



WEATHER

Town of Maxwell floods as worry about Oroville Dam shifts to creeks and canals

By Loretta Kalb and Robin Opsahl

lkalb@sacbee.com

FEBRUARY 19, 2017 06:11 AM, UPDATED FEBRUARY 19, 2017 05:43 PM



An American Red Cross shelter set up early Saturday at the Colusa County Education after an evacuation order was issued in the Maxwell area. BY ROBIN OPSAHL



Listen to this article now

04:59

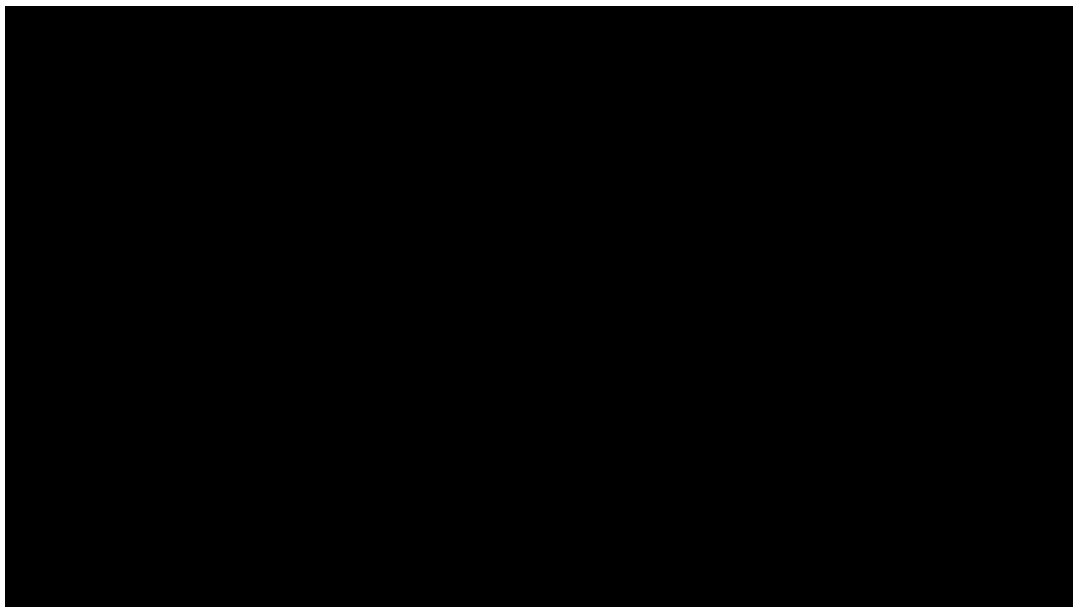
Powered by [Trinity Audio](#)

The first word on flooding came at 2 a.m. Saturday when residents of the tiny farm town of Maxwell began calling the Colusa County Sheriff's Office.

Hours later, many homes and businesses in the town of about 1,100 people were inundated with nearly a foot of water as residents fled to drier ground. A stark image shared by the National Weather Service on social media showed buildings surrounded by murky brown water that stretched across the flat land.

Northern California was saturated Saturday despite a break in the most recent wave of storms. While the danger behind the Oroville Dam had receded by the weekend, the network of swollen canals, streams and rivers menaced homes, businesses and roadways.

TOP ARTICLES



SKIP AD

As Maxwell flooded, two stretches of Interstate 5 north of Williams were barely passable because of encroaching waters. Roads throughout the region were closed from flooding and mudslides. Reclamation districts patrolled levees, monitoring boils and sandbagging. And residents nervously watching the Oroville Dam packed their bags and prepared to evacuate again if necessary.

In Colusa County, the Sheriff's Office blamed local creeks and canals for the widespread flooding "due to the overabundance of water the last 24 hours" and announced "voluntary evacuations for those who felt their safety was at risk."

By then, scores of residents had hastily collected their personal items and headed to Red Cross sites in Williams, about 10 miles to the south, or to Maxwell High School, on higher ground on the west side of town.

For most, it was a short stay, said Picard Robert, Red Cross shelter manager. By midafternoon most had left the evacuation centers in Williams to stay with family members or find lodging. Only a handful remained at the high school in Maxwell, he said.

Assemblyman James Gallagher, R-Yuba City, said he expected evacuees to be displaced "for an undetermined amount of time."

"This is devastating for the people living here," he said.

Locals voiced amazement at the flooding.

Prominent rice farmer Don Bransford, who lives in Colusa about 10 miles east of Maxwell, said everything "is just filled. The rice fields ... are all filled with water. The ditches are filled."

With several area roads closed, he added, "People are pretty anxious about how big this next storm is going to be. ... A lot of people haven't experienced this kind of weather or this much water. ... It's been a long time since we've seen this much standing water everywhere."

Mary Wells, 71, a rancher who lives in the hills a few miles west of Maxwell, said it was the first time that "folks who've lived here even longer than I can remember

this much water coming through town. Lot of damage.”

Wells estimated that the flooding affected “probably one-third of the town. The elementary school, lots of houses.”

Anxiety levels also were building up and down the banks of the Sacramento River watershed.

