

**FLOODING:**  
Rain-on-snow event threat is receding

*Continued from page 1*

speaker, was: “Plan ahead and be prepared to take care of yourself, if possible.” The other side of that directive was “Check on your neighbor” in the case of an emergency or natural disaster. And finally, “Turn around. Don’t drown.” In other words, do not try to ford a stream that is rising.

Kyle Gorman, South Central Region manager of the Oregon Water Resources Department, told the audience that in Sisters there are two mechanisms for flooding: rain-on-snow events with rapid melting; and an extraordinary amount of snow at lower elevations, like we have had since mid-December.

There is currently 142 percent of average snowpack at high elevations and 130-140 percent snowpack at Three Creek Meadow, with abundant snow below that elevation.

Gorman indicated that the snowpack is firming up so the chance of flooding due to a rain-on-snow event is decreasing. Problems are more likely to arise when the snow is newly fallen. By March of most years, that possibility is greatly reduced or gone.

Water flow for Whychus Creek near Sisters is measured at three different locations — on the way to Three Creek Lake outside of town, just downstream from the Locust Street bridge, and at Camp Polk Road. The flow peaked this month on February 9 with a mean daily flow of 202 cubic feet per second (CFS) at the first station. On February 4 it had been 76 CFS and on February 12, it had decreased

to 127 CFS.

The highest flow measured on Whychus Creek was in 1964 at 2,000 CFS. In February of 1996, the creek washed out U.S. Highway 20. In 2014, when Whychus Creek was running high and fast through town and over its banks in places, it was moving at 1,200 CFS. Since that time, there has been work done upstream from Sisters creating some new high-water channels.

Residents are able to monitor the flow of Whychus Creek in near-real-time online. Go to [www.Oregon.gov/OWRD](http://www.Oregon.gov/OWRD). In the left-hand column, click on Near Real Time Streamflow Data under Lookup Information. When that page opens, in the upper right-hand corner, enter the station number you want to check. 14075000 is Whychus Creek upstream from town; 14076050 is the location downstream from the Locust Street bridge, and 14076100 is at Camp Polk Road near Sisters. There is also a link from the Sisters Fire Department’s website.

Whychus is not the only creek in Sisters’ backyard. Trout Creek has a tributary that runs under State Highway 126 and Highway 20 and through Trapper Point, where there has been occasional minor flooding. Three Creek has no channel so it finds any low spot it can, causing problems at the Brooks-Scanlon Haul Road, the Black Diamond Ranch, and a number of other properties. Indian Ford Creek, with headwaters at Black Butte Ranch, can cause flooding near the Sisters airport.

In the event of a flood in Sisters, an emergency operations center would be set up at Sisters’ fire station, where the joint command of representatives from the City, the fire department, Deschutes

County and the sheriff’s office and other agencies will make the necessary decisions to respond to the flood. The joint command has a plan ready to initiate in the event of a flood, and there are mutual-aid agreements among all agencies.

The City will focus on protecting the infrastructure of sewer/water, bridges, and roads. There are currently three sewer-system crossings on the creek and six water-system crossings. The City has local contractors on standby, ready to remove debris carried by the creek from the bridges.

The fire department will respond first to life threats and stranded victims. They will also assist with evacuations if they are able. Assistant Fire Chief Tim Craig’s job would be to manage all available resources, including the Black Butte Ranch and Cloverdale fire departments, the U.S. Forest Service, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and other agencies.

The fire department will also drive through the affected areas to do a field damage assessment to determine the level of impact of the flood. They will assess structures for habitability. They will not stop to deal with non-life-threatening incidents. There will be very little direct intervention beyond their normal duties of firefighting and medical calls.

The Deschutes County Sheriff’s Office of Emergency Management will help wherever they are needed, by supporting local resources with additional County resources. They act as the conduit to the State of Oregon for more resources. They also manage the damage assessments that go to the State and on to FEMA. They also coordinate with the American Red Cross to set up shelters.

If residents want to receive



PHOTO BY SUE STAFFORD

A resident registered her cellphone for emergency contacts.

emergency notifications on their cell phones, they must register online. The site is [www.deschutes.org/911/alerts](http://www.deschutes.org/911/alerts). The Deschutes Alert System was instituted in May 2016 so that, besides receiving a reverse 911 call on a landline, it is also now possible to receive it on a cell phone or voice-over-Internet platform (VoIP). The alert system covers all of Deschutes County as well as Crooked River Ranch and Camp Sherman in Jefferson County.

Several of the speakers confirmed that sandbags are not a great tool against flooding. They are best utilized to protect outside doors and foundation vents. To build a 100-foot wall, two feet high using sandbags would take 2,100 sandbags. Hay bales with plastic sheeting are a viable alternative, as is plastic sheeting and duct tape on outside doors. Sand piles are available at Village Green Park and Creekside

Campground for residents to fill their own sandbags.

If a resident owns property within the 100-year flood plain, they should definitely have flood insurance. Of the 80 properties identified, only about 50 percent have coverage. If there is damage from a flood, and a homeowner doesn’t have flood insurance, they are on their own, according to Fire Chief Roger Johnson. Homeowners insurance does not cover loss from a flood.

“Familiarize yourself with the creek. What does 500 CFS look like? And then be aware of what the creek is doing,” said Johnson.

Sisters Public Works Director Paul Bertagna was pleased with the turnout of almost 100 people for the event.

“Over the past five years, the City has worked to improve and strengthen our emergency response capabilities,” he said.

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