

GOING WITH THE FLOW

FOLLOWING THE CALAVERAS RIVER'S RAIN-SWOLLEN PATH

Photo 1 of 3 | [Zoom Photo +](#)



Sue and Ron Massaglia of Valley Springs watch Monday as water is released from New Hogan Dam near Valley Springs. CLIFFORD OTO/The Record

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SAN ANDREAS - Water is rising behind the big dams that protect Stockton and Lodi from flooding, and dam operators Monday moved to boost releases in order to make room for more rain and snowmelt still to come.

"We really have to stay on top of it," said Charles Hardy, a spokesman for the East Bay Municipal Utility District, which operates Camanche and Pardee dams on the Mokelumne River.

Hardy said the utility expected Monday to boost releases from Camanche Dam into the lower Mokelumne River to 3,500 cubic feet per second.

Pardee Reservoir, which is just upstream from Camanche, is full, and water has been coming over the spillway next to the dam since last week. As of midnight Sunday, water was flowing from Pardee into Camanche at more than 4,300 cubic feet per second.

Richard Marmolejo, the dam operator at New Hogan Lake on the Calaveras River, faces a similar situation. He said he would be boosting releases into the channel that flows down the Calaveras River, then through Stockton in Mormon Slough and the Stockton Diverting Canal. He expected the flow to reach 6,000 cubic feet per second late Monday.

"I wouldn't recommend that anybody messes around down by the rivers at these elevations," Marmolejo said of the high flows.

Lake levels behind New Hogan Dam on the Calaveras River and Camanche Dam on the Mokelumne River are higher than they should be for current conditions, according to the daily Army Corps of Engineers report on flood control requirements for California reservoirs.

Camanche Reservoir was holding about 36,250 acre-feet more than its target and New Hogan Lake was holding 72,597 acre-feet more than its target at midnight Sunday, according to the Army Corps report.

An acre-foot is enough water to cover an acre 1 foot deep and is roughly enough water to serve the needs of an average family for a year.

In a thirsty state, water utilities would like to be able to hold onto that water. But many dams - including New Hogan and Camanche - were built primarily to protect cities downstream from devastating floods.

That means water agencies have to walk a tightrope, constantly changing plans as weather forecasts dictate.

Marmolejo noted that water agency officials were pleased that after a dry February, rains in March boosted the level of New Hogan Lake to 76 percent of capacity.

"In theory, 76 percent would be perfect if we didn't have any more storms," Marmolejo said.

Rain is not expected to let up, at least not for any period of length, until the weekend.

According to the National Weather Service, there is a 30 percent change of rain tonight and then much stronger chances of rain or showers on consecutive days Wednesday through Friday, diminishing chances Saturday and the potential for sunshine on Sunday.

The weather also placed a burden on those looking to travel to Yosemite National Park. Highways 41, 120, and 140 have been disrupted by snow and ice as deep as nine inches. Highway 140 has also been punished by mudslides, fallen trees, falling rocks and downed power lines, park spokeswoman Victoria Mates said. Roads leading into the park will remain closed this morning.

Those predicted storms - and a heavy snowpack at higher elevations that will melt in coming months - are forcing many dam operators to scramble now to lower reservoir levels.

On the Mokelumne, EBMUD officials are hoping to avoid increasing the releases to 5,000 cubic feet per second. That level is allowed when needed but can cause problems downstream.

"It is very significant where we are at now. Ideally you don't want to have to release at 5,000," Hardy said.

The one river with few flood worries for the moment is the Stanislaus. New Melones Lake on the Stanislaus can hold up to 2.4 million acre feet and is so large that it rarely fills.

Pete Lucero, a spokesman for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, said that Melones has only about 1.8 million acre-feet of water, leaving plenty of room to catch runoff and snowmelt.

"That is about 7 percent above normal for this time of year. That is a good thing. New Melones is not easy to fill," Lucero said.

Staff writer Keith Reid contributed to this report.