

Board asking state, feds for storm recovery assistance

By Nick Baptista / The Valley Springs News / February 27, 2026

The Calaveras County Board of Supervisors after hearing the extent of the damage caused by last week's winter storm adopted a resolution Tuesday that opens the door to state and federal assistance for ongoing response and cleanup efforts.

Sheriff Rachell Whiting, Public Works Director Micah Martin and Chief Building Official Doug Oliver briefed supervisors on how the county and other agencies responded to the storm that dumped feet upon feet of snow at the higher elevations, causing havoc with downed trees that blocked roads, toppled power lines and left PG&E customers without power for many hours or days into this week.

"There were a total of 476 calls (to the emergency dispatch center) between February 17 and February 23, and that is just the West Point, Avery, Arnold, and Dorrington areas of the County," Sheriff Whiting told the board. "That's 58 evacuations, 96 calls of the roads being blocked due to snow, trees or power lines, 118 other storm related calls, nine requests to remove vehicles out of the roadways that were impeding snowplow operations, 76 welfare checks, 62 citizen assists, 28 9-1-1 misdials related to the storm, three smoke check calls, and 26 medical aid calls in the affected area."

The highest volume of calls occurred on Feb. 18 and 19, with the highest concentration in the Arnold area, she added.

"A lot of the initial requests for emergency extraction did include visitors staying at short-term rentals that were unprepared for this weather event and lacked food supplies, lacked alternative power or heat and either their vehicles were incapable of operating in four-wheel drive or were unable to be used due to closed roadways," Whiting told the board.

She thanked the local fire departments, probation department and other nearby law enforcement agencies for providing assistance during the storm. One of the fire agencies providing mutual assistance during and after the storm period was Calaveras Consolidated Fire Protection District, which sent a strike team to cover calls in the West Point area.

"There's always going to be polarized public opinion on how the response was handled," Whiting said. "That ranges from the opinion that this storm wasn't that bad and people should have been more prepared to handle a week long event to opinions that we should have done more ahead of time and throughout the response effort. Frustration is understandable. Placing blame is understandable and expected."

To that extent, an after action review process is under way looking to improve the future performance.

Snowplow crews were working around the clock, but "progress was reduced significantly on Thursday when roads became impassable due to heavy snow and trees into power lines," Martin said. "By Friday, February 20, Dorrington had received approximately 88 inches of snow, and the Arnold community received 58 inches of snow."

Disabled or abandoned vehicles on county roads also hindered the snowplowing efforts, he added. In all, public work crews were confronted with 20 abandoned or disabled vehicles, 157 power lines conflicts with downed trees and 300 downed trees on county roads.

Oliver told the board his department was activated Monday to conduct safety and damage assessments and had accomplished 20 inspections the first day.

The building department has set up a hotline for residents and businesses who want to report storm damage at 1-209-754-6380.

He added that when a team goes out to assess the damage at one building, they generally find three more in the same area that are damaged.

Members of the board praised the efforts of the emergency responders with District 2 Supervisor Autumn Andahl saying, "the level of communications and coordination was phenomenal."

The damage assessment process is ongoing, the sheriff reported, with cost estimates still to be determined.

The resolution passed by the board calls for the county to seek recovery assistance from the state, including funding under the California Disaster Assistance Act and Federal Stafford Act.