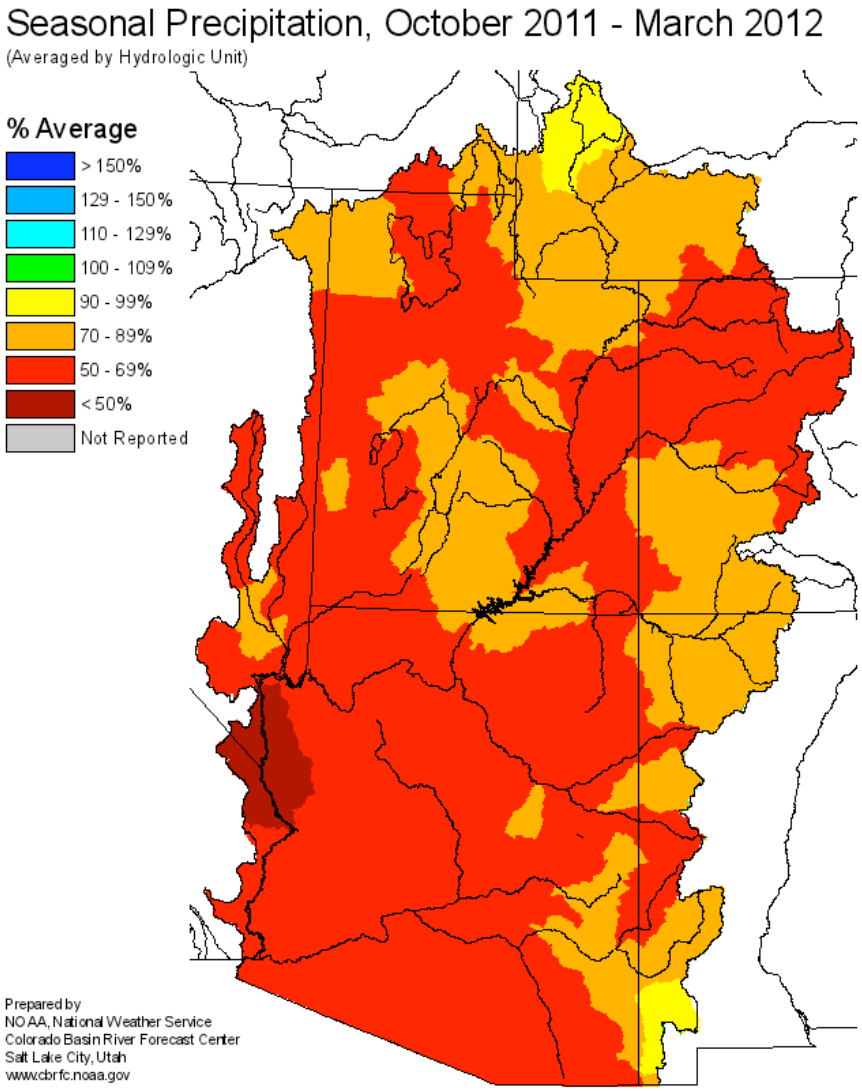
Forecast Methodology

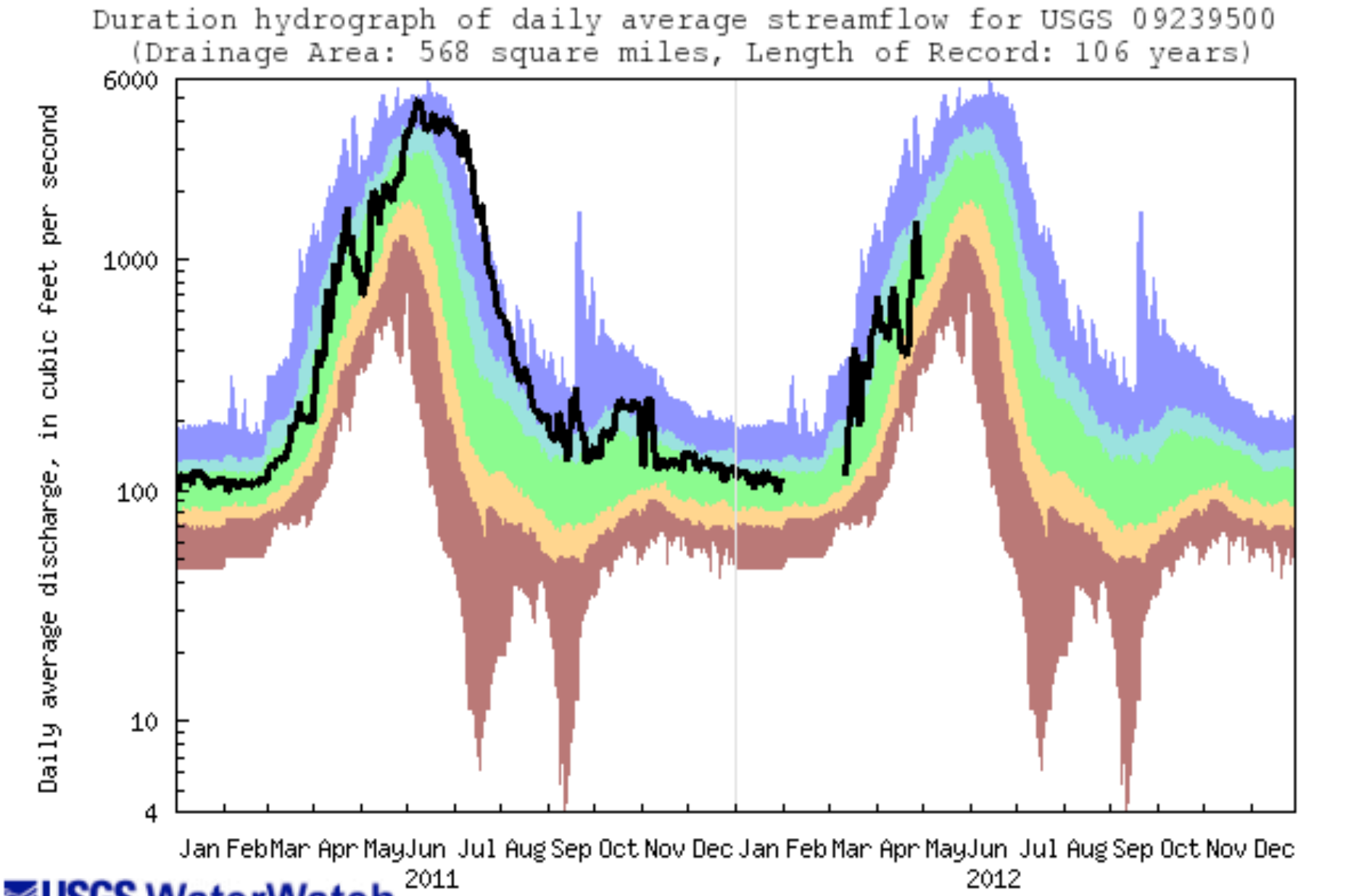
Forecast Process



2011 vs 2012: Both Extremes






Duration hydrograph of daily average streamflow for USGS 09239500
(Drainage Area: 568 square miles, Length of Record: 106 years)
Daily average discharge, in cubic feet per second
6000
1000
100
10
4
Jan Feb Mar Apr May Jun Jul Aug Sep Oct Nov Dec Jan Feb Mar Apr May Jun Jul Aug Sep Oct Nov Dec
2011
2012
USGS WaterWatch
Last updated: 2012-05-01

Late 2010

October 18, 2010, 2:05 PM

Lake Mead Hits Record Low Level

By FELICITY BARRINGER

Jim Wilson/The New York Times

Bleached rock indicating a former high-water mark on outcroppings surrounding Lake Mead.

Living

Sometime between 11 and noon on Sunday, the water level in Lake Mead, the massive reservoir whose water fills the taps of millions of people across the Southwest, fell lower than it ever has since it was filled 75 years ago.

The New York Times

LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

Drought-stricken Lake Mead falls to a level not seen since 1937

K.M. CANNON/LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

An aerial photo taken Saturday shows the marina operations in Lake Mead's Hemenway Harbor, just down the hill from Boulder City. All of the docks shown used to be located elsewhere but had to be moved to their present locations because of the reservoir's falling water level. » Buy this photo

BY HENRY BREAN
LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

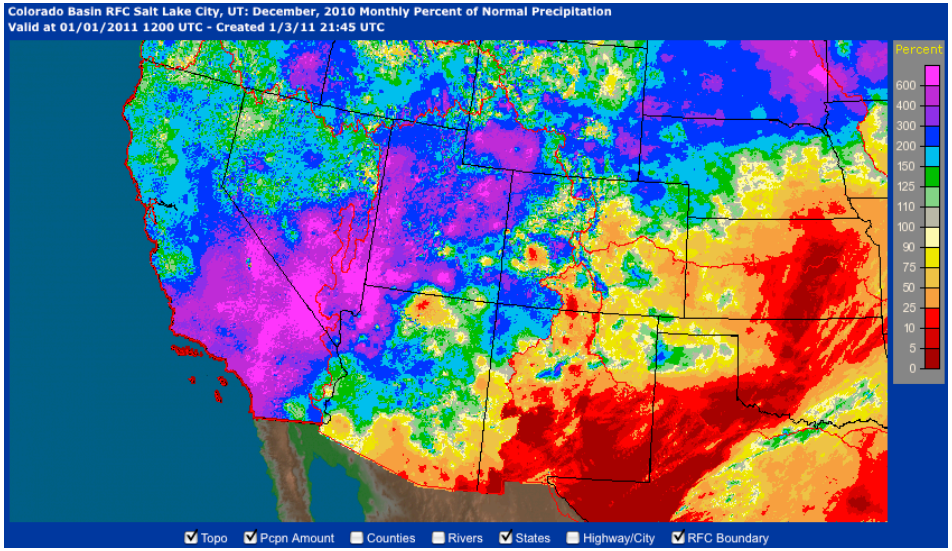
Posted: Oct. 19, 2010 | 12:00 a.m.
Updated: Oct. 19, 2010 | 7:17 a.m.

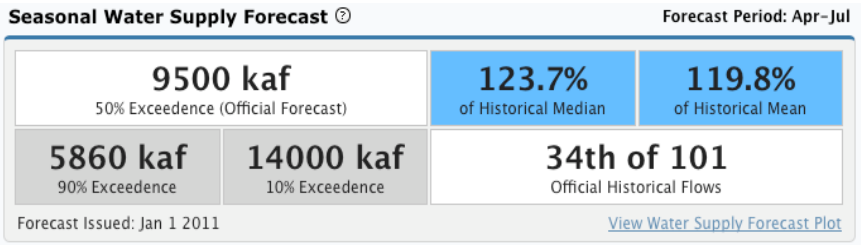
Oddly, the drought's latest milestone arrived on a rainy day.

