

High temps, deep snow

By **WHITNEY ROYSTER**

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JACKSON -- January 2006 was a pretty good month for Wyoming.

Most of the state enjoyed record warm temperatures (strong winds notwithstanding), and western Wyoming saw nearly a season's worth of snowfall in just one month.

Casper recorded the sixth-warmest January on record, with an average temperature of 30.9 degrees. That's 8.6 degrees above normal, according to Art Meunier, a climatologist with the National Weather Service in Riverton. Casper snowfall was close to the historical average at 11.1 inches -- the average is 11.2.

Lander saw the second-warmest January on record since 1892. Although no record highs were set, the average temperature was 30.3 degrees, 10 degrees above normal. The city also received less than half its average snowfall -- only 4.2 inches.

Cody had the third-warmest January on record, with an average temperature of 36.1 degrees, and Cheyenne saw the fourth-warmest January. The capital city's average temperature was 34.6 degrees, 8.7 degrees above average, with records dating back to 1915, according to Meunier.

Meanwhile, snowstorms dumped record amounts of snow on mountains in the western part of the state. In Moose near Jackson, 62.5 inches of snow fell, making it the ninth-snowiest January since 1958. The record is 103 inches in 1965.

According to the Bridger-Teton Avalanche Forecast Center Thursday, Rendezvous Bowl, just below the summit of the Jackson Hole Mountain Resort, had 342 inches of snow for the season, with a snow depth of 99 inches. The record at the bowl for Feb. 2, recorded since 1979, was 138 inches of snow depth in 1997. The average is 77 inches. This year's depth at that location is the fourth-highest since 1979.

Snowfall of at least an inch was recorded 23 of 31 days in January at the Jackson Hole Mountain Resort.

Togwotee Mountain Lodge, meanwhile, had 168 inches of snow for the season and a snow depth of 52 inches.

The reason for the discrepancy across the state? Pacific storms came through, dumping all the moisture on the western side of the mountains, leaving the eastern half warm and dry, Meunier said. Cold air was "pretty much held at bay" throughout Alaska and Canada.

But that may change next week, as the state -- particularly the western half -- is in for a cold snap.

High pressure is expected across the state today and tomorrow, with a storm front coming through Saturday night that could deliver snow across all parts of the state.

Then, "everything points to a major pattern shift at least through next week," Meunier said. Expect clear, sunny and warming days in most of the state with cold, clear nights. Far western Wyoming will see sub-zero temperatures during the day.

Lil and Phil agree

It's unanimous: Expect six more weeks of winter.

Both Punxsutawney Phil, the Pennsylvania groundhog, and Lander Lil, the Wyoming prairie dog, saw their shadows on Thursday morning.

Lil saw her shadow at 7:28 a.m. on Groundhog Day, according to a Lander Chamber of Commerce spokeswoman. Phil had the same experience several hours earlier, according to The Associated Press.

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Wyoming snowpack

These numbers show water content in snowpack as a percentage of historical averages as of Feb. 2:

Basin Percentage of average

Snake River 129

Upper Yellowstone 119

Wind River 90

Big Horn 87

Shoshone River 88

Powder-Tongue 90

Belle Fourche 82

Upper N. Platte 126

Lower N. Platte 109

Little Snake River 129

Upper Green 119

Lower Green 125

Upper Bear River 138

Source: Natural Resources Conservation Service
