



Officials Warn Against Entering Merced River

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Due to high flows, the Merced River will continue to be extremely dangerous during the upcoming Memorial Day weekend and likely remain so into July.

Merced County and the Merced Irrigation District would like to remind the public that because of these hazardous conditions, no one should enter the Merced River for any reason.

In addition to the rapidly-melting snowpack, precipitation over the past week has also added to large volumes of water flowing down the river.

Merced County Sheriff Vern Warnke, whose office handles water rescues along the Merced River, is very concerned about current conditions and encourages everyone to stay out of the river and follow all precautionary signage in place at Hagaman and Henderson parks.

“The Merced River should be considered off-limits and should not be entered for recreational purposes,” Warnke said. “When individuals disregard our warnings and ends up needing to be rescued, they’re not only putting their safety on the line, but also that of my personnel who risk their lives to save them. Anyone who enters the water and needs to be rescued can be held personally liable for the costs associated with that operation.”

Flows below Lake McClure and along the lower Merced River are reaching more than 6,000 cubic feet per second. In comparison, the river typically has 300 CFS flowing through the river in the late summer when much of the snowmelt has already passed.

“Water is continuing to flow from New Exchequer Dam in accordance with state and federal operating requirements. As a result of the extreme conditions, people should be extremely vigilant about water safety and remain away from the Merced River,” said MID Deputy General Manager Hicham ElTal. “Entering the river at these flows is fatal.”

Merced County Interim Fire Chief Mike van Loben Sels, who also serves as the director of the Merced County Office of Emergency Services, said although the water may seem inviting when the weather starts to warm up, it is extremely cold, swift and dangerous.

“The flows along our local waterways are deceptively fast,” van Loben Sels said. “We absolutely do not want a tragedy this year. Please, stay out of the river.”

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