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January's Preferred Realtor Network Topic: The Front Range Water Forecast

Alpine Desert



Top: Mt. Kilimanjaro, Tanzania
Below: Front Range, Colorado

It conjures up pictures of stark terrain with rocky vistas. If you watch the Travel Channel, it makes you think Mt. Kilimanjaro. Colorado has more in common with Mt. Kilimanjaro than we do our five closest states. We are an Alpine Desert, too. We are classified with high altitudes, low precipitation in winter and wetter spring and summer seasons. In December, our snow doesn't just melt- it evaporates. The sun comes out and so do our sunglasses and sunscreen.

What happens in March through May can make some people throw up their hands in despair! We swing from wet, icy blizzards to 70 degree days and back again. We start the cycle of afternoon downpours and sunshowers, to flash floods and hail, back to sun and dry, hot days. We also have experience additional moisture from snow melt in the Rockies in the form of runoff and increased groundwater.

Snowpack and Our Water Forecast

According to the USDA National Resources Conservation Service, we've seen an above average snowfall in the high country. Snowpack is heavy and the ski slopes have been thrilled. The reservoir storage basins are also in good condition with some reservoirs being reduced in volume to accommodate expected inflows in spring.



The outlook for summer water availability has improved to good conditions despite the lack of rain and snow in Denver, says the Colorado Water Supply Outlook Report. In fact, the only thing missing for a perfect spring season is a long, slow, steady melt extending into early summer.

Canon City—Heavy Snowpack and Flooding?

The National Weather Service is considering issuing its spring flood outlook for 2011 at the beginning of March and has warned that the Arkansas River has an 80% chance of overflowing its banks in Canon City, 60% in La Junta. Flooding would be minor, but the larger concern is the increased groundwater present from the heavy snowpack and random blizzards of the spring season.

Colorado Springs Forecast

We are expected to have wetter soil this year due to the increased groundwater. Rockrimmon and other areas with large amounts of clay in the soil are expected to see that clay swell in volume, which can lead to wet basements, damp crawlspaces, shifting and heaving foundations, as well as an increase in mold and mildew.

In fact, many basements in Colorado Springs will see the return of the seasonal wetness that we experienced prior to the 2002 drought.



The Eastern Plains

While the mountains have been getting hit hard this winter, the lower elevations haven't had much snow to deal with. Seasonal snowfall is running below normal. Colorado Springs is 13" below normal, Pueblo is 11" below normal, and Denver is running below normal too. We can make up some ground in March and April, so it is a little early to get concerned.

Flash Flooding Remains a Concern in the Pikes Peak Region

Whether you live or work in the eastern plains or western foothills of the Pikes Peak Region, you could be at risk of flooding. Within minutes, a thunderstorm can escalate into a dangerous flood. Severe thunderstorms over the mountain topography have proven to be a lethal. In 1864, 1915, 1935 and 1970, floods resulted in deaths and extensive damage in this area. More recently, the flood in 1999 caused millions of dollars in property losses.

Flash floods are usually caused by thunderstorms over the mountains during the summer months, from May through September. Persons downstream are at the greatest risk and may not hear or see the danger. A flash flood monitoring system, developed by Pikes Peak Regional Building Department's Floodplain Administration, continuously transmits rain and stream data to Emergency Management agencies.

Changing Water Levels Means Changing Soil Conditions

This Spring season will bring more than just changes in water restrictions or flood and fire dangers, it will effect how the soil under homes behaves. According to the USDA, many areas in the Front Range *already* experience unstable soil conditions and changes in water levels will cause soil expansion and contraction. It will be more important than ever for homeowners to be aware of how their foundation is handling these changes. If your sellers believe that their foundation may be shifting and they have an existing crack that they would like to monitor, please have them contact us at Peak Basement Systems.

If the foundation seems stable, but seasonal dampness is increasing the risk for mold problems, we have a full line of products with fully transferable, nationally backed warranties that will be a real value add to any home sale.

Finally, if your buyers are concerned about a home's foundation or water-related problems, please contact us for a comprehensive estimate for any project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Sutton'.

Paul Sutton
Project Manager
Peak Basement Systems

