Monthly Climate Report

NWS Reno NV

Issued: 3/7/2026

Weather Synopsis & Highlights:

Temperatures in February were generally 2-4 degrees above average, with parts of Pershing County and far northern Washoe County more than 4 degrees warmer than average. The only areas near or below average were parts of central and southern Mono County from Mono Lake to Mammoth Lakes (Figure 1). Precipitation was wetter than average (up to near 150% of average) across northeast CA and far northwest NV, near to slightly below average across the Tahoe basin, the Sierra crest, and western NV north of US-50. Below average precipitation was observed across much of western NV south of US-50 and eastern Mono County, with southern Mineral county and southeast Mono County having the largest deficits, receiving less than 25% of average February precipitation (Figure 2).

February 2026 began with overall dry conditions and temperatures well above average through the first 8 days of the month, with highs mainly in the 60s for lower elevations and around 50 degrees for Sierra communities.

The first storm of the month brought snowfall to the Sierra on the 10th and 11th, with 3-7 inches below 7000 feet and up to 1 foot near the crest west of Tahoe (Photo 1). The heaviest snow fell in far southern Mono County, with storm totals of 2 feet at Mammoth Mountain near 9000 ft elevation. For lower elevations, spotty light rain fell with 0.10” or less around the Reno area. Temperatures cooled off to near average during and after this storm, before briefly warming up again for the weekend of the 14th-15th.

A series of strong winter storms between the 16th and 19th brought large amounts of snowfall to the Sierra and also some lower elevation sites. The greatest overall impacts occurred on the 17th when heavy snow of 4-10” occurred across the main urban areas of far western NV (Photos 2 & 3), and higher amounts between 12-18” from bands of heavy Lake Tahoe-enhanced snow between Carson City and Washoe Valley. A second storm brought between 2-6” of new snow to far western NV on the 19th, with lake-enhanced amounts over 8” between Reno and Carson City. For the Sierra, the snow was nearly continuous for 4-5 days especially near the Tahoe basin, with overall totals of 3-6 feet down to lake level and west of US-395 in Mono County (Photo 4) and over 9 feet near the crest. The Central Sierra Snow Lab’s 5-day total of 111” was the third largest in the lab’s reporting history since 1970 (only 7.5” short of its 5-day record from April 1982). Tragically, a large avalanche buried a group of backcountry hikers on Castle Peak during the late morning of the 17th, resulting in 9 fatalities, which set a new California record for the most fatalities from a single avalanche in that state. Travel impacts were widespread with prolonged closures of main highways over the Sierra, and slick snow covered roads into western NV. Icy roads from temperatures well below freezing lingered into the morning of the 20th.

Dry and cold conditions prevailed for the 20th and 21st, then a warming trend began on the 22nd. The next storm mainly on the 24th was much warmer with snow levels above 9500 feet. Rainfall totals between 1-3” along the Sierra crest produced a rain on snow episode, with notable rises on rivers and creeks in parts of northeast CA and the eastern Sierra (see the Hydrology section below). Away from the Sierra, rain amounts dropped off quickly to less than 0.25” for the eastern shores of Lake Tahoe, while for western NV most

precipitation was shadowed out with strong winds being the main impact. Gusts up to 60 mph were reported across lower elevations, while wind prone areas received peak gusts of 75-95 mph, with a peak ridge top gust of 128 mph on Slide Mtn. These strong winds overturned several high-profile vehicles on I-580 through Washoe Valley (photos 5 & 6), resulting in an 11-hour closure of this highway, while semi trucks were also overturned on US-95 in Mineral County south of Walker Lake and US-395 in Mono County north of Mono Lake.

The remainder of the month featured warm conditions with temperatures climbing into the upper 60s to near 70 degrees for lower elevations. Dry weather prevailed through the 27th, then a weaker storm moving through this warm air mass brought scattered showers and isolated thunderstorms to parts of northeast CA and northwest NV on the final day of February. Rainfall amounts were generally 0.20” or less, with isolated heavier totals up to 0.50”.

Hydrology:

After going over 5 weeks with no significant storms, the colder mid-February storms were a welcome change for the snowpack, water supply and winter recreation conditions. Between the 16th and 20th the snowpack gained considerable ground, closing the large gap that had formed below normal conditions. During this time the E. Sierra SNOTEL sites climbed from 62 to 86% of median (Figure 3). Snowpack gains were not nearly as favorable for N. Nevada, where conditions only improved from record low to barely above record low (Figure 4). Snowpack conditions in the Feather River Basin and Eastern Sierra are displayed in Figures 5 and 6 respectively.

Optimism for snowpack conditions returning to normal levels along the east side of the Sierra was short-lived. The warm rain event on the 24th combined with high winds warmed mountain snowpacks rapidly and initiated snowmelt at lower elevation and shallow snowpack locations. On the 25th, little rain fell, but very warm temperatures, high humidity and strong winds melted what remained of the low elevation snowpack and started to eat away at higher and deeper snowpack locations up to about 8500’ (Figure 7). This rapid snowmelt resulted in very high flows along area rivers and streams (Photo 7) and a few areas of very minor flooding impacts. The most notable of the flood impacts were on the lower Susan River where water overtopped, but did not close, Hwy 395 near Standish.

The melt rates on Wednesday the 25th were exceptional at SNOTEL sites in the E. Sierra. Many of these sites reported a record decrease for that day, and the average decrease among all SNOTEL in the E. Sierra area rivaled the peak day of the January 1997 event, as did the three day loss from 2/25 through 2/27 this year. No other years in the SNOTEL record came even close to daily melt rates during the winter months (Figure 8). This melt has continued, but at a much lower rate. These snowpack losses in combination with the ever growing gap between current conditions and normal snow accumulation have erased, or will soon erase, the gains made by the mid-February storms.

Mountain soil moisture is now excellent to record wet conditions, and streamflows are high for this time of year (Figure 9) while spatial modeled soil moisture is more of a mixed bag in lower elevations (Figure 10). Observed water year to date streamflow is generally well above normal along the east side of the Sierra, but well below normal along the Humboldt and tributaries (Figure 11 left side). The April-July water supply outlook has decreased significantly due to a well below normal snowpack, early melt and a dry outlook. The water supply outlook is much worse along the Humboldt and tributaries in northern Nevada. Major reservoirs are generally near or above normal storage for this time of year, with Lake Tahoe and the Walker Basin well above normal storage, and Rye Patch below normal (Figure 11 right side). Reservoir storage conditions are well above

normal in Lake Tahoe and in the Walker basin, slightly above normal in the Truckee and Carson, and below normal along the lower Humboldt (Figure 12).

Drought Update:

The large contrast between current snowpack (Figure 13) conditions and water year to date mountain precipitation (Figure 14) is a strong indicator of snow drought. The lack of snow is at least partially balanced by favorable precipitation, soil moisture, and in some areas streamflows. The area of the NWS Reno Service area highlighted as abnormally dry expanded over the past month due in part to the lack of snowpack (Figure 15). The drought monitor is intended to reflect current conditions and not future forecast conditions, but may see significant changes if the snow drought continues later into the spring. The very warm water year temperatures (Figure 16) are at least in part to blame for the limited snowpack. Area wide water year precipitation is displayed in Figure 17.

Additional Information on Drought and Climate:

Report Drought conditions here
Nevada statewide Drought update
NV State Climate Office
NV Living with Drought
Drought Monitor
New Drought.gov
California Nevada Drought Early Warning System
NOAA CPC Drought page
CNAP Drought tracker
California Nevada River Forecast Center
WRCC Drought Tracker
WRCC Enso page
WRCC Monthly Climate Summaries
Evaporative Demand Drought Index
US Seasonal Drought Outlook

Contact NWS Reno Climate Team
rev.climate@noaa.gov 775-673-8100
https://www.weather.gov/rev/

Photos:

Photo 1: Widespread snow across the Mammoth area on the 10th. Photo courtesy of Barbara Coleman Richter on Facebook 2/10/26.

Photo 2: Widespread snow (4-10” with locally higher amounts) over Reno on 2/17, photo from NWS Reno on the morning of 2/18.

Photo 3: Widespread snow (4-10” with locally higher amounts) over the Reno area on 2/17. Photo courtesy of Michael Yackovich on Facebook

Photo 4: Snow covered intersection of CA-203 and US-395 on the morning of 2/19 (Photo credit: CalTrans District 9).

Photos 5 & 6: Overturned tractor-trailers along I-580 in Washoe Valley due to strong winds on 2/24. Credits: 2 News Nevada (top) and NWS Reno (bottom).

