

EXHIBIT 2

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Early snowmelt raises concern

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CHEYENNE -- Wyoming is no exception to a trend that sees the onset of spring creeping earlier on the calendar each year, but in the Cowboy State, the effects are likely to be most notable in the dog days of summer.

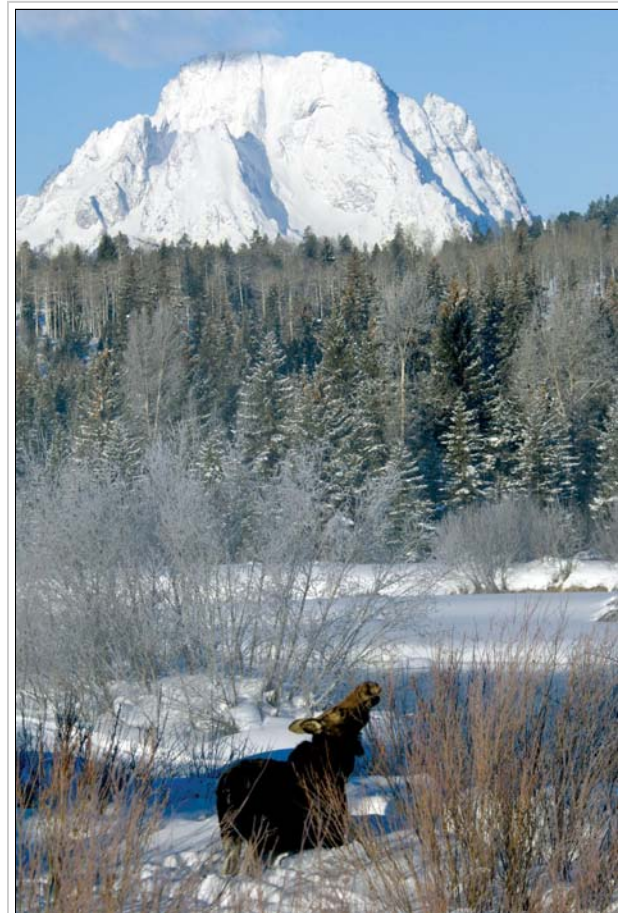
Scientists say seasonal timing changes are evident in nearly every state as flowers bloom and wildlife emerge earlier than in decades past. In Wyoming, melting snowpack is an indicator of the relatively early onset of spring.

State climatologist Steve Gray said snow has been melting and running off into streams as much as four to eight weeks earlier than the historical average. While snow sat high on Wyoming mountains well into July about 40 years ago, it's typically gone by early June in recent years.

For a state that relies predominantly on snowpack and its runoff into local streams and reservoirs for water, early snowmelt can be a major concern. That's the case even in years with good snowpack, like this one is shaping up to be.

"When the snow melts earlier, then we don't get as much of the big flows that last us into the midsummer months," Gray said.

Without adequate water for the midsummer months, Wyoming tends to experience hotter, drier summers with less water for crops and keeping cool, Gray said.



A cow moose browses on willows in belly-deep snow along the Snake River with Mount Moran visible in the distance. Mountain snowpack has been strong this season in most of Wyoming, but experts worry about a trend of earlier and earlier snowmelt that hurts late-summer water supplies. Photo by JIM LAYBOURN, Star-Tribune correspondent.

He said Wyoming is battling an eight-year drought that has caused basins and reservoirs to be so depleted that it would take years of well above historical average snowpack for them to fully recover.

J.J. Shinker, an assistant professor of geography at the University of Wyoming, said the early onset of warm temperatures has caused snow to melt sooner. Without snow, the earth's surface tends to get warm, which contributes to more days with high temperatures.

"It's called a positive feedback loop," Shinker said. "You don't have anything on the ground to reflect the sun rays, so it just ends up absorbing it."

Gray said the trend of early snowmelt and runoff point to climate change.

"We have to take into consideration the variability of climate, but all signs point to this being different from what we've seen in the past," he said.

Walt Gasson, executive director of the Wyoming Wildlife Federation, said his members have noticed slight changes in the ecosystem where they hunt and fish as well.

He said anglers have mentioned rising stream temperatures and decreasing water levels, both of which can hurt fish populations.

Meanwhile, Tony Seahorn, president of Platte Valley Trout Unlimited, said fish populations that were dwindling and under stress during the early drought years seem to be recovering this year. This year's good snowpack has helped, he said.

"We were recommending that no one disturb the river," Seahorn said. "And, we've been slowly recovering."

Gray said Wyoming has received almost historical average snowpack so far this year, but a couple more big snowfalls in the coming weeks are still needed.

"We are just at about status quo right now," he said.