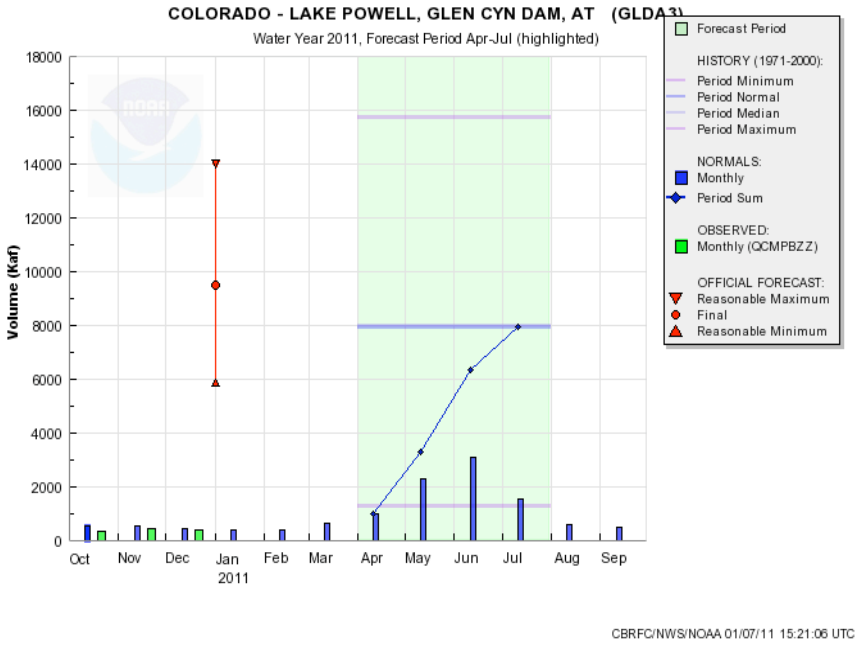
Tools

183 Like 28 Tweet Email Print Share

Early 2011







Pre Holiday Storm:

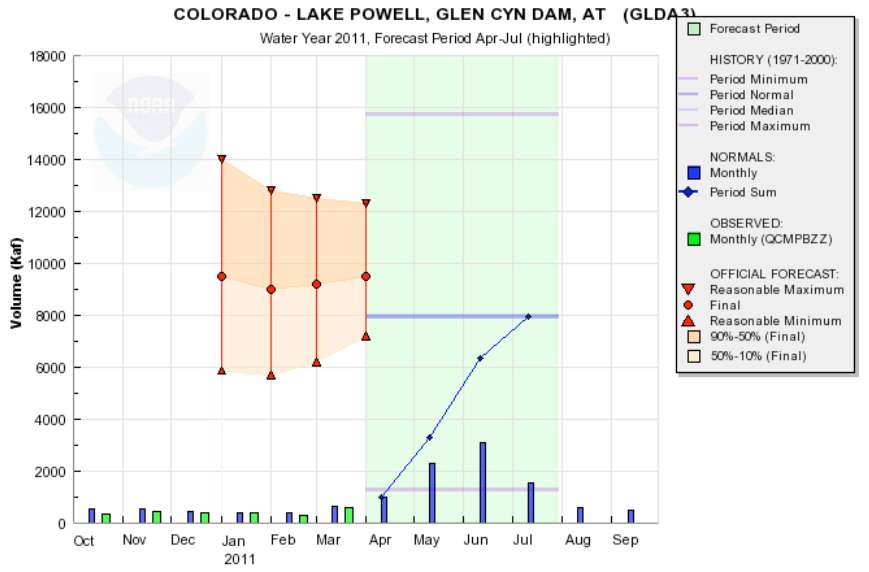
- Lake Mead up ~2 feet from local runoff
- Large snow accumulation
- Forecasts reflected that….

Irrational Exuberance?

Seasonal Water Supply Forecast ⓘ — **Forecast Period: Apr–Jul**

9500 kaf 50% Exceedence (Official Forecast)	**123.7%** of Historical Median	**119.8%** of Historical Mean
7200 kaf 90% Exceedence	**12300 kaf** 10% Exceedence	**34th of 102** Official Historical Flows

Forecast Issued: Apr 1 2011 — View Water Supply Forecast Plot



CBRFC/NWS/NOAA 04/07/11 00:16:40 UTC

Web Reference: www.cbrfc.noaa.gov/gmap/gmapm.php?wcon=checked

Spring 2011

- Winter and Spring 2011 were much wetter than normal for most of Utah – especially the months of March/April/May
- Spring was very cold across Utah
- Snowpack accumulated to record or near record amounts at most SNOTEL sites
- Snow melt was delayed – and largely tempered by cool May/ June weather
- Flood did occur in low elevation basins (May/June) and high elevation basins (late June/July)

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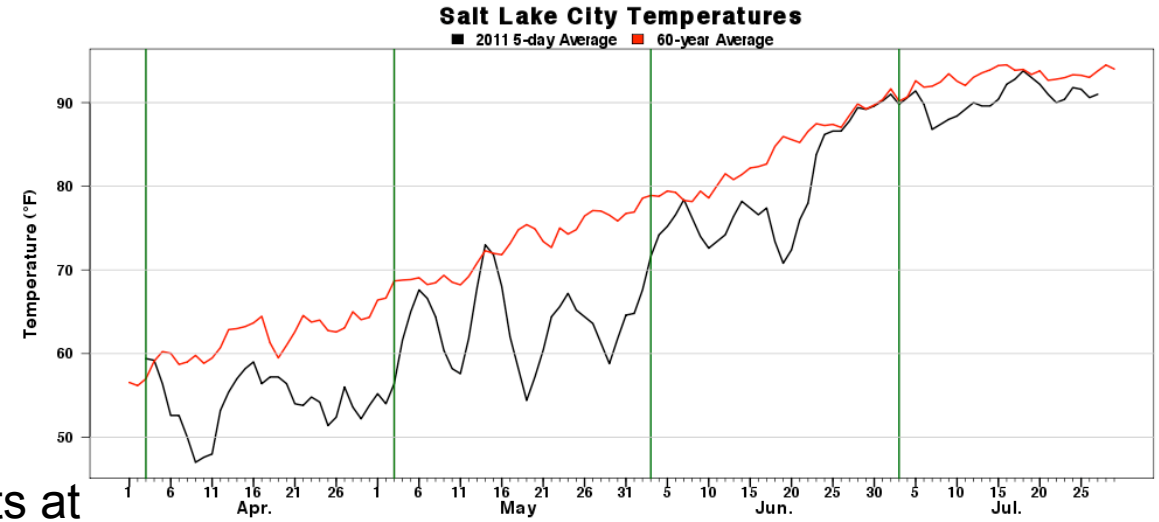

Number of Days Below 60-yr Average (April 1 – July 29)

Year	Number of Days Below Normal	Standard Deviation of Below Normal Days
2011		
1998		
1995		
1983		
1953		
1999		
1991		
1975		
1993		
1982		
2010		
1965		

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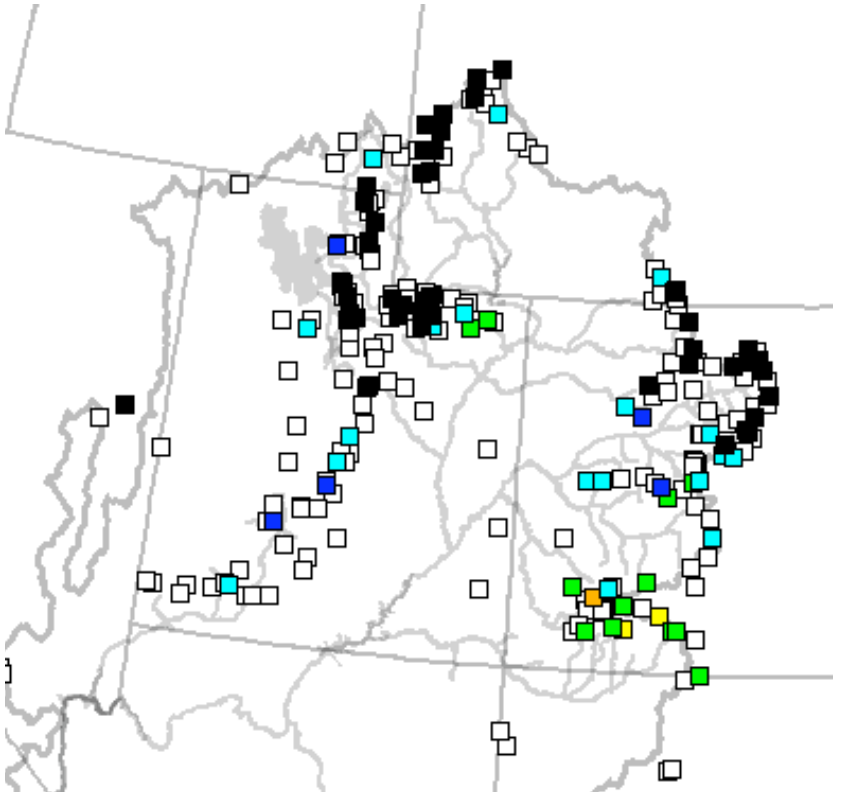


Flooding and High Flows

denverpost.com

Yampa River remains steady at Steamboat Springs; flood stage hits Monday

BOOKMARK PRINT EMAIL 0 COMMENTS

By Matt Stensland
Steamboat Pilot

POSTED: 06/02/2011 11:09:02 AM MDT
UPDATED: 06/02/2011 11:10:57 AM MDT

Recommend One person recommends this.

The height of the Yampa River remained steady overnight through Steamboat Springs, but it's expected to rise during the course of the day today and peak at about 7 feet tonight at the Fifth Street bridge measuring site, according to the National Weather Service in Grand Junction.

The Yampa River flows by Fish Creek Mobile Home Park on Thursday morning. Sandbags line the banks. (STEAMBOAT TODAY | Matt Stensland)

A similar trend is expected to continue into Monday, with the forecast calling for high temperatures in the 70s.

The Yampa is forecast to reach 7.7 feet at Fifth Street by 6 a.m. Monday. The flood stage at that location is 7.5 feet. The third highest recorded height at that location is 7.65 feet, set on June 3, 1997. The record crest was June 8, 1905, when the river reached 8.9 feet. A year ago the Yampa peaked at 6.72 feet on June 7.

11NEWS

Colorado River still running high, causing flooding in some areas

Parts of the Colorado River are still swollen, overflowing it's banks in some spots.

Posted: 8:45 AM Jun 9, 2011
Reporter: Cecile Juliette
Email Address: cecile.juliette@nbc11news.com

Story | 0 Comments

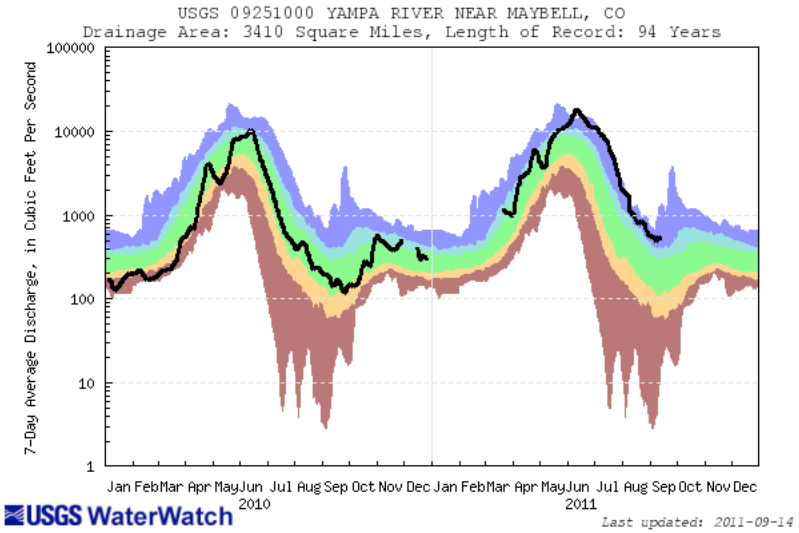
Font Size: A A A

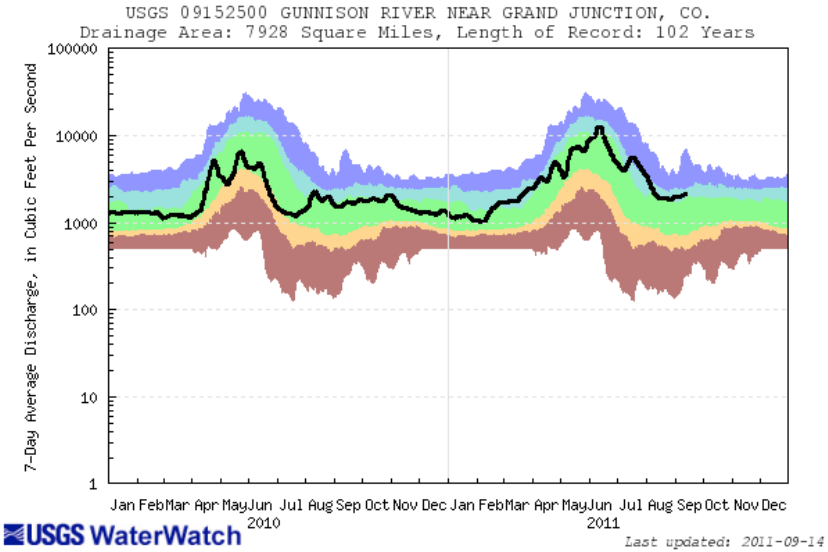
MESA COUNTY, Colo. (KKCO) - The Colorado River is still cresting in parts of Mesa County, according to the National Weather Service.

