



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 10, 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

Storm Impacts Widespread

RESIDENTS URGED TO SHELTER IN PLACE IF POSSIBLE

UPDATE – 4:30 p.m. – All waterways in the Owens Valley are inundated and at flood stage. The water is swift and deep, and conditions are expected to deteriorate through the weekend. The public is urged to avoid all roads and paths along waterways as they are slick, muddy, and dangerous.

County Road Crews are currently working to save Whitney Portal Road, where the shoulder is collapsing due to flooding. A similar issue still exists with Lower Creek Road between Gorge Road and Paradise, with the road nearly washed away entirely. Inyo County Public Works has a loader staged onsite so that crews can repair the road and make it passable again as soon as the water stops actively flowing. In the meantime, the community of Paradise will remain cut off from services in both directions. Inyo County issued an emergency notification to Paradise residents earlier this afternoon telling them to shelter in place.

An evacuation warning is still in effect for the communities of Oak Creek and Ft. Independence. In the absence of an imminent evacuation order – and any residents needing shelter – the County closed a temporary evacuation point it had set up at the Owens Valley School District Multi-Purpose Room. If and when the situation grows more serious, emergency staff will regroup at the Independence HHS office to determine whether the shelter needs to be reopened.

County emergency staff is monitoring the Aberdeen and Olancho areas for possible evacuations. Olancho in particular is vulnerable where the aqueduct goes under the highway, and has been experiencing significant flooding around the four-lane project area with sand and debris in the roadway.

Reports of heavy storm impacts have also come in from Lone Pine, where the Lone Pine Paiute-Shoshone Reservation set up an emergency shelter in the gymnasium earlier today. Los Angeles Department of Water and Power crews responded to flooding at Lone Pine Creek near Tuttle Road. Southern Inyo Hospital was experiencing flooding earlier today and sandbags were deployed by the County in response.

Big Pine Canal had topped its bank and was sheeting water earlier today, but LADWP responded and has generally abated the issue.

The storm is also impacting State Route 168 East and CalTrans has been monitoring the situation and working to mitigate damage.

Highway 395 remains closed to all non-emergency vehicles from Pearsonville to Bishop. There is no estimated time of opening, but the highway is passable for emergency vehicles.

An updated Road Open/Closed list has been posted and is on [Ready Inyo \(inyocounty.us\)](https://www.inyocounty.us/readyinyo).

UPDATE – 2:35 p.m. – Lone Pine Airport has been reopened to the public. Flights are still coming in and out of the Bishop Airport, and the Independence Airport remains closed. All County landfills will be closed until further notice.

1 P.M. - As predicted, the warm atmospheric river event that arrived in the Eastern Sierra Thursday has brought significant rain to lower elevations and snowfall in the higher elevations, causing widespread flooding, road closures, avalanches, and other hazards.

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

Flooding has prompted an evacuation warning for the communities of Oak Creek and Ft. Independence. A temporary evacuation point has been set up at the Owens Valley School District Multi-Purpose Room, 202 S. Clay St., Independence. The Lone Pine-Paiute Shoshone Tribe has established an evacuation point at the gymnasium. A Red Cross trailer will be positioned at the Tri-County Fairgrounds in the event southern Mono residents are evacuated.

The community of Paradise is advised to shelter in place. Lower Rock Creek Road has been closed due to flooding. Currently, there is no way in or out of the Paradise community.

U.S. 395 remains closed at this time from Pearsonville to Bishop in Inyo County and from the Mesa to 1.5 miles north of the junction with State Route 203 in Mono County. The CHP reported at 7:07 a.m. that 2-3 feet of water was running over the highway between Lone Pine and Olancha. The National Weather Service reported that other locations expected to experience flooding are Bishop, Millpond Campground, Pleasant Valley Campground, Browns Town Campground, the Mesa, Round Valley, Dixon Lane-Meadow Creek, and West Bishop.

Sandbags are available at the Bishop, Big Pine, Independence, Lone Pine, and Olancha-Cartago volunteer fire departments. Members of the Independence Volunteer Fire Department will be at the fire station today until 4 p.m. today to assist anyone needing sandbags.

An avalanche evacuation warning has issued for the community of Aspendell and the public is urged to avoid the area. Residents were encouraged to evacuate prior to the storm arriving on Thursday. The Eastern Sierra Avalanche Center has issued an Avalanche Warning through 7 a.m. Saturday for all Eastern Sierra slopes from Virginia Lakes to Bishop Creek. The avalanche danger is categorized as high and could possibly be elevated to extreme today. Recreation is not recommended. For more information, visit www.esavalanche.org or www.avalanche.org

A National Weather Service (NWS) Flood Warning will remain in effect for lower-elevation areas through 7 p.m. tonight. A Flood Advisory will remain in effect through Sunday morning.

The County of Inyo has closed the Lone Pine Airport and Independence Airport, where water is running across the runway. Bishop Airport remains open at this time and flights are landing. The Lone Pine Landfill is fully closed, and the Bishop Landfill has been closed to the public.

Schools in the Bishop area have begun loading students onto buses to get them home.

In Independence, the Clerk-Recorder, Auditor-Controller, and Health & Human Services offices are closed. Other departments are minimally staffed. Independence residents are discouraged from visiting the Independence campus altogether during the current weather event.

Multiple roads from north of Bishop to south of Olancha have been closed. See the Caltrans QuickMap for more information: <https://quickmap.dot.ca.gov/>.

Southern California Edison customers may report outages at 1-800-611-1911, <https://www.sce.com/outage-center/report-an-outage> or through the SCE Outages app.

Current incident information as well as links to key resources can be found at the Office of Emergency Service's new website, <https://ready.inyocounty.us>. Incident managers will be posting regular updates on the status of the weather event and key actions/activities including road conditions (with a list of County Road closures), sheltering, and other details to this site.

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.

#####