

## Snowpack keeping area rivers, streams ice cold

By Rachel Rosenbaum / rrosenbaum@appealdemocrat.com Jun 5, 2019

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With temperatures getting closer to triple digits, Yuba-Sutter waterways are starting to look more enticing. But officials warn that melting snowpack makes the rivers too dangerous for swimming.

"It's going to be a few more months before we get those traditional cool, emerald pools we've had in years past," said Daniel Belshe, community engagement manager for South Yuba River Citizens League.

SYRCL and other public safety partners are hosting a press conference today in Nevada County to stress the importance of river safety, especially in light of the many drowning deaths in the Yuba River in recent years. Many of the swimmers they worry about, he said, are those who may not pay attention to local river conditions. And it's not just swimming – dangers can come from people jumping in to rescue their dog or a child and get pulled in.

"A lot of people we're seeing down at the river in past years are from out of the area," Belshe said. "They're assuming it's going to be tranquil pools like in past years and unfortunately it's just raging right now."

Along with the Sierra Nevadas boasting a historical snowpack comes swift and cold currents that can be dangerous to boaters and swimmers. And with a rafting event planned along the Feather River next weekend, law enforcement officials are concerned about safety.

"The body loses heat 25 times faster in cold water than cold air," Sutter County public information officer Chuck Smith wrote in an email. "Cold shock response can cause a heart attack, or a narrowing of the blood vessels. The immediate shock of the cold can cause involuntary inhalation, which can result in drowning."

Even if the shock of the cold water isn't fatal, hypothermia from exposure to cold water is not immediate — as the body protectively cuts off blood flow to "non-essential" muscles, it becomes difficult to maneuver in the water to save oneself, he said.

"Don't boat alone," Smith wrote. "Avoid swimming in the cold water."

If planning on recreating at a body of water, wear a lifejacket, use the buddy system and if with children, designate adults as “water watchers,” the state Division of Boating and Waterways suggests. There are numerous life jacket loan stations up and down the state; check here: <https://tinyurl.com/y6bb4q96>.

In Yuba County, residents can borrow a life vest at Englebright Lake near Smartsville through the California Division of Boating and Waterways.

Belshe said the swift river flows and high river levels are expected through early August, meaning recreators should be wary longer than usual.

And drinking on the waterways is also a no-no, as impaired people make poor judgements that can be deadly.

“This river safety message is huge,” Belshe said.

While SYRCL hosts volunteers spreading the safety message at four river crossings in Nevada County, it is looking to expand its program to the lower Yuba River near Marysville. They hope to add 100 river ambassadors whose mission will be to educate river goers about safety and keeping the river clean.