



# COUNTY OF INYO

## ADMINISTRATOR'S OFFICE/OFFICE OF EMERGENCY SERVICES/SHERIFF'S OFFICE

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### JOINT PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
April 28, 2023

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## Get Ready, Because Here it Comes

### Local Agencies Form Unified Command in Face of Rising Temperatures

While the Eastern Sierra is facing an almost literal sea of unknowns over the next several months, there are some stark certainties: the runoff is coming, there will be flooding, roads will be closed, communities will be cut off, and you need to be prepared sooner rather than later.

That was the essence of the message delivered to the public during a community meeting hosted by the County of Inyo and Los Angeles Department of Water and Power at the Tri-County Fairgrounds and on Zoom Thursday night. Officials were joined by representatives from CalTrans, Southern California Edison, the City of Bishop, and fire and medical service providers – all part of a Unified Command formed to prepare for and respond to the runoff emergency declared by Inyo County in March.

Thursday's meeting was held to specifically provide the latest status updates on the multi-agency effort to prepare for a summer-long tide of snowmelt, in addition to the status of the historically deep Sierra snowpack. Officials also took the opportunity to emphasize the role the public will play in preparation and mitigation efforts, with personal responsibility a recurring talking point during the event.

The gathering preceded what are expected to be the warmest temperatures of the season yet with a looming 300 percent-of-normal snowpack with an estimated 1 million acre-feet of water (326 billion gallons) to release. According to the National Weather Service, weekend temperatures in the 80s and 90s will provide the first real preview of what's to come this summer, with the highest levels of snowmelt expected Tuesday, May 2.

#### Outlook

Officials also said that while they can do their best to anticipate when and where the snowmelt will be coming down from the Sierra and where flooding might occur, Mother Nature is ultimately in charge.

And while past heavy snow years such as 1969 and 2017 can be looked to as examples of what to expect, the 2023 runoff year will be unprecedented – with runoff amounts anticipated to be more than twice what was seen during 2017 in some local waterways, including Tinnehama Reservoir.

Eric Tillemans, LADWP Water Operations Manager, told attendees Thursday night that the city spread approximately 215,000 acre-feet of excess runoff around the valley in 2017 and expects to spread 460,000 acre-feet this summer, with more than 150,000 acre-feet having to go to the Owens Lake Brine Pool.

In addition to rising temps, spring showers – less predictable than larger storm systems – can also be expected in coming weeks. The runoff season is expected to peak in mid- to late June, with runoff concerns lingering through at least July. Inyo County Administrator/Director of Emergency Services Nate Greenberg stressed that, unlike the flooding experienced in February and March, spring flooding will be a “prolonged and protracted” issue.

### **Preparation**

Preparation efforts continue, including reinforcing bypasses, clearing creeks and streams of debris, unblocking culverts, preparing areas for water spreading, and clearing ditches and other channels on the Owens Valley floor that haven't seen water in decades. Agencies have also been staging large equipment such as excavators and backhoes at strategic areas throughout the Owens Valley to facilitate quick response to flooding.

Inyo County Deputy Public Works Director-Roads Shannon Platt was among those to impress upon the public Thursday that it also needs to play a role in preparing for the onslaught, including removing debris and any artificial objects from ponds and creeks, widening irrigation ditches, and generally not making your problem your neighbors' problem.

Property owners were strongly encouraged to also obtain sandbags from their local fire departments.

The main message regarding preparation is that it needs to be done now, not after problems arise. Greenberg also noted that the County is not and cannot be responsible for private property.

Efforts are underway to catalogue and map specific areas of concern and establish trigger points for issuing warnings and/or evacuation orders. Given the likelihood of some communities being cut off from population centers due to flooding, it is incumbent on residents to begin building their own safety nets now, including stocking up on supplies and medications.

### **Recreation/Personal Safety**

Inyo Sheriff's Lt. Nate Derr and Public Information Officer Carma Roper stressed that the recreating public needs to exercise extreme caution around local waterways and obey all posted signs – which it was repeatedly noted will be there to keep you from harm.

Lt. Derr urged attendees not to be “that person” that goes around a road closure, gets stuck, and takes limited resources away from where they are critically needed. Bishop Fire Chief Joe Dell echoed those sentiments, also urging motorists not to drive through high water.

This weekend's fishing opener will be a challenging one, with most higher-elevation waters still inaccessible. First responders are asking anglers to stay out of closed areas, keep off the ice, wear proper flotation devices, keep children close by and dogs on leashes near water, and be aware of undercut creek and river banks, as well as swift water hazards.

Fisheries deemed “safe” for the Opener are Diaz Lake, Buckley Ponds, and Millpond. LADWP planned to open Pleasant Valley Reservoir to fishing Saturday morning.

Residents who are not already signed up to receive emergency alerts from the County may visit <https://www.inyocounty.us/services/sheriff> to do so.

### **Additional Resources**

The Ready Inyo site, <https://ready.inyocounty.us>, is the main hub for County of Inyo emergency readiness, response, and recovery information including preparedness tips, sandbag information, and road closures, as well as surveys asking for community feedback and engagement.

The Inyo County Sheriff's Office posts frequent runoff and flood updates at <https://www.facebook.com/InyoCountySheriffsOffice>.

Visit <https://ladwpeasternsierra.com/runoff2023> for LADWP updates for run-off management.

Video from the April 27 community meeting can be found here: <https://ready.inyocounty.us/pages/2023-spring-runoff-response>.

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