



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

March 9, 2023

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President of the United States
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Through: Robert J. Fenton, Jr.
Regional Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency Region IX
1111 Broadway, Suite 1200
Oakland, CA 94607-4052

Dear Mr. President,

Under the provisions of Section 501 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, 42 U.S.C. §§ 5121-5207 (Stafford Act), as implemented by 44 C.F.R. § 206.35, I request that you issue an Emergency Declaration for the State of California due to the continuous, ongoing series of winter storms, which are now forecasted to include an impending atmospheric river system. According to the National Weather Service (NWS) and the State's climatologist, these storms, which began in late-February, are predicted to continue to pummel California through at least mid-March. The sustained force and longevity of persistent heavy rains, high winds, freeze warnings and record snowfall have already strained local and State resources.

I am specifically requesting approval of emergency protective measures (Category B), limited to Direct Federal Assistance (DFA), under the Public Assistance program for the following counties: Amador, Butte, El Dorado, Fresno, Humboldt, Imperial, Inyo, Kern, Lake, Los Angeles, Madera, Mariposa, Mendocino, Merced, Mono, Monterey, Napa, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Sacramento, San Bernardino, San Francisco, San Mateo, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Sierra, Sonoma, Stanislaus, Tulare, Tuolumne and Yuba. I am requesting DFA in order to meet critical emergency protection requirements in the form of generators, road clearance equipment and supplies, and sheltering and potential mass care assistance. The emergency measures required as a result of the severity and destructiveness of these

continuous winter storms, including the incoming atmospheric river system, are beyond the capabilities of the State and affected local governments to perform or to contract for, thus requiring DFA.

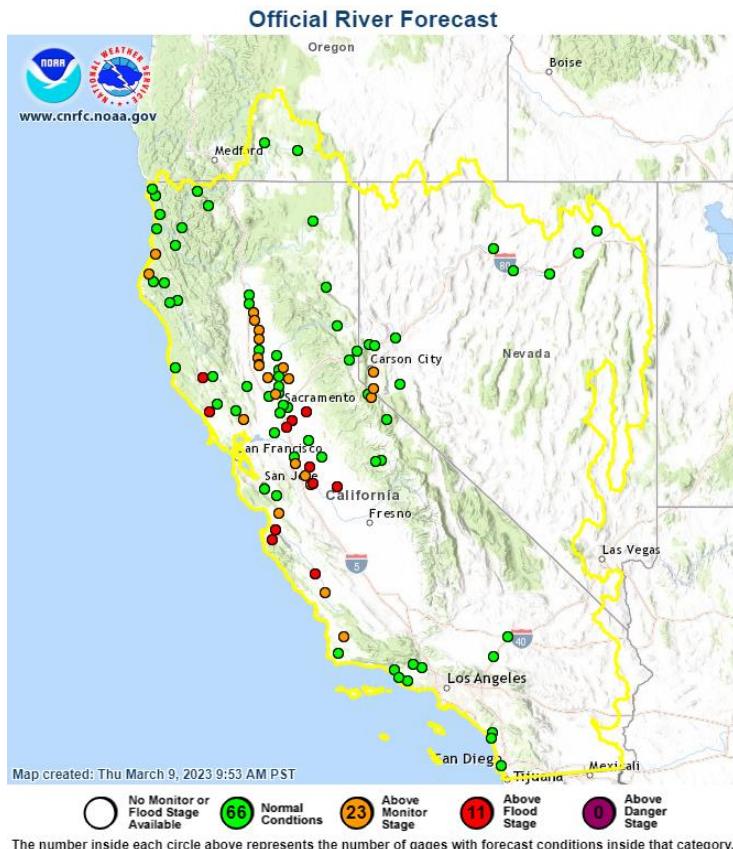
I. **Meteorologic Forecasting**

A series of winter storms began affecting California on February 21, 2023. Since the start of the event, California has had nearly uninterrupted storms. These storms have already caused significant damage in California from the substantial rain, snowfall, and river and urban flooding. It is expected the incoming atmospheric river system will bring heavier precipitation, creating greater impacts and compounding the complexities of response and recovery in the affected counties that are still responding to effects of the December 2022-January 2023 winter storm event.

The NWS predicts that heavy rain and snow will inundate California over at least the next week, substantially adding to the water and snow that has already saturated the State since late February. The atmospheric river system will likely affect the State through mid- to late-March. Moderate to heavy snow is possible at or above 7,000 to 8,000 feet elevation, particularly in the High Sierra, with heavy rainfall expected in Northern, Central, and coastal Southern California.

