



Inyo National Forest
Inyo County Sheriff's Office

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Whitney Portal Evacuated Due to Earthquake/Rockfall ***Damage assessments underway***

Mt. Whitney area, (above Lone Pine), CA, June 25, 2020 – On June 24 at 10:40 am a 5.8 earthquake centered approximately 12 miles from Lone Pine, CA triggered several high-altitude rockslides. The most significant slide occurred south of the main parking area at Whitney Portal.

At this time, there are no reported injuries or reports of missing individuals.

There were approximately 40 vehicles parked in the area. Vehicles were covered in dust, but there did not appear to be damaged. The Whitney Portal store was also covered in a blanket of dust. The Inyo National Forest has not begun issuing permits to hike Mt Whitney.

Aerial reconnaissance, as well as reports from hikers identified several additional slides; one directly above Lone Pine Lake, one about a quarter mile above Lone Pine Lake near the main trail, and three slides on the face of Mt. Whitney. It is unclear at this time if the Mt. Whitney trail has been damaged. Based on dust seen from the Owens Valley floor it appears that most canyons, including trailheads, south of Kearsarge Pass had at least minor rockslides triggered by yesterday's earthquake.

Due to several smaller aftershocks throughout yesterday afternoon and evening, only a preliminary search could be conducted near the slide zone. After an evaluation by a US Forest Service geologist this morning, the intention is to send in search and rescue teams and canines to check each of the debris fields.

Today, if it safe, Inyo National Forest Wilderness Rangers will begin assessing if there is damage to the trail systems in the area. Yesterday's initial assessment shows substantial damage to a section of the National Recreation Trail (that starts at Lone Pine Campground and ends in Whitney Portal). The focus today will be on the Mt. Whitney Trail. At this time, the Mt. Whitney Trail, The Meysan Lakes Trail, and the North Fork of Lone Pine Trail (Mountaineering Route) are closed until further notice. Permits for day and overnight summits of Mt. Whitney will continue be cancelled until further notice.

The Inyo National Forest will also coordinate with Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks. Long distance hikers were being permitted to exit at Whitney Portal if their itinerary included that. Efforts to determine if there are hikers that need assistance to safely end their hike will be implemented. The forest is also completing an engineering assessment of the Eastern Sierra Visitor Center in Lone Pine to determine that it is structurally safe. There will need to be clean up of the building once that is determined.

Whitney Portal Road has been closed to the public. All campgrounds above the closure have been evacuated and will remain closed until further notice.

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Assisting agencies include California Highway Patrol, CALFIRE, Bishop Fire, Lone Pine Volunteer Fire Department, Independence Volunteer Fire Department, CA Fish and Wildlife, USFS, CALOES, Inyo Search and Rescue, Santa Barbara Search and Rescue, CA Rescue Dog Association (CARD A), and Inyo Sheriff. Aerial support has been provided by China Lake Naval Weapons Base, USFS, and CHP. Canine support is provided by CARD A and Santa Barbara Search and Rescue.

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