Photo 7: High flows and from rapid snowmelt on the Upper Truckee near South Lake Tahoe 2/25/26

Figures:

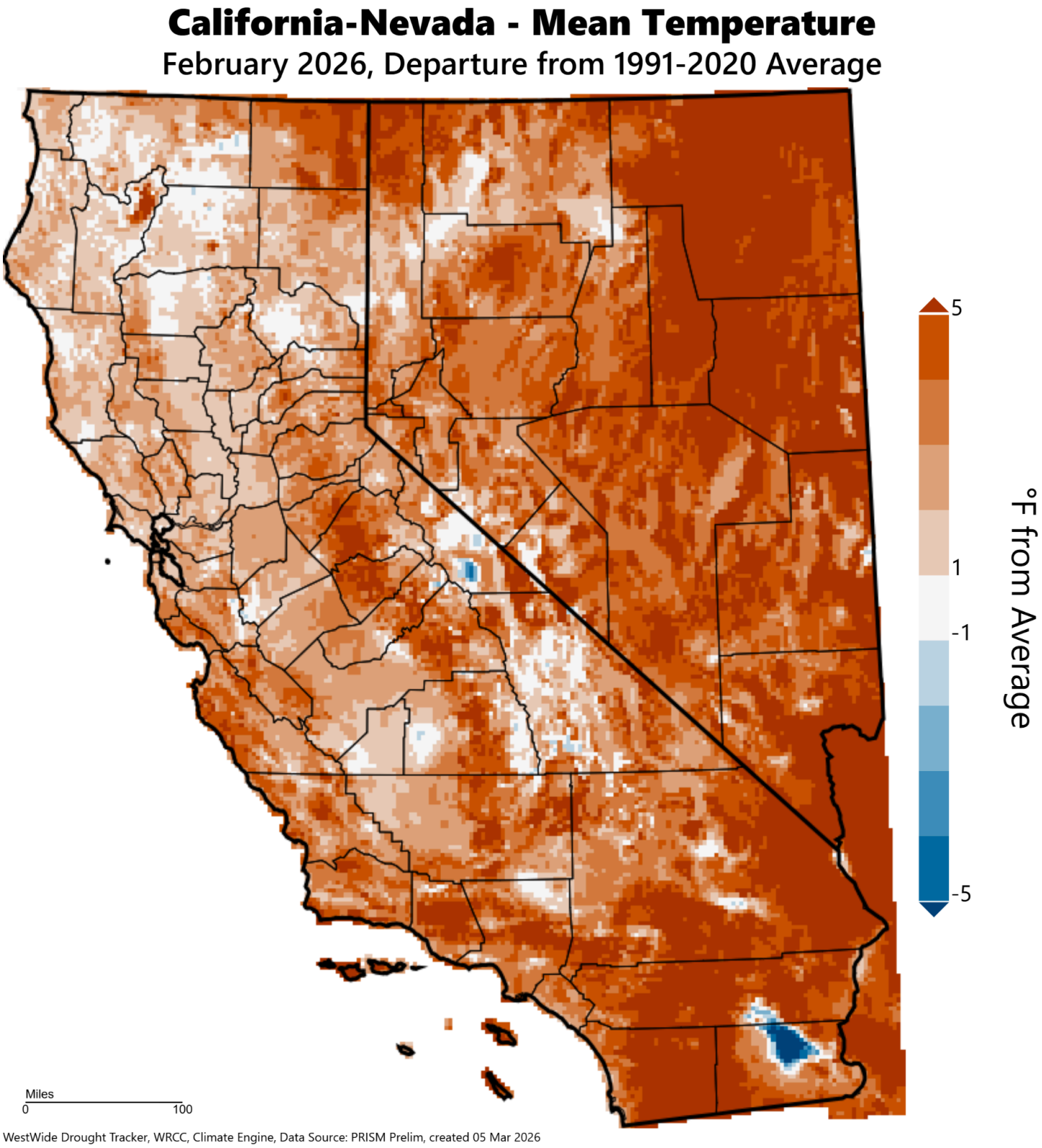


Figure 1: Departure from normal temperatures for February 2026.(WWDT)

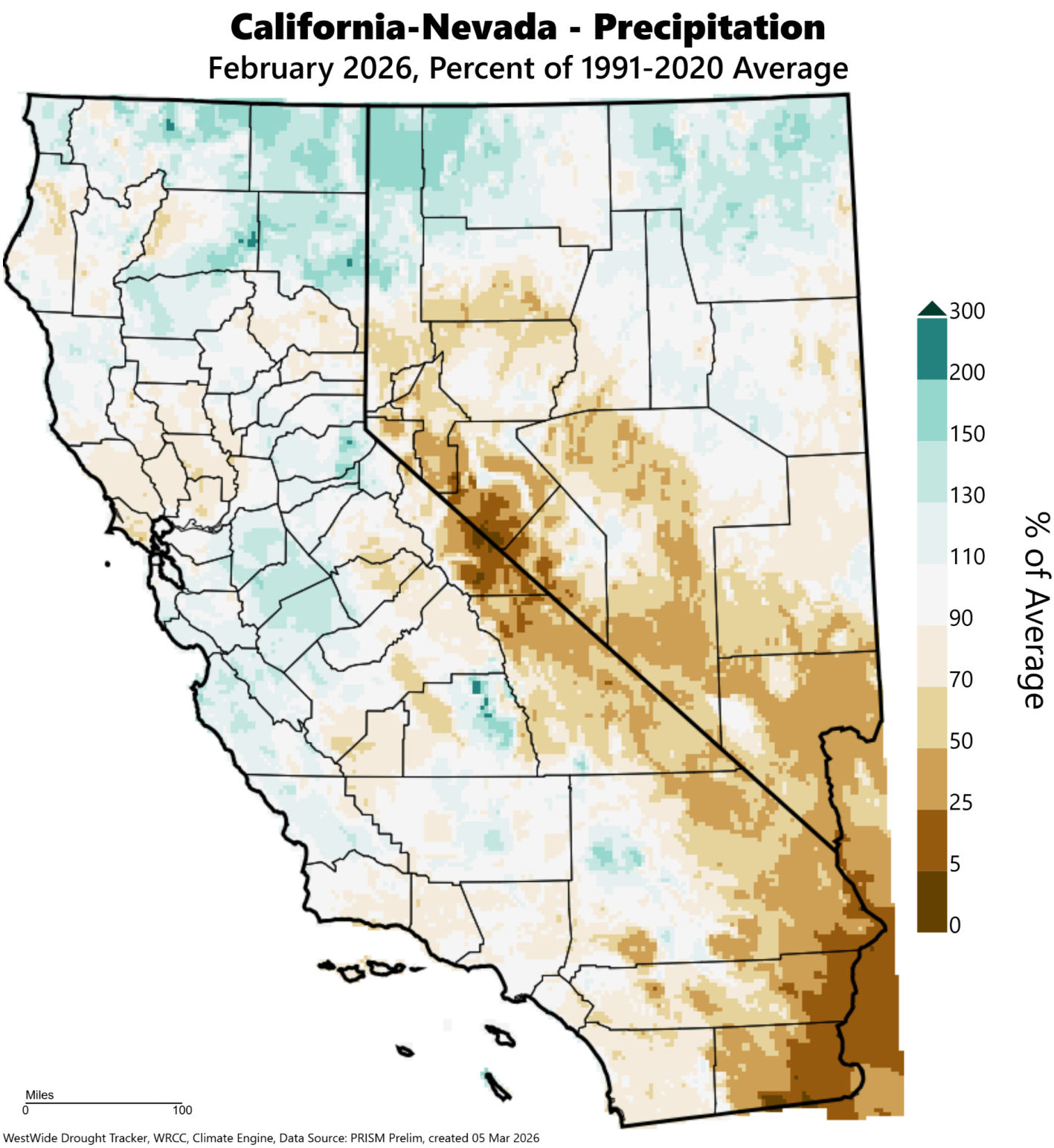


Figure 2: Percent of normal precipitation for February 2026. (WWDT)

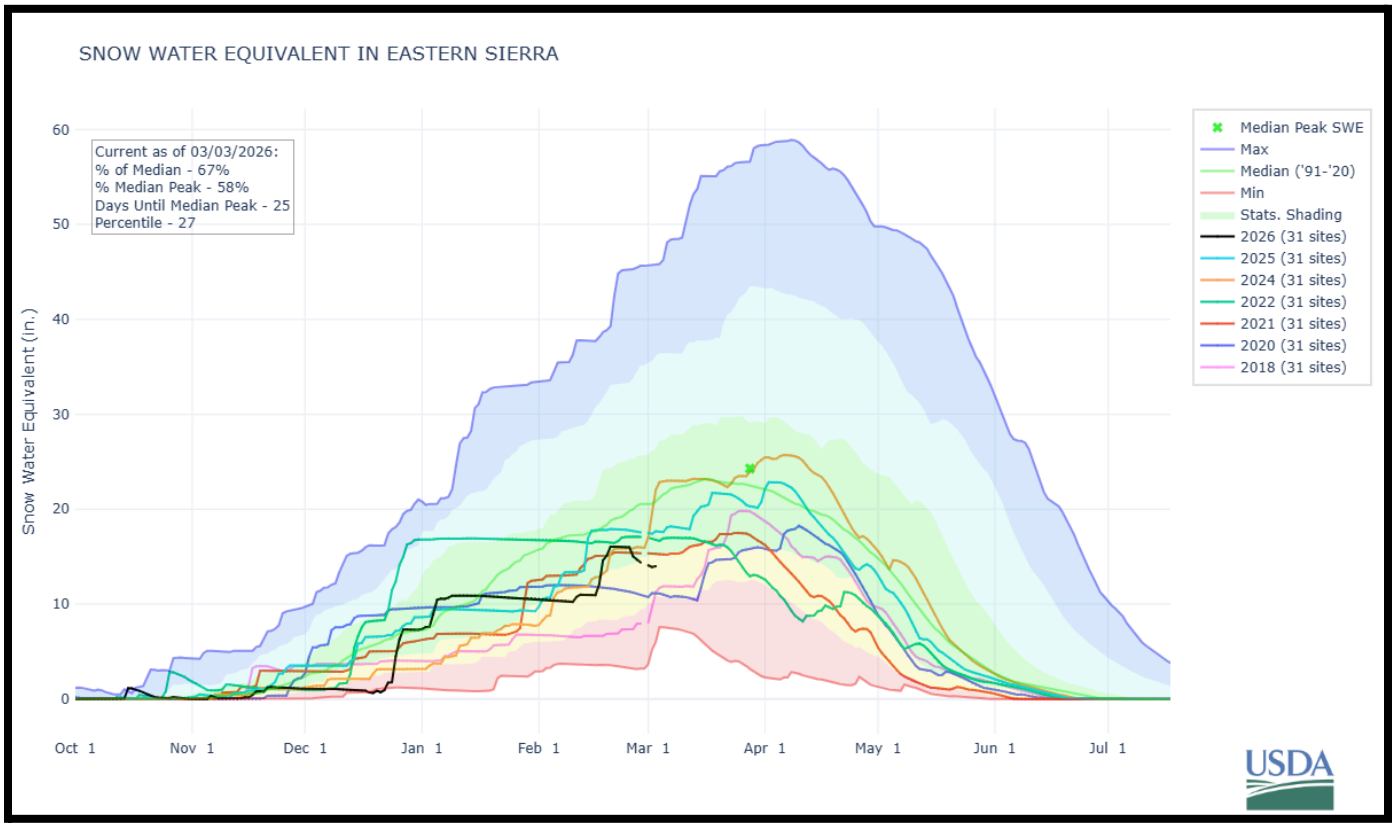


Figure 3. [NRCS SNOTEL snow water equivalent (SWE)] for the combined Tahoe, Truckee, Carson and Walker basins. This year in black with several other recent normal and below normal years for reference. Note this area is currently the lowest snowpack conditions since 2020!