At Reclamation District 108, an agricultural district about 30 miles south of Maxwell, crews were patrolling the 90 miles of levees that protect a region stretching from Colusa to Knights Landing.

“We do have some boils we’re sandbagging,” said the district’s general manager, Lewis Bair. “We’re definitely not comfortable, but we’re managing the situation.”

Ray Long, a truck driver hauling construction materials from Southern California to Redding, reached a peak of frustration Saturday and he decided to pull off I-5 and stay the night at the Motel 6 in Williams.

Long said the trip should have taken just a day and half but, instead, will be a three-to four-day ordeal.

He was delayed Friday because of flooding along the Grapevine in Southern California, he said. Then, just before he reached Williams, he was stalled three hours in traffic because of the flooding just north of the town.

“I’m supposed to have time off after this and spend time with my wife and kids,” he said. “Now I’m not going to be able to do that for a few days.”

Maxwell’s plight followed a week of high stress during mass evacuations from Oroville, Yuba City and Marysville.

Along the Sacramento River on Saturday morning from Bend Bridge to the Ord Ferry, weather service monitors recorded water levels that remained at or just above flood stages.

And it’s not over. A large storm is expected to dump heavy rain over Northern California and add several feet of snow to mountain passes starting Sunday night.

In the Central Valley, forecasters call for 2 inches to 3 inches of rain through Tuesday. At higher elevations, the heavy rain could reach 5 to 7.5 inches during the period,

said Hannah Chandler, weather service meteorologist. She said the onslaught threatens to produce more mudslides and flooding.

Donner Pass will receive around 18 inches of snow, she said, and Carson and Ebbetts Pass in Alpine County are expected to receive 38 to 40 inches of snow.

“The storm should ... hit us hard on Monday into Tuesday,” Chandler said. “So we do have a flood watch out for our entire area for that time frame.”



With Sutter Buttes in the background to the east, cars slowly make their way down the I-5 corridor near Williams, Calif. BY RANDY PENCH

Writers Nashelly Chavez, Dale Kasler and Al Pierleoni contributed to this story.

Loretta Kalb: [916-321-1073](tel:916-321-1073), [@LorettaSacBee](https://twitter.com/LorettaSacBee)



Looking north, floodwater crosses over Interstate 5 at Williams, backing up traffic in north and southbound lanes for hours Saturday in Williams. RANDY PENCH RPENCH@SACBEE.COM

COMMENTS

Hello reader, our comment section is currently disabled. We still want to hear from you, so please leave your thoughts here, or submit a letter to the editor.

LOCAL READ NEXT

Sierra snowpack at 59% but ‘next few weeks will be critical’ for California water officials

BY ROSALIO AHUMADA
 APRIL 01, 2021 02:51 PM,
 UPDATED APRIL 01, 2021 03:57 PM

California is experiencing one of the driest years on record.

KEEP READING →

TRENDING STORIES

‘Nuisance crimes’ by homeless anger Sacramento business owners. Why little has been done
 UPDATED 10 HOURS 13 MINUTES AGO

Gavin Newsom signs tax break on pandemic loans for many California businesses
 UPDATED APRIL 29, 2021 09:23 PM

Exclusive: FBI investigating Sacramento prison plagued by inmate slayings, hazing
 APRIL 29, 2021 8:50 AM

This mom protested vaccines, then started a ‘militia.’ How California extremism is changing

UPDATED 4 HOURS 20 MINUTES AGO

After a wild day, 49ers fans have their say about Trey Lance, the third pick in the draft

UPDATED APRIL 29, 2021 08:07 PM

LOCAL

Thunderstorms bring hail to Sacramento region; heavy rainfall and strong winds possible

UPDATED MARCH 11, 2021 02:01 PM

WEATHER NEWS

Nearly a foot of snow fell in Sierra and another storm is coming, weather service says

FEBRUARY 13, 2021 10:11 AM

WEATHER NEWS

More rain ahead for Sacramento as another winter storm passes over Northern California

JANUARY 31, 2021 4:12 PM

WEATHER

Storm closes Interstate 80, Highway 50 in Northern California as rain and snow totals pile up

UPDATED JANUARY 28, 2021 02:32 PM

WEATHER NEWS

Bundle up: Northern California is in for a wintry week ahead with snowstorms incoming

UPDATED JANUARY 25, 2021 09:01 AM

WEATHER

Sacramento region could see record heat Monday amid strong winds. But fires unlikely

JANUARY 18, 2021 12:06 PM

Take Us With You

Real-time updates and all local stories you want right in the palm of your hand.

[THE SACRAMENTO BEE APP →](#)

[VIEW NEWSLETTERS →](#)

SUBSCRIPTIONS

[Start a Subscription](#)

[Customer Service](#)

[eEdition](#)

[Vacation Hold](#)

[Pay Your Bill](#)

LEARN MORE

[About Us](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Newsletters](#)

[News in Education](#)

[Photo Store](#)

[Archives](#)

ADVERTISING

[Place a Classified Ad](#)

[Legal Notices](#)

[Place a Digital Ad](#)

[Place a Newspaper Ad](#)

COPYRIGHT

COMMENTING POLICY

CORRECTIONS POLICY

PRIVACY POLICY

TERMS OF SERVICE