

## **Wet weather boosts runoffs**

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By Chris Mulick

A wet March has bolstered Northwest river runoff forecasts, which is good news for power managers and farmers alike.

The Northwest River Forecast Center's latest projection estimates January through July runoff at The Dalles will be 83.1 million acre-feet, or 78 percent of normal, assuming normal weather from here on out.

That's the most optimistic forecast this year.

"We're in good shape," said Ed Mosey, a spokesman for the Bonneville Power Administration, which figures to have no problem meeting electrical demand this summer.

It's particularly good news in the Yakima River Basin. Because the Yakima watershed is comparatively small, it is much more susceptible to drought than the Columbia River, which irrigates about the same acreage between Pasco and Grand Coulee Dam.

Precipitation in the Yakima Basin was almost twice normal levels this month, pushing precipitation totals from October through March to nearly 93 percent of normal, according to the Bureau of Reclamation.

Before the month started, supplies figured to be a bit tight at certain times this summer at the Roza Irrigation District, whose customers are most at risk. But the latest forecasts offer more assurance a serious drought is not in the offing this year.

"It should be pretty good, I think," said Tom Monroe, district operations manager. "It will be nothing like 2001."

That year, runoff at The Dalles was only 55 percent of normal.

Just as critical is when the runoff comes down the river. Once the snowmelt is gone, irrigators will have to rely on what's behind reservoirs.

Recent storms have boosted snowpack in the mountains, but it won't be known by how much until new figures are released in about a week.

"The longer we can run on the river, the better off it is for everybody," Monroe said.