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NEWS RELEASE

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April 1, 2010

Lack of March snow brings drought to Middle Park

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Kremmling Field Office snow surveyors Mark Volt and Matt Barnes took the April 1 snow survey measurements during the last days of March, when the monthly precipitation for the upper Colorado River Basin was a scant 68% of average.

Snowpack in the mountains above Middle Park now ranges from 59% to 107% of the 30-year average, with the highest readings on the southeast side of the valley, and the lowest readings along Rabbit Ears Divide on the north side of the valley. This is slightly more snow than on April 1 in the drought years of 2002 or 2004.

"This resumes the pattern of weak spring snows observed during 2005-2007—despite the fact that March is historically the snowiest month," said Mark 'Doctor' Volt, District Conservationist. "The April 1 readings are the most critical for predicting runoff and summer water supplies, as most of our high country snowpack peaks during April."

Snow density is averaging 31%, which means that for a foot of snow there are 3.7 inches of water. This is less water than normal for this depth of snow on April 1.

Muddy, Troublesome, Corral, and Willow creeks in Middle Park, and the North Platte River in North Park, have the lowest snowpack in the state. According to the U.S. Drought Monitor, most of Grand County and adjacent parts of Jackson and Routt counties are now in moderate drought, with northern Summit County and most of the rest of northwest Colorado abnormally dry. The highest snowpack, relative to normal, is in the upper Rio Grande Basin in south-central Colorado. Reported readings for the major river basins in Colorado are as follows: the Colorado River Basin averages 76%; Gunnison River Basin, 94%; South Platte River Basin, 83%; Yampa and White River Basins, 77%; Arkansas River Basin, 111%; Upper Rio Grande Basin, 115%; San Miguel, Dolores, Animas, and San Juan River Basins 101%; and the Laramie and North Platte River Basins, 74% of average for this time of year.

Most of the snow courses around Middle Park have been read since the 1940s. Snow course readings are taken at the end of each month, beginning in January and continuing through April. March is historically the snowiest month, and the April 1 readings are the most critical for predicting runoff and summer water supplies, as most of our high country snowpack peaks around that time.

For further information, including real-time snow and precipitation data for SNOTEL (automated Snow Telemetry) sites, visit http://www.co.nrcs.usda.gov/snow/index.html.

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NRCS Kremmling Field Office snow survey for April 1, 2010, compared to long-term average.

Snow course or SNOTEL (SC or ST)	Last year		This year		30-year average (1971 - 2000)		Percent of average	
	Snow depth	Moisture content	Snow depth	Moisture content	Snow depth	Moisture content	Snow depth	Moisture content
	----------(inches)----------						---------(%)---------	
Arapaho Ridge ST	68	20.7	55	14.8		22.9		65%
Arrow ST	48	17.0	33	8.7		14.2		61%
Berthoud Summit ST		19.2	56	17.6		18.4		96%
Buffalo Park ST	49	14.3	32	9.1		14.4		63%
Columbine ST	79	27.0	48	17.9		25.0		72%
Copper Mountain ST		15.5	35	11.2		14.0		80%
Corral Creek SC	48	14.7	29	8.6	45	14.6	64%	59%
Elliot Ridge ST			44	14.0				
Fremont Pass ST		19.4	52	13.1		16.2		81%
Gore Pass SC	32	10.3	31	8.8	34	10.6	91%	83%
Granby SC	28	8.5	24	7.7	26	7.2	92%	107%
Grizzly Peak ST		18.5	40	11.5		18.4		63%
Jones Pass ST	57	16.4	37	10.7		16.2		66%
Kremmling Reservoir SC	56	16.9	47	12.8				
Lake Irene ST	78	25.3	55	17.5		25.7		68%
Lynx Pass ST	38	13.6	25	8.6		12.8		67%
Middle Fork Camp SC	29	8.1	28	7.7	35	10.1	80%	76%
Phantom Valley ST	31	9.9	19	6.8		9.3		73%
Stillwater Creek ST		6.9	11	5.4		7.8		69%
Summit Ranch ST	42	14.1	23	7.7		11.1		69%
Willow Creek Pass SC	43	11.4	31	7.8	44	12.5	70%	62%
Average							***80%***	***73%***

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NRCS Kremmling Field Office snow survey April 1 moisture content records.

Snow course or SNOTEL (SC or ST)	Highest Apr. 1 moisture content			Lowest Apr. 1 moisture content		
	(inches)	(%)	(year)	(inches)	(%)	(year)
Arapaho Ridge ST (read since 2003)	26.9	117%	2008	~~**18.6**~~	~~**81%**~~	~~**2007**~~
New record low				***14.8***	***65%***	***2010***
Arrow ST	21.9	154%	1996	7.4	52%	1966
Berthoud Summit ST	25.3	138%	1996	10.9	59%	2002
Buffalo Park ST (read since 1996)	17.7	123%	1996	8.0	56%	2002
Columbine ST	37.9	152%	1984	12.0	48%	1981
Copper Mountain ST	18.1	129%	2008	7.9	56%	1981
Corral Creek SC (read since 1995)	16.9	116%	1996	8.0	55%	2002
Fremont Pass ST	21.9	135%	1978	10.0	62%	1966
Gore Pass SC	16.0	151%	1965	4.3	41%	1966
Granby SC	12.3	171%	1965	0.0	0%	2004
Grizzly Peak ST	27.7	151%	1996	8.7	47%	1981
Jones Pass ST (read since 2000)	19.2	119%	2006	9.7	60%	2002
Kremmling Reservoir SC (read since 2001)	19.4		2008	11.4		2002
Lake Irene ST	37.6	146%	1962	11.8	46%	1977
Lynx Pass ST	20.8	163%	1962	6.0	47%	1977
Middle Fork Campground SC	17.0	168%	1996	5.8	57%	1981
Phantom Valley ST	14.9	160%	1996	1.1	12%	2004
Stillwater Creek ST (read since 1986)	12.8	164%	1965	1.5	19%	2004
Summit Ranch ST	17.0	153%	1996	7.4	67%	1981
Willow Creek Pass SC	20.5	164%	1952	7.2	58%	1977