This incoming atmospheric river system is expected to exacerbate the effects of these storms which have already strained local and State resources. Recent heavy snowfall, combined with anticipated warmer temperatures over the course of the next week, are expected to bring snow melt runoff rates higher than the forecasted accumulation. The snowpack above 4,000 feet elevation will absorb and freeze most of the incoming rainfall; however, the existing snow below that transition zone will experience melting and contribute to rainfall runoff. The NWS forecasts the atmospheric river system is expected to broadly impact the lower elevation Sierras, foothills, and valley stream networks. River, creek, stream, roadway, and urban flooding is predicted to occur, resulting in the NWS placing 47 counties under a flood watch beginning today, March 9, 2023. Flooding in these counties will contribute to cascading risks of mud and debris flows in coastal and lower elevation Sierra burn scars undermining the safety of persons and critical infrastructure.

The below graphic predicts 11 locations that will exceed flood stage and 23 locations that will exceed monitoring stage throughout California.



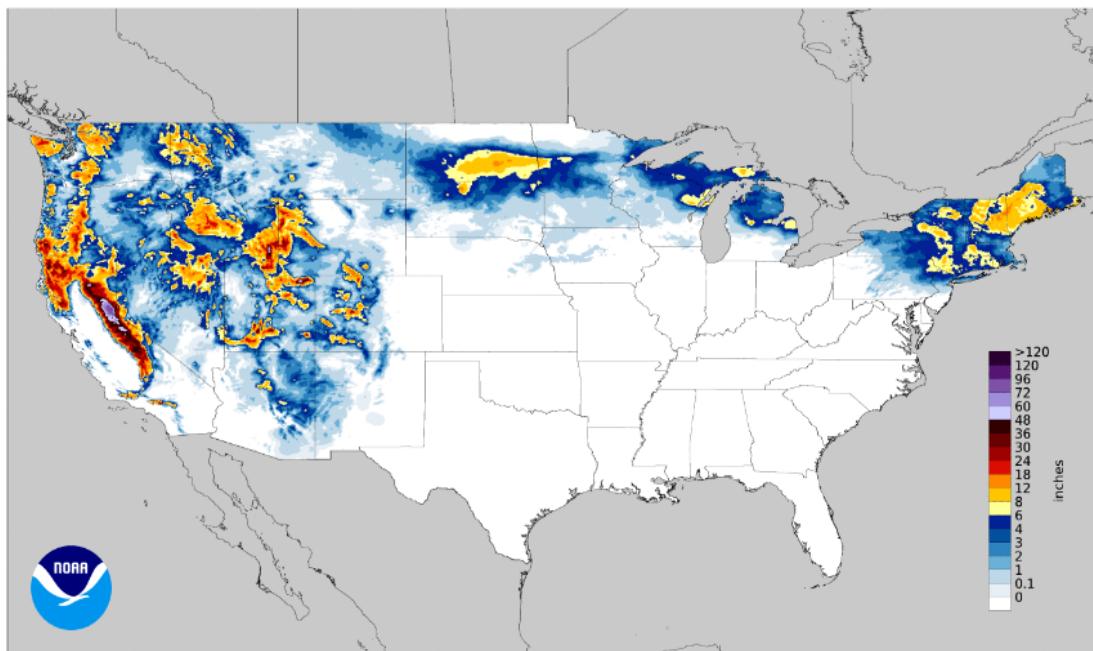
The incoming atmospheric river system, coupled with the winter storms that have already hit California, is expected to generate new and historic flood records. The Merced River near Stevenson in Merced County is forecast to reach a record-setting high-water mark of 73.5 feet during the early morning of March 12. The Salinas River near Spreckels in Monterey County is forecast to peak of 24.8 feet on March 14. This area of the Salinas River was previously damaged during the December 2022-January 2023 winter storm event, causing significant negative impacts to the local population. The Russian River near Hopland in Mendocino County is forecast to peak at 16 feet on March 10, resulting in flooding of Highway 175. The Cosumnes River near Michigan Bar in Sacramento County is forecasted to peak at 13.8 feet on the night of March 10, flooding houses in Wilton and overtopping local levees.

II. EMERGENCY RESPONSE

A. INCIDENT OVERVIEW – STATE AND LOCAL EFFORTS AND RESOURCES

On February 21, 2023, the State activated its State Operations Center (SOC) and it has remained operational. As a result of the storms, NWS issued weather warnings, watches, and advisories, including blizzard, winter storm, freeze, and high wind for areas across California. It is forecasted by the NWS that there will be potential for record snowfall in the southern half of the Sierras. This is in addition to the record snowfall accumulations exceeding 8 feet that have already been observed over the last two weeks from the northern Sierras to as far south as Big Bear. The significant low elevation snowfall in counties such as Los Angeles, Mono, and San Bernardino caused entire communities to become isolated essentially overnight. For a period of time, Interstates 5 and 15, along with other State highways, which served as connectors from Southern California to the rest of the State, were completely closed due to snowfall. Interstate 80 between the California and Nevada borders suffered the same fate. Parts of the Sierra Nevada mountains range saw up to 6 feet of snow in the 72 hours prior to March 1, 2023. The Southern California mountains saw 1 to 3 feet during that same time frame. All the while, the storms continued deepening the snowpack across the Sierra Nevada.

