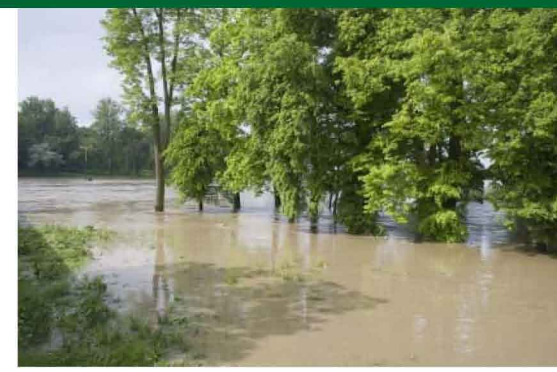
U.S. Forest Service

Know Before You Go

Preparing to Visit a National Forest

Flash Floods



Flash floods are rapidly developing floods that can happen with little or no warning. Flash floods can occur in mountainous areas on small streams, on rivers and even in towns. Water levels can suddenly rise in heavy rainstorms, leaving little time before small streams become raging rivers. Sometimes a flash flood can unleash its deadly force in minutes.

The National Weather Service issues flash flood watches and warnings which are transmitted on NOAA weather radios and through local media. A flash flood **watch** means threatening weather is possible in the area. A flash flood **warning** means you may have only seconds to escape. A flash flood can happen so rapidly that you may not get a warning. If a flash flood warning is issued for your area, **go to safety immediately.**

Safety Checklist

- ☐ Know your area's flood risks. Monitor the NOAA weather radio all hazards bulletins, or your local news stations for vital weather information.
- ☐ Stay alert for signs of heavy rain (thunder and lightning), both where you are and upstream. Watch for rising water levels.
- ☐ If flooding occurs, get to higher ground. Leave low-lying areas immediately.
- ☐ Don't try to outrun a flash flood in your car. Climb to safety immediately.
- ☐ Avoid areas already flooded, especially if the water is flowing fast. Do not attempt to cross flowing streams. Remember: turn around; don't drown.
- ☐ Don't try to swim to safety; wait for rescuers to come to you.
- ☐ Do not camp or park your vehicle along streams and rivers, particularly during threatening conditions.
- ☐ Be especially cautious at night, when it is harder to recognize and respond to danger.
- ☐ Visit http://www.noaa.gov/ for weather updates and for driving tips: http://preview.weather.com/ready/checklists/drivingChecklist.html
- ☐ When possible, carry a NOAA weather radio.

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