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# OPINION

## EDITORIALS

### The flood's lessons

■ Most valley residents aren't accustomed to worrying about the weather.

**W**hen we live in the San Joaquin Valley, we take our moderate weather for granted, somehow believing that we aren't vulnerable to nature's fury. But then events like the California flood come along to remind us that even in the Valley, the weather can be devastating.

The flood was such an odd spectacle for us that authorities closed down part of Friant Road for a time Saturday because drivers were obstructing traffic as they gawked at debris floating down the raging San Joaquin River.

National Weather Service officials said this was one of the two or three worst floods in the state this century if you judge by the large number of regions affected. Gov. Wilson has declared a state of emergency in 41 counties, including Fresno, Madera and Tulare.

Although flood waters are receding with improved weather, major highways and roads around the state and Valley remained closed, complicating the drive Sunday for students returning to college from Christmas break and weekend travelers trying to get home.

But the closed roadways are a minor circumstance compared with the many Valley residents forced out of their homes by the flooding. Those living along the San Joaquin River in Fresno and Madera counties were especially hard hit. In the Modesto area, the Tuolumne River and the San Joaquin forced more than 3,000 residents out of their homes.

Damages from the flood must still be calculated, but the cost will be huge to repair the public infrastructure that was damaged around the state and the devastation to the homes and other private property. Personal effects lost in the flood can never be replaced, and that will take a psychological toll on many people. But the disaster declarations from President Clinton and Gov. Wilson will play a big role in the rebuilding effort. It is comforting to have government there when we need it. "We will continue to provide all necessary state resources to assist individuals as they begin to rebuild and recover from these devastating storms," Wilson said Sunday.

After the clean up, it is imperative that we learn the lessons of the great flood of 1997. Although public agencies appeared to do their jobs well, the crisis offers an opportunity to do a post-mortem on those efforts to see where improvements can be made.

The flood also gives the community a chance to review the land-use planning for the region, especially in the San Joaquin River bottom where developers are determined to build homes. They contend the flooding only defined the river's most flood-prone areas, making it easier for them to safely plot homes. But then what else are they going to say when their view of the area is profit-driven?

Supporters of the San Joaquin River Parkway say the flood should be a warning to keep the river bottom free of development. There is reason to be optimistic. Doug Harrison of the Fresno Metropolitan Flood District said the district will study the flood data and may come up with recommendations for stricter development standards in the river bottom.