

Higher than normal snowpack raising risk for flooding

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FORT COLLINS – Snowpack at higher elevations is at levels researchers have not seen in a decade.

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"Basin wide, the snowpack is 110 percent to 130 percent than average. There is a concern for flooding because it's been years since we've had this much of a snowpack where the snow is deep at high elevations, all the way from northern New Mexico to the Colorado/Wyoming border," said Colorado climatologist and Colorado State University researcher Nolan Doesken.

Doesken says on a scale of one to 10, the risk of flooding in river basins like the San Juan, Rio Grande and Gunnison basins is "a five or six." So far, spring temperatures have been relatively cool, said Doesken. Depending on the precipitation in the coming weeks, Doesken says the risk of flooding may be increased even further.

"There's still plenty of time, lots of different ways the snowmelt could occur, but when there's a lot of snow and when spring has been cool, that does increase the chances of flooding later on," said Doesken.

Snow at elevations 10,000 feet and above usually begins to melt in May and continues on through June. Doesken says if there are many consecutive days of warm temperatures, then flooding is more likely, but he emphasized that Colorado has historically had a "well-behaved" snowmelt.

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