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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 5, 2023

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County Accelerates Runoff Preparation PRIVATE PROPERTY OWNERS URGED TO CLEAR DITCHES

Inyo County has joined the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, CalTrans, Southern California Edison, and other entities in preparing for a deluge this spring and summer with the melting of the record Southern Sierra snowpack.

At 300 percent of its average April 1 measurement, the massive snowpack is expected to release an estimated 1 million acre-feet of water – an amount roughly the size of five Crowley Lakes. According to the California Department of Water Resources, 2023 is one of – if not the largest – snowpack year on record in California, eclipsing other big water years like 1952, 1969, 1983, and 2017.

County Administrator Nate Greenberg told the Inyo County Board of Supervisors Tuesday that the County and other agencies, although still performing cleanup from the March storms and floods, have accelerated planning efforts in order to mitigate more damage from the spring runoff, which has yet to begin in earnest.

Much of the pre-melt effort has comprised of clearing pathways for the voluminous runoff as it courses down the valley. This has included widening and deepening channels that haven't seen water in years or even decades, as well as removing brush and other debris from streams, canals, and creek beds.

Most waterways, including the L.A. Aqueduct, are already running at or very near capacity, with the Owens River already overflowing its banks in spots. Road Superintendent Shannon Platt told the Board that County road crews have been hard at work cleaning out bypasses and other channels in Bishop, Big Pine, and Lone Pine, but he still anticipates every county road that crosses the aqueduct or Owens River to flood as temperatures warm.

He added that the Road Department has been staging heavy equipment at strategic locations to aid in quick flood response, and that the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power – with whom the Road Department has a good working relationship – has additional equipment scattered across the Owens Valley.

Private property owners are encouraged to start their own preparations for the runoff. "Those little irrigation ditches need to be wide and deep enough to accommodate the runoff," Platt said. "Private property owners have to take responsibility for what they have on their property."

Specifically, property owners should:

- Clear ditches of all plants, rocks, and debris;
- Clear overhanging vegetation from waterways to ensure maximum flow;

- Open pond outflow channels, and remove decorative rocks; and
- Clean all water screens, gutters, and drains; consider draining ponds or lowering levels.

Also preparing for the runoff is the Sheriff's Department as it focuses on public safety. According to Acting Lieutenant Nate Derr, keeping the public informed of the dangers of recreating around swift water, while also sharing safe ways to enjoy the outdoors this spring and summer, will be key. He noted that potential hazard areas are being identified ahead of time in the event emergency response is needed.

For more information on flooding risks and preparedness, visit <http://www.ready.gov/floods>. For information on obtaining sandbags, visit <https://ready.inyocounty.us/>.

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