

Will this wet winter solve our water challenges and drought?

When you live in a state of drought for multiple decades, every bit of precipitation receives a warm welcome, but what does that really mean for our drought status, and what effect does it truly have on our water supplies?

When it comes to the Colorado River, this winter's snowstorms have brought above-average snowfall to the Rockies and will hopefully provide favorable runoff. However, even with a spring runoff that is better than the last few years, it will not change the [river's negative trajectory](#). As our climate has become warmer and drier, the snow is melting and evaporating far sooner in the spring, which means less moisture flows into streams and rivers and ultimately into the Colorado River. In other words, hydrologic conditions have radically changed, which is why the Colorado River is producing less water, which will continue well into the future.



On the [Salt and Verde systems](#), this wet winter is helping to raise the levels of Lake Roosevelt and its other reservoirs, which is good for Valley communities. Rain and snow that fall in the watershed north of the Valley are vital to the health of this water supply, and this winter will positively impact the entire system. While this will bolster a key supply for the AMWUA cities, it does not lessen the concerns and challenges that their water utilities are facing with diminishing Colorado River water.

When it comes to drought, there is no doubt that this winter's precipitation is providing relief to our [short-term drought conditions](#), a boost to things such as our vegetation and moisture in the ground can also help reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires. However, this winter's rain and snow are merely a few drops in a huge bucket that cannot erase the effect of multiple dry years. Research shows that Arizona's drought and wet cycles run for 20 to 30 years, and the current record-breaking drought cycle began around 1996. So realistically and historically, it would take a few years of greater-than-average snow and rain to heal the wounds of those arid decades and alter our [long-term drought conditions](#) in Arizona. When looking at the Colorado River Basin, it will take much longer to stabilize and recover Lake Mead and Lake Powell.

The AMWUA cities understand this historical cycle, the circumstances of living in an arid climate, and how those factors can impact their water sources differently. In other words, they are built for drought by continually preparing for both long-term and short-term challenges. They have invested in a unique, complex, and robust infrastructure network to

ensure water is always available, which is vital to our desert communities and our state's overall economy.

So, while we welcome this winter's significant snow and rainfall, water managers understand that we must continually plan, manage, and invest in our water resources because long-standing droughts and a dwindling Colorado River supply are our reality.

For over 50 years, the Arizona Municipal Water Users Association has helped protect our member cities' ability to provide their communities with assured, safe, and sustainable water supplies. For more information, visit www.amwua.org.