



TUWaterWays

Water News and More from the Tulane Institute on Water Resources Law & Policy
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No “White Christmas” in the American West

A white Christmas has been a dream of children and (some) adults since time immemorial—or at least since it has been celebrated in the United States—and features heavily in all things Christmas, like greeting cards, Hallmark Christmas movies, and songs that infect the popular consciousness this time of year. Unfortunately, according to the National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS), a service of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the American West probably won’t be having a white Christmas this year. [NIDIS reports the lowest snow cover in over two decades in the American West](#) despite Water Year 2026 (which runs from October 1, 2025, to September 30, 2026) having rainfall at or above the median for much of the region. The reason, you ask? Elevated average temperatures have caused most of the precipitation to fall as rain rather than snow.

The implications of a [snow drought](#) are more serious than not having a snowy backdrop for the annual family holiday photo or [having to ski on artificially-made snow](#). The hydrology of the American West relies on snowpack for water storage, which is then released during the spring thaw. The mountains act as reservoirs that store and release water, and these [natural “water towers” account for 75% of the American West’s freshwater](#). But warmer average temperatures jeopardize the delicate balance of the water cycle. The water that would have been naturally stored and released gradually instead flows abruptly, bypassing those reservoirs and making it unavailable to quench the American West’s ever-growing thirst or meet the water appropriation rights that are often developed with the traditional water cycle assumed and limited to certain times of year when that spring melt could once have been relied upon.

From providing a soft surface to tumble down when you fail to stick the landing in your attempt at replicating [Hiroto Ogiwara’s 2340 in the X Games](#) to storing water for the spring, snow is an important element of winter in much of the world. Climate change, changes in the water cycle due to [forest fires](#) and [deforestation](#), and alterations in seasonal climatic phenomena like El Niño don’t only threaten your [white Christmas](#), they threaten your drinking water and food supply. So, the next time you dream of a [white Christmas](#), think of the other important ecological functions that snow fulfills.

Washington State’s Floods May Have a Silver Lining

The news has been replete with [stories of the flooding](#) caused by an atmospheric river that has drenched much of the Pacific Northwest in several “pulses” of heavy rain, the most recent dumping over 16 inches of rain over the region over the past few days. Levees have begun to fail, dams are showing strain, and as many as 100,000 people have had to evacuate. The poor condition of some flood control infrastructure, such as [Lake Sylvia Dam](#), a 107-year old concrete dam, and the [Desimone Levee](#), which are essentially being held together with duct tape and prayers, surely didn’t help matters.

Despite the horrific scenes of flooding and levee breaches—something we are all too familiar with in far too many places, such as New Orleans—there appears to be a silver lining to this story. As of December 17, [only one death has been reported in Washington State](#). Although we can only begin to guess as to the reasons, there is evidence that the timely warnings and evacuation orders, as well as the preparation by emergency management personnel and first responders in Washington, have helped prevent more deaths. Perhaps other states—[like Texas](#)—could take a page out of Washington’s emergency management playbook.

Water Song 2025: [Wildfire Season](#)

In a year plagued by wildfires, droughts, and other effects of climate change, [Wildfire Season by Jobi Riccio](#) edged out the competition for our Water Song 2025! A water song about a lack of water, it discusses the harms humanity has caused to the environment and the ramifications of those harms and is a poignant reminder that we all have a role to play in safeguarding our environment for our collective future. Plus, it sounds good! Give it a listen; we hope you enjoy the song as much as we did! You can enjoy our [other water-themed songs](#) as well!

With 2025 coming to a close, we are signing off for the year with the next issue of TUWaterWays slated for January 9, 2026. In the meantime, we wish all our readers a very joyful and safe holiday season, no matter which holidays you celebrate, and a Happy New Year! Let’s hope the world is a safer, more peaceful, more conscientious place in 2026.

Coming Up:

[Environmental Law & Policy Summit](#)

Tulane University Law School; New Orleans, LA; March 5–7, 2026

[Coastal Law CLE](#)

May 7 & 8, 2026; New Orleans, LA

Water jobs:

[Deputy Director of Water Resources; City of San José, CA](#)

[Senior Watershed Scientist, America’s Watershed Initiative; Mississippi River Basin \(Remote\)](#)



The [Tulane Institute on Water Resources Law and Policy](#) is a program of the Tulane University Law School. The Institute is dedicated to fostering a greater appreciation and understanding of the vital role that water plays in our society and of the importance of the legal and policy framework that shapes the uses and legal stewardship of water.

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