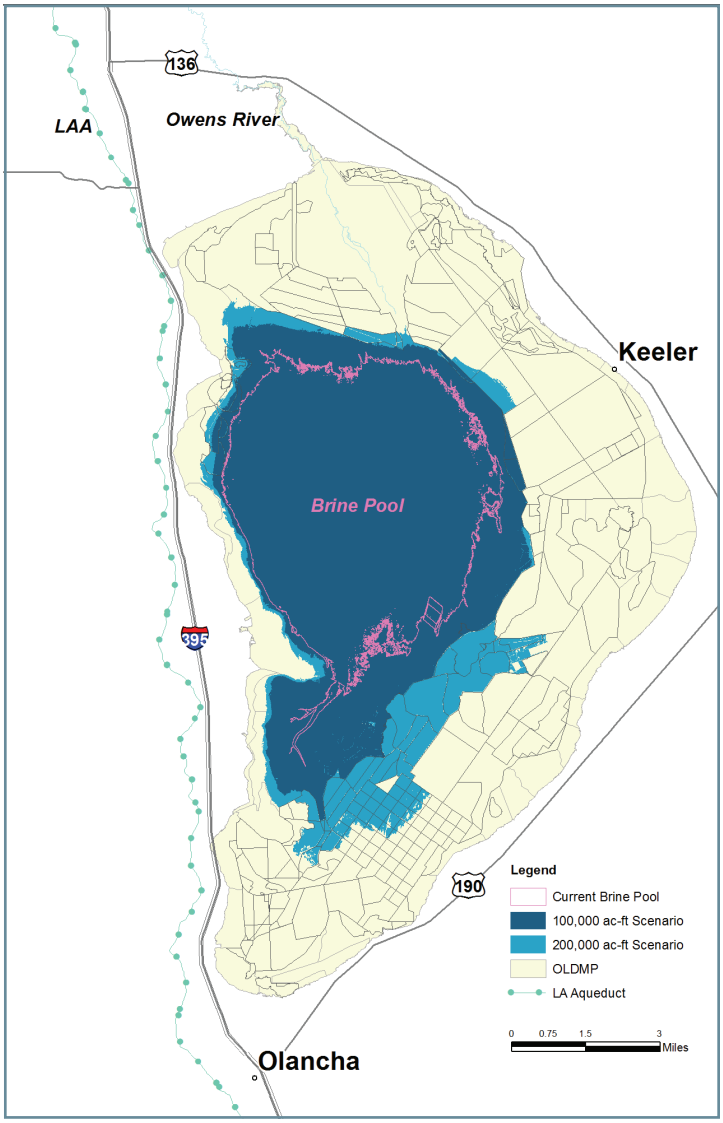
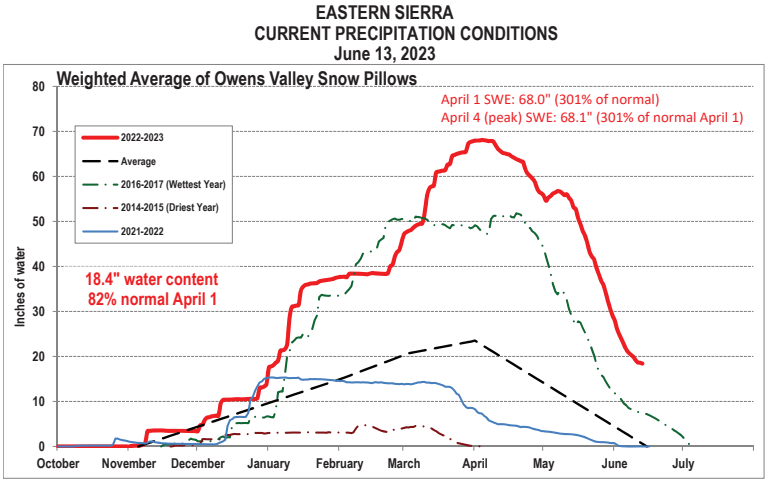
2023 City of Los Angeles
Snowpack Runoff Emergency Response
Fact Sheet

With snowpack levels in the Eastern Sierra registering over 296 percent of normal, the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) is expecting one of the largest snowpack runoffs from the Eastern Sierra watershed in the over 100-year history of the Los Angeles Aqueduct. Approximately 1 million acre-feet (AF) of water - or about twice the amount of water Angelenos consume in one year - is expected to flow through the Aqueduct system this spring and summer.





This massive amount of water has prompted the Mayor of the City of Los Angeles to issue an Emergency Declaration to allow LADWP to take immediate steps to protect infrastructure and aid in managing flood waters. The declaration is expected to assist the City in response to the threat posed by this excessive runoff to the health and safety of the public as well as to protect infrastructure and the environment.

To maximize the beneficial use of this water to the fullest extent, LADWP is spreading water throughout the Aqueduct system to replenish local groundwater aquifers, lowering reservoirs to create more storage space for runoff waters, and supplying Los Angeles with Aqueduct water in place of purchased water and pumped water wherever possible.