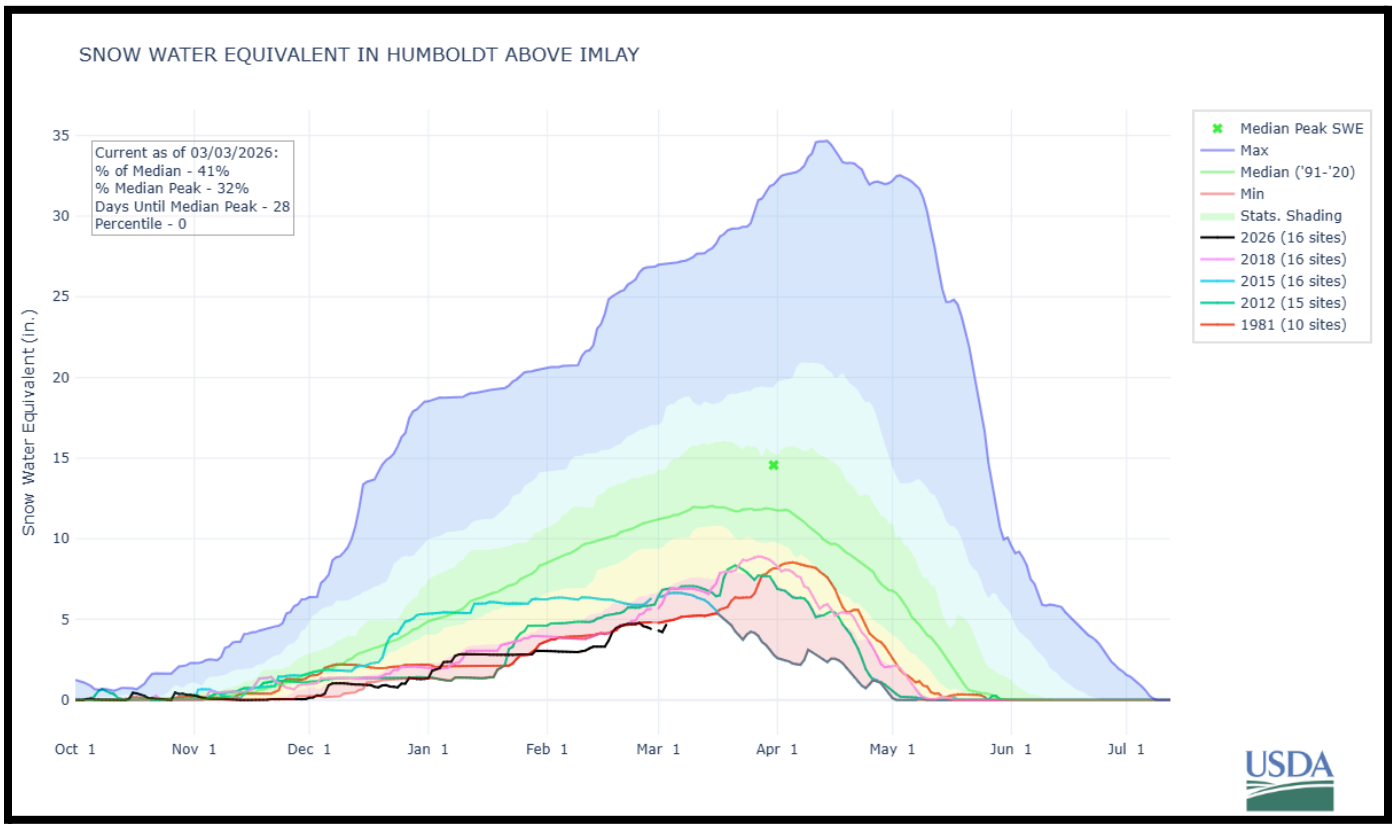


Figure 4. [NRCS SNOTEL snow water equivalent (SWE)] for the Humboldt with this year in black, and other recent very dry years for comparison. Current conditions are near the record low for this date set in 1981, but note there were fewer SNOTEL sites in 1981 than today, so the comparison is not direct.

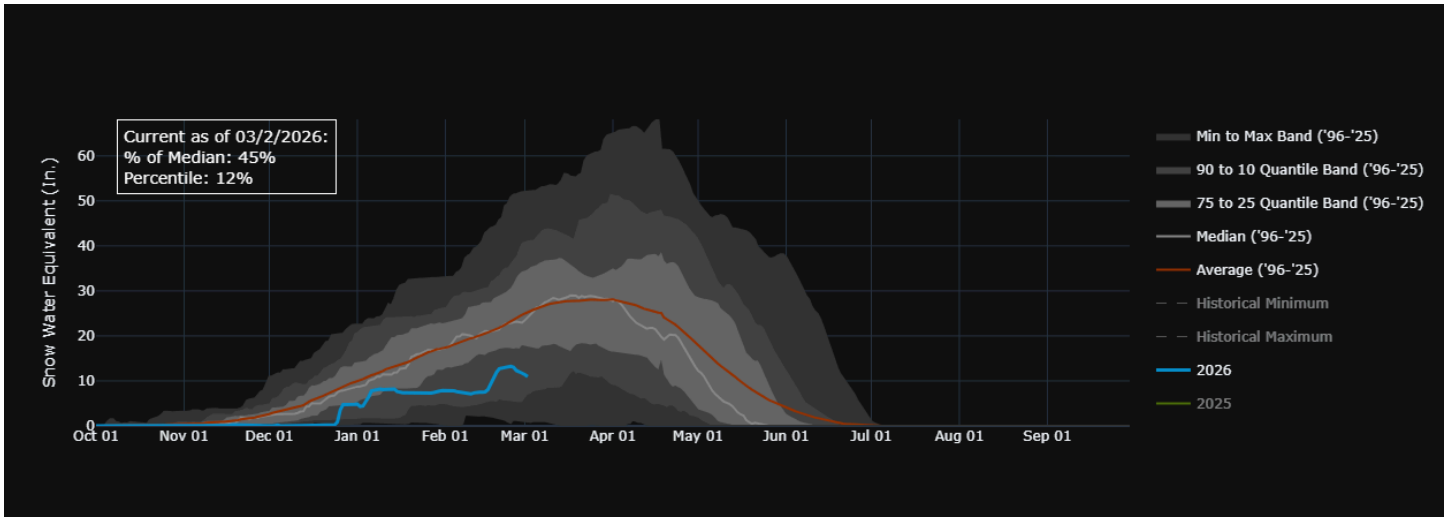


Figure 5. Feather Basin California Cooperative Snow Survey snow water equivalent (SWE)

