

Two storms forecast for central San Joaquin Valley this week

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Two storms, the first rolling in Wednesday and the second and larger one coming Friday, could bring as much as an inch of rain total to the central San Joaquin Valley.

That's the forecast for Fresno this week, said Dan Harty, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Hanford. And Harty said Sunday that there will be traceable measures of rain throughout the Valley this week.

The news comes as a slight relief as California endures its driest year in recorded history. The latest evidence of how dry it has been: The weather service said that from Jan. 1 through Feb. 19, Fresno reached its warmest first 50 days of any calendar year.

"It's good news but it's not going to end the drought by any means," Harty said.

Wednesday's storm is forecast to provide only light to moderate rain throughout the Valley, with the heaviest rain in Fresno. A quarter of an inch is expected in Fresno and places such as Kern County could see a tenth of an inch of rain. The storm, expected to taper off Thursday morning, could drop about an inch of rain and up to a foot of snow above 7,000 feet in the southern Sierra.

A larger storm is expected to arrive by Friday, bringing heavier rain in Fresno and even a slight chance of thunderstorms, lingering into Saturday and possibly Sunday. Other parts of the Valley could receive from half an inch to an inch of rain, Harty said.

If the storms bring what's expected, it will really tip the rain gauge. Since the start of the rain year July 1, Fresno has only 2.3 inches, well short of the average of 7.45 inches.

For the first time, the weather service has issued winter red flag warnings reflecting the tinder-dry conditions in the southern Sierra, the Tehachapi Mountains and the south end of the Valley. Unusually dry vegetation increases the likelihood of wildfires.

With a few more days until Wednesday's storm, Harty said the forecast will be fine-tuned.

In the meantime, springlike weather is expected to continue, Harty said. Sunday's high reached 76 degrees in Fresno, much warmer than the normal of 64 degrees for the day. Highs Monday and Tuesday are expected to reach the mid-70s.

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