

Storms bring flood risk to fire ravaged areas



The Emerald Fire scorched trees on both sides of Highway 89. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

All the moisture that is in the forecast for the next week is a mixed blessing.

Five years of drought in California and western Nevada have left so many areas parched. The tinder dry brush has also contributed to horrendous fires throughout both states.

Now potential flooding is the major threat.

It is so worrisome to California officials that the state Department of Water Resources in conjunction with CalFire and the National Weather Service this week issued flash flooding warnings for not just this week, but the entire wet season.

“With an increased number of burn areas comes increased potential for flash flooding in those areas,” Bill Croyle,

deputy director of Statewide Emergency Preparedness and Security for DWR, said at a press conference Oct. 24. "Flood preparedness is even more important this year due to widespread wildfires the state has experienced."

Crews have been busy laying down tightly woven straw bales to prevent the burned hillside of the Emerald Fire along Highway 89 from washing down. The fire earlier this month burned nearly 200 acres on both sides of the highway, though mostly it was on the west side of the roadway.

DWR uses monitoring tools that synthesize multi-agency data to understand detailed, real-time ground conditions, helping to inform officials of developing areas of flood concern. The NWS is responsible for issuing flood watches and warnings. CalFire at different burn locations has taken measures to stabilize several slopes, including straw-mulching and installing early warning system rain gauges linked to local government emergency response systems to trigger evacuations.

As of Oct. 15, California had experienced 6,726 fires burning a total of 560,888 acres.

According to the National Weather Service in Reno, heavy precipitation is headed for Lake Tahoe on Thursday night. There will be a break Friday afternoon before the rain begins again Saturday afternoon and should last through Sunday.

Snow levels are expected to drop Saturday night to about 7,000 feet.