

# California reels from 'endless' storm onslaught, 14 dead

January 10 2023, by Sebastien VUAGNAT, with Huw GRIFFITH in Los Angeles

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Waters have risen in a flooded neighborhood in Aptos, California.

Relentless storms were ravaging California again Tuesday, the latest bout of extreme weather that has left 14 people dead and prompted evacuation of a star-studded town home to Britain's Prince Harry and

wife Meghan Markle.

Fierce storms caused flash flooding, closed key highways, toppled trees and swept away drivers and passengers—reportedly including a five-year-old-boy who remains missing in central California—and authorities were bracing for more rain and snow to batter America's most populous state.

More than 230,000 California homes and businesses were without power as of early Tuesday, according to tracking site [Poweroutage.us](http://Poweroutage.us).

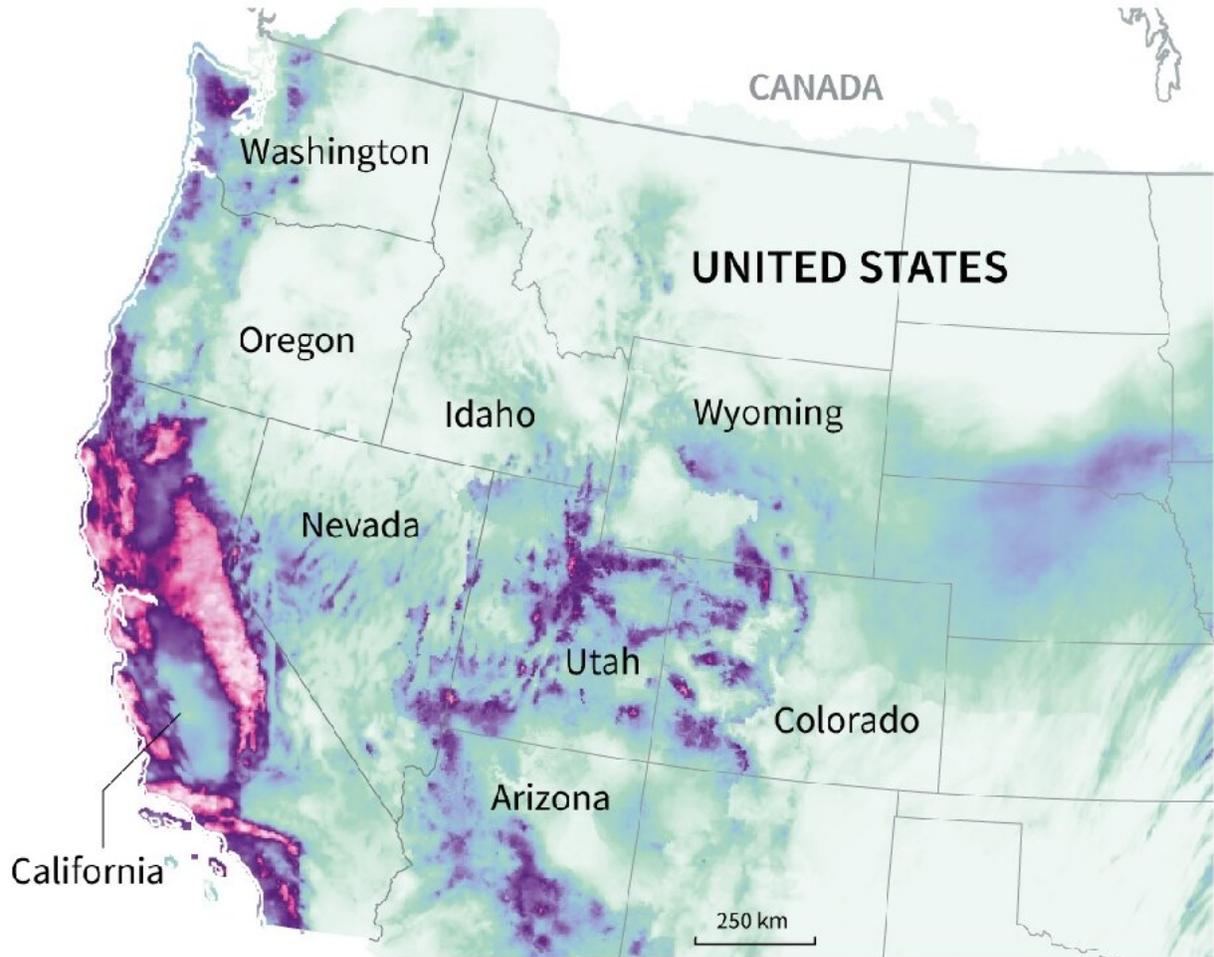
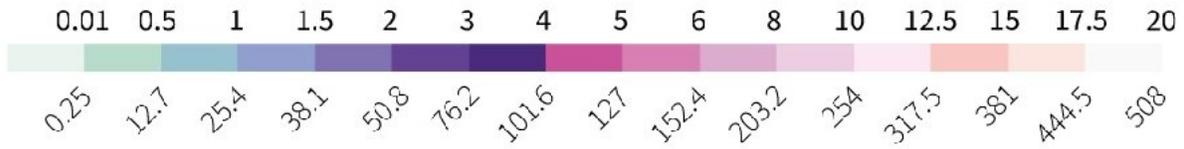
A fresh storm is set to pound the state with as much as seven inches (18 centimeters) of new rain in northern California by Wednesday and "several more feet of snow" in the Sierra Nevada mountains, the National Weather Service said in a Tuesday forecast.