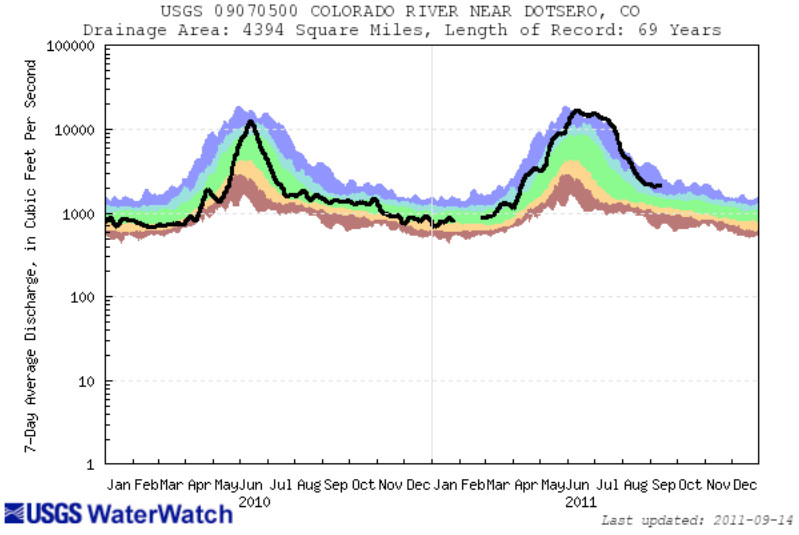
An early morning check of the Cameo gauge on Thursday revealed that the Colorado River had receded slightly. On Wednesday it was recorded at 13.4 feet, and on Thursday it measured 13.1 feet.

Flooding and High Flows

- Wettest area was northern Colorado
- Upper Colorado also quite wet
- Gunnison divided web from normal
- Dolores, San Juan basins nearer normal





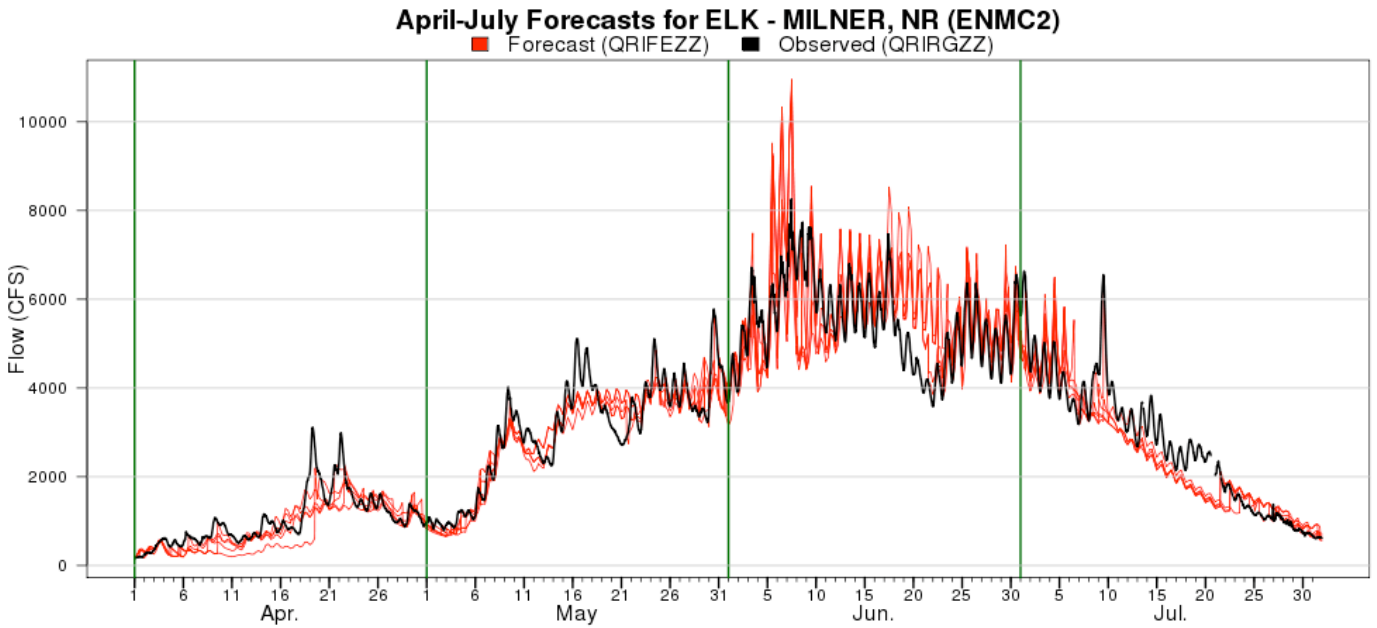


Yampa: Daily Forecasts

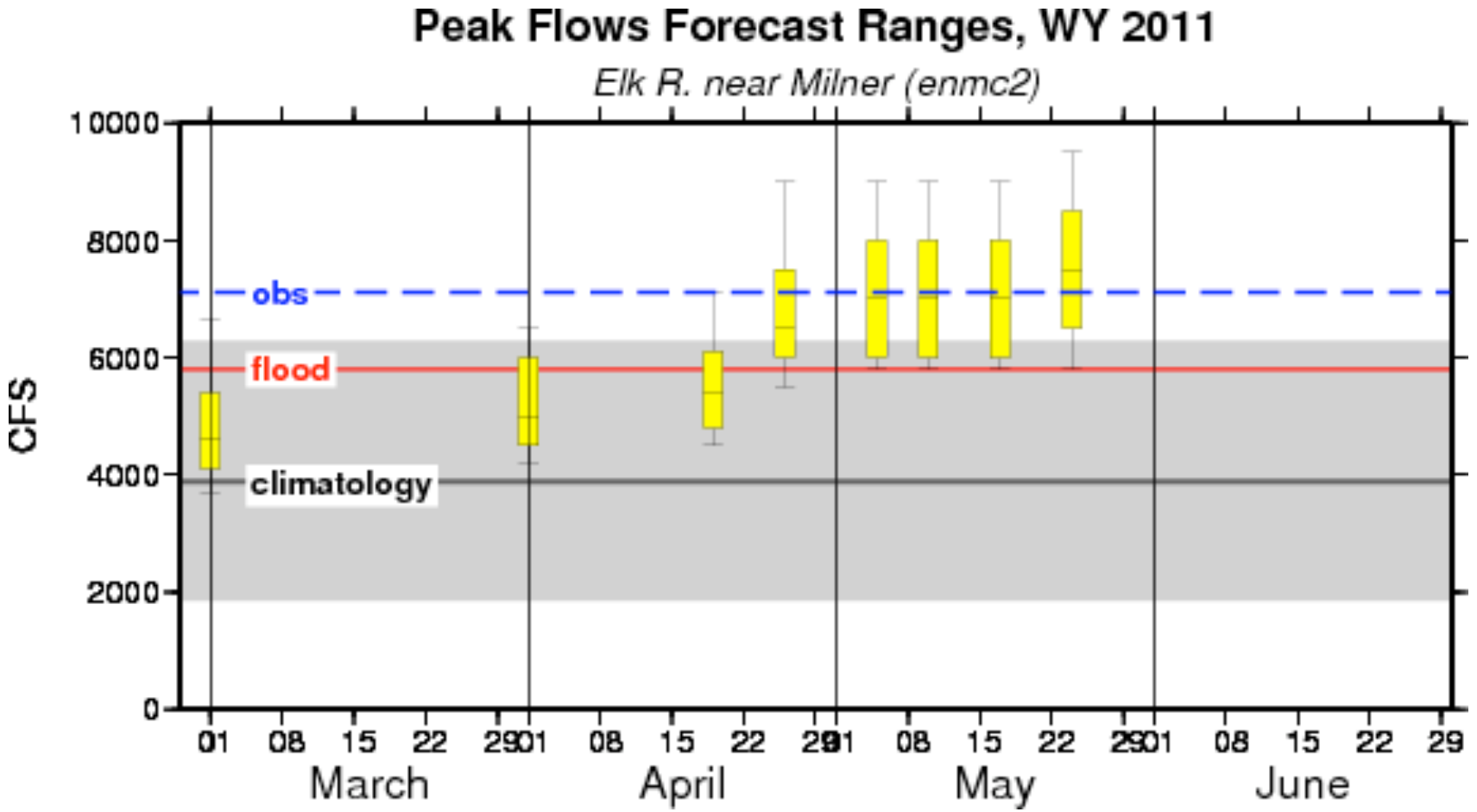
Yampa / White Rivers generally peaked in June

Very high (many records) snowpack

Cool June somewhat mitigated high flows although rivers flowed high for several weeks