National Snowfall Analysis: 72-hour accumulation ending 2023-03-01 12 UTC
Issued 2023-03-03 09:28:46 UTC



Counties across the state have proclaimed local emergencies, and more are expected to follow, as the unrelenting storms overwhelm their local response resources. The State responded to these storms by providing snow removal equipment and personnel, search and rescue units, air resources both for reconnaissance, rescue, and resupply efforts, and by opening shelters. To achieve this, the State has called upon resources from the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE), California National Guard (CNG), California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), California Conservation Corps (CCC), California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), California Department of Social Services (CDSS), and local government resources. Hundreds of people were evacuated due to avalanche, flooding, and structure collapse potential, while tens of thousands lost power. Entire communities still remain under shelter in place orders due to the snowfall, such as in San Bernardino County where an estimated 30 to 50 percent of the local population in the Lake Arrowhead area are having critical needs met via emergency response personnel. Numerous state and federal highways are closed and damaged due to flooding, snow, and earth slides and, for many of those, there is no estimated time of reopening. The lack of useable roadways has resulted in State and local aircraft resources being utilized to supply communities with food, water, livestock feed, and fuel.

Due to the severity of these continuous storms, as well as the impending atmospheric river system, there will be significant and heavy rain-on-snow load stresses to structures, in some cases exceeding the engineered design loads. Many of the areas that will receive significant accumulation are not accustomed to receiving heavy snowfall and will suffer significant structural damage and roof collapses. This includes San Bernardino, Mono, El Dorado, and Nevada counties, where commercial and residential structures have already collapsed while power within these areas remains down.

On March 1, 2023, I proclaimed a State of Emergency for 13 counties¹ impacted by the winter storms that had occurred and those that were and are still ongoing and incoming. On March 8, 2023, I added 21 counties² to the State of Emergency in response to ongoing storms, developing needs and more damage discovered from the winter storm onslaught. I expect to add additional counties as the snow continues to melt or be removed and further damage is revealed and/or needs arise.

¹ Amador, Kern, Los Angeles, Madera, Mariposa, Mono, Nevada, San Bernardino, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Sierra, Sonoma, and Tulare

² Butte, El Dorado, Fresno, Humboldt, Imperial, Inyo, Lake, Mendocino, Merced, Monterey, Napa, Placer, Plumas, Sacramento, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Stanislaus, Tuolumne, and Yuba

As the State continues to respond to these winter storms and drawing upon CAL FIRE, CNG, CCC, CDCR, additional resources, including swift water rescue task forces, aviation search and rescue, high water vehicles, excavation equipment, fire engines, and hand crews, are being pre-positioning for what may be the most damaging storms of the series. The California Department of Water Resources (DWR) Flood Operations Center, activated on March 9, 2023, has already begun to liaise with counties facing elevated flood risks and to send flood fight specialists to areas of concern.

B. FEDERAL AGENCY EFFORTS AND RESOURCES

The U.S. Coast Guard has provided support in the form of aircraft to assist with distribution of emergency feed to sustain livestock operations.

C. ACTION TAKEN

In addition to the above-described response efforts, I have taken appropriate action under State law and directed the execution of the State Emergency Plan consistent with 44 C.F.R. § 206.35 (c)(1) and (c)(2) when I proclaimed the States of Emergency in specified counties, on March 1, 2023, and March 8, 2023, due to the widespread impact of these extreme and continuing winter storms.

D. FINDINGS PURSUANT TO 44 C.F.R. § 206.35 (b)(1) and (b)(2)

I hereby find that these winter storms, and the forecasted atmospheric river system, are of such severity and magnitude that effective response is beyond the capability of the State and the affected local governments. I further find that the counties identified in this request require supplementary Federal emergency assistance, as set forth above, to save lives and to protect property, public health and safety, or to lessen or avert the threat of this disaster.

III. CERTIFICATION

I certify for this emergency that the State and local governments will assume all applicable non-federal shared costs as required by the Stafford Act.

IV. STATE COORDINATING OFFICERS AND AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVES

I have designated the Director of the Governor's Office of Emergency Services, Nancy Ward, as the Governor's Authorized

Representative (GAR) and State Coordinating Officer for this request. Director Ward is empowered to execute on behalf of the State all necessary documents for federal assistance, including claims for Public Assistance, and will work with FEMA in continuing to provide more information or explanation on my behalf.

V. CONCLUSION

California is prioritizing life and safety response measures at this time and will complete preliminary damage assessments when it is able to do so. Due to the ongoing winter storms devastating California and overwhelming deployed State and local resources, and the approaching atmospheric river system, I am requesting an Emergency Declaration to authorize Direct Federal Assistance for effective efforts necessary to save lives and protect public health and safety, while reserving the right to request a Major Disaster Declaration based on damage caused by these winter storms.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Gavin Newsom".

Gavin Newsom
Governor of California

Enclosures:

OMB No. 1660-0009/FEMA Form 010-0-13