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Stanislaus River flows will be high through June; boaters, rafters advised to use caution

An above-average snow season in the Sierra means flows on the Stanislaus River will be higher than normal through June, raising safety concerns. Boaters, rafters, canoers and other river-goers are reminded to use caution and take appropriate safety measures while enjoying the river this summer.

The federal Bureau of Reclamation, which operates New Melones Reservoir, will be sending more water than normal down the river to create space behind the dam for snow runoff and to meet pulse flow requirements to assist juvenile salmon in their outmigration efforts.

Pulse flows are intended to help the small parrs and smolts (stages of juvenile salmon) begin their perilous journey down the river, through the Delta and, eventually, to the Pacific Ocean.

Today, the river is running at about 2,000 cubic feet per second (cfs). Beginning early Saturday morning, the bureau gradually will decrease flows to 800 cfs before ramping them back up to 1,600 on Monday.

Flows will range from 800 cfs to 1,200 cfs for the rest of the month in a final effort to encourage any remaining juvenile salmon to move downstream. Typically, by the end of June, flows have slowed to about 300 cfs, where they stay most of the summer.

This month's high flows are not just for fish, however. The California Department of Water Resources, in its final snow survey for 2019, said the [Sierra snowpack is as much as 188%](#) of normal in some locations. The May 1 report estimates there is still more than 1 million acre-feet of water in the Stanislaus River basin remaining as snow that will run off this year.

[New Melones](#) – the state's fourth-largest reservoir – currently holds more than 2 million acre-feet of water, which is 134% of what it normally has in late May. Releasing water now will create space to capture all that snow runoff well into the summer.

Higher flows create hazardous conditions most people are not accustomed to. If you must go near the river, it is advised to wear a life jacket at all times. Free life jackets can be reserved and checked out at five locations of the [Stanislaus Consolidated Fire Department](#):

- Station 26 at 3318 Topeka St., Riverbank

- Station 27 at 450 S. Willowood Drive, Oakdale
- Station 28 at 325 E. G St., Oakdale
- Station 29 at 17700 Main St., Knights Ferry
- Station 30 at 13200 Valley Home Road, Valley Home

Life jackets come in sizes for adults to small children. For more information, call 869-7470.

Though daytime temperatures are forecast to reach into the 90s by this weekend, the water in the river will be much, much colder – about 60 degrees.

National Weather Service experts in Sacramento sent out a tweet earlier this week warning people about perilous river conditions and reminding everyone that water temperatures below 60 degrees are “very dangerous,” especially without a life vest. Arms and legs quickly become stiff in such conditions and breathing can be difficult, experts say. The risk of hypothermia is real.

The Stanislaus River and its series of nine parks from the McHenry Avenue Bridge east to Knights Ferry – collectively known as the String of Pearls – are a popular summertime playground. The parks provide access for boaters, kayakers, rafters, hikers and fishermen.

But even when the river slows down and daytime temperatures begin to rise, everyone is reminded that the water remains cold well into summer. Please be careful while enjoying the river.

About Us: The [South San Joaquin Irrigation District](#) was established in 1909 and is located in Manteca. It provides agricultural irrigation water to about 55,000 acres in Escalon, Ripon and Manteca. In 2005, the district expanded into providing domestic water service to selected cities within its territory. The [Oakdale Irrigation District](#) was created in 1909 and provides agricultural water to about 62,000 acres in northeastern Stanislaus County and southeastern San Joaquin County.

OID and SSJID hold senior water rights on the Stanislaus River. For more than 100 years, our agencies have responsibly delivered surface water to farms in San Joaquin and Stanislaus counties, and for SSJID, thousands of homes in San Joaquin County. We are committed to sensible water policies, innovative irrigation techniques, prudent conservation practices, and important investments in biological studies of the river and fish habitat.

Save the Stan is a public education effort by SSJID and OID to inform Californians about the threat posed by the state’s plan to take more water from the Stanislaus River. For more information, go to www.savethestan.org or our [Facebook page](#).