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River Watch Prepares for Launch as Spring Breakup Forecast Indicates Above-Average Flood Risk

High snow loads and greater than average ice thickness have created conditions conducive to potential flooding across the state

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska – The State of Alaska Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management is actively assisting local communities as they prepare for the spring breakup along Alaska’s major river systems.

Each year, the River Watch program revitalizes a long-standing partnership between the division and the National Weather Service. This collaboration, which has spanned more than four decades, utilizes the expertise of the Alaska-Pacific River Forecast Center and emergency management personnel to conduct aerial surveillance of rivers susceptible to ice jam flooding. These teams are responsible for issuing timely flood warnings and providing direct support to communities during flood emergencies.

Surveillance flights are scheduled to commence along the Kuskokwim and Upper Yukon rivers during the first week of May.

The Alaska-Pacific River Forecast Center recently updated its spring flood outlook, incorporating data on river ice thickness, current snowpack levels, and long-term climate trends. This year’s statewide forecast indicates an increased probability of a dynamic breakup. In such scenarios, river ice remains thick and strong until the rapid influx of snowmelt forces it downstream, significantly increasing the risk of jams.

DHS&EM Director Bryan Fisher said, “These communities are familiar with the River Watch program and are prepared to act. The primary mission is to provide the earliest possible warnings and to deploy emergency management support to affected areas as quickly as possible.”

In addition to aerial monitoring, River Watch teams are conducting regular conference calls with riverfront communities to share the latest forecast updates and essential breakup information.

Resources:

Overview of the River Watch program: <https://youtu.be/NcdHTMIKaKMd>

This year’s breakup forecast may be found at <http://www.weather.gov/aprfc/floodpotential> and <https://youtu.be/Bt-NJsbL0No>

Break up map at <https://www.weather.gov/aprfc/breakupMap>

Fresh Eyes on Ice <https://www.facebook.com/groups/FreshEyesOnIce>

Flood Preparedness Checklist [Link](#)

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