

Caution urged around fast flowing rivers

By Matt Kawahara and Bill Lindelof, Sacramento Bee

Just days away from Memorial Day weekend, the American River is “a different river” compared with this time in years past, said Sacramento County Parks Director Janet Baker.

“It’s colder and swifter than normal,” Baker said. “It’s more dangerous.”

Traditionally the unofficial kickoff of summer, this Memorial Day weekend is expected to send boaters, rafters, swimmers and those who want to relax by the shore flocking to area waterways – even with forecasts that are decidedly more springlike.

But due to an abundant winter snowfall and spring snowmelt in the Sierra, safety officials said, people need to be wary of faster conditions in local rivers, and wear personal flotation devices when they hit the water this weekend.

“The river flow is high and it’s cold, so you have to come prepared with life jackets and the proper boating,” said Sacramento Metropolitan Fire District spokesman Assistant Chief Scott Cockrum.

“There’s still some snags in the river that will deflate inflatable rafts and you’ll be stranded out there – or worse,” he said.

Statewide, about 14 percent of accidents involving pleasure boats each year occur during the three major summer holiday weekends – Memorial Day, Fourth of July and Labor Day – said Gloria Sandoval, spokeswoman for the state Department of Boating and Waterways.

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