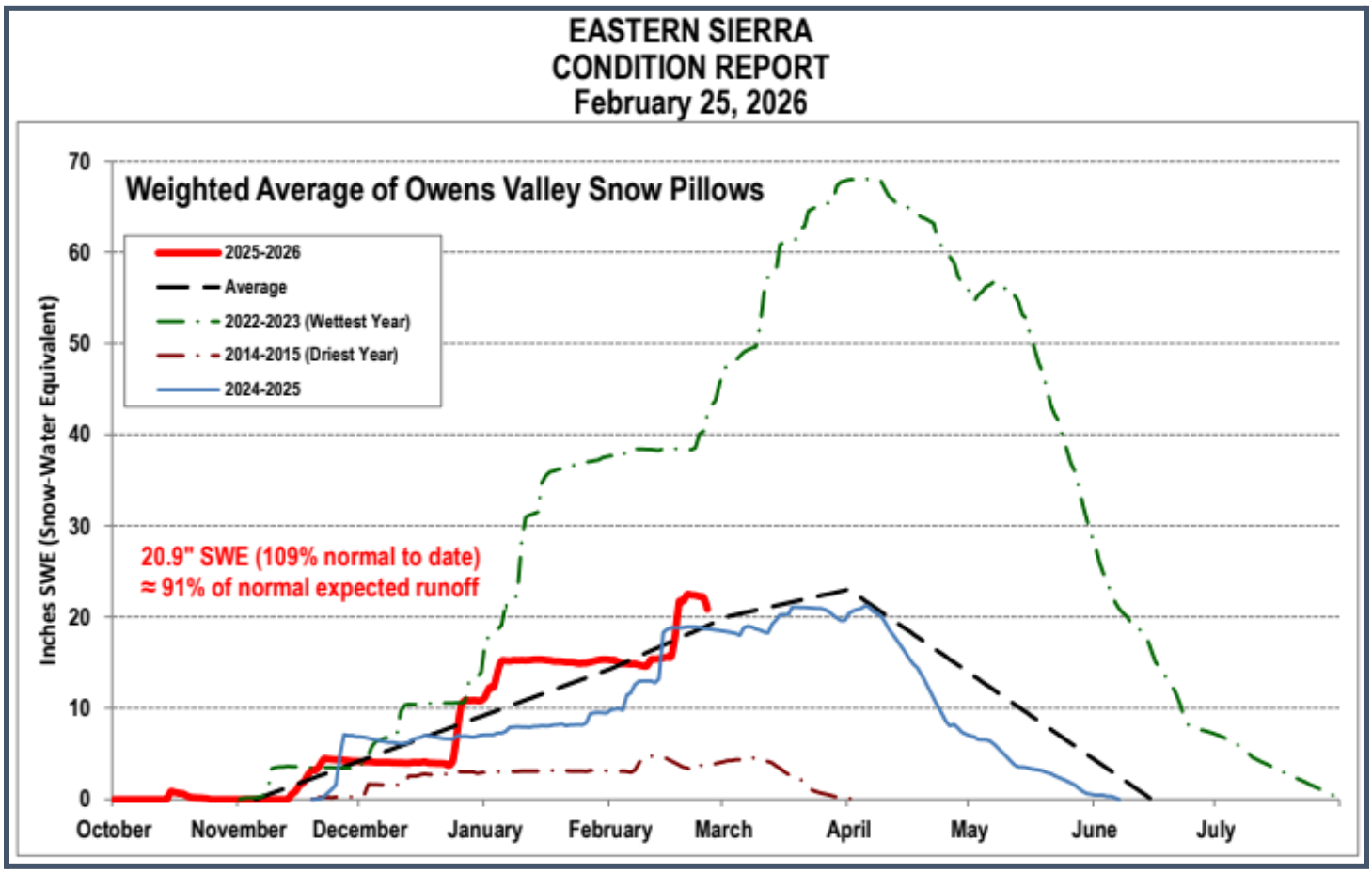


Figure 6. Snowpack conditions in Owens watershed as of late February. Figure courtesy of LADWP

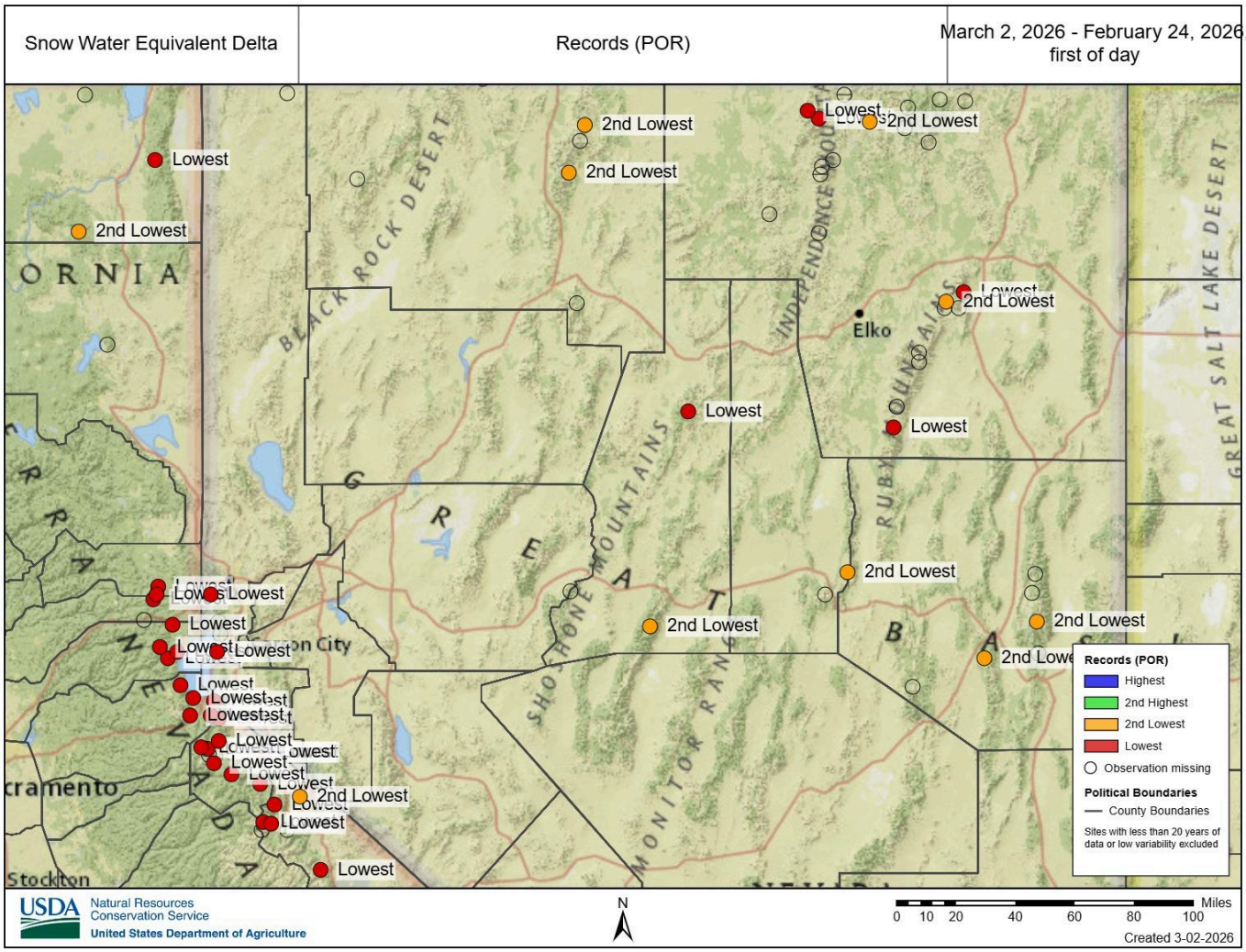


Figure 7. Record and near Record daily Snow Water Equivalent (SWE) losses for 2/25 at SNOTEL locations.

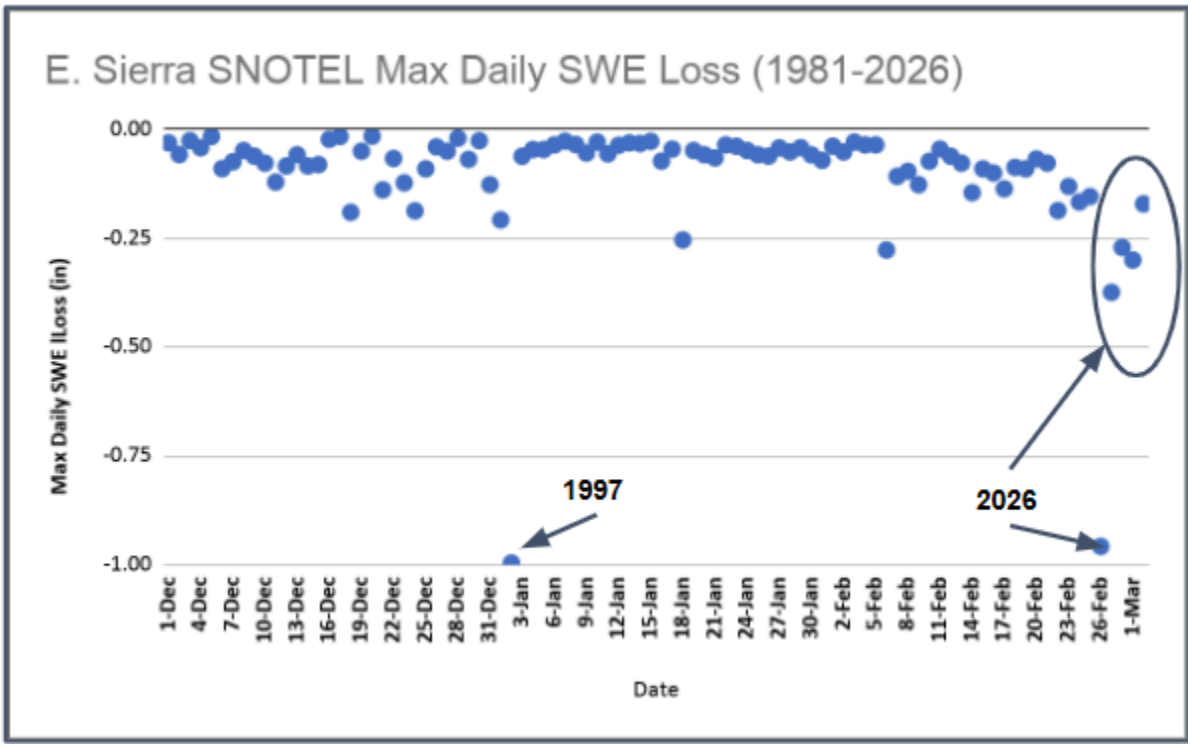
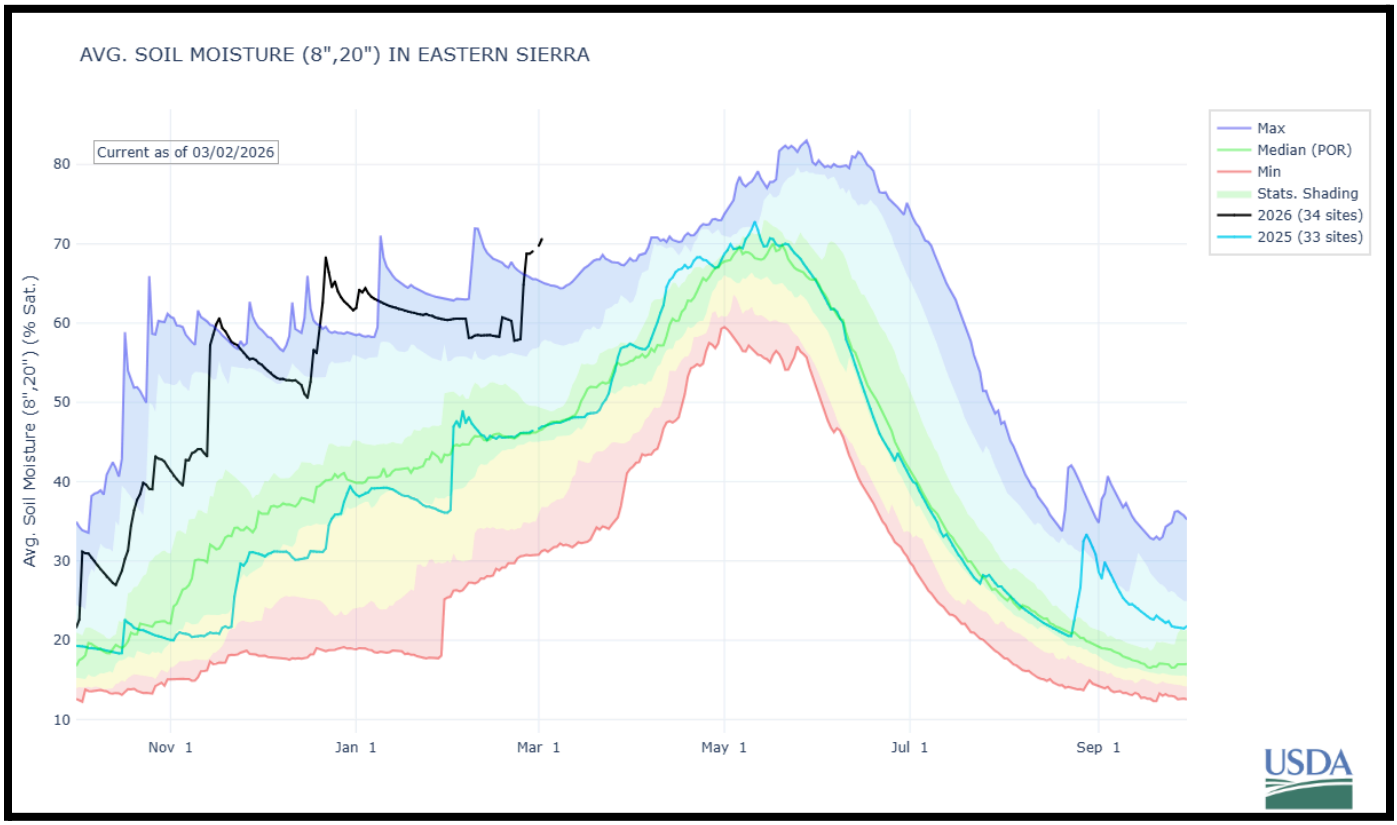


