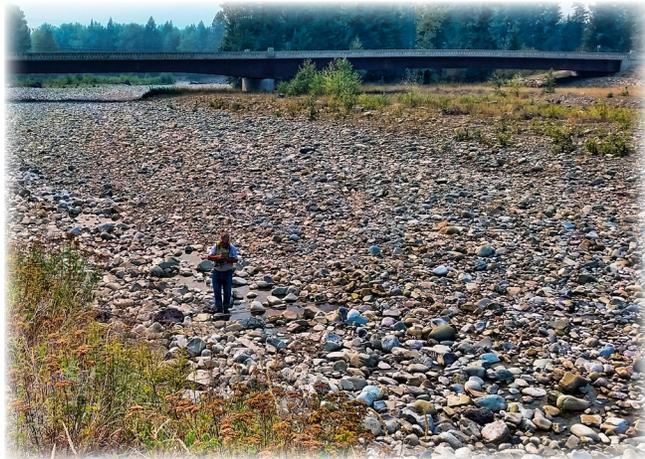


Assessing the Vulnerability of Western Watersheds to Drought

What's Happening?

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) is collecting streamflow, water temperature, and other data from rivers and streams to document the severity of this year's drought across six western states, including Idaho. The goal of the study is to assess how warmer winter temperatures, reduced mountain snowpack, and a shift in precipitation from snow to rain may affect future water availability.



USGS hydrologic technician measuring low streamflow

When and Where?

- 150 sites throughout Idaho
- Hundreds of other sites in Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, and California
- Late August through mid-September

Why?

Throughout most of the western United States, winter snowpack during 2015 was far less than normal. Warmer winter temperatures meant that precipitation fell more often as rain than snow. Without the slow release of water from snow at higher elevations, many western rivers and streams reached their peak flows earlier than normal and are now at or near historically low flows. These conditions create stresses on water supplies, fish and wildlife, and forests and rangelands. Resource managers need scientific information to be able to plan for the future.

How Will the Information Be Used?

USGS scientists will analyze the newly collected data and compare it with data from previous years to answer several research questions, including:

- Which sites are most dependent on snowpack? Which are supported by groundwater?
- How are low flows affecting habitat for fish and other aquatic species?
- Do low flows contribute to higher stream temperatures?
- Which watersheds are most vulnerable to the effects of future droughts?

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