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FLOODING SCENARIOS

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Published 6:18 p.m. PT Feb. 20, 2017 | Updated 10:34 a.m. PT Feb. 21, 2017

As the saturated North State endures another storm and looks ahead toward more rain, local agencies in Shasta County have begun to prepare for mass evacuation scenarios and severe flooding plans.

The city of Redding has weighed the unlikely scenario if Shasta Dam were to release 100,000 cubic feet per second of water due to high levels in the reservoir and heavy inflows from the surrounding mountains, officials told the Record Searchlight.

Unlikely scenarios have taken on new urgency in the wake of the Oroville Dam crisis, in which some 188,000 people had to be quickly evacuated over fears that an emergency spillway might fail.

So far, water releases of up to 79,000 cfs from Shasta Dam in the past week are in line with levels of a five-year storm, according to a report from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

In a 100,000 cfs scenario, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation would be able to warn residents downstream at least 12 hours in advance, but flooding would likely displace about 2,000 residents from the city of Redding and cover an area of 3,000 acres. Damages are estimated to be about \$131 million, according to the 2015 City of Redding Local Hazard Mitigation Plan.

Sheriff Tom Bosenko said local agencies have been meeting for the past two weeks to discuss evacuation plans due to localized flooding. Emergency scenarios are elevated as river levels rise and agencies have review evacuation routes. In the event additional resources are needed from outside the county, the California Office of Emergency Services could provide boots on the ground from outside the region.

“We’ve been planning for this for quite some time,” Bosenko said. “It’s a team effort for all the agencies involved.”

Evacuation scenarios could play out in several parts of Shasta County and Red Cross would dictate where shelters would be established, said Redding Fire Chief Gerry Gray.

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On Feb. 13, water levels at Shasta Dam were about 6 feet from crest and the reservoir was 96 percent full, according to the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. High releases since then have created more room, and by Monday the dam was 89 percent full.

The last time the lake crested and water was sent over the dam's drum gates and down the spillway was June 1998. Water also went over the top of the dam in late May 1983. But both times it was late spring and lake releases had been dialed down because officials weren't as concerned about lowering water levels to accommodate more rain.

Some 4,000 spectators showed up as operators released water over the top from noon to 4 p.m. on June 18, 1998, as water came down at 1,200 cfs over the spillway and into the Sacramento River, creating the world's largest manmade waterfall. About 15,000 cfs was being released downstream at Keswick Dam that day.

In 1998, it was concerns about debris, not floodwaters, that prompted the decision to spill the lake. A U.S. Bureau of Reclamation official told the Record Searchlight that in a typical

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The debris can create a potential hazard at the dam power plant should it get through the trash racks and into the power plant turbines. It's also a potential boating hazard. So water was sent over the top to create room on the shoreline.

Gray said there are guidelines in place based on the amount of water being released at the dam. Emergency personnel will consider evacuation notices in the most vulnerable areas when Keswick Dam releases exceed 79,000 cfs.

"Those are general guidelines for us. We have to factor in the whole picture, what the forecast might hold," Gray said. "At 79,000 cfs we see relatively small impact, but above we would get into extensive flooding."

The National Weather Service in Sacramento says residents can expect localized flooding with the next storm systems that are set to linger until Wednesday. Redding can expect 2 to 3 inches of rain over the next two days.

The Sheriff's Office has warned residents along the Sacramento River and other tributaries to be cautious with the oncoming storms. Residents with a landline would be notified, also the emergency broadcast would be signaled on TV or radio. Those without landlines can register their mobile phones or internet-connected phones for an alert at www.shascom911.com.

Bosenko and Gray say the 79,000 cubic feet per second outflow from Shasta Dam is concerning because of the impact it poses to residents in low-lying areas.

Evacuations were not issued for the 79,000 cubic feet per second releases, because there was no storm system contributing to the tributaries and river levels.

"But it was getting close to intruding on homes in Anderson and other areas," Bosenko said.

There is no specific threshold for evacuations, because of the variables. Rain is expected for the next two days across Shasta County, but outflows from Shasta Dam are at 40,000 cubic feet per second.

The Bureau of Reclamation is involved with coordination efforts with the local Operation of Emergency Services, said Bosenko, who is acting director for the region.

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“It’s vital that we protect the downstream community, vital that we protect the system,” Moore said. “We would be able to provide enough of an update on those increases. They could be a matter of hours or days depending on the time of year.”

Bosenko said he has not had a time to meet with Butte County Sheriff Kory Honea to discuss the evacuation of about 180,000 residents from Oroville last week.

“I have spoken to (Honea),” Bosenko said. “After things cool down, we’ll have a debriefing regarding the incident.”