Just as the Pacific Ocean is the natural terminus for flood waters from the western side of the Sierra Nevada Mountain Range, Owens Lake, located near Lone Pine, CA, is the natural endpoint for rain and snowmelt flowing down the Owens River through the Owens Valley. Water that exceeds what can be spread to recharge local aquifers, and which does not make it into the Aqueduct system, will end up on the Owens Lakebed. LADWP expects there to be about 160,000 AF of flood water that will naturally flow to Owens Lake. Once there, it will add to the existing 26 sq. miles of saline brine pools and has the potential to cause significant flood damage to the dust control infrastructure.

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Since 1998, LADWP has invested over $2.5 billion to improve air quality in the Owens Valley and throughout Inyo County. The excess runoff threatens to significantly impact portions of LADWP's dust mitigation infrastructure, possibly affecting dust mitigation operations. In light of lessons learned during the wet years of 2017 and 2019, LADWP took immediate steps to shore up areas of Owens Lake to minimize the damage posed by rising water levels. LADWP is also taking the following steps to minimize the impacts.

Los Angeles Aqueduct System Runoff Prep:

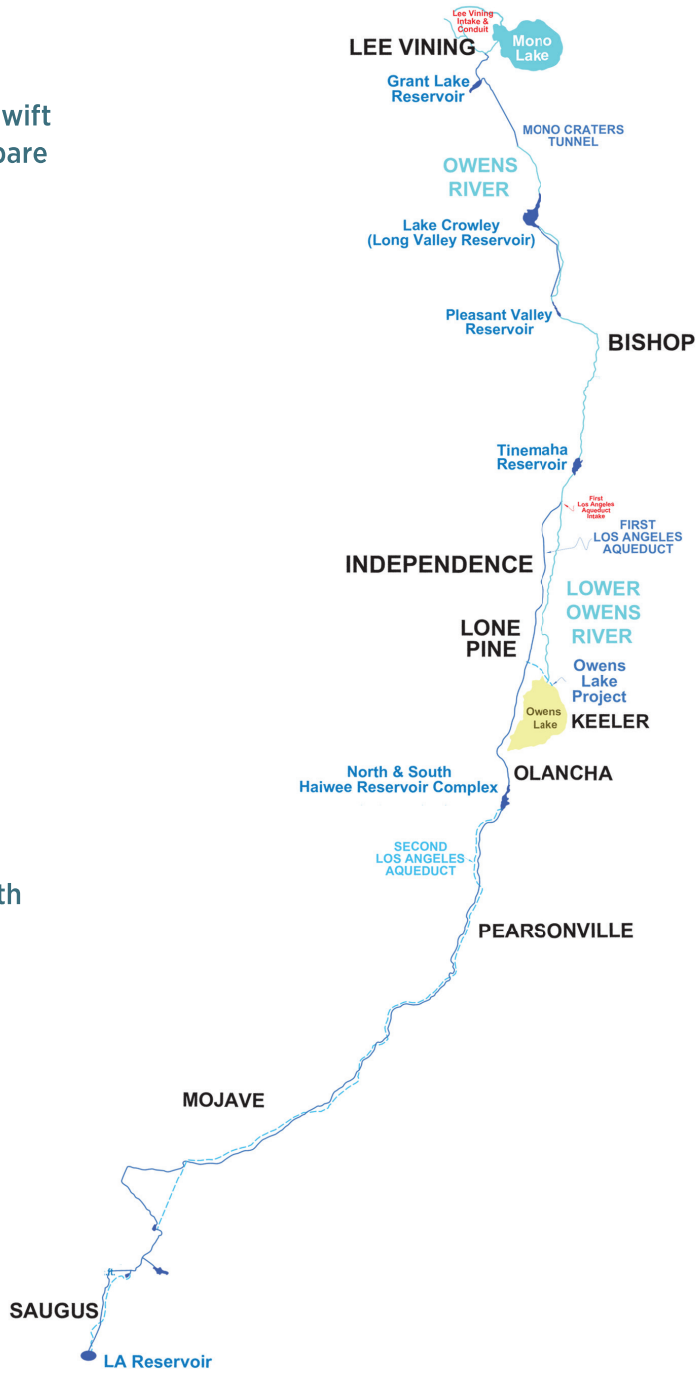
- Active participant in the joint incident command communications response for public information.
- Develop media campaigns warning about the dangers of swift water, and the need for home and business owners to prepare their properties for the large volumes of water expected.
- Prepare areas for water spreading, and clear ditches and other channels on the Owens Valley floor that haven't seen water in decades.
- Stage large equipment such as excavators and backhoes at strategic areas throughout the Owens Valley to facilitate quick response to flooding.

Owens Lake Runoff Prep:

- Construct protective measures at and near Owens Lake, as well as along the Aqueduct to manage the flow of water into Owens Lake.
- Armor facilities, including the Lower Owens River pump back station, berm roads, pipes, and ancillary facilities.
- Repair, replace, and remediate damaged dust control measures in an expedited manner that incorporates flood resilience components in order to maintain compliance with air quality regulations in the Owens Valley Planning Area.

