

2011 SEVERE MARCH STORMS  
AFTER ACTION REPORT

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**Description of Event**

During the period between March 15, 2011, through March 27, 2011, California experienced a series of storms that brought significant snowfalls, heavy rains, and high winds resulting in flooding, mud, and debris flows that caused major damage to coastal counties as far north as Del Norte County and as far south as Ventura County. Many Inland Region Counties also reported significant damage in the wake of these storms. In all, a state of emergency was proclaimed for 20 counties by the Governor that included the following: Alameda, Amador, Butte, Contra Costa, Del Norte, Humboldt, Madera, Marin, Mariposa, Mendocino, Monterey, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz, Sierra, Stanislaus, Sutter, Trinity, Tuolumne, and Ventura.

**Incident Period**

March 15, 2011 to March 27, 2011

**Injuries and Damages**

There were no injuries reported.

Total estimated losses for all counties were over \$34,659,000 not including damages to state highways and bridges.

Property damage was due to debris from fallen trees and mudslides throughout several counties. Roadways were washed out or blocked. The flood system reached its maximum capacity with several levees flooding and cracking creating emergency conditions. The damages to state highways and bridges were estimated at \$249,540,786.

Summary of Significant Damages:

Total initial damage estimate: \$34,659,000

Madera County: \$1,140,500

Mariposa County: \$500,000

Mendocino County: \$6,415,000

Monterey County: No dollar amount available

Santa Barbara County: \$2,700,000

Santa Cruz County: \$17,300,000

Sutter County: \$2,145,000

Tulare County: No dollar amount available

Tuolumne County: \$718,000

### **Infrastructure**

At the height of the severe storms there were more than 41,500 people without power. The California Utilities Emergency Association (CUEA) coordinated with more than 15 utility companies in California, Oregon, and Nevada to restore power and communications.

### **Evacuations and Shelter**

Humboldt County Red Cross supported shelter for approximately 14 displaced persons. Sutter County Red Cross supported shelter for approximately 51 displaced persons. Santa Barbara County evacuated and sheltered 24 displaced persons. Mariposa County provided warming centers.

### **Declarations and Proclamations**

The following counties, cities, and special districts declared a local emergency:

Amador, Butte, Contra Costa, Del Norte, Humboldt, Madera, Mariposa, Mendocino, Monterey, Placer, Santa Cruz, Sierra, Stanislaus, Sutter, Trinity, Tuolumne, City of Pleasanton (Alameda), City of Hercules (Contra Costa), City of San Anselmo (Marin), City of Gonzalez (Monterey), City of San Pablo (Contra Costa), and Reclamation District 1001 (Sutter).

On April 15, 2011, Governor Brown proclaimed a State of Emergency for the counties of Alameda, Amador, Butte, Contra Costa, Del Norte, Humboldt, Madera, Mariposa, Mendocino, Monterey, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz, Sierra, Stanislaus, Sutter, Trinity, Tuolumne, and Ventura but did not authorize funding through the California Disaster Assistance Act (CDAA). Placer County was added to the State of Emergency in April due to severe damage to propane tanks as a result of heavy snowfall. The Governor did order Caltrans to formally request immediate assistance through the Federal Highway Administration's Emergency Relief Program in order to obtain federal assistance for critical highway repairs and reconstruction in the affected counties.

The Governor's proclamation was based on the following facts:

- There were landslides, flooding, and road damage throughout the state
- Utilities were interrupted
- Levees were damaged
- There was an estimated \$34M in storm impact damage
- There was significant damage to state highways and bridges

On April 22, 2011, Governor Brown requested a Presidential major disaster declaration for the State of California for the severe storms beginning March 15 through March 27. The Governor specifically requested public assistance programs for the seventeen counties significantly impacted by the storms. The Governor also requested hazard mitigation funding statewide.

On June 21, 2011, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) denied the Governor's request for a Presidential major disaster declaration.

On July 13, 2011, the Governor appealed the decision in a letter dated July 13, 2011.

On August 4, 2011, FEMA upheld its decision and denied the Governor's appeal for a Presidential Major Disaster declaration.

On April 26, 2011, the Small Business Administration (SBA), acting under its own authority, declared an emergency for the counties of Santa Cruz, San Benito, San Mateo, and Santa Clara. The emergency declaration by SBA made assistance available to residents and businesses affected by the storms through low-interest federal disaster loans.

### **Summary of Successes**

Successful operations were highlighted in the following areas:

- Proactive and coordinated response between counties, tribes, and State agencies
- Recovery Operations
- There was effective use of several mutual aid networks by Cal FIRE, CUEA, the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), and the American Red Cross
- Advance Planning
- Public Information contributed most to the protection of the community during the severe weather event. Several counties used public information phone lines and social media such as Twitter and Facebook to disseminate necessary emergency updates to the community
- At the Operational Area (OA) level, situational awareness was significantly improved because of robust information sharing between counties allowing first responders to better support overall emergency response efforts

### **Summary of Areas Needing Improvement**

Overall, the management of this disaster was very effective and the needs of the citizens of the impacted counties were met in a timely manner. However, it is important to take advantage of the opportunity to identify areas needing improvement that can be made to enhance California's response to future disasters.

Below are areas identified as needing improvement which can be applicable to all five SEMS levels (Field, Local, Operational Area, Regional and State).

- There was a lack of coordination between county law enforcement and tribal law enforcement
- The use of technical specialists in the REOCs and SOC is inconsistent resulting in the underutilization of a valuable resource
- The absence of planning and coordination between local critical life safety, law enforcement, emergency management facilities, and power companies led to an inundation of calls from the public reporting power outages potentially delaying higher priority requests for services and resources
- There were no clear lines of communication or points of contact established between EOCs and utility companies which led to inconsistent communications resulting in reduced situational awareness

## **ORGANIZATIONS CONTRIBUTING TO THIS REPORT**

### **State Agencies and Departments:**

California Emergency Management Agency (Cal EMA)  
California Department of Transportation (Caltrans)  
California Department of Corrections & Rehabilitation (CDCR)  
California Department of Water Resources (DWR)  
California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE)

### **Local Government/Operational Areas/Private:**

Butte County  
Del Norte County  
Mariposa County  
Santa Barbara County  
Santa Cruz County Fire Department  
Sutter County  
Tuolumne County  
Tuolumne County Fire Department  
City of Pleasanton