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JOINT PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 3, 2023

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Stay Safe This Fourth of July

SWIFTWATER RESCUE TEAM PRE-POSITIONED FOR HOLIDAY

County of Inyo offices and facilities in Tecopa, Lone Pine, Independence, and Bishop will be closed tomorrow in observance of the July 4 holiday. Offices and facilities will re-open for business on Wednesday, July 5.

Inyo County wishes residents and visitors a happy and healthy Fourth of July, with the reminder that those recreating outdoors need to exercise caution as runoff peaks throughout the Eastern Sierra amid soaring temperatures. The public is strongly encouraged to obey all road closures and avoid areas with swift water – for their safety as well as that of first responders.

The National Weather Service has issued a flood warning for the region through Tuesday evening, with the hottest temperatures of the year contributing to rapid snowmelt and excessive runoff. The NWS warns that flooding of rivers, creeks, streams, and other low-lying and flood-prone locations is likely. Numerous local waterways are already flowing near, at, or over-capacity.

A swift-water rescue team has been deployed to the Owens Valley at the request of the County and with assistance from Big Pine Fire Chief Damon Carrington and Senator Marie Alvarado-Gil's office. The team arrived late last week and is essentially on call through the July 4 holiday. Local first responders are not trained nor are they authorized to enter swift water during an emergency. Having the team available boosts local response capabilities during one of the busiest times of the year in terms of outdoor recreation.

Obviously swift water is a serious hazard this summer. The Owens River is considered dangerous and should be avoided. Most of the public access to the Owens River has already been closed due to extensive flooding and severely undercut and eroding banks.

The public is strongly encouraged to avoid the river and most waterways this summer with the exception of Diaz Lake, Millpond, Buckley Ponds, and Klondike Lake. Swiftwater dangers include water cold enough to induce hypothermia, hidden underwater snags, and heavy debris.

The public is reminded also that recreating downstream of a dam – such as those operated by Southern California Edison in Bishop Creek Canyon – presents certain hazards. Although the increased flows are not believed to pose significant dam safety risks, there are treacherous currents in the creeks that should be avoided. One slip on the wet, unstable banks or rocks can lead to a life-threatening situation.

Wildfire is also a very real danger. With the wet winter and excessive runoff has come excessive fuels on the valley floor. And despite the profusion of water, conditions are deceptively dry. The BLM last week enacted fire restrictions throughout the Bishop Field Office, including: no fireworks; no campfires, barbecues, or stoves outside of agency-provided fire rings or barbecues at designated sites; no smoking outdoors unless surrounded by a three-foot safe zone; no welding or operating torches with open flame; and no target shooting (hot bullet fragments and exploding targets can ignite a fire).

Remember that Eastern Sierra winds plus unattended campfires create wildfires. The public is urged to always expect wind in the Eastern Sierra and as such, to extinguish their campfires at night and before they leave during the day and to never walk away from hot embers or coals. Anyone responsible for recklessly allowing a campfire to become a wildfire can face prosecution, fines, and even jail time.

For more information, including where to obtain sandbags for your home or business, visit:

<https://ready.inyocounty.us>

<https://www.facebook.com/InyoCountySheriffsOffice>

<https://ladwpeasternsierra.com/runoff2023>

<https://inciweb.wildfire.gov/incident-information/cainf-inyo-national-forestflood-response>

<https://wsoweb.ladwp.com/Aqueduct/realtime/lvrealtime.htm>

<https://www.esavalanche.org/>

<https://www.weather.gov/safety/coldwater>

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