Figure 8. Eastern Sierra group daily maximum Snow Water Equivalent (SWE) loss.



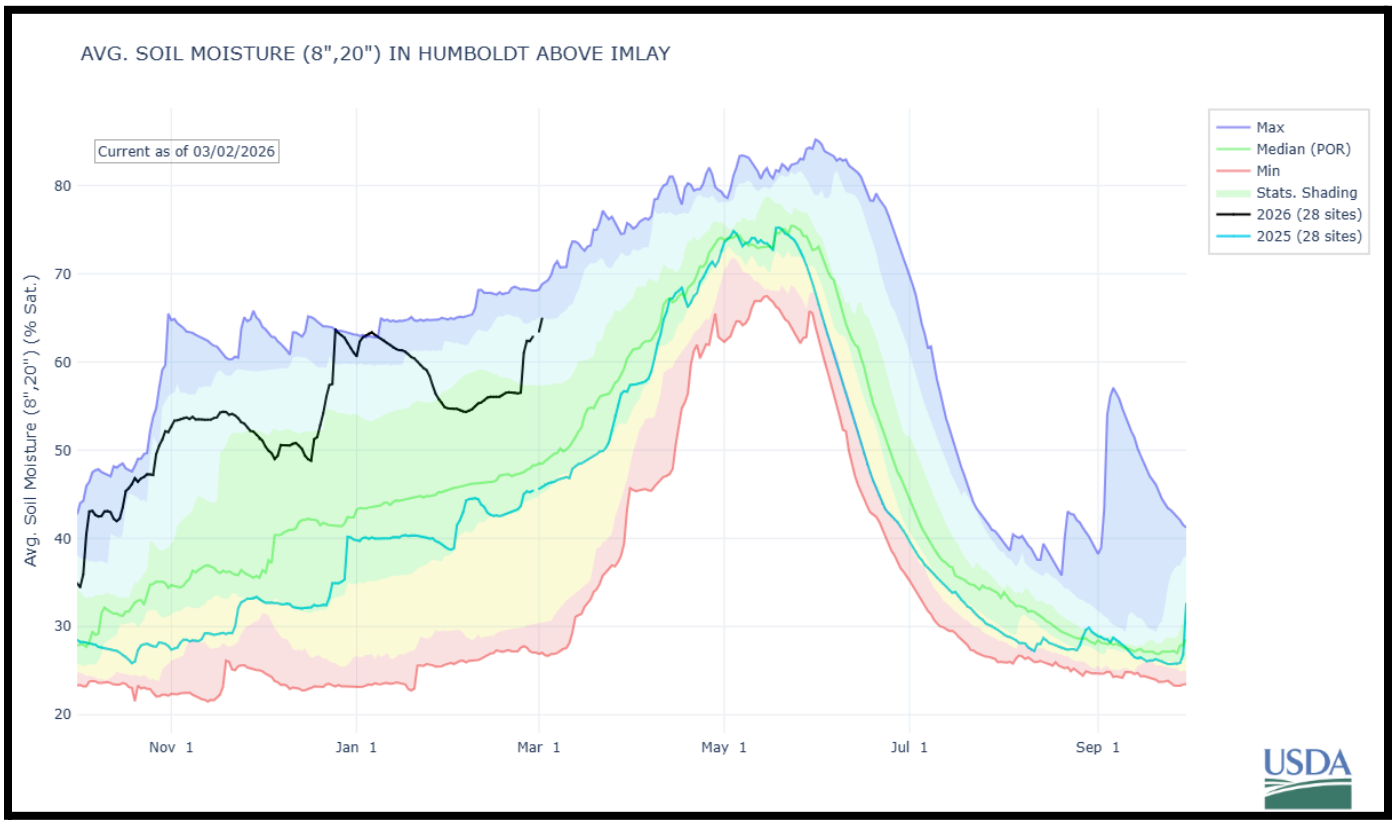


Figure 9. NRCS SNOTEL soil moisture for the combined Tahoe, Truckee, Carson and Walker basins (top), and Humboldt basin (bottom) indicated in black for the water year 2026. Water year 2025 is plotted in green for additional perspective.