Yampa: Long Lead Peak Forecasts

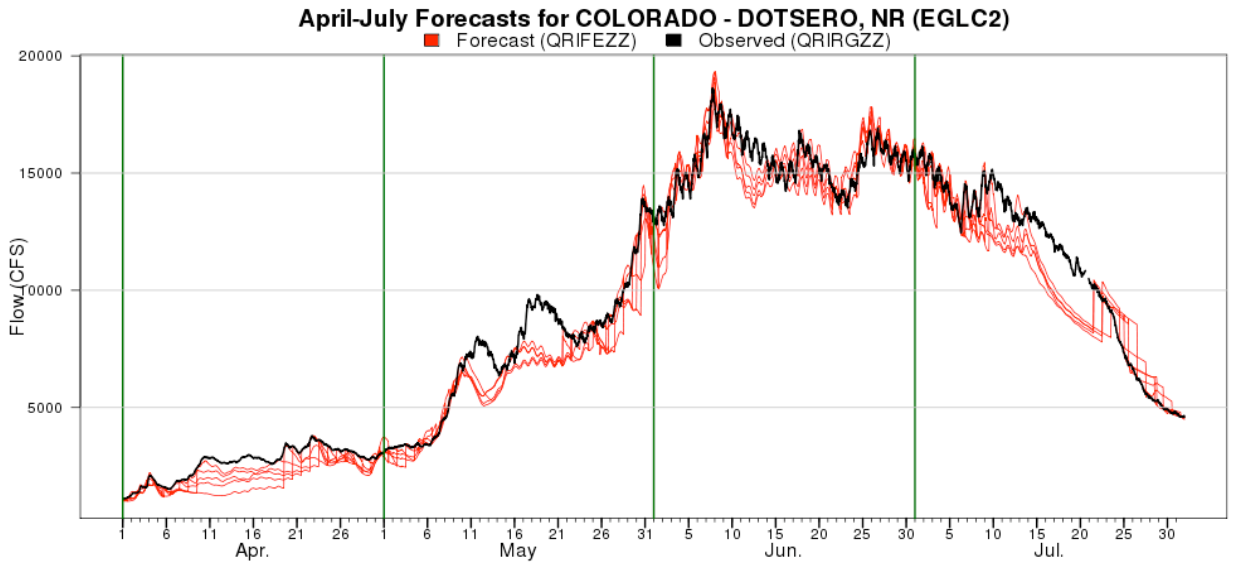


Upper Colorado

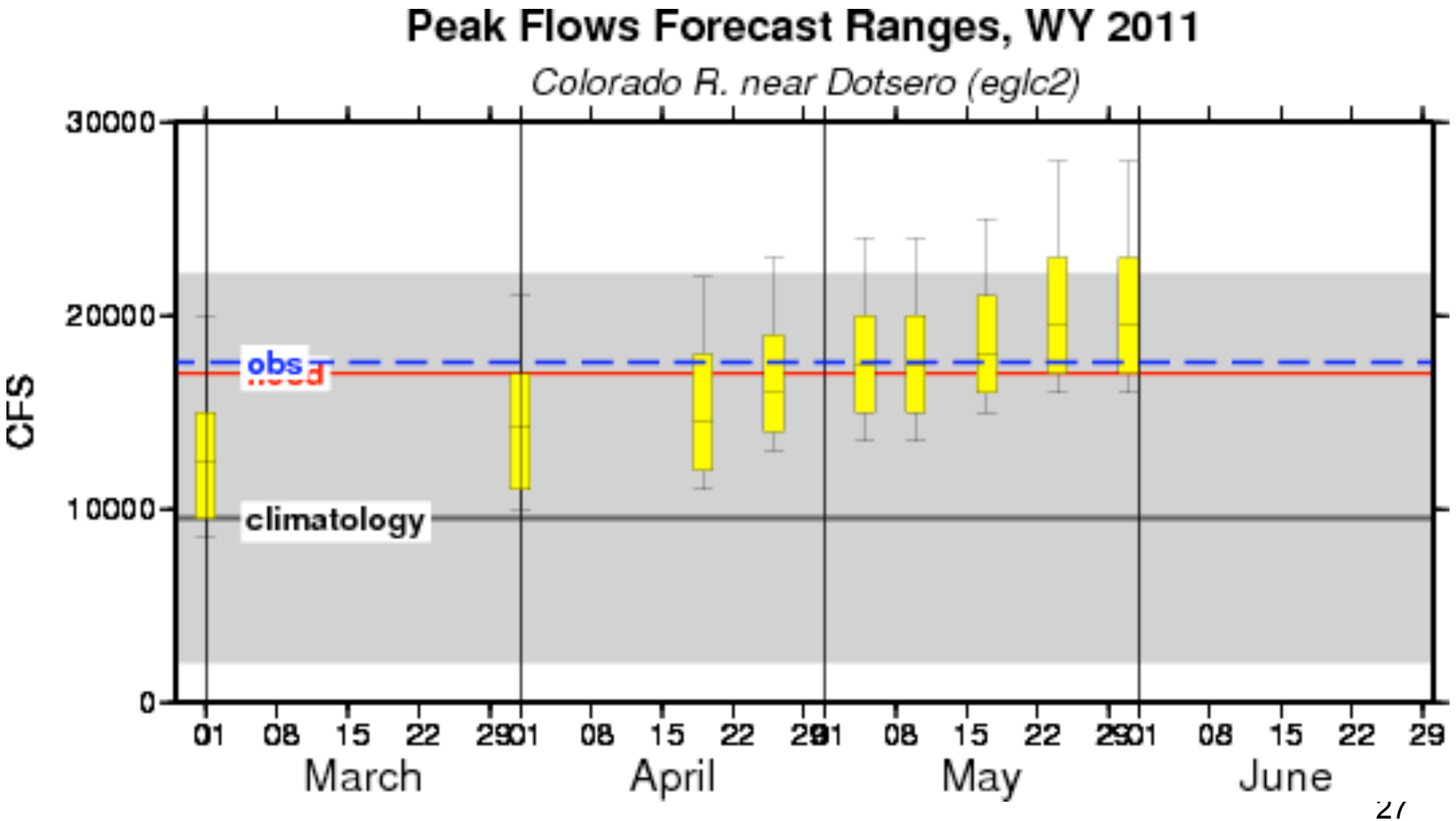
Upper Colorado includes many high elevation basins that peaked late into June or early July

Near record snowpack caused high flows

High flows were mitigated by cool June temperatures



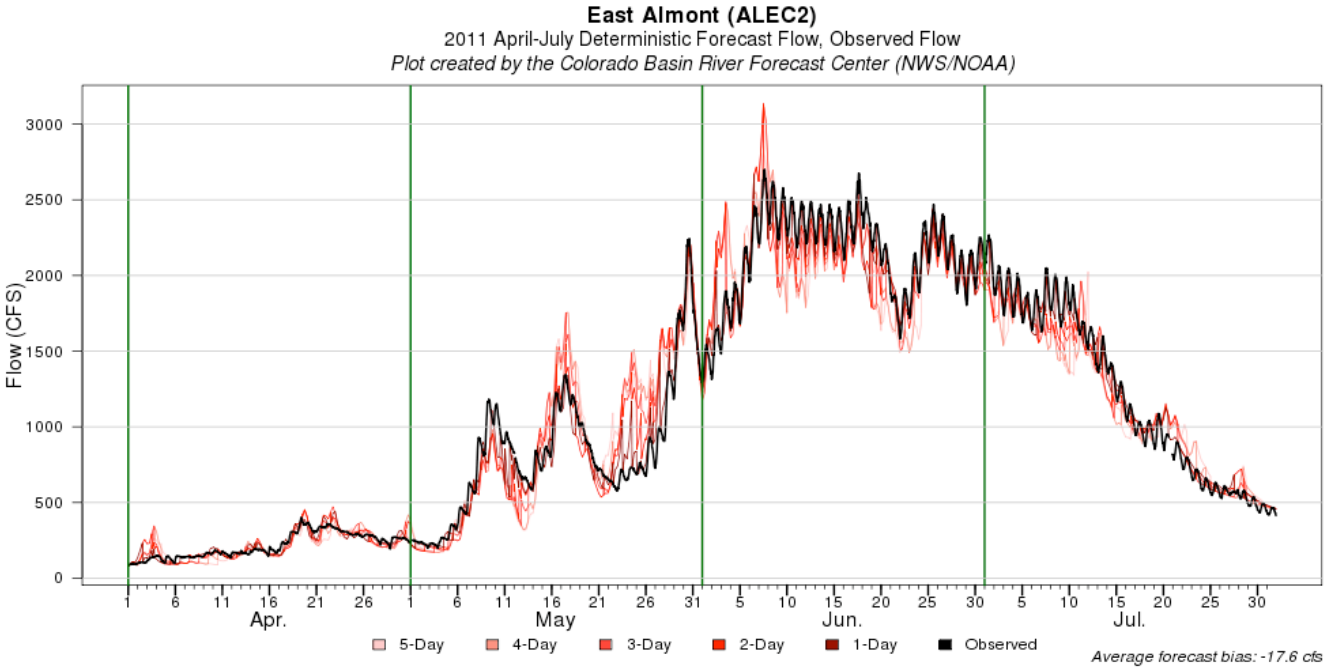
Upper Colorado: Long Lead Peak Forecasts



