

Just one blizzard away from a drought

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A few weeks ago, I was sitting in my car, stopped inside the tunnel on I-70 just east of Idaho Springs. I was waiting for my wife to let me have it with one of her *I told you so*'s about trying to drive to Blackhawk during a blizzard. Heck, we had only been sitting for five hours staring intently at the sign just ahead signaling our exit to the plowed and traffic-free Central City Parkway.

Only a week before this road trip, some Front Range communities were considering implementing some type of drought plan, including mandatory watering restrictions, due to lack of snowfall. Now here we were, sitting in the middle of a snowstorm dropping three to four feet of snow in the foothills, listening to a weather forecast on the radio predicting that in two days the temperature would be 60 degrees, which could cause flooding from the melting snow.

Back here on the Western Slope, we had a relatively normal winter with an average snowpack in the mountains around us. This snowpack and resulting runoff should give us an adequate supply of water for both the domestic water users and the irrigation water users this summer. With warmer-than-average temperatures we have had the last few weeks, our spring runoff is ahead of schedule and our snowpack is down to about 75 percent of average. The Front Range still has a snowpack around 100 percent of average.

Whether we have blizzards, heat waves or monsoons, Western Colorado residents live in an arid desert environment and need to keep in mind that water is a precious resource. Our water-supply situation can be affected by a single storm or a week of 100-degree temperatures. Residents need to be water smart about their usage and continue to use all the water-saving tips that DRIP has promoted over the years. For more water-saving ideas visit www.thedripwebsite.com.

We live in a semiarid climate where droughts will always be a part of our environment. Water for our future means conserving now. The Drought Response Information Project (DRIP) is a collaboration between the valley's domestic water utilities and CSU Cooperative Extension to provide information and educate the public about drought and the importance of water conservation.