

BIG BAD STORM HEADED OUR WAY

Forget about The Great American Eclipse coming on Monday. Before then, in a rare event, up to 3 inches of snow are expected to fall across the East Bay Hills, Mount St. Helena, Mount Diablo, and Mount Hamilton, with Big Sur eyeing as much as 6 inches, and Southern California setting up for snow down to 2,500 feet, not to mention the brutally cold temps expected in Yosemite, Tahoe, and the Central Valley, along with plenty of rain in what may be one of the last storms before the dry season begins. Here are more details:

Amy Graff, sfgate.com: A winter-like storm is expected to bring biting cold and snow to California in spring. A storm system that the National Weather Service described as “anomalously cold” is headed for the Golden State, and it will be carrying a polar air mass. Cold air is expected to be funneled into California both ahead of the storm’s arrival and behind it, said Nicole Sarment, a forecaster with the weather service.

The storm is poised to sweep California Wednesday into Friday, bringing rain and thunderstorm chances across the Golden State and pushing snow levels as low as 1,500 to 2,000 feet, even in the San Francisco Bay Area, where snow in spring is infrequent. The precipitation is expected to be mostly beneficial and precipitation totals minimal — but the cold is forecast to be extraordinary for this time of year and perhaps record-breaking. “It’s looking to be pretty cold,” said Sarment, who works in the weather service’s Bay Area office.

Downtown San Francisco is expected to hit a low of 43 degrees Thursday night, while downtown Los Angeles could see a low of 42 degrees Friday night. The weather service’s Los Angeles office said Friday’s temperatures “would be considered cold for January,” let alone April.

Temperatures in these coastal cities could almost be considered balmy compared with the temperatures some other parts of the state are expected to get: Truckee is forecast to see a low of 17 degrees Friday night, Yosemite 19 degrees, and Napa a low of 38 degrees. The storm is predicted to initially push into far northern California Wednesday into Thursday. The weather service’s Eureka office warned subfreezing temperatures will be possible in the state’s northwest corner — including Del Norte, Humboldt, Trinity and Lake counties — beginning Wednesday night.

Thursday and Friday should also be chilly, and temperatures in the mountains could drop to as low as 15 to 25 degrees. Snow levels on Thursday “will be quite low for early April,” the agency said, and snow could fall as low as 1,500 to 2,500 feet. Snow amounts, however, aren’t forecast to be significant. The Sacramento Valley and western slopes of the northern Sierra Nevada could see light precipitation as early as Wednesday, with rain and snow chances continuing Thursday and Friday. While snow levels in the Interstate 50 and Interstate 80 corridors could drop to 2,000 feet, snow amounts in these areas aren’t expected to be that high, with about 6 inches of fresh powder expected at the highest elevations. “Heaviest snow will occur overnight Wednesday into early Thursday morning,” the weather service said.

The Tahoe Basin is also expected to see the heaviest snowfall Wednesday night into Thursday and could pick up 8 or more inches of snow in this storm, the weather service said. The central Sierra, including Yosemite, is likely to see the brunt of the storm on Thursday and Friday, and the weather service is predicting Yosemite's Mariposa Grove could pick up 12 to 18 inches of snow.

In the San Francisco Bay Area, cloud cover is expected to increase Wednesday as the storm approaches the region. Temperatures will likely begin to cool Wednesday, but the big drop is forecast to come Thursday, with many inland valleys seeing lows in the 30s, the weather service said. Similar unseasonably cool temperatures are expected Friday. "I know we'll be approaching record lows for Friday and Saturday morning," Sarment said. Locations across the Bay Area are predicted to measure 0.10 to 0.50 inch of rain Thursday and Friday. Up to 3 inches of snow is possible at elevations of 2,000 feet and above including on Mount St. Helena, across the East Bay hills, and on Mount Diablo and Mount Hamilton, Sarment said.

To the south of the Bay Area, the Santa Lucia Mountains in Big Sur are expected to record 3 to 6 inches of snow. The weather service's LA office is forecasting cold, showery weather Thursday and Friday, with rainfall totals ranging from about one-third to two-thirds of an inch in San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Ventura and LA counties. Snow fall levels in these counties are expected to be about 2,500 to 3,000 feet, with up to 1 to 3 inches of snow possible.