

Ahead of El Niño this winter, Governor Newsom prepares California for winter storms and flooding impacts

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Colusa County, California sent a emergency note to the Notice Nearby publisher inbox. 96 Ahead of El Niño this winter, Governor Newsom prepares California for winter storms and flooding impacts - California is staging flood-fighting supplies, preparing water infrastructure, and helping coastal communities FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE Friday, October 9, 2026 Governor's Press Office: (916) 445-4571 Ahead of El Niño this winter, Governor Newsom prepares California for winter storms and flooding impacts Calif...

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What you need to know: Governor Newsom is moving early to prepare for a potentially historic winter storm season by pre-positioning millions of sandbags and other emergency supplies throughout the state, inspecting levees and water infrastructure, helping communities prepare to capture stormwater, and more.

SACRAMENTO - Governor Gavin Newsom is taking early action to prepare for a potentially historic winter storm season amid an unprecedented El Niño forecast. Responding to the Governor's emergency proclamation issued on September 21, state agencies are coordinating with local communities, staging flood-fighting supplies,

inspecting levees and water infrastructure, helping coastal communities prepare for flooding and erosion, and positioning resources to capture and store stormwaters.

The storm season is already making itself felt. This year, "Kelvin waves" have raised sea levels, and offshore Pacific Hurricanes fueled by warm eastern Pacific water have sent strong waves into the California coast, causing coastal flooding that scientists attribute to El Niño. Recent years have shown how quickly California can swing between severe drought and devastating floods - extremes that climate change is making more pronounced. The state's preparations focus on protecting people, communities, and businesses, while capturing and storing water for future use when conditions allow.

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"We're taking action now to protect Californians before winter El Niño storms arrive. That means getting flood-fighting supplies into position, bolstering our water infrastructure, and helping communities across the Golden State prepare."

Governor Gavin Newsom

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Preparing for floods

The Department of Water Resources (DWR) is working with local communities and the Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) to prepare for potential flooding. Preparations include:

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Staging life-saving supplies: DWR has stockpiled flood-fighting materials at 68 locations statewide. These materials include 4.4 million sandbags, over 52,000 feet of "Muscle Wall" - portable flood barriers that crews can quickly deploy to divert water - and 400,000 tons of rock for emergency levee repairs.

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Inspecting and maintaining infrastructure: Crews are also moving swiftly to inspect and prepare California's flood-control infrastructure. Each fall, the state inspects all 1,600 miles of levees under the State Plan of Flood Control and maintains other weirs, bypasses, and flood control structures across the state. The system includes major flood-control infrastructure in the Sacramento and San Joaquin valleys, extending north to the Oregon border.

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Coordinating with local partners: DWR is working with counties, cities, and other government agencies across California through more than a dozen regional preparedness workshops statewide, with technical assistance, engineering guidance, and emergency response to local partners responsible for levees. Through the Dam Safety Planning Unit, Cal OES reviews and approves dam emergency action plans and supports coordination to protect downstream communities during a dam emergency.

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Preparing dams for potential heavy rain: DWR has notified dam owners statewide to prepare for potential El Niño-related storms. Its Division of Safety of Dams inspects all high- and extremely high-hazard dams annually and evaluates older dams for seismic and flood risks.

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Keeping the State Water Project ready: The system supplies water to 27 million Californians and has performed annual maintenance and inspections to prepare for winter operations.

California Department of Water Resources Utility Crafts workers remove debris near the Colusa Weir near River Road in Colusa County. (September 2026)

Capturing stormwater for dry years

The state is preparing to use this winter's precipitation to replenish groundwater basins. DWR is hosting a Recharge Readiness webinar series with technical guidance to help local agencies and other water users prepare projects that capture stormwater and recharge supplies. In addition, the State Water Board has organized two workshops to help local agencies apply for recharge permits and prepare for flood diversions in late October.

Since 2019, the board has provided more than \$329 million for stormwater projects that can capture more than 48,000 acre-feet of water per year. Capturing runoff reduces flood risk for cities and adds to local water supplies. Recent examples:

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Twain Harte (Tuolumne County): A state-funded stormwater-improvement project completed four projects in Tuolumne County in 2024, including a 5,000-gallon rain tank at an elementary school and a rain garden at a community center. Located in the Tuolumne River watershed, the collaborative project replaced outdated storm drains, installed innovative stormwater capture technology, and created bioswales and other permeable surfaces to slow and capture runoff.

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South Lake Tahoe: The State Water Board and City of South Lake Tahoe completed the Tahoe Valley Stormwater and Greenbelt Improvement Project in September 2026, creating a 320-acre greenbelt that improves stormwater management, reduces flood risk, and protects Lake Tahoe's water quality.

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South Gate: The State Water Board and City of South Gate completed the Urban Orchard Project in 2025. Supported in part by an \$8 million State Water Board grant, the project diverts millions of gallons of stormwater and urban runoff each year into wetlands and other permeable surfaces, helping recharge groundwater, improve water quality, and create new public green space for the community.

Strengthening flood defenses

Since 2019, Governor Newsom and the Legislature's investments have strengthened flood preparedness and infrastructure, helping communities become more flood-ready. Some key projects include:

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Creating more room for floodwater in the Delta: The completed Lookout Slough Project in Solano County added more than 40,000 acre-feet of flood storage capacity in the Yolo Bypass, helping reduce flood risk for nearby communities. Lookout Slough broke ground in June 2022 and included building over three miles of a 25-foot-tall setback levee, which provides 100-year flood protection with allowances for future sea level rise; excavating 26 miles of open tidal channels; and restoring native habitat through natural revegetation and other strategies.

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Repairing storm-damaged Delta levees: Cal OES approved more than \$390,000 in state disaster-assistance reimbursements for emergency repairs to levees along the Cosumnes River near Wilton after the 2022 flood.

Protecting the coast

Governor Newsom's El Niño emergency proclamation is helping state agencies move faster to prepare coastal communities for flooding and erosion by expediting permitting and supporting emergency work.

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Speeding up emergency protection: The California Coastal Commission has been directed by the Governor to expedite review of projects that protect people, property, and essential services from erosion, flooding, and landslides. When immediate action is necessary, the Commission can act on qualifying emergency permit requests within 24 hours.

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Repairing damage at Carlsbad State Beach: California State Parks is working with coastal engineers and the Coastal Commission to protect the shoreline and repair the Tamarack parking lot after summer swells and high tides stripped sand from the beach and damaged th

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