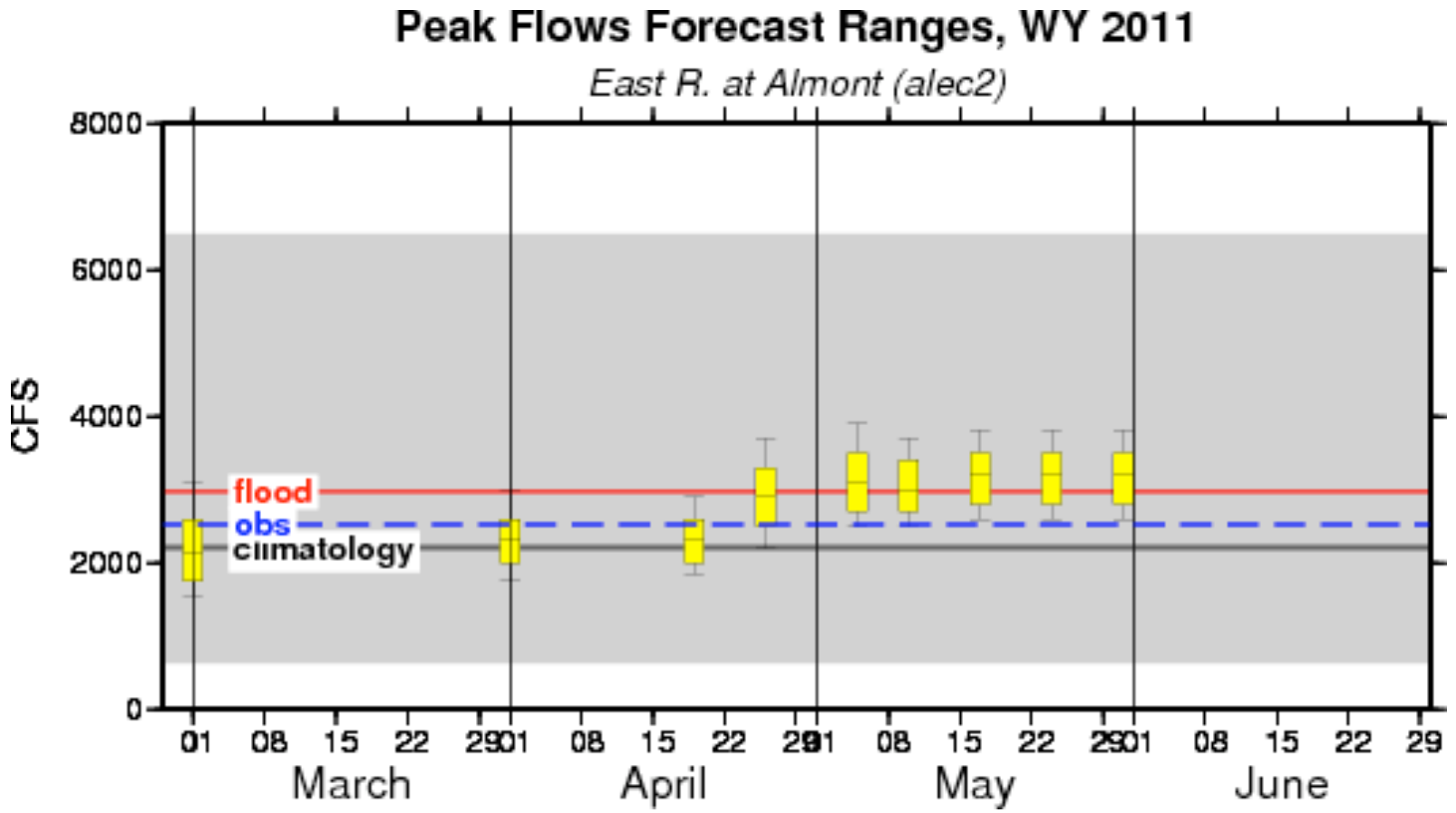
Gunnison

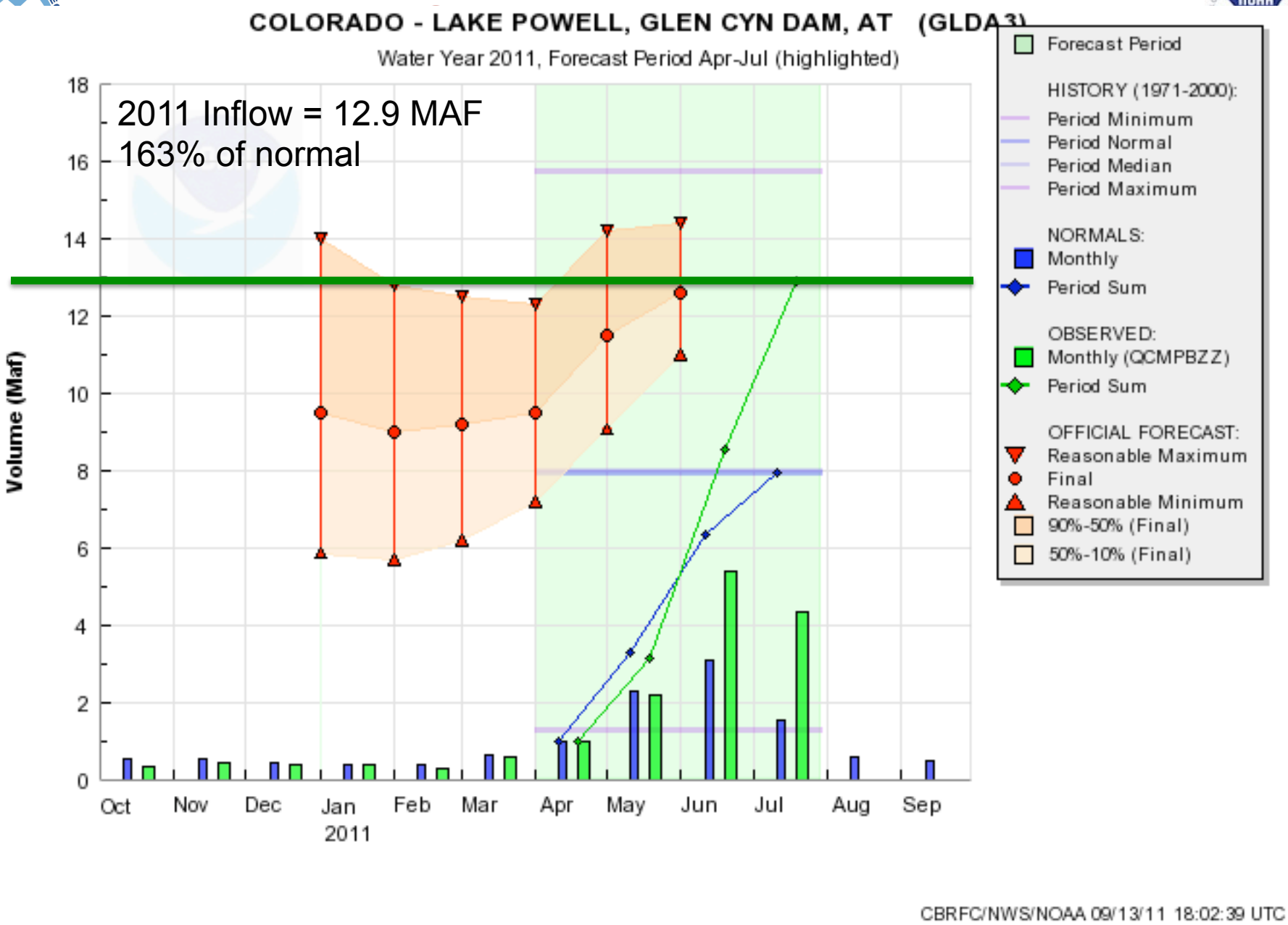
Gunnison basin divided wet conditions to the north and near average to the south. Hwy 50 was a rough dividing line

Peaks mostly in early June with continued high flows through June and even July (monsoon moisture)



Gunnison: Long Lead Forecasts



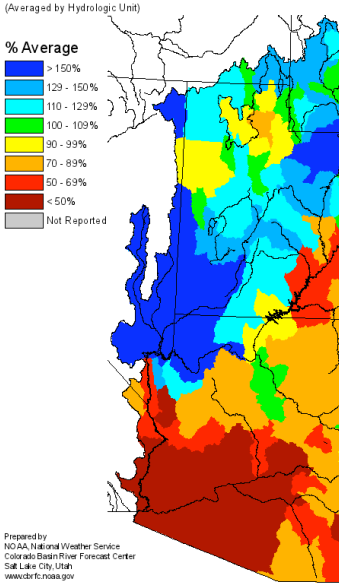


CBRFC/NWS/NOAA 09/13/11 18:02:39 UTC

2012

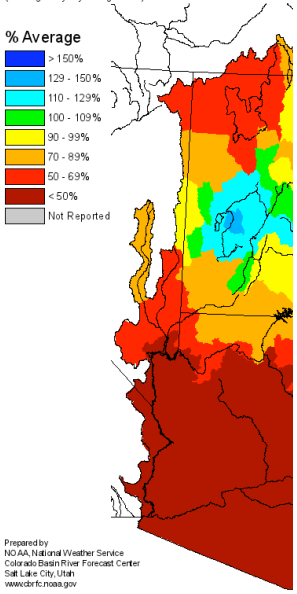
Seasonal Precipitation, October 2011 - April 2012

(Averaged by Hydrologic Unit)



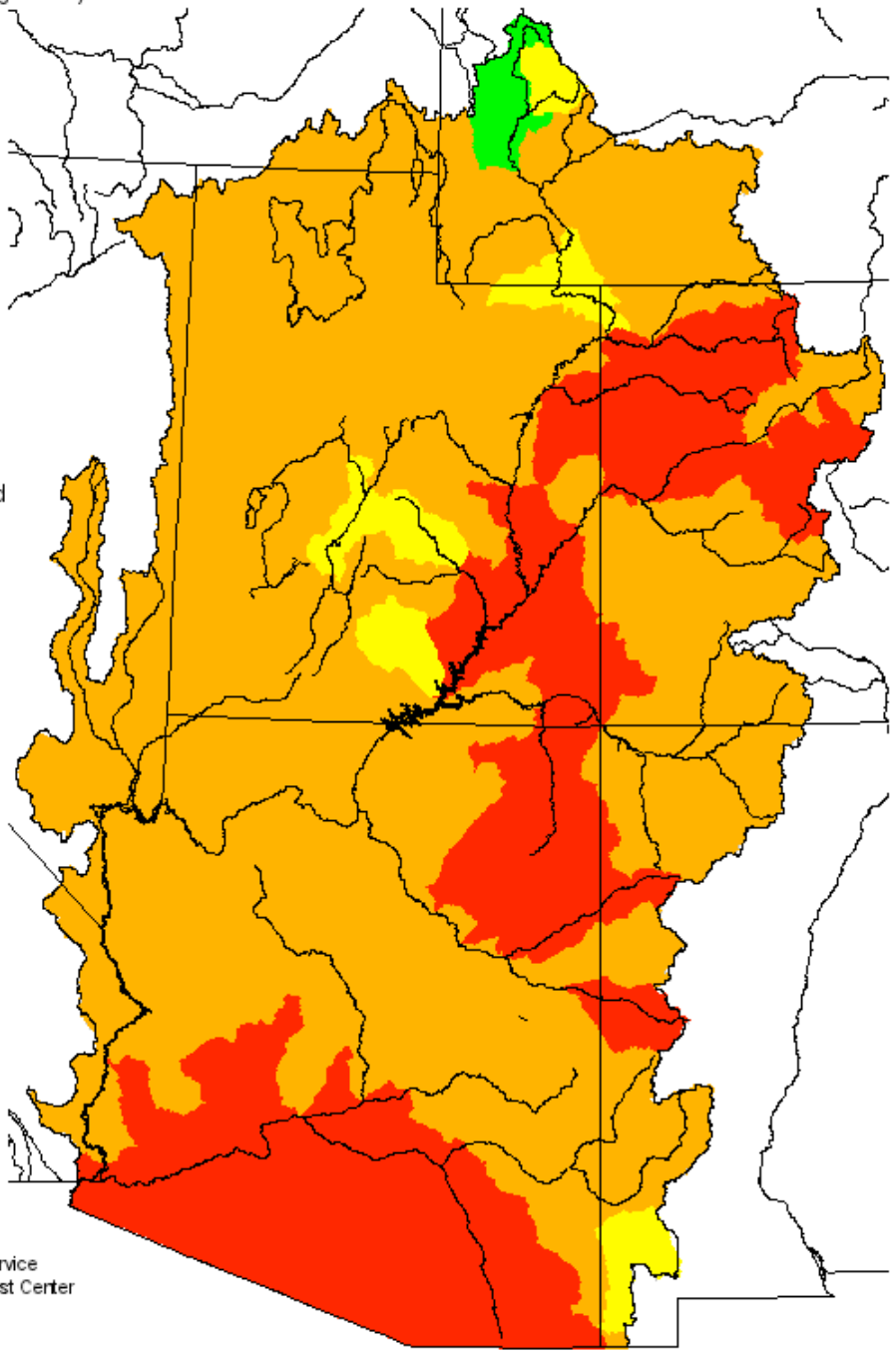
Monthly Precipitation for October 201

(Averaged by Hydrologic Unit)



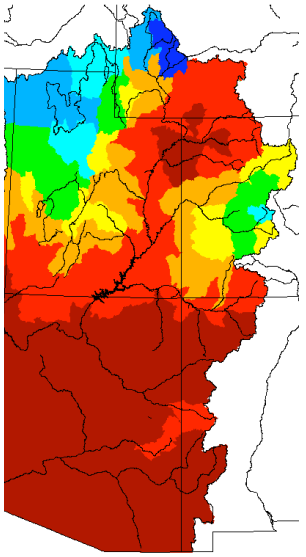
Monthly Precipitation for Februa

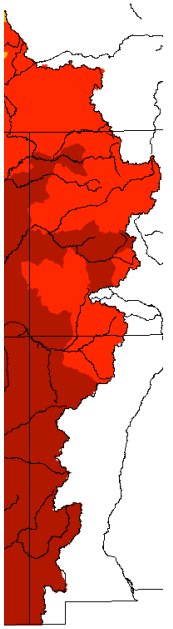
(Averaged by Hydrologic Unit)



