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Behind California's extreme weather emergency

written by Scott Scheffer
March 6, 2023



Submerged cars on Interstate 5 in the San Fernando Valley, Los Angeles County, Feb. 25.

March 3 — While the giant U.S. energy corporations and banks seek out every way to profit from the climate change emergency that they inflicted on the world, extreme weather events are becoming the new normal.

In the last week of February, rain, snow, and damaging winds hit the U.S. west coast, breaking historic records. Instead of reining in the energy corporations that created this crisis, the Biden administration has proven to be every bit the ally to them as every preceding president since the beginning of the 20th century.

Over the last week, people were stranded in their homes in the San Bernardino and Sierra Nevada mountain ranges. The highest elevations experienced the heaviest snowfall. Mount Baldy, east of Los Angeles, got 6.5 feet of snow. An astonishing 15 feet of snow has closed Yosemite National Park.

Thousands were without power. Homes were damaged by winds, and roof cave-ins from the weight of snow. As of this writing, the number of people who may still be stranded in their homes is unclear. But during the first two days of March, people communicated to the press that they were nearly out of food, baby formula, medicine, and gasoline for their generators.

The snowfall hindered driving so much that the Department of Transportation was forced to put plans to evacuate people on hold when roads proved to be much too hazardous even for their equipment. A section of Interstate 5 about 70 miles north of Los Angeles called the Grapevine, where 100,000 drivers travel every day, was closed.

It's not unusual for the highest elevations to be hit by snow storms. But areas all the way down to 1,500 feet above sea level are now covered with snow and look more like the Himalayas than California mountain ranges.

The Woodland Hills neighborhood in the San Fernando Valley - known for being one

of the hottest and driest areas within the city limits of L.A. – got 10 inches of rain. The city of Pasadena had hail storms. Photographs appeared in major media and posted on social media of cars stuck in busy urban intersections with only the roof sticking out above flood waters. Governor Gavin Newsom has declared an emergency in 13 California counties.

Atmospheric rivers more frequent

The drought that has been plaguing the west, and was the worst in 1,200 years by some measures, appears to have improved – reservoirs are filling up, and rivers and creeks are rising. But it would be a huge mistake to think of this event as a silver lining and diminish its significance as part of the overall disaster that the global climate change crisis represents.

Like the ongoing drought in East Africa, the floods that ravaged Pakistan, the historic wildfires in the western states of the U.S., the heatwaves that hit China, parts of Europe and the U.S. west coast in recent years, these February 2023 rain and snow storms are a very dangerous sign that extreme weather events are intensifying.

Atmospheric rivers are happening more frequently because of the rising temperature of the atmosphere and are the direct cause of California's latest weather disaster.

Atmospheric rivers are long streams of water carried over the Pacific from the warm bands of air over the Tropics toward the west coast of the U.S. They may move streams of water between 250 and 375 miles wide. The strongest atmospheric rivers can move anywhere between 7 and 25 times as much water as the flow of the Mississippi River.

Normally, they may be part of a cycle during which, after a period of dry weather, a

good healthy rainstorm replenishes water supplies and helps agriculture to recover. But climate scientists are now very concerned about an increase in the frequency of weather crises when several atmospheric rivers might deluge the West Coast by happening all at once or over a short period of time. That is what walloped a huge part of California during the last week of February.

The [Jan. 3 New York Times explained](#) the growing concern on the part of climatologists that the kind of storms that hit the West Coast more than 150 years ago could happen again. The Times reported that “a pile-on of wet weather caused catastrophic flooding across California and the Pacific Northwest in the winter of 1861-62, when deluges swept away homes and farms and turned valleys into vast lakes ... the risk of a replay of those floods is rising.”

The article cited a study that found that “nearly four out of five years between 1981 and 2019, half or more of all atmospheric rivers that affected the state were part of an atmospheric river family, or a rapid parade of storms.”

The increasing possibility of a repeat of the 1861-62 calamity is due to rising global temperatures from burning fossil fuels. Today, California is the most populous state, and a repeat of what happened 150 years ago would be far worse.

Biden's sophistry

In President Joe Biden's Feb. 7 State of the Union speech, he referred to the climate crisis as “existential,” but went on to say that “we will be stuck with fossil fuels for a long time.” This might be considered sophistry – using a bit of truth to strengthen a big deception.

Biden left out that his administration provoked the war in Ukraine, which is a devastating setback in the fight against climate change. Even before U.S. imperialism's provocations cornered Russia into war, U.S. banks and energy

companies were looking for ways to take the European natural gas market from Russia.

In a recent article, investigative journalist [Seymour Hersch presented convincing evidence](#) that the sabotage of the Nord Stream pipeline, meant to carry liquid natural gas from Russia to the European market, was carried out by Washington. Now the U.S. is producing more natural gas than ever before – most of it being exported to Europe.

Biden has also greenlit auctions of Gulf of Mexico oil drilling rights and okayed more oil drilling in Alaska.

Once they are done counting the money, U.S. oil giants Exxon and Chevron are expected to have brought in another \$100 billion in profit during 2022 due to the war that the U.S. instigated in Ukraine.

The global temperature has risen 1.1 degrees since the beginning of the capitalist industrial age. Annual United Nations-sponsored conferences have pledged to keep it from rising past a 1.5-degree increase by the year 2050.

Climatologists have come to realize that the consequences of burning fossil fuels are coming faster than anticipated. This is a global emergency. Capitalism is, in fact, the “existential” threat. The dominance of energy corporations, banks, and other mega-corporations must come to an end.

