

# Blizzard warning of up to 10 feet of snow in the Sierra could make travel 'dangerous to impossible'

February 29 2024, by OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ and SCOTT SONNER

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In this photo released by Mammoth Lakes Tourism, snow covers Mammoth Mountain on Tuesday, Feb. 20, 2024, in Mammoth Lakes, Calif. Credit: Jacob Myhre/Mammoth Lakes Tourism via AP

A Pacific storm packing powerful winds and heavy snow is shaping up to be the strongest of the season, forecasters say, as it pushes toward California with potential blizzard conditions in the Sierra and up to 10 feet (3 meters) of snow in the mountains around Lake Tahoe by the weekend.

The National Weather Service in Reno issued a blizzard warning Wednesday for a 300-mile (482-kilometer) stretch of the Sierra from north of Lake Tahoe to south of Yosemite National Park effective from early Thursday to 10 a.m. Sunday.

Widespread blowing snow will create blizzard conditions with white-out conditions and near-zero visibility, making travel "dangerous to impossible" Friday into Saturday morning, when the heaviest snow is expected, the weather service said.

Between 2 and 4 feet (61 to 122 centimeters) is expected in towns along Tahoe's shore and 5 to 10 feet (1.5 to 3 meters) at the highest elevations with winds gusting in excess of 100 mph (160 kph) over Sierra ridgetops, the weather service said. Road closures and [power outages](#) are likely.

"Do not take this storm lightly," the weather service in Reno warned.

Potential snow totals vary under different scenarios, but the National Weather Service's Weather Prediction Center in College Park, Maryland, said there's little doubt "March will be coming in like a lion for the West Coast states."

An "impressive winter storm will hammer the Cascades to the Sierra with blizzard conditions to end the week," the center said Wednesday. Heavy but lesser snow is on its way to the Rocky Mountains, and "heavy rain is expected for the [coastal areas](#) between San Francisco and the

Olympic Peninsula of Washington where a few inches are likely over the next 3 days."

The lead scientist at a snow lab atop the Sierra said it's possible they could break their modern-day record of about 3.5 feet (1 meter) of snow in a single day from back in 1989.

"It's a very serious storm for us," Andrew Schwartz said Wednesday from UC-Berkeley's Central Sierra Snow Lab, founded in 1946 in Soda Springs, California, northwest of Lake Tahoe.

Kristi Anderson, a waitress at The Gateway Cafe in South Lake Tahoe, California said she's already filled up her gas tank and was stocking up on food and firewood.



In this photo provided by Mammoth Lakes Tourism, snowboarders walk in the snow on Monday, Feb. 19, 2024, in Mammoth Lakes, Calif. Credit: Jacob Myhre/Mammoth Lakes Tourism via AP

"Last year we had a lot of storms, and the power went out a lot and a lot of people couldn't get out to get food and the [grocery stores](#) didn't have power so, we're preparing for that," Anderson said. "I'm hoping not a lot of people travel here because the roads will be really bad."

Others remain skeptical.

Richard Cunningham said he's heard before about forecasts for the storm of the century that didn't materialize since he moved from Las Vegas to Reno in 1997.

"Same story, different day," he said Wednesday. "Sometimes it doesn't even snow."

But Schwartz, the Sierra snow lab scientist, said he's been watching the computer models over the past two weeks and, if anything, thinks the National Weather Service's snowfall predictions are conservative.

"The forecasted total at the snow lab of 6 to 9 feet (1.8 to 2.8 meters) is on the lower side of what the models are suggesting," he said.

It's good news for Tahoe-area ski resorts, where the season began with little snow but has been picking up as of late on the heels of last year's near record snowfall.

Officials at Palisades Tahoe ski resort, where a skier was killed in an

avalanche last month, said on its web site Wednesday it's "thrilled about the prospect" for [heavy snow](#) while at the same time preparing for "challenging operational impacts."

"There will be slick roads, reduced visibility, and closures on mountain passes that are pretty much guaranteed," Palisades Tahoe spokesman Patrick Lacey said.

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Correction note: This story has been updated to correct the forecast from the National Weather Service for travel as "dangerous to impossible," not "extremely dangerous to possible."

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