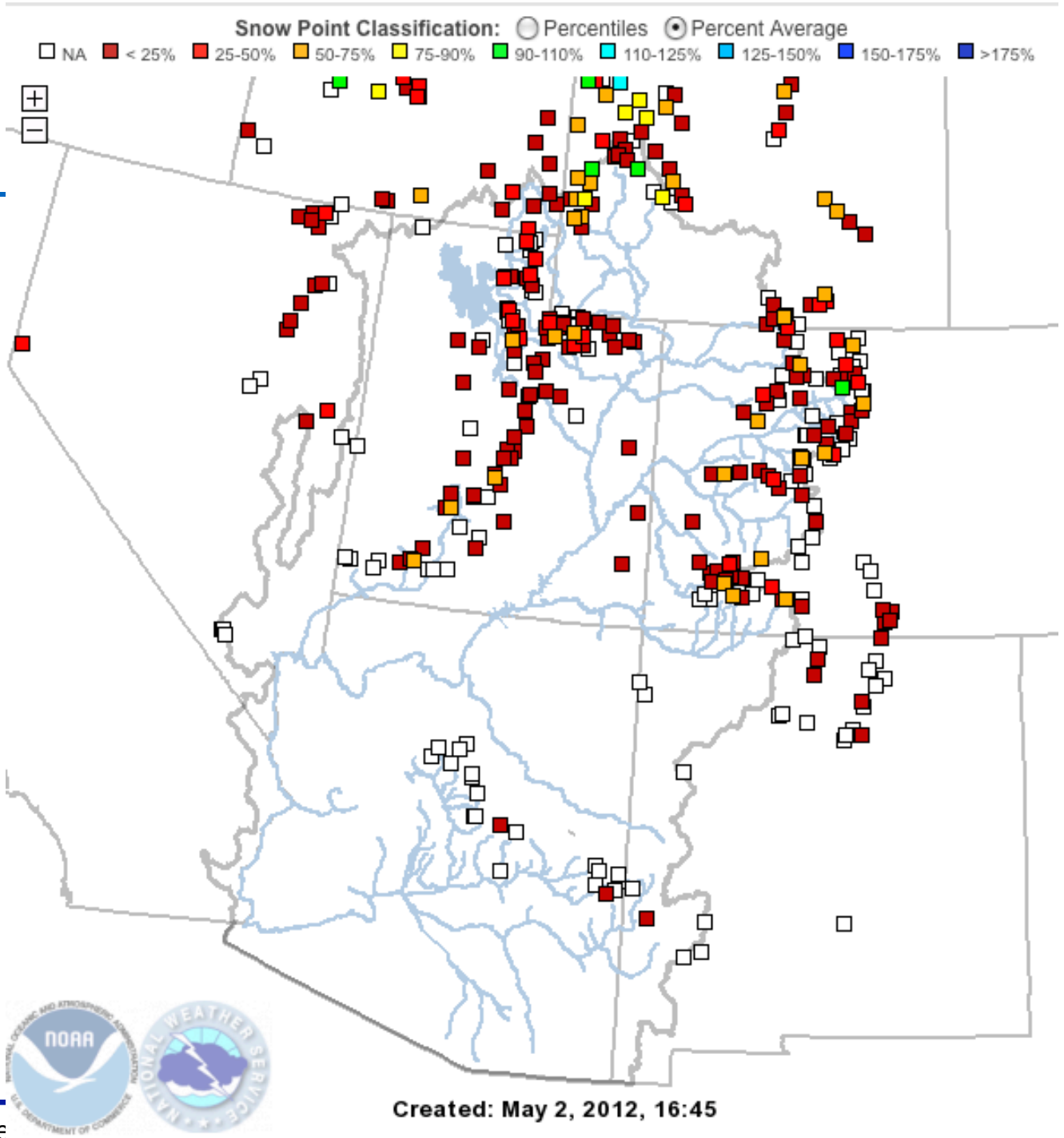
Prepared by
NOAA, National Weather Service
Colorado Basin River Forecast Center
Salt Lake City, Utah
www.cbrfc.noaa.gov

on for January 2012





Snow



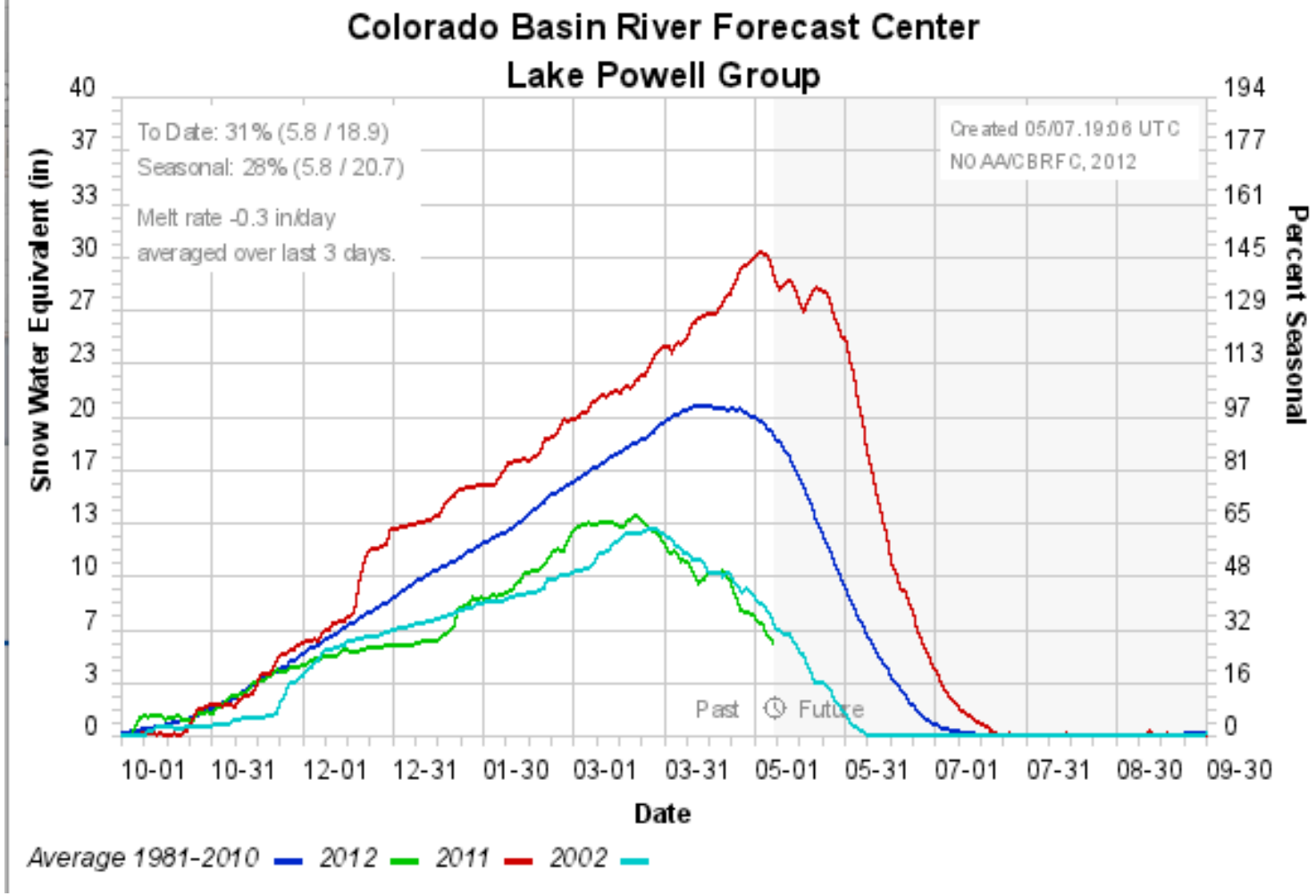
Web Reference

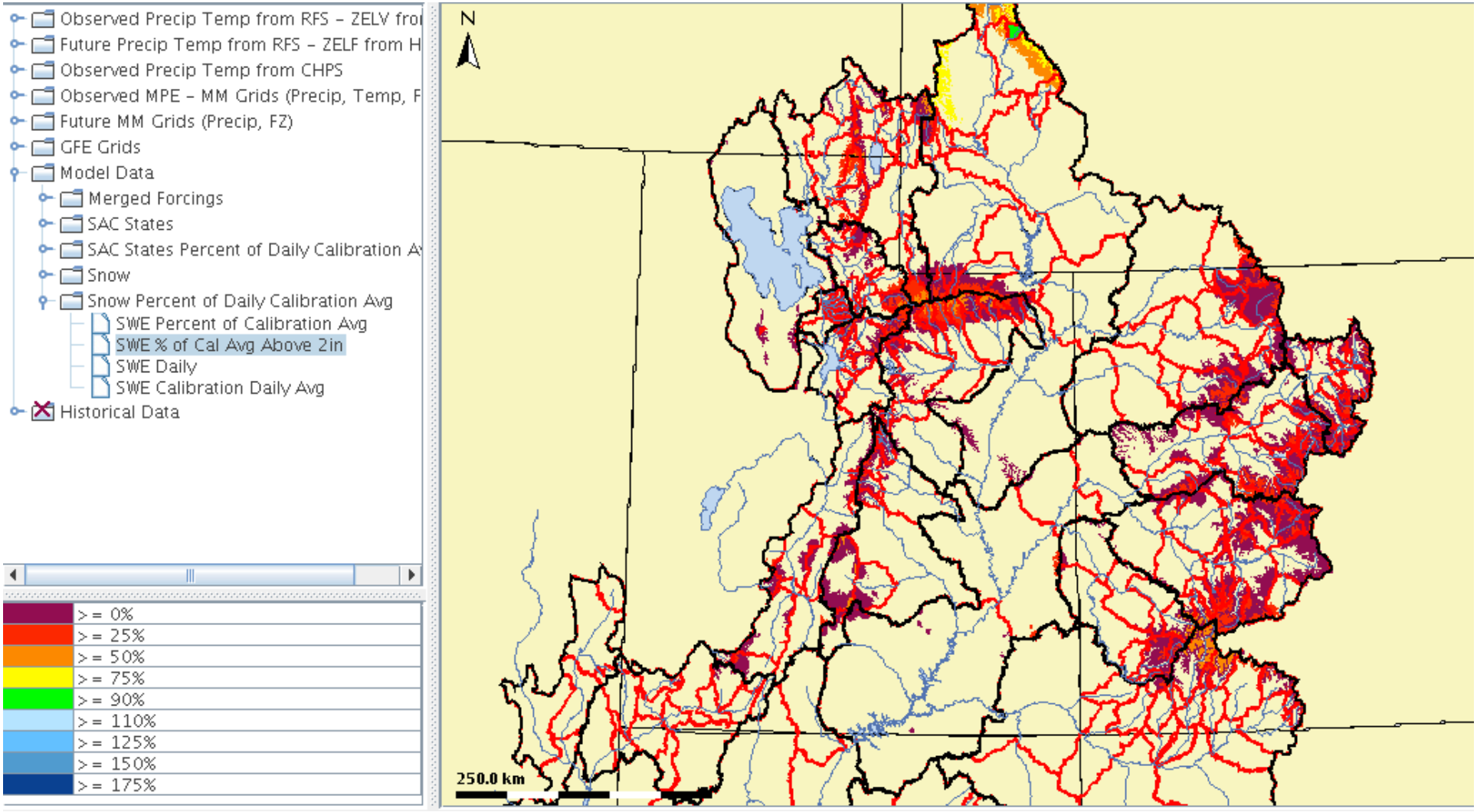
Snow

Lake Powell Snotel Group

View station in google maps or google earth

The current time is: 05/07.19:06 UTC




Observed Precip Temp from RFS – ZELV fro
Future Precip Temp from RFS – ZELF from H
Observed Precip Temp from CHPS
Observed MPE – MM Grids (Precip, Temp, F
Future MM Grids (Precip, FZ)
GFE Grids
Model Data
Merged Forcings
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SAC States Percent of Daily Calibration A
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Snow Percent of Daily Calibration Avg
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SWE Calibration Daily Avg
Historical Data
>= 0%
>= 25%
>= 50%
>= 75%
>= 90%
>= 110%
>= 125%
>= 150%
>= 175%
N
250.0 km

2012

Tuesday, May 1st 41° F | 7-day forecast Contribute | Steal The Deal | Advertise | Place a Classified Ad |

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Drought: Will there be a call on the Colorado River?

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Saturday, April 28, 2012

By Janice Kurbjun
Summit Daily News

Email Print

ENLARGE

The reduction in water levels due to drought on Lake Mead can be seen by the white ring around the shore at Hoover Dam in this Friday, July 21, 2006 file photo in Boulder City, Nev.
APfile photo

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Bloomberg Businessweek

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THE ASSOCIATED PRESS April 24, 2012, 11:34AM ET text size: T | T

Colorado gearing up for possible summer drought

DENVER

Colorado is preparing to tap a law that allows a water trust to lease water from willing water users to preserve wildlife and plants.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service is warning stream flows are likely to be low across the state this summer.

The law was passed in 2003 to protect waterfowl, wildlife, fish, bugs and plants.

