

Rapid snowmelt causes floods, impacts recreation



Water-covered trails are common in the Tahoe basin, which is less of a problem for four-legged hikers. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

Memorial Day weekend is usually the start of summer for most of the country. For Lake Tahoe, it's really the end of winter.

This coming weekend won't be any different. While the forecast is for sunny skies and highs in the mid- to high 60s, the remnants of winter will likely be felt by people who are near any body of water and on hiking-biking trails.

The National Weather Service in Reno has issued a flood watch that is in effect through 11pm May 24 for South Lake Tahoe, Truckee, Bridgeport, Mammoth Lakes, Stateline, Incline Village, Carson City, Reno and Gardnerville.

Unseasonably hot weather is in the forecast for this week, which will accelerate the melting of what was a record snowpack for this area of the Sierra. In South Lake Tahoe, the high today is expected to be 78, 79 on May 23, and 74 on May 24. There is also a chance of thunderstorms on Tuesday, which would convert the snow to liquid faster, as well as add to swollen waterways via rain.

According to the Weather Service, "Best estimates for flows this week coming out of unregulated Eastern Sierra creeks and streams are likely to be 2-2½ times current flows with smaller creeks likely to see three times current flows. Daily peak flows on small creeks and streams typically occur during the evening and overnight hours."

Camping near creeks, streams and rivers is not advised.

Expect the rising water to impact surrounding campgrounds, hiking-biking trails and meadows. Depending on where the water is flowing, it could also destabilize already saturated hillsides, causing mud and rock slides.



Trout Creek is creeping into South Lake Tahoe backyards.

Photo/Kathryn Reed

Water is spilling forth from hillsides, creating mini-waterfalls that even longtime locals don't remember ever seeing.

In South Lake Tahoe the Upper Truckee River and Trout Creek have been beyond their banks for weeks. Trout Creek is in the back yards of people in the Al Tahoe neighborhood. The river looks like it might spill onto the runways at Lake Tahoe Airport.

The Upper Truckee River is flowing at 713 cubic feet per second, about $2\frac{1}{2}$ times higher than the mean for this time of year.

For those who are thinking about venturing into any Sierra body of water should remember how cold the water is and how swift it's moving.

Parts of the bike trail from Tahoe City to Truckee are expected to continue to be under water as the Truckee River floods.

It doesn't take long to hit snow on some of the area's popular trails. And many without snow are covered with measurable water. Trees are also a hindrance in some places.

The U.S. Forest Service says to expect trails about 8,000 feet to be melted by mid-July.

Here are a few reports on trail conditions:

· According to the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit it's possible to drive to the Glen Alpine trailhead. "The hike to the springs is a mix of dry, deep water, and snow. Above the Glen Alpine Spring, expect lots of snow. Snow ranges from 2-20-plus feet depending on aspect, elevation, and shade. Lakes are all frozen, very little dry ground (isolated rock outcroppings) above 8,000 feet."

- Wrights Lake Road is snow-free to the three-mile marker from Highway 50. From there it is covered in 4 to 8 feet of snow, with some large drifts that are 12 to 15 feet deep.
- Patchy snow remains on the Eagle Lake Trail above Emerald Bay. Eagle Lake remains partially frozen. Expect to post hole.
- The Mount Tallac Trail is clear with patchy snow from the trail head to the first ridge, but as the trail nears Floating Island Lake there is 3 to 4 feet of snow on the trail and on the approach to Cathedral Lake, there is 6 to 7 feet of snow obscuring the trail.
- For more info on trails managed by the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, go **online**.
- For more info about mountain biking trails, go to **TAMBA's website**.