The NWS described an "endless onslaught of atmospheric river events" that is the most powerful storm system since 2005.

The town of Montecito, a favorite of American entertainment royalty such as Oprah Winfrey and Jennifer Aniston, was expected to get up to eight inches of rain in 24 hours—threatening dangerous mudslides on hills already sodden by weeks of downpours.

# Heavy rain hits California

During the last seven days, in inches (mm)



Source: NOAA, data to January 9



Map showing rainfall in California over the last seven days, with data from NOAA to January 9.

Emergency authorities in the town 90 minutes from Los Angeles said anyone in the area should get out.

"LEAVE NOW! This is a rapidly evolving situation. Please pay close attention to emergency alerts," a fire department website said.

An AFP reporter saw police roadblocks set up to prevent people from getting into the town, where several roads were flooded.

The town, whose multi-million dollar properties are perched in breathtaking California countryside, is particularly vulnerable to mudslides because it sits at the foot of a mountain range that was ravaged by fire five years ago.

Hundreds of square miles (kilometers) of land were scorched in 2017 and 2018, denuding the hillsides of the vegetation that normally keeps soil in place.

Devastating January 2018 mudslides in Montecito killed 23 people.



Overflowing rivers have forced the closure of roads in and around Montecito, a California town where authorities have warned of potential mudslides similar to ones that killed 23 people there in 2018.

"Over the last 30 days, Montecito has received 12-20+ inches of rain across the community, exceeding our yearly average of 17 inches," Montecito Fire said on Twitter.

"This cumulative, saturating rain puts the community at greater risk of flooding and debris flow."

It was not clear how many of the town's residents, who also include Ellen DeGeneres, Gwyneth Paltrow, Katy Perry and Rob Lowe, had heeded the call to flee.

## Boy swept away

The Montecito evacuation order came as California was being lashed by the latest in a parade of storms that have already killed 14 people—a toll which Governor Gavin Newsom's office said is already "more lives than wildfires in the past two years combined."

In San Luis Obispo County authorities called off a search for a five-year-old boy as rushing waters were too dangerous for divers, Fox News reported, quoting a county official.



The pier at Capitola Wharf took a hammering in the bad weather.

The child, who fled with his mother from their car as it was inundated by [flood waters](#), has not been declared dead. The mother was rescued.

In Ventura County northwest of Los Angeles, the fire department said it rescued 18 people Monday from an island in the flooded Ventura River.

Swathes of the Golden State were under flood warnings as it struggled to cope with yet more rain on top of near-record downpours in recent weeks—with even more forecast over the coming days.

"Two major episodes of heavy rain and heavy mountain snow are expected to impact California in quick succession during the next couple of days in association with two of the more energetic and moisture-laden parade of cyclones that are aiming directly" for the state, the NWS said.

Last week Newsom declared a state of emergency and on Monday the White House greenlighted the use of federal funds for emergency operations in California.

"We expect to see the worst of it still ahead of us," Newsom told reporters.



San Francisco has seen its wettest 10-day period in 150 years.

### **Downpours in drought**

While heavy [rain](#) is not unusual for California during winter, these downpours are testing the state.

They come as much of the western US is more than two decades into a punishing drought that has seen major increases in the frequency and intensity of wildfires.

Scientists say human-caused climate change, brought about by the unchecked burning of fossil fuels, has supercharged these wild swings in weather.

Storms last week around San Francisco caused flooding, on the heels of a ferocious New Year's Eve downpour which left the ground sodden and waterlogged.

But even the recent heavy rains are not enough to comprehensively reverse the drought.

Scientists say several years of above-average rainfall are needed to get reservoirs back to healthy levels.

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