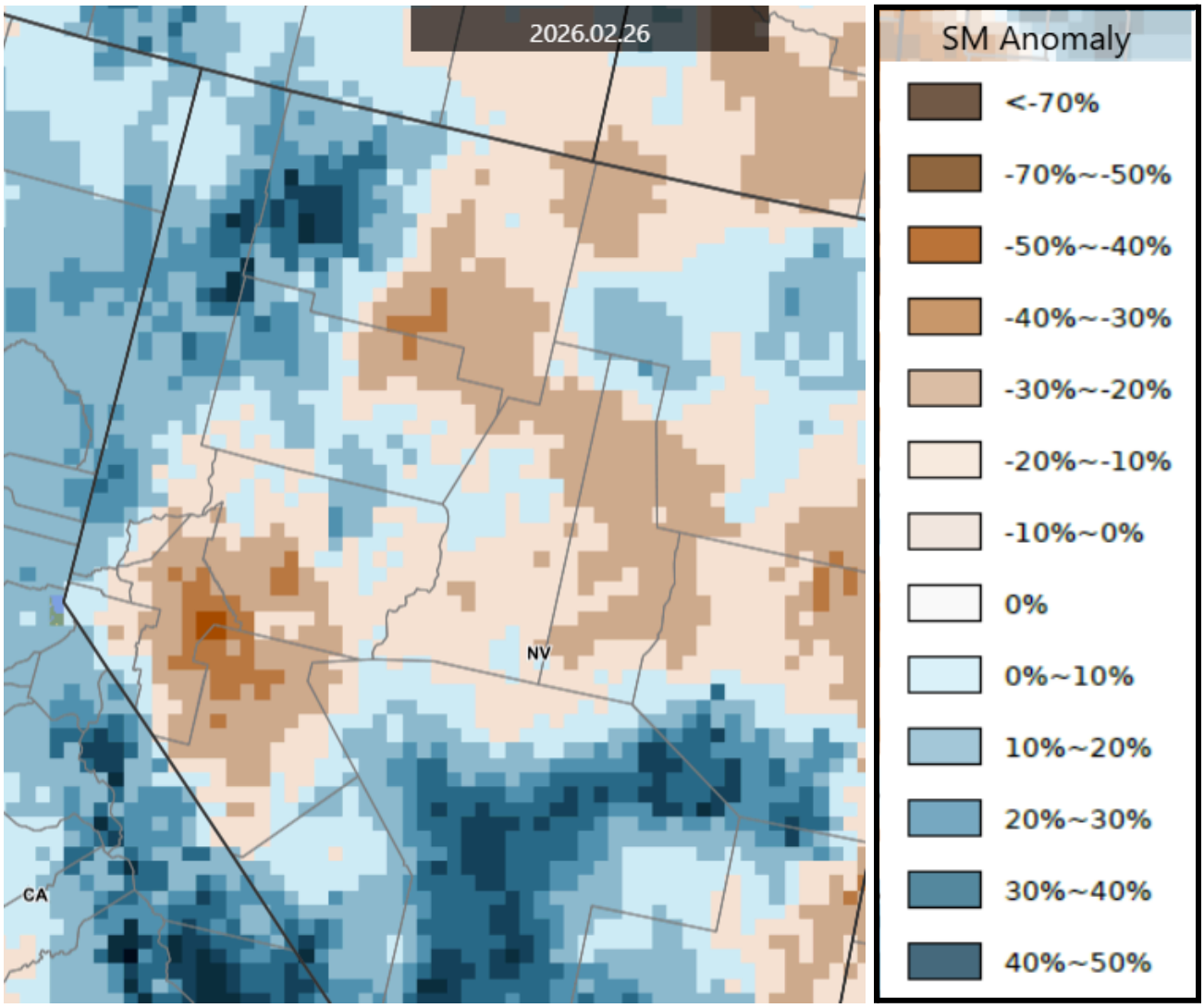


Figure 10. Crop-CASMA Soil Moisture Anomaly 02/26/2026

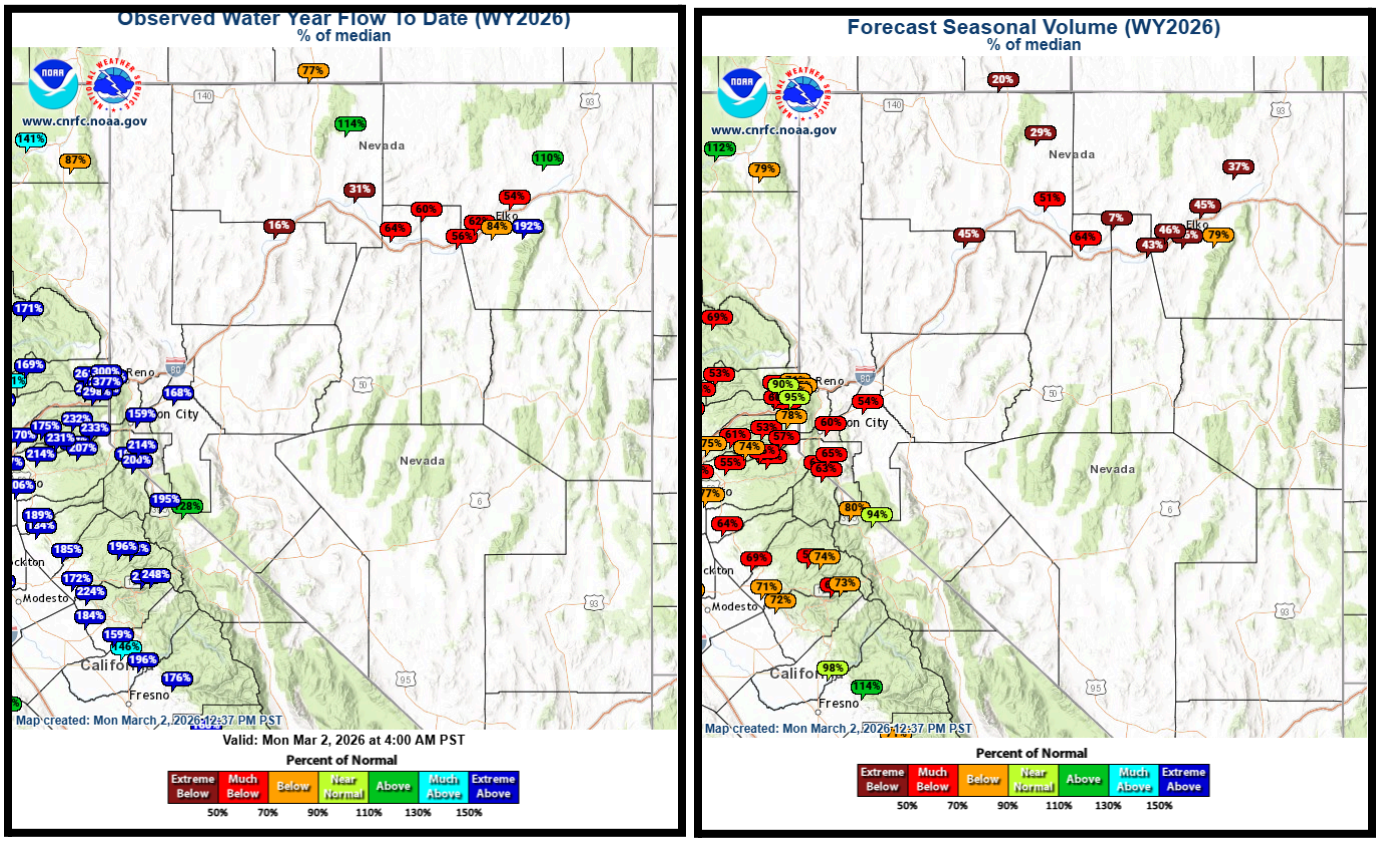


Figure 11. CNRFC Water year 2026 observed flow to date and right figure CNRFC April-July forecast volume both as % of median and as of March 2nd.

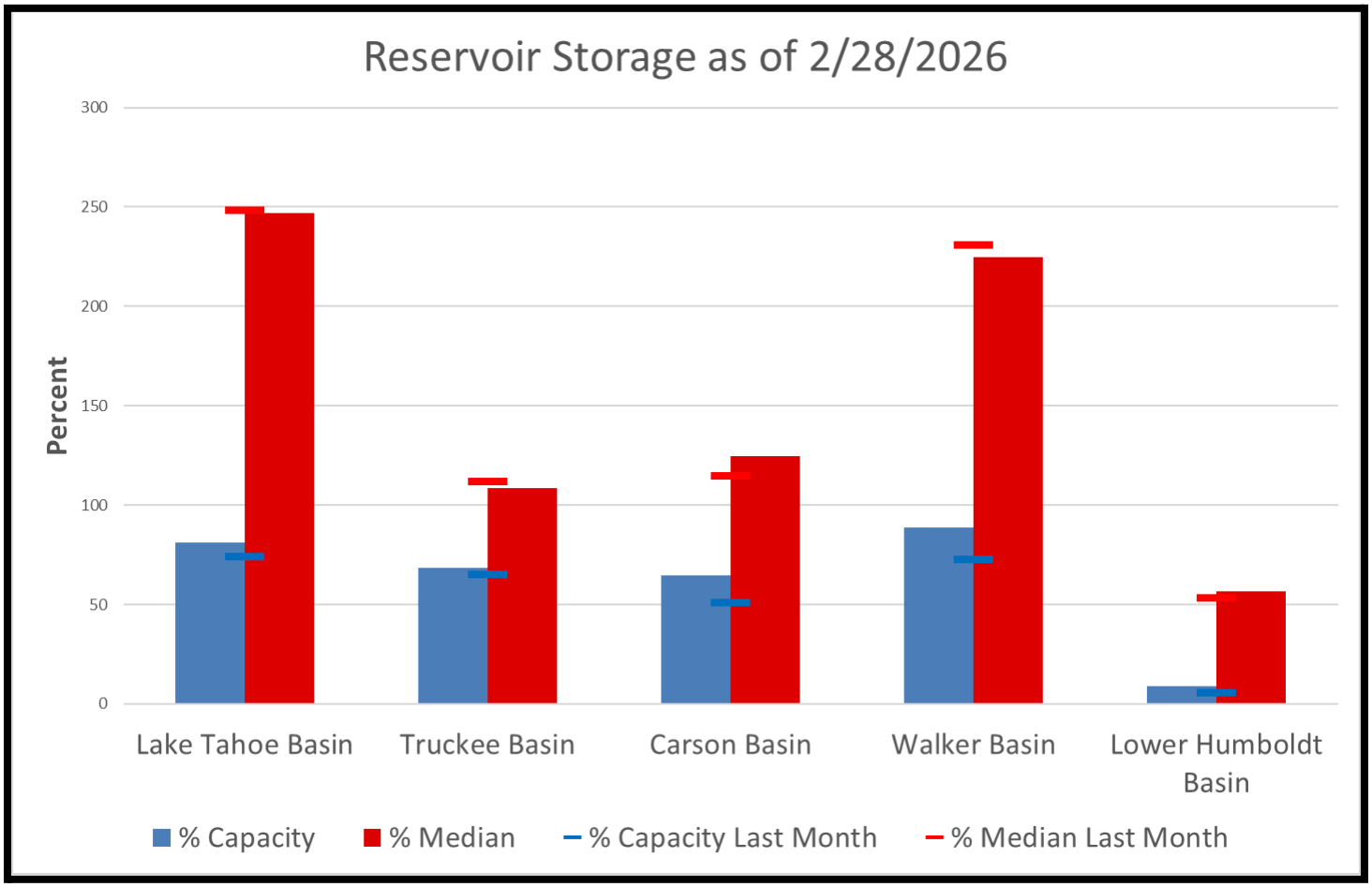


Figure 12. End of February reservoir storage relative to capacity and **median*** for this month and last month.

