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Cops: Labor Day still a lot of work

By GREG WELTER - Staff Writer

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CHICO — Despite numbers for arrests and river rescues that were lower across the board compared to last year, officials were no less concerned Tuesday about the challenge to control Labor Day.

"As predicted, Labor Day remained a significant event," said Chico Police Chief Mike Maloney.

Maloney said weekend media coverage of Labor Day, and the float on the Sacramento River in particular, may not have represented the true picture.

"We were being told it was 70 degrees and fair," Maloney said in a media briefing Tuesday, giving his take on what was being reported. "But that wasn't really the case," he said.

The number of arrests indicates that alcohol is still a problem, Maloney said.

"Yes, there was a decline in the volume of activity, but it continues to be a concern," Maloney said about Labor Day celebrations in Chico, mainly on Friday and Saturday night.

Calling the law enforcement resources expended between Friday and Monday nights in Chico "incalculable," Maloney placed officer overtime cost at approximately \$50,000.

"These are resources that we were prevented from using somewhere else," he added.

Maloney said Labor Day, looked at on a regional basis, has to become more manageable.

On Sunday an estimated 11,000 people took part in the traditional river float. A tenth of that number floated Saturday, and the count on Labor Day itself was about 800.

While all the numbers were lower than in some years past, Glenn County Sheriff Larry

Jones said beer can beach, a party spot during and after the float, was trashed beyond levels seen last year.

"The carnage that took place there is completely unacceptable," he said, pointing to a picture of a large metal barbecue, among items that got left behind.

By Tuesday groups and individuals had cleared all of the recyclables from beer can beach and the river banks, but Jones said a lot of garbage remained.

He said he was sending a team out Tuesday to assess the environmental damage to the island, which is in Glenn County.

Despite about 3,000 fewer tubers on the river than last year, Jones said his boating patrols were taxed to the limit, and noted that without trained rescuers on the water, there would have been serious injuries or even deaths.

"We were taking people on board who were vomiting, and had no idea where they were," he said.

Jones counted 56 rescues on Sunday. A multi-agency water rescue team counted 241 rescues over four days, and 41 of those required medical care to some degree.

Cal Fire-Butte County Battalion Chief Greg McFadden said is was so busy at one point Sunday, that water rescue teams had to call in extra help from fire stations.

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Stacey Vincent, a nurse who coordinates Enloe Medical Center's emergency room, said 52 people were brought in over four days to be treated for alcohol overdoses. Two required critical care.

At one point, Vincent said 25 percent of the hospital's emergency department was sectioned off and used just for alcohol-related problems. The breakdown on the inebriated patients was 35 males, 17 females.

There were no assaults on law enforcement personnel at the river, said California State Parks warden Travis Gee. He said revelers on beer can beach threw rocks and full cans of beer at a Butte County Sheriff's Office helicopter, which came in to help break up one of several fights on the island.

In addition to fights, Gee said authorities became concerned when a number of women began taking off their tops. That went on for about 30 minutes, but eventually ended with no intervention from officers.

Gee said officials reacted to only a small number of troublemakers, and sent in several officers at a time to deal with them.

"Unlike in past years, people were compliant when we asked them to move or let us get to an incident," Gee said.

There were no sexual batteries reported at the river over the weekend, Gee said, adding some could come in later.

Overall, Maloney guessed, education efforts and other factors, may have resulted in 3,000 fewer people celebrating Labor Day in the Chico area last weekend.

Officials said Labor Day 2011 was "a step in the right direction," but agreed that the event needs to be further "scaled back."

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