The Colorado snowpack is down to 35 percent of the statewide average, as of Monday. The North Platte and South Platte basins in northern Colorado were in the best shape, at 48 percent of average.

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Rafting Colorado rivers not so wild in 2012: Water levels could be just right for first-timers, families

By Kyle Wagner
The Denver Post

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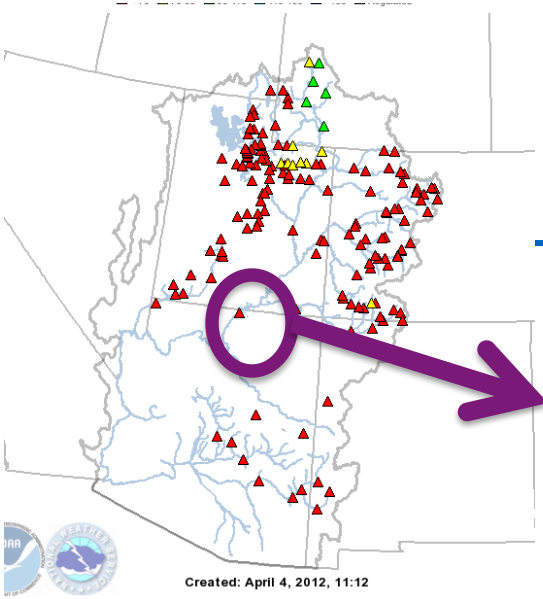
Boaters with Kodi Rafting ride the rapids into Seidel's Suckhole on the Arkansas River through Brown's Canyon Thursday. (*Mark Fox, Summit Daily file*)

So, Goldilocks, last year you said you didn't want to go whitewater rafting because the rivers' water levels were too high.

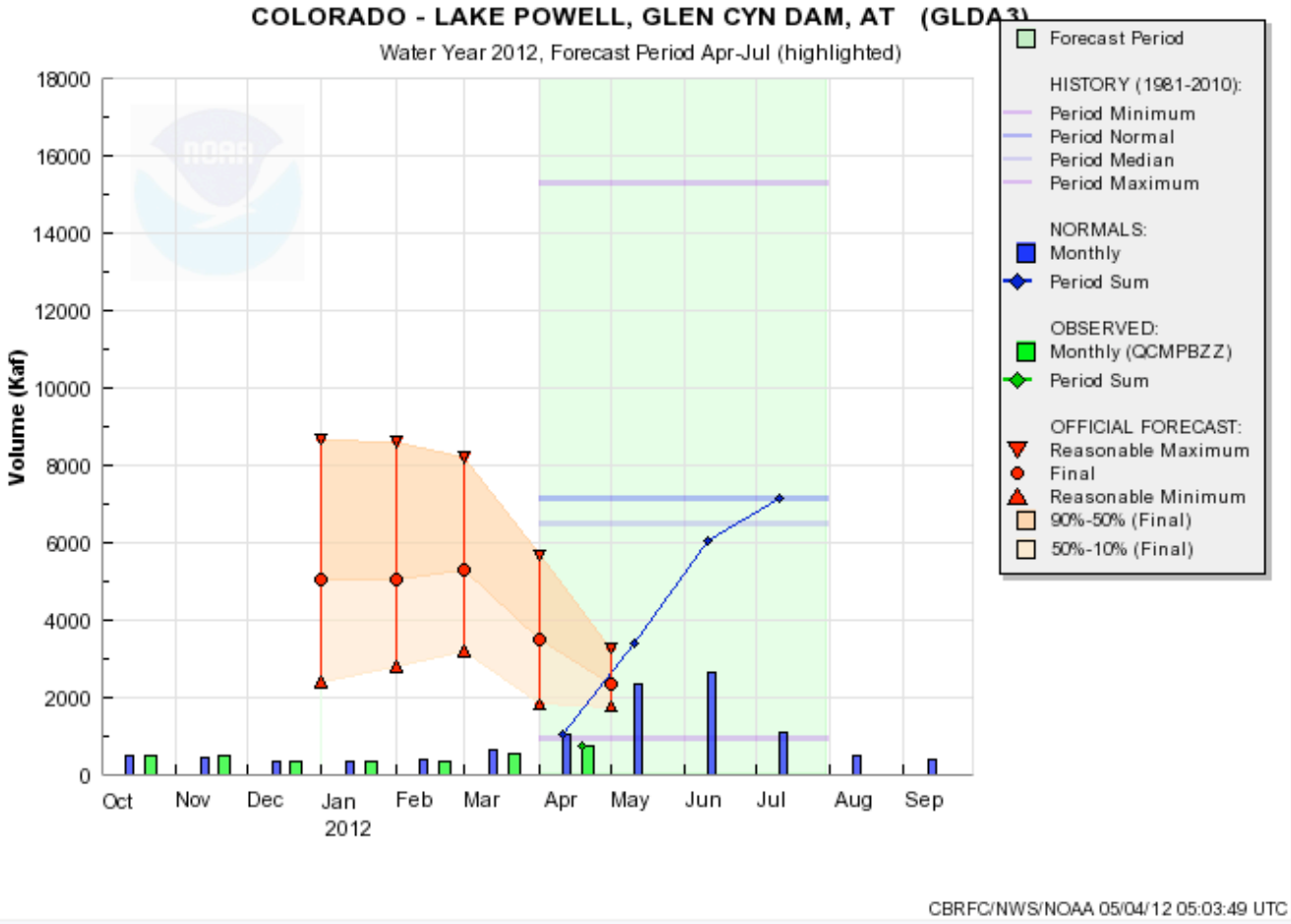
What's your excuse this year?



Seasonal Water Supply Forecast ⓘ — **Forecast Period: Apr-Jul**

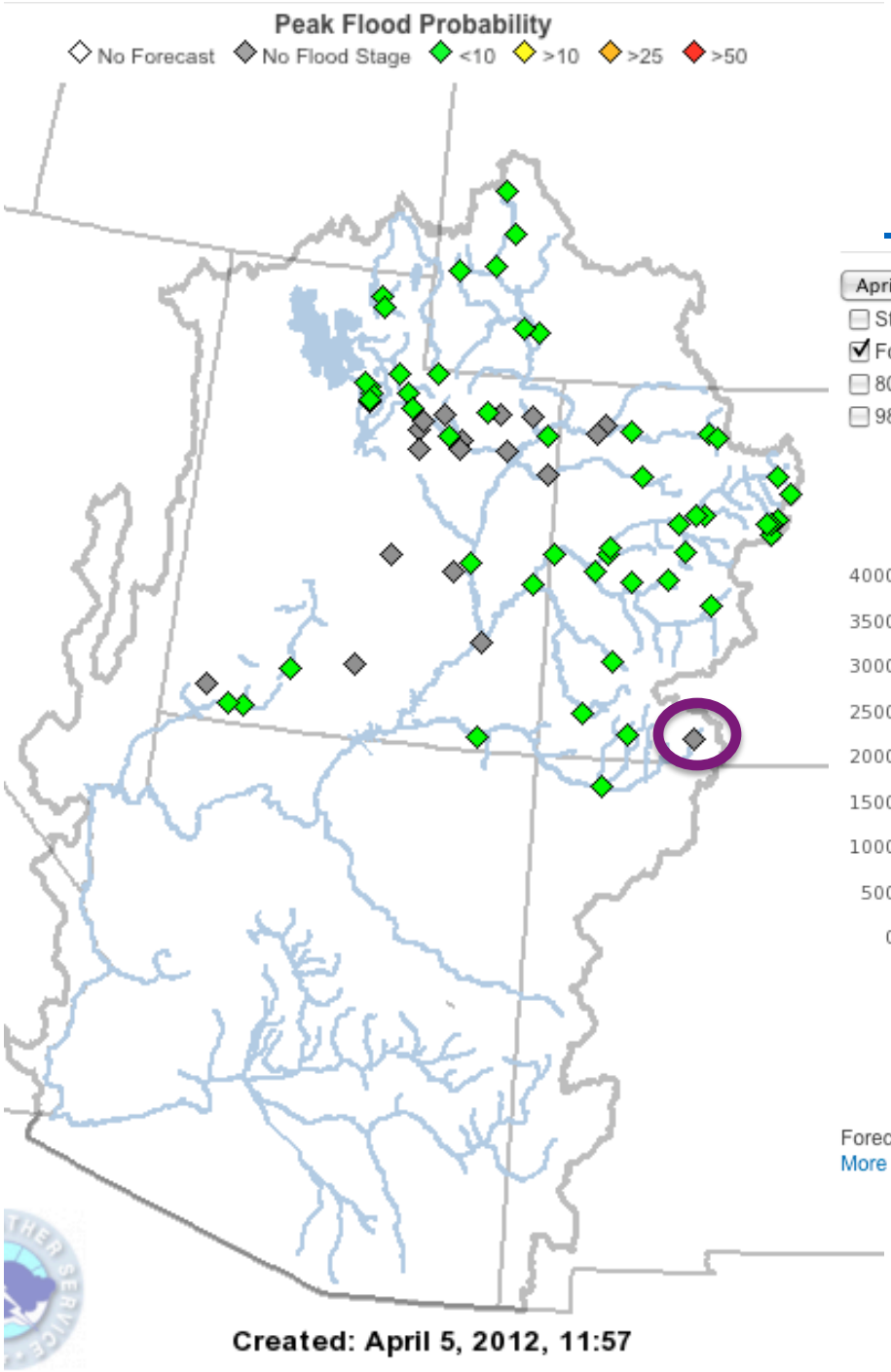
2360 kaf	36%	33%
50% Exceedence (Official Forecast)	of Historical Median	of Historical Mean
1760 kaf	**3260 kaf**	**100th of 103**
90% Exceedence	10% Exceedence	Official Historical Flows

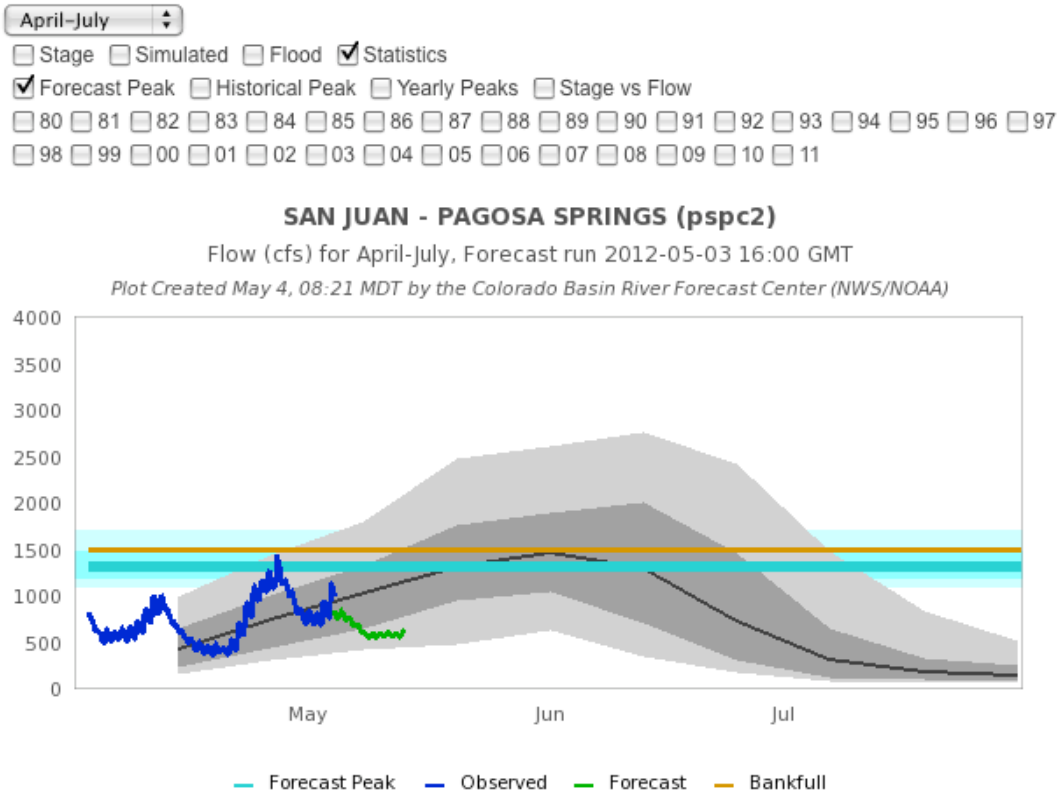
Forecast Issued: May 1 2012 — View Water Supply Forecast Plot



