Brunt of storm on its way; flooding likely

By Kathryn Reed

With a wind advisory in effect through 4am Sunday, public works crews in the Lake Tahoe Basin will be patrolling streets through the weekend to make sure storm drains are not clogged with pine needles or other debris, which can cause streets to flood.

But there is nothing crews can do to stop the rivers in the region from rising.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is predicting the Truckee River will be close to 8 feet between 3am and 3pm on Sunday. Flood stage for the portion of the river along Highway 89 near the Placer-Nevada county line is 4.5 feet.

Officials are advising people to avoid traveling on Highway 89 between Truckee and Tahoe City.

Farther downstream, the level of concern is even more heightened.

"(Friday) morning, the National Weather Service issued a flood warning for the Truckee River area and Susanville," said Aaron Kenneston, Washoe County emergency manager, said at a press briefing. "We are joining forces with our regional partners to declare a state of emergency in Reno, Sparks, and Washoe County in order to access state resources that can help us

The following are storm totals from the National Weather Service in Reno from 4pm Nov. 27 through 6pm Nov. 30:

Reno 1.47 inches (rain)
Incline Village 1.11 inches (rain)
Mammoth Lakes 26 inches (snow)
Kirkwood Mountain 22 inches (snow)
Sierra-at-Tahoe 19 inches (snow)

maintain public safety as we deal with the impact of this 25-year flood. Those resources include the Nevada National Guard, the Division of Forestry, and other agencies that specialize in emergency disaster management and relief."

Sugar Bowl 12.0 inches (snow)
Alpine Meadows 9 inches (snow)
Upper Kingsbury Grade 8 inches (snow)

Storms keep rolling

Tahoe Regional Planning Agency inspectors were out Friday checking on projects and storm drains.

"While we don't know right now if this was a 20-year storm, BMPs are engineered to handle 1 inch of rain in one hour, which equates to a 20-year storm event," Jeff Cowen with TRPA told *Lake Tahoe News*. "The key is that the first hour provides the 'first flush' of pollutants. Once that first flush is captured, the stormwater following is much cleaner and less impactful."

The National Weather Service in Reno has issued a flood watch from this afternoon through Sunday morning for the Lake Tahoe Basin, eastern Alpine County and the Reno-Carson City-Minden area along and west of Highway 395. Heavy rain with high snow levels is expected to occur tonight through Sunday. This will increase the potential for minor flooding near creeks and streams.

Forecasters are calling for 3 to 5 inches of rain during this time period, with isolated amounts up to 7 inches along Highway 89.

With moisture comes the wind – with gusts expected to hit 120 mph on mountain passes.

Clearing the debris

Bobby Maxwell with South Lake Tahoe public works on Nov. 30 clears a storm drain on Ski Run and David. Photos/Kathryn Reed

In South Lake Tahoe the public works crews were driving all over town dealing with the more than two dozen usual problem areas along with the calls coming in from concerned residents.

By 3pm Friday a couple hundred bags of sand have been filled at the fire station near the Y. Bobby Maxwell with the city's public works department delivered more bags so people can protect their property.

A homeowner on Janet Drive did what he could to clear the water, but Mother Nature was winning. The vactor truck is sent over to suck up the water and debris. Still, sand bags line his driveway while the water ponds on the far side of his street.

This is one of those low-lying parcels, where the street goes up in both directions and the property at the bottom is where the water collects.

The large vactor truck is running all day – and will be this

weekend. When it’s full the gunk is dumped in the Caltrans yard at the end of Sierra Boulevard.

The vactor mobile is also one of the tools the city has to help prevent clogs. It along with street sweepers is sent out before storms to rid roads of as much debris as possible.

Maxwell says curbs are a good thing; adding that Highway 50 is noticeably better in this storm because Caltrans installed curbs and gutters the last two years.

But Caltrans’ work has caused problems for those on Fremont Avenue. The city had a pump there on Friday to help with drainage flows. Later in the afternoon the center was pumping water from below the parking lot on to Fremont Avenue with a fire-type hose.

Caltrans messed with the city’s infrastructure in summer 2011 so the drainage is worse. It nearly caused the businesses in the Fremont Mall to flood last year.

Markers let the crews know what kind of drain is installed. DI = drain inlet, P = pipe, and DW = dry well. The latter don’t work all that well because they can only hold so much water. A flooded street is usually the result of a dry well being overloaded, a low-lying area where all the water collects, or a flat area where there is no movement of water – it just puddles.

The drain inlets are where crews can take a metal rake to remove the debris to get the water flowing again.

At Tamarack and Ski Run the water is nearly across both lanes. Water is over the top of Maxwell’s boots. But after a few swipes of the grate with the rake the water is spiraling down the drain. The road is wet, but there is no more standing water.

Along Lakeview Avenue where the city did improvements the last

two years it would be hard to know there had been a substantial storm. In winters past about 20 calls came in each season to let crews know water was accumulating.

While snow is more common in Tahoe this time of year than rain, the history books point to plenty of flooding in the area. The most recent significant event was New Year's Eve 2005.

"It seems like we are working harder in the winter because the storms are more powerful," Maxwell told *Lake Tahoe News*.

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