

Hundreds Still Marooned In De Luz; Food Runs Low

By STEVE LaRUE
Staff Writer, The San Diego Union

DE LUZ — Mud slides, raging creeks and the rain-swollen Santa Margarita River tightened their grip yesterday on this 200-family community in the county's northwest corner, which has been cut off from the rest of the county since Sunday.

Sheriff's helicopters airlifted medical supplies to isolated DeLuz Heights residents with heart and respiratory ailments yesterday morning as Red Cross copters flew in food supplies.

No injuries or damage to homes was reported in the besieged area. But massive damage to water mains was reported, water reserves for firefighting were low and damage to roads was described as the most severe in a decade or longer. A food shortage was feared if the rains kept up much longer.

"We've never been completely isolated before," said Darlene Berg. "We just feel so utterly helpless. Our men are walking the roads checking on all the families."

Berg, an employee of DeLuz Heights Municipal Water District, said rain gauges showed 17 inches of rain there since Jan. 30. Normal yearly rainfall here is about 18 inches.

"There's just an unbelievable amount of damage," said Fire Chief Bill Rose, who estimated it at more than \$1 million. "Last year, we had some damage and we thought we wouldn't see a flood like that again for 100 years. This year is worse."

Ross Daily, a county planning commissioner, said the avocado and citrus area's last link to Fallbrook was washed away Sunday night when about 6 inches of rain fell in six hours.

"It took out everything we had — six-foot culverts just stood on their ends," Daily said. "We have one 16-inch water pipe bent around just like it was a straw."

Another 5 inches of rain poured down on this already saturated upland area Monday night, Daily said. He said damage has been worse than in the flood years of 1978 and 1968.

"We had a mudslide on our grove and about 20 (avocado) trees are gone — they're in a mud pile," said Maurine Ross of DeLuz Heights.

The Santa Margarita River, described as surging four feet deep at points where it is 100 feet wide, last week severed the DeLuz and Daily roads access to Fallbrook, Berg said.

DeLuz Creek, which drains a 75-square-mile area, rampaged over DeLuz-Murrieta Road, cutting the route to Temecula, she said. And Sunday's deluge whiped out parts of an unnamed backcountry road to Rancho California, swelling the river to a depth of eight feet, she said.

"That was our last way out," Berg said.

Members of several families, such as Fire Chief Rose's daughter Cathy, were forced to wait out the rains in Fallbrook and other nearby communities, he said.

Forecasters predicted two more inches of rain would fall here last night. Electricity is still on and stores of drinking water are plentiful.

(Continued on B-7, Col. 1)



The swollen Sweetwater River has turned the grassy plain of Sweetwater Park into a new lake.

—Staff Photo by Joe Holly