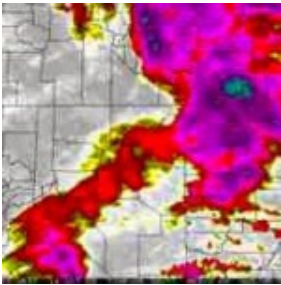


Storm wallops Sierra



Satellite
image of
Sierra storm.

By Kathryn Reed and Susan Wood

Pelting rain pummeled Lake Tahoe for more than 24 hours, making Tuesday one of the wettest days on record, which in turn is likely to make this a record month if storms keep rolling in.

National Weather Service officials were a bit harried all day and didn't have previous water accumulations at hand, but said, "This is one of our better winter storms." And winter is still more than two months away.

"It's a very strong jet stream that sucked up moisture of remnants of a typhoon that created excellent ingredients to bring rainfall in a winter-like storm to California and Nevada," explained Chris Jordan of the National Weather Service in Reno.

The storm that walloped all of California and much of Northern Nevada was being called one of the strongest October events in a half century. Some localities were reporting three times the amount of typical rainfall for this time of year.

Even though the wet stuff started coming down about midnight Tuesday in the greater Lake Tahoe area, the Weather Service

said since 1pm about 1 inch was falling every three hours.

Jordan said more than 3 inches had fallen throughout the basin as of 10pm, with 3.8 inches recorded at the base of Alpine Meadows at 7pm.

“Usually we don’t see storms of this magnitude until November or December,” Jordan said. “This will be one of wettest days on record in October and probably one of top 10 wettest Octobers on record.”

Jim Cantore, one of the Weather Channel’s main meteorologists, made a rare appearance on the West Coast as he gave his report from Placerville.

Hazardous conditions

On the West Slope, the storm couldn’t keep former El Dorado County Office of Emergency Services Director Marty Hackett from being close to the action. His new job with the El Dorado County Ambulance Authority – which handles services for 10 fire districts – prompted him to respond to a tree hitting the authority’s office in Diamond Springs.

“All I know is we’ve been really, really busy,” Hackett said, answering his cell phone at 9:30pm. Accidents filled his call sheet. “Anytime you get the first winter storm, the roads are really slick.”

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger had state emergency crews on alert, especially in areas prone to landslides because of recent fire activity.

Early in the day South Lake Tahoe officials set up sandbag distributions at 1160 Rufus Allen Blvd. and near the intersection of David and Ruby lanes.

Oct. 15 is the deadline the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency has for moving dirt, but no one told Mother Nature.

A small landslide sent Douglas County crews scurrying on Highway 50 east of Spooner Summit about 6pm. Crews heaved debris off the road, sheriff's Sgt. Anthony Field said.

It's too early to know what the storm will do to construction sites. Steve Morales, facilities director for Lake Tahoe Unified School District, arrived at last night's meeting soaked. He and the construction gurus were at South Tahoe High School ensuring everything was in place to keep the dirt in place.

The Angora Fire burn area of 2007 has held up for two winters without any earth movement, but this is the most significant storm to hit since that June inferno burned more than 3,000 acres on the outskirts of South Lake Tahoe.

Pine needles along highways and city-county streets were plugging drainage routes and sending water into the road. Standing water on roads made driving conditions a little squirrely and hydroplaning common.

A tree that fell about 10pm onto Highway 50 one-quarter mile north of Cave Rock near Warrior Way sent one motorist to Barton Memorial Hospital with minor injuries and closed down the major artery between Carson City and South Lake Tahoe for a half hour, Tahoe Douglas Fire Battalion Chief Ben Sharit said.

Earlier in the evening the Douglas County School District board of education was meeting at the county library. The wind was not robust at 6pm.

Like Lake Valley Fire, the California Highway Patrol watch commander reported a relatively quiet day. But its counterpart in Nevada cited 14 accidents in the Reno area in the morning.

Power outages were reported in several parts of the Bay Area. Locally, reports of no electricity came from the Hopi Road area of Meyers. Sierra Pacific Power offices did not return

calls.

Flickering lights were the norm Tuesday.

Snow on mountaintops

The Mount Rose Highway – which may see 2 feet of snow as morning dawns – saw its share of spinouts Tuesday, NHP Trooper Chuck Allen added.

Caltrans had chain controls in place on Highway 88 near Kirkwood Tuesday night. Be sure to check with Caltrans and NDOT (or click on their icons on the Home page of *LTN*) to be current with road conditions.

“Snowfall was limited to above 8,500 feet. What happened was a few inches of snow fell (Tuesday) morning as the storm came in,” Jordan said. “Then it was rain on snow. As the storm winds down and the cold comes in, the snow levels will be back down probably not much below 8,000 feet.”

Having an initial wet storm like this is just what ski resorts like for a base.

Kirkwood Mountain Resort was reporting 2-6 inches Tuesday night, while Mount Rose Ski Resort had 6-8 inches.

Although high wind activity produced up to 6-foot waves on the lake, the U.S. Coast Guard reported no activity.

A high wind warning has been issued until 8am for the entire Lake Tahoe area. Today will be breezy.

Temperatures are expected to be in the upper 60s by Friday, before cooling off to about 60 on Sunday when a cold front moves through.