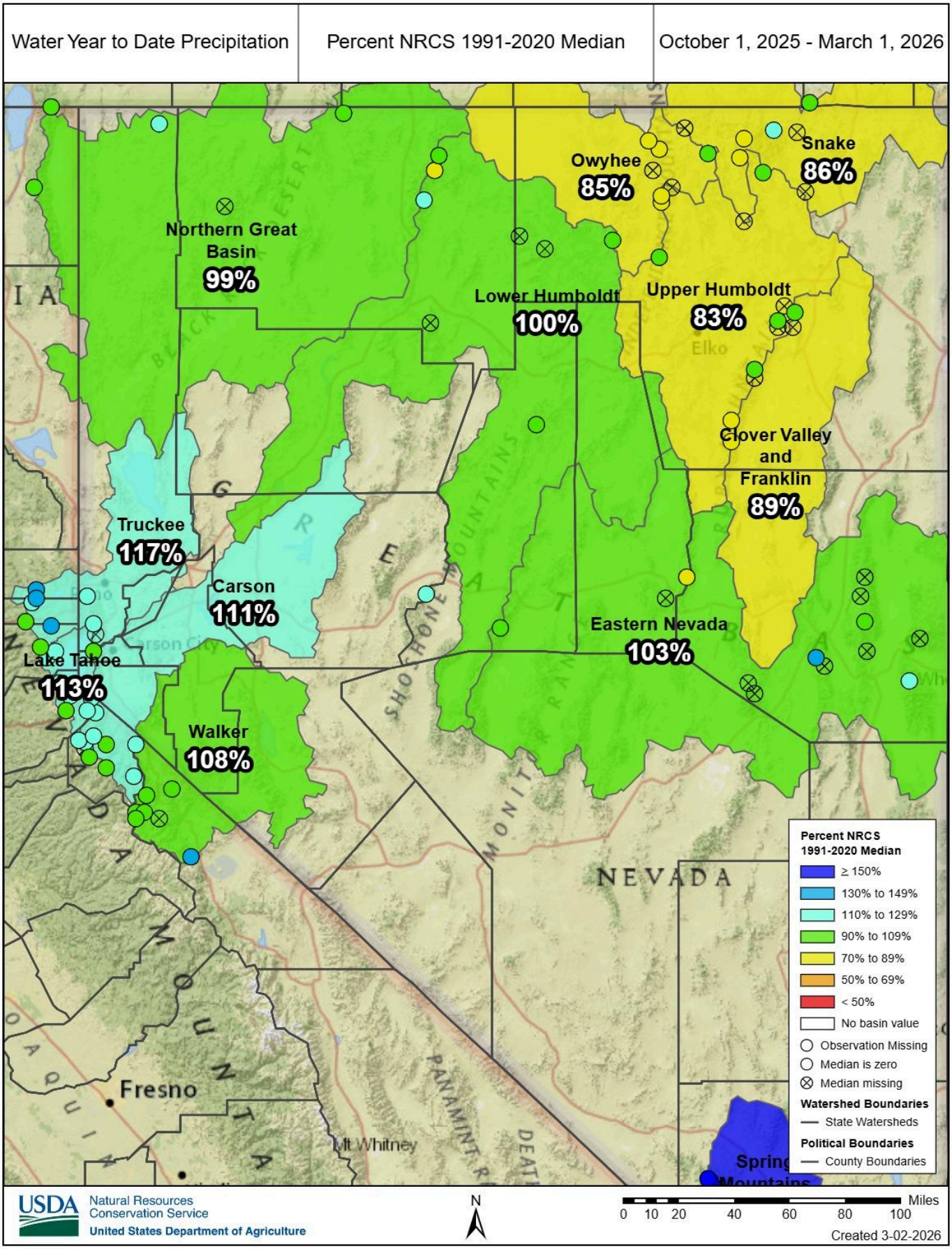


Figure 13. [NRCS SNOTEL basin Water year precipitation as % of Median] as of March 1st, 2026

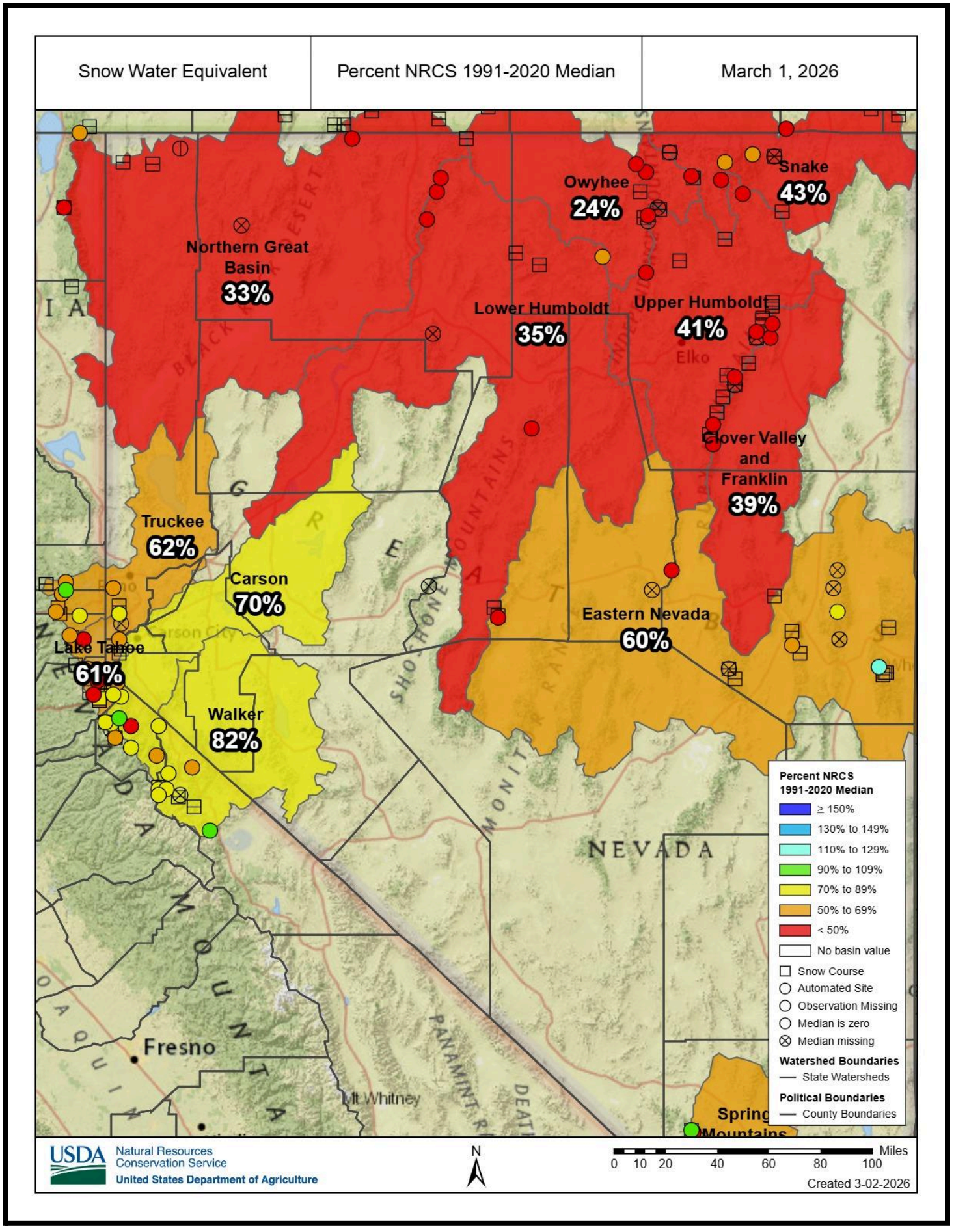
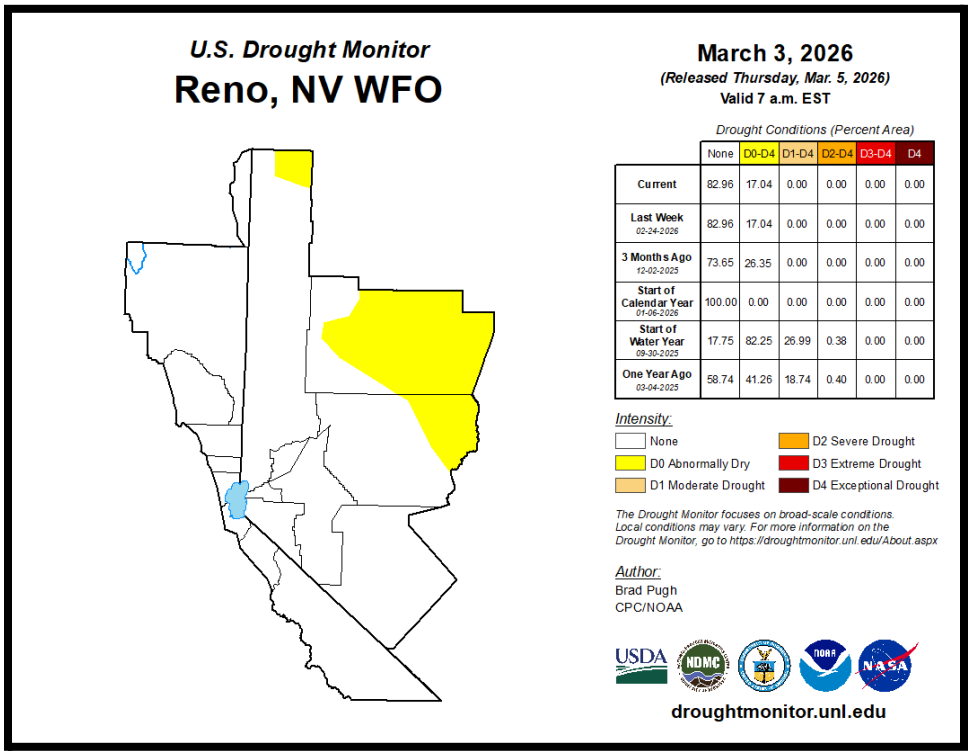


Figure 14. NRCS SNOTEL basin snow water equivalent (SWE) as % of median as of March 1st. 2026



