# **Chevron braces for possible flooding in Kern River Oil Field**

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**Body**

Apr. 24—Chevron Corp. is shutting in some of its production in the ***Kern*** River ***Oil*** Field to minimize chances of an ***oil*** spill in case the unprecedented snowpack above Isabella Lake leads to flooding near Bakersfield.

A spokesman said by email Monday the company is monitoring the situation and working with government agencies to "prepare for potential flooding" by doing things like isolating wells and planning to scale up such efforts as needed "depending on river levels."

Pipelines serving the ***oil*** field are being drained and power has been turned off in some areas, ***Kern*** River Watermaster Mark Mulkay said Monday. The intention is not only to protect against an accidental release of crude into the ***Kern***, he added, but also to make sure ***oil*** is not actively pumped into the river if disaster strikes.

"They know what's coming and what they're getting ready for," Mulkay said about recent actions by Chevron officials. He added that the company has "all kinds of people out there working on it."

The ***Kern*** River ***Oil*** Field, extending north-northeast of Bakersfield alongside its namesake, is considered the most dense oilfield operation in California. Some of its wells are located inside the river's levee system, while some are outside of it.

Spokesman Sean Comey said Chevron is keeping in regular communication with what he said were appropriate government agencies. He noted the company has a response plan from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

***Kern*** County's most senior official, Chief Administrative Officer Ryan Alsop, said Monday he had heard nothing about flood-related risks in the ***oil*** field, adding, "if that is an issue, Chevron has not made us aware of it."

The state agency most directly responsible for overseeing ***oil*** producers, the California Geologic Energy Management division, did not respond to a request for comment Monday.

Word of actions being taken by Chevron to limit harm from a potential flood has come as state and local agencies reported stepping up efforts to protect people and infrastructure from snowmelt from the southern Sierra Nevada. Weather is a big focus now, because sunlight and warm temperatures could accelerate flows from the mountains into the Central Valley.

The ***Kern*** River watershed is estimated to be holding snow equivalent to three times the amount of water Isabella Lake can hold. Officials have warned that if warm weather sends water downstream too fast, then the lake might not be able to control it all. In a worst-case scenario, so much flow would have to be released down the river that it could damage infrastructure and possibly flood areas in and around Bakersfield.

Comey pointed out that Chevron generates its own electricity for its work in the ***Kern*** River Oilfield and, given that it comes from areas not expected to be impacted by flooding, the company does not anticipate losing power.

He noted the company used its response plans in 2017 and that Chevron was able to prevent any significant impact on the environment in that wet year.

Alsop said that as the county awaits maps from the state Department of Water Resources showing where flooding might happen in ***Kern***, its biggest concerns include the possibility of having to close Highway 178 through the ***Kern*** River Canyon.

He said at this point that would leave only two working access roads: Highway 178 east of Lake Isabella and — with mudslide repair work keeping Highway 155 closed — Caliente Bodfish Road south of the lake.

Other priorities for the county, besides removing debris near bridges and unplugging culverts, he said, are Lamont and Poso Creek.

Alsop noted that flooding of residential areas was avoided in the Lamont area in March thanks to the availability of sediment basins, holding ponds and a huge drain field that can take on diverted water.

He said water levels may rise in Poso Creek because of Sierra snowmelt, and so county workers have focused on removing debris to lessen the impact of flooding in McFarland.

Recently the county had to close part of Round Mountain Road at Hart Park because the ***Kern*** River's flow was eroding a slope and undermining the roadway, Alsop said. He added the road is a main access point serving about 150 homes.

The ***Kern*** County Fire Department said in a news release Monday it will release information about preparations for potential flooding as it becomes available.

"In the meantime, all are encouraged to monitor weather forecasts and sign up for emergency notifications at ReadyKern.com," the department stated.

"For questions or comments related to areas of the ***Kern*** River flowing through Bakersfield, or to report blocked waterways, individuals can call the Water Dispatch Hotline 24 hours a day at (661) 326-3715."

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