



COUNTY OF INYO
ADMINISTRATOR'S OFFICE/OFFICE OF
EMERGENCY SERVICES/SHERIFF'S OFFICE

NATE GREENBERG
COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

MIKAELA TORRES
EMERGENCY SERVICES MANAGER

STEPHANIE RENNIE
SHERIFF



JOINT PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 13, 2023

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:
Sheriff's Public Information Manager Carma Roper, croper@inyocounty.us
CAO/Emergency Services Director Nate Greenberg, (760) 878-0292
Emergency Services Manager Mikaela Torres, (760) 878-0120

Eastern Sierra Braces for Round 2

COUNTY EMERGENCY WORKERS RACE TO PREPARE FOR NEXT STORM

Emergency responders took advantage of a brief break in the weather this weekend to assess damage and make road and other repairs countywide, while also bracing for the next storm that is expected to hit the Eastern Sierra today.

Another atmospheric river event was predicted to blow into Inyo and Mono counties late last night/early this morning, bringing with it high winds, rain in lower elevations and up to two feet of heavy, wet snow at about 8,000 feet and above. The region should see slightly less precipitation – about a half inch to an inch in the Owens Valley – than the storm that dropped 2-3 inches on Friday, March 10. The rain line will be a little higher than last time, however, with Mammoth Lakes expected to receive rain on top of the existing massive amounts of snow.

The County discourages all residents and visitors from traveling unless absolutely necessary and strongly encourages sheltering-in-place if possible.

Runoff from the Sierra snowpack and high water levels in local creeks, ditches, ponds, and lakes remain a major concern, and accounted for the lion's share of emergencies over the weekend, including widespread flooded/damaged roads, inundated infrastructure, and avalanche threat. All residents and visitors are advised to stay clear of creeks, rivers, and other waterways, as currents are strong and banks are muddy and slippery.

Avalanche evacuation warnings are still in effect for the communities of Oak Creek, Ft. Independence, and Aspendell.

U.S. 395 in Inyo County has been closed multiple times due to flood waters crossing the highway, and travelers should expect potential closures during the upcoming storm. A number of county roads sustained severe damage as a result of flooding. A section of Whitney Portal Road that was severely undercut has collapsed. Lower Rock Creek Road has been almost completely washed out. Severe undercut has also compromised the Independence Airport runway, and the facility remains closed.

Staff will be bringing an emergency item to the Board of Supervisors today for authorization to start immediate repairs on Whitney Portal Road, to be followed by Lower Rock Creek Road. Administration encouraged all staff to work from home today and avoid travel, especially with intermittent closures on U.S. 395.

The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power reported the late Friday collapse of several sections of the concrete-lined channel of the aqueduct about two miles south of Olancha. LADWP said three 20-foot sections on the west side of the channel ruptured due to intense rains that caused storm water to pool and erode supporting soils. LADWP currently has 130 aqueduct personnel deployed to work on controlling localized flooding, monitoring and ensuring dam safety, and addressing the aqueduct breach. LADWP reported that personnel have opened the spill gates at Alabama Hills and Cottonwood to help push large volumes of aqueduct water into open ditch systems.

Caltrans responded Saturday to a broken water main that flooded State Route 168 West with water and debris. As of yesterday morning, the highway remains closed above Starlite. Emergency crews can get through both 168 West and 168 East, which remains closed due to snow. Caltrans continues to close and open U.S. 395 as conditions warrant.

Inyo County personnel – from Public Works, Emergency Services, the Sheriff's Office, Administration, Health & Human Services, Information Services, and Risk Management – have been in disaster response mode 24/7 since early Friday, working in tandem with their counterparts in Mono County.

In a proactive move to bring in more resources, Inyo County made the decision early last week to enter into a Unified Command with Mono County and open a joint Emergency Operations Center (EOC) in order to better coordinate efforts in response to the atmospheric river event. "In order to ensure that our EOC and County operations could run smoothly and maintain a level of functionality necessary to support both emergency and daily business, the Counties decided to request support from a Type 1 Incident Management Team," Inyo County CAO Nate Greenberg said. "These teams are the same ones who are called upon to manage large scale wildfires across the country and are adept at standing up resources and operational infrastructure that standardizes communication and approaches to management."

Type 1 Incident Management Team #2 from Southern California arrived in Bishop on Wednesday, March 8 with more than 25 staff, and Incident Command was established the next morning. Since then, dozens of personnel from Inyo and Mono counties have been deployed to support the response effort, and will continue to do so over the coming days with this next pulse of storms.

Operational priorities include repairing Whitney Portal Road; clearing brush out of the Bishop Creek drainage; repairing the Independence Airport runway; stationing supplies and maintaining access and egress on U.S. 395 South to ensure a pipeline for supplies, fuel, and food; ensuring U.S. 6 is open as a backup route; and ensuring access and egress for all outlying communities, at the very least ensuring access for emergency traffic.

Thursday should be the next dry day, with additional rain and snow possible this weekend.

"This season is unprecedented for a variety of reasons, and as the storms continue to roll in, it is shaping up to be the wettest winter over the 100 years that we have kept records," Greenberg said.

Sandbags are available at the Bishop, Big Pine, Independence, Lone Pine, and Olancha-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.

#####