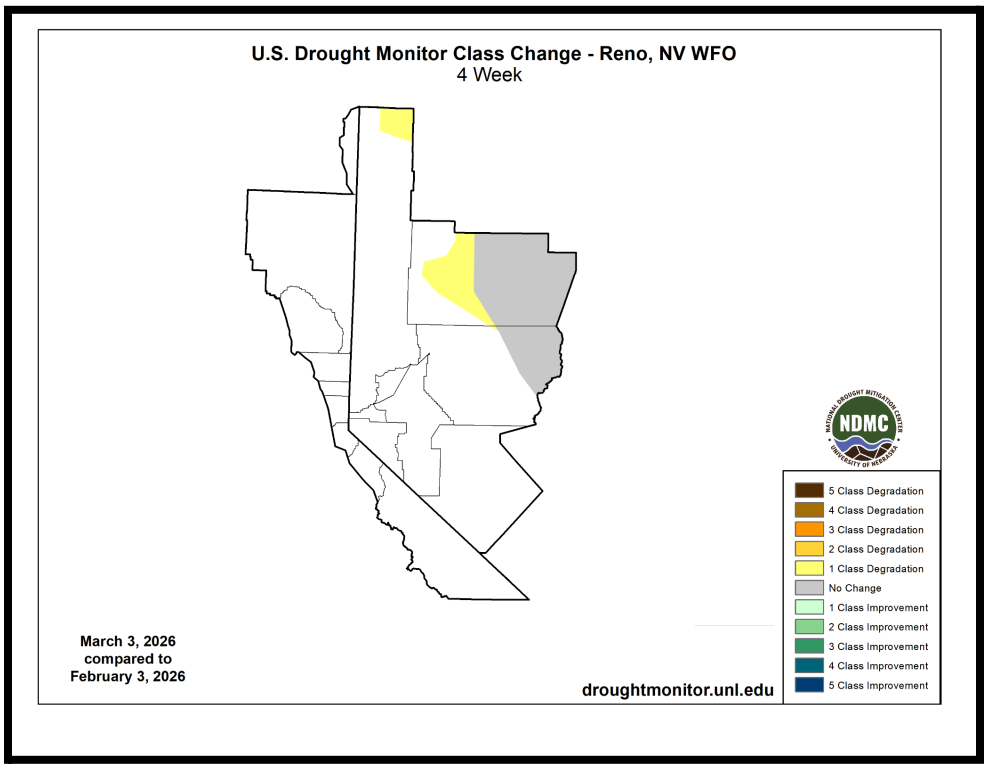


Figure 15. Drought Monitor Status and water year change map. Check for updates at: Drought Monitor.

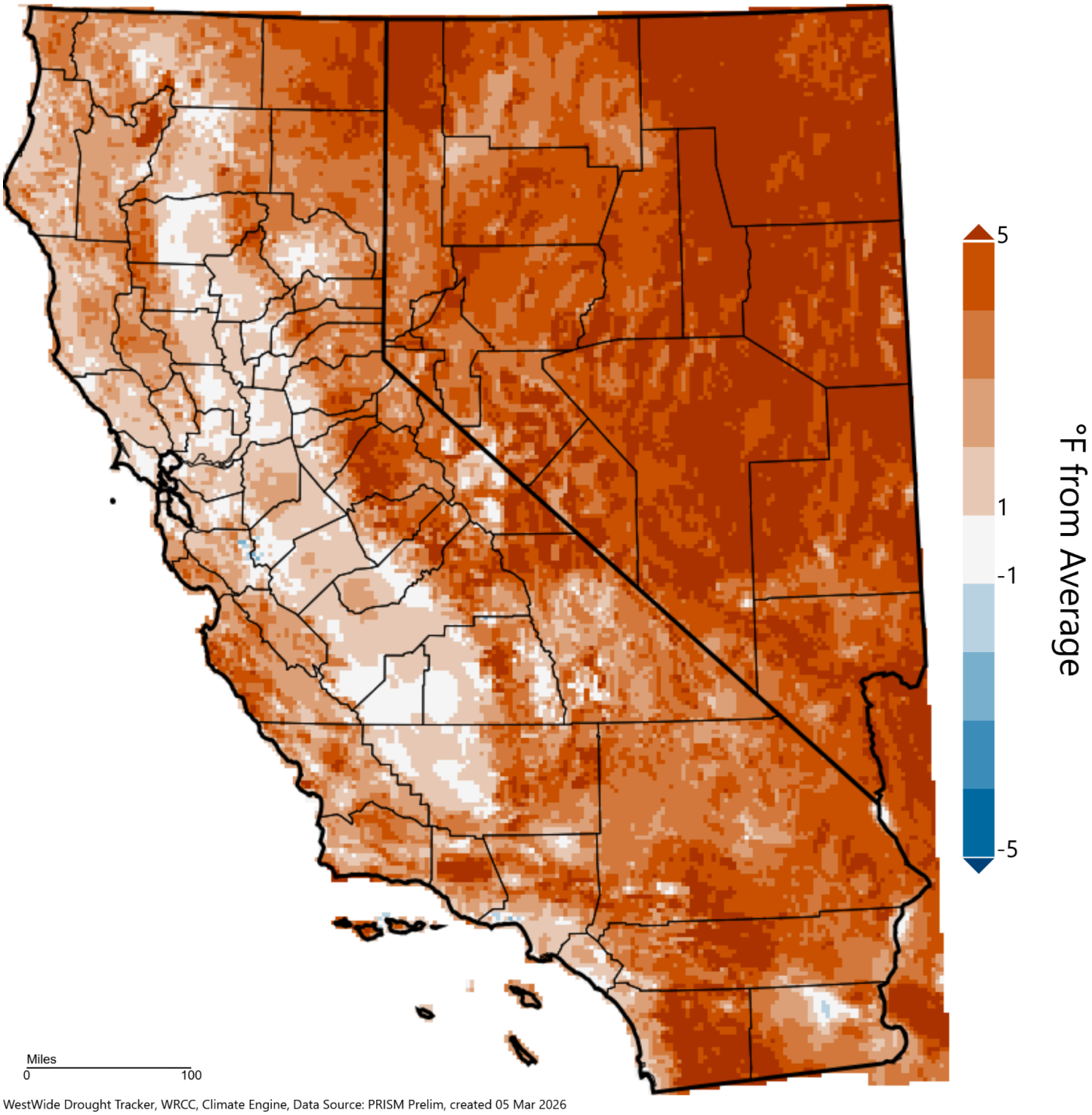


Figure 16. Water year to date mean temperature departure. Courtesy of West Wide Drought Tracker. (WWDT)

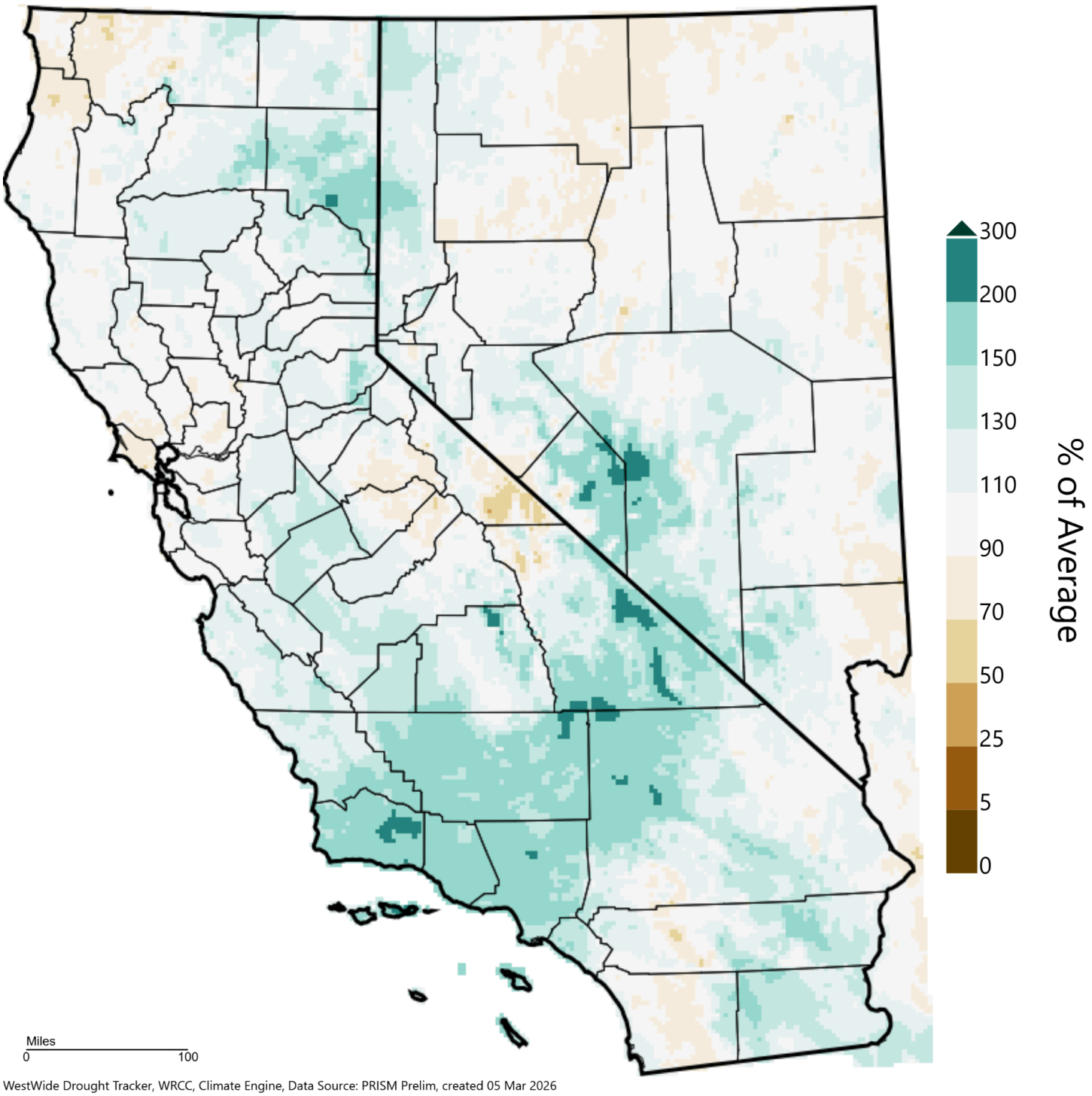


Figure 17. Water year to date precipitation. Courtesy of West Wide Drought Tracker. (WWDT)