CBRFC/NWS/NOAA 05/04/12 05:03:49 UTC

Web Reference: www.cbrfc.noaa.gov/gmap/gmapm.php?wcon=checked





Forecast Peaks are Mean Daily. Historical and Yearly Peaks are Instantaneous.
More Plot Options

Barriers, Gaps, Chasms

Common Stakeholder Requirements

- More frequent updates of our long lead products
- More analysis - often involving climate science plus water resources
- More metadata and data about our forecast process:
  - raw model forecasts
  - snow distribution
  - model forcing information
- Longer lead forecasts - even with minimal skill

Service Gaps & Science Challenges

- Skillful seasonal forecast for Upper Colorado (minimal ENSO signal)
- 2-5 year forecasts
- Water Demand / ET forecasts
- Probabilistic streamflow forecasts across time scales
- Dust on snow
- Beetle kill
- Connecting forecasts and science to stakeholder decisions

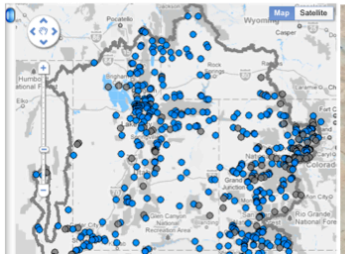
Workshop Summary

SI/Y2 Climate and Streamflow Forecasting Workshop

NOAA/NWS Colorado Basin River Forecast Center
Salt Lake City, UT – March 21-22, 2011

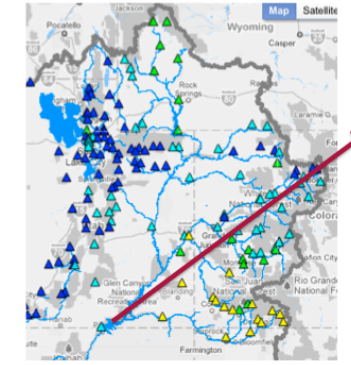
Organized by
CBRFC
USBR

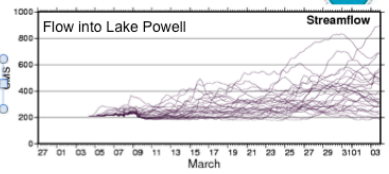
Sponsored by
Colorado Water Conservation Board
NIDIS

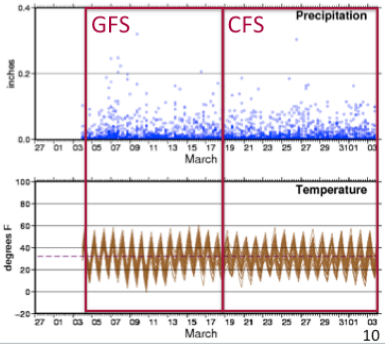


Example of Experimental Ensembles

GFS and/or CFS based ensembles: CBRFC & CNRFC experimental products updated daily

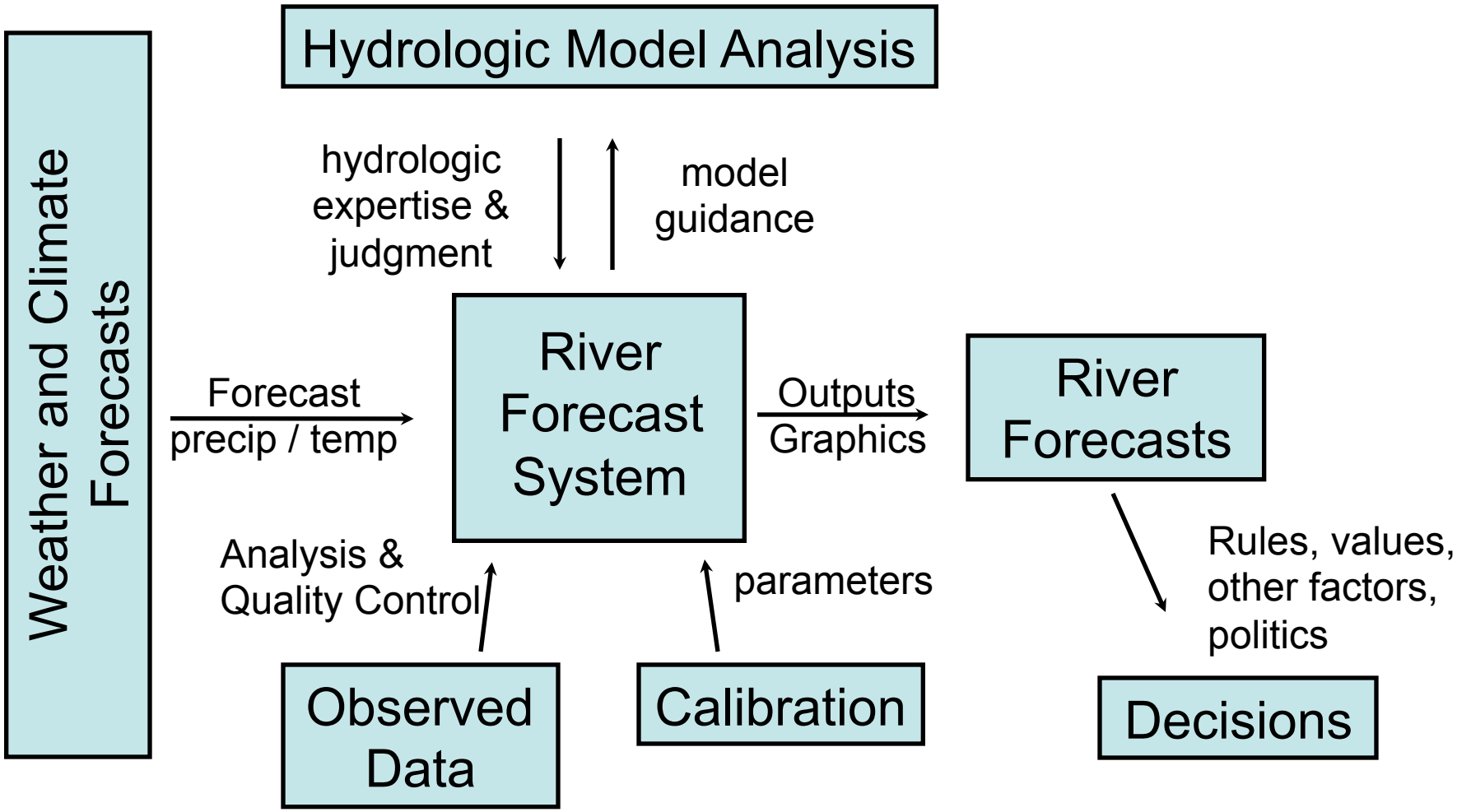






Contact: Andy Wood (Andy.Wood@noaa.gov)

Research Needs



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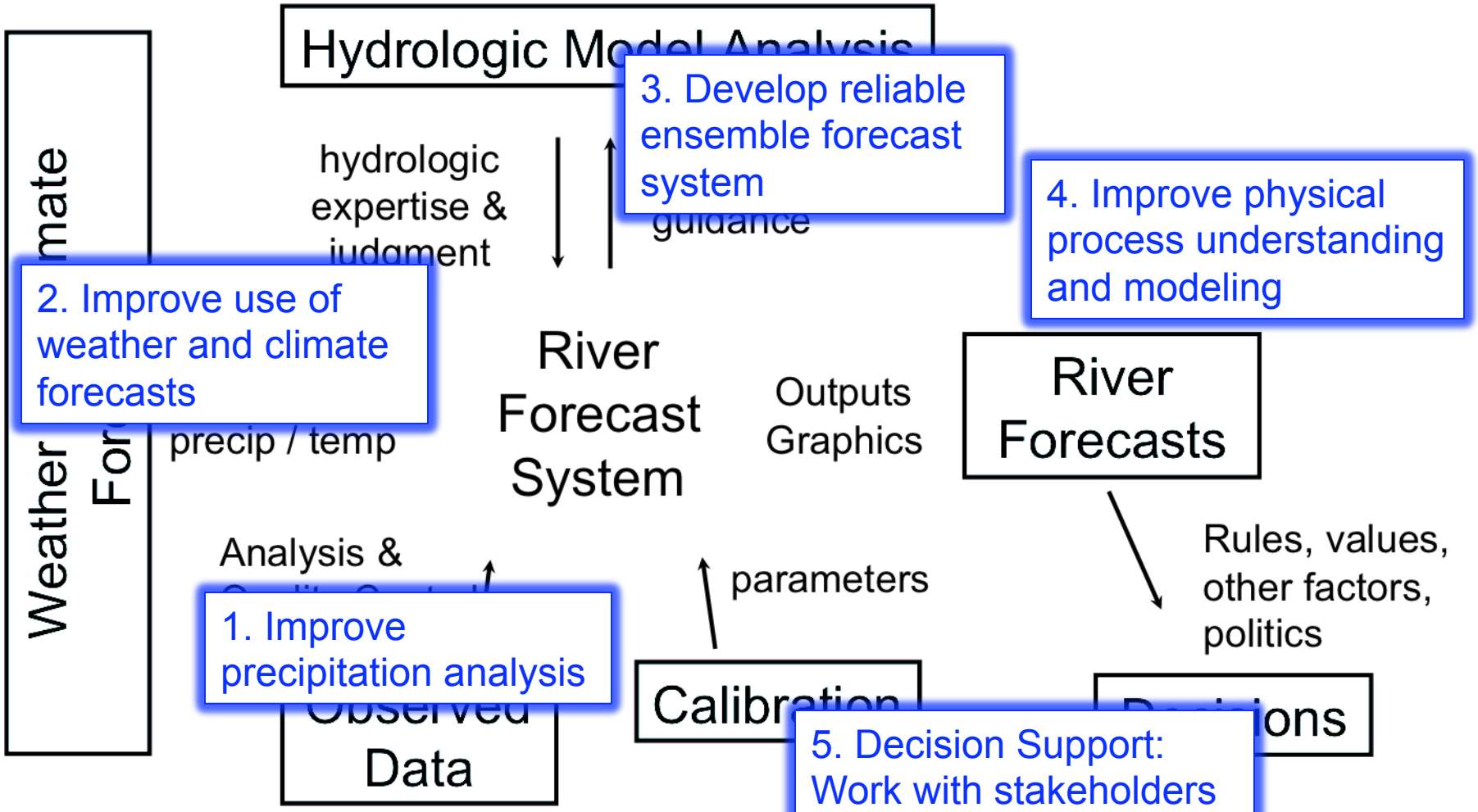

Chasm

Mission: To understand and predict changes in the Earth's environment … to meet our Nation's economic, social, and environmental needs

Colorado River water resources stakeholders

Summary

Colorado River Overview

CBRFC Forecast Challenge

2011 and 2012: Two Extremes

Research Opportunities

Questions?

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