

Light snowpack raises western fire risk

by UPI

DENVER - Snow in the mountains of the western United States melted early this year, increasing the danger of fire and drought.

"Mother Nature's been dealing some interesting cards," Phil Pasteris of the National Water and Climate Center told USA Today. "For almost every basin in the West, we have lost snowpack."

Lake Powell and Lake Mead on the Colorado River are at about half their normal volume. Many mountain areas already had a lighter-than-usual snowpack before the temperature turned unseasonably warm in March and melted much of what was left.

The Bureau of Reclamation, a division of the Interior Department, warned last week that every state in the West faces an "early and long" fire season.

Southern California, which depends on the Colorado River for much of its water, faces what climatologists say is a "triple whammy." The region is in a severe local drought, combined with the light snow pack and drought in the Colorado River basin.

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