



**COUNTY OF INYO**  
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**JOINT PRESS RELEASE**

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## **Storm Threat Not Over**

### **RUNOFF A MAJOR CONCERN THROUGHOUT EASTERN SIERRA**

The atmospheric river event that arrived in Inyo County this morning is proving – so far – to be less extreme than past storms in terms of precipitation amounts, but emergency responders caution that impacts could still be substantial due to saturated soil, high water levels in creeks and streams, and existing road damage.

According to a status update from the multi-agency Emergency Operations Center established in Bishop, communities across Inyo County are experiencing varying levels of flooding that is impacting roads and operations. Mono County is experiencing heavy snow-related issues, impacting highways and infrastructure.

Motorists were advised earlier in the day to avoid all roads crossing the Owens River east of U.S. 395, as they were expected to flood because of extreme runoff. As of 2:30 p.m., Mazourka Canyon Road, Manzanar Reward Road, and Lone Pine Narrow Gauge Road were all closed. Farther north, Tungsten City Road was also closed due to flooding. Buttermilk Road, Chalk Bluff Road, and Lower Rock Creek Road remain closed due to severe damage.

Whitney Portal Road, which experienced at least 8 feet of undercutting due to the weekend's rains, underwent emergency repairs Monday evening and has been reopened. The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power was able to repair the breached sections of the aqueduct south of Olancho and planned to reopen the channel at 5 p.m. today.

Avalanche evacuation warnings are still in effect for Aspendell, with flood warnings for Ft. Independence and Oak Creek. The EOC warned that a major wind event could be expected, creating possible impacts to power lines, travel and possibly damaging or uprooting trees.

No shelters are currently open, though Health & Human Services is monitoring the situation and positioned to open temporary evacuation points if needed. The County has received zero requests for shelter assistance and has not heard of any individuals or families being displaced – other than voluntary relocations by residents in avalanche warning areas.

The Inyo County Road Department reported that access to all Inyo County communities has been maintained and/or restored.

This latest atmospheric river is expected to last at least through tomorrow, with Thursday appearing to be the next dry day, possibly followed this weekend by another lighter and colder storm this weekend. Warmer temperatures paired with up to 5 inches of rain in the Owens Valley falling on the near-record snowpack have been causing flooding since Friday, March 10. The runoff will remain a major concern in the coming weeks with the arrival of spring temperatures.

Earlier today, the Inyo County Board of Supervisors declared a local state of emergency and ratified the declaration made by CAO Nate Greenberg on March 7 in his capacity as Director of Emergency Services. Among other, more immediate threats, the declaration cites spring runoff projected to be 800,000 to 1 million acre-feet of water in the Owens River drainage – more than double the normal runoff amount of around 412,000 acre-feet.

“(C)urrent climate trends toward warmer air temperatures may contribute to and exacerbate periods of excessive snowmelt runoff,” the emergency declaration states. “2023 storms and runoff conditions threaten the safety of property and persons in Inyo County by flooding private, Tribal, and public property; damaging or destroying infrastructure including roads, bridges, water conveyance and diversion structures, dust control apparatus, sanitary facilities, and campgrounds; creating conditions that propagate mosquitoes and other vectors that harbor disease and threaten public health; and, posing long-term environmental threats associated with the spread of invasive species.”

Sandbags are available at the Bishop, Big Pine, Independence, Lone Pine, and Olancho-Cartago volunteer fire departments.

Current information on road closures can be found on the Caltrans QuickMap: <https://quickmap.dot.ca.gov/>.

For more information, visit <https://ready.inyocounty.us>, a site designed to serve as a one-stop-shop for authoritative and near-real-time information coming from the storm incidents.

Individuals who do not have access to the internet and ability to use the Ready Inyo website are encouraged to call 2-1-1. This non-emergency phone service will provide information similar to what is maintained on the Ready Inyo website, as well as the ability to access other County resources via phone. Anyone seeking more information about the storm and storm response is urged to call this number – NOT 9-1-1, which is intended for life safety issues only.

Remember: Turn Around, Don't Drown! According to the NWS, each year, more deaths occur due to flooding than from any other thunderstorm related hazard.

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