The Emergency Declaration issued by the Mayor triggers City rules allowing LADWP to contract for the goods and services necessary to respond to the threat and rebuild any infrastructure that may be damaged in an expedited fashion. It also allows the City to request all necessary assistance from the State in order to respond to the flooding and proactively take necessary precautions to prepare for possible damage.

LOS ANGELES AQUEDUCT SYSTEM



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Questions and Answers about the City of Los Angeles Emergency Declaration to Respond to the Snowpack Runoff

What is LADWP doing to manage the excess water?

In preparation for the high runoff, LADWP crews lowered reservoir levels in the upper Aqueduct system in order to make room for the runoff when the snow begins to melt. LADWP is also maximizing the benefits of the water by replenishing the groundwater table in the Owens Valley watershed as much as possible through spreading and supplying as much water as we can to environmental projects in the Owens Valley.

The total amount available to be delivered to Southern California is limited by the size of the Aqueduct. There is a maximum amount of the snowpack that can ultimately make it to Los Angeles. The vast majority of the excess will remain in Owens Valley and flow to Owens Lake, although some will be spread south of the Owens Valley.

LADWP is also reducing purchased water and increasing the use of Aqueduct water wherever possible by making operational adjustments in the City water distribution system.

Given this abundance of runoff, is L.A. still in a drought?

The high snowpack level in the Eastern Sierra this year is good news, but we have no idea what next year has in store for our water system. Climatologists predict that climate change will result in more extreme weather patterns. That means we need to prepare for wetter wet years and also drier and hotter dry years. Because of this, we continue to encourage all Angelenos to maintain their water efficient lifestyle. We need to plan for the long-term and not feel any false sense of security from one extremely wet year in the midst of the overall severe drought in the western United States.

How much could this potentially cost the City of Los Angeles?

LADWP has invested over $2.5 billion to improve air quality in the Owens Valley Planning Area and throughout Inyo County and significantly reduced dust levels in the Owens Valley. Some of this investment may be significantly damaged by flood waters that are expected to raise the level of Owens Lake up to eight feet. The water is expected to damage and/or destroy some of the dust control areas that have been planted with managed vegetation, others that have been tilled and contoured to mitigate dust, as well as other infrastructure. The extent of damage is not possible to fully assess or estimate at this time. However, LADWP has insurance and will seek federal and state disaster relief assistance. These sources are expected to cover some, if not all, of the costs to repair the damage.

Why not just refill Owens Lake and keep it full?

In this extreme year, flood water will naturally flow to Owens Lake. However, that water will eventually evaporate, likely over the next 12 to 18 months. In future years, LADWP expects to divert water to the Aqueduct according to established water rights and environmental agreements. Our priority is protecting the environment in Owens Valley, while also providing a reliable source of water for the City of Los Angeles.

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Questions and Answers about the City of Los Angeles Emergency Declaration to Respond to the Snowpack Runoff

Has an emergency declaration been issued before for a situation like this?

This is the second emergency declaration the City of Los Angeles has ever issued for excess snowpack runoff. The first emergency declaration was issued in 2017. In past record years (1969 and 1983), excess runoff would naturally flow to Owens Lake where it would evaporate over time. This year is different because the water that will naturally flow to Owens Lake can do significant damage to dust mitigation measures and infrastructure constructed by LADWP over the past 23 years that were not in place during the 1969 and 1983 record wet winters.

Besides infrastructure on Owens Lake, what is threatened by this influx of water?

Public safety, roads, homes, and erosion of land are all at risk by this vast amount of water flowing through the Owens Valley this year along with sensitive environmental areas. LADWP is working closely with Inyo County officials and other land agencies to assist in managing these flood waters while taking steps to minimize the damage that we expect to occur to dust control measures at Owens Lake, where possible.

Does this flooding pose the risk of dam failure similar to that experienced recently by the Oroville Reservoir?

We are taking every precaution to ensure dam safety during this period of high runoff. Spillways will be used at some dams along the Aqueduct system. However, we are working to avoid spilling Long Valley Dam due to environmental concerns, specifically protecting the habitat for the Owens Tui Chub that live just below Long Valley Dam.

Is LADWP managing flood waters for Inyo and Mono Counties?

All of LADWP's efforts to manage water this runoff season will aid in preventing harm and damage to the Los Angeles Aqueduct infrastructure and the communities within Mono and Inyo Counties. LADWP's efforts will assist the counties with their flood control efforts.

If Owens Lake floods to the levels we expect, how long would it take to recede?

We expect water to evaporate from the Owens Lakebed between 12 and 18 months after the high level of flow ceases. It is important that LADWP manages the increased flow so as to not disturb the ecosystem restoration and dust mitigation measures to the greatest extent possible. LADWP will work to repair any damage to the dust mitigation infrastructure and ensure that future investments allow for surge capacity in extreme wet years.

LADWPEasternSierra.com/runoff2023