

Floodwaters flow to central Nebraska

Written by Brenda Johnson Brandt

Flooding conditions that began with Sept. 11 rains in the Front Range flowed into central Nebraska early this week and flood warnings continue.

In the Sterling area, another 4 inches of rain was received Monday, Sept. 23, causing another surge of water to head down the South Platte River.

Sedgwick County Emergency Management Director Mark Turner said Tuesday morning that spotters are keeping a close eye on the water coming down the Platte.

Volunteers deserve the credit for heeding the flood warning last week and preparing for the water to avoid extensive damage, according to Turner.

After flooding the town of Crook in Logan County, the South Platte waters ran fast toward Sedgwick County last Tuesday, Sept. 17.

Turner said they had enough warning that they were able to hold the water back and the infrastructure stayed intact.

There was concern for the water treatment plants near the river in all three towns—Sedgwick, Ovid and Julesburg. They were able to sandbag and prepare.

Two houses in the flood area were firmed up and sandbagged as well, said Turner.

But Tuesday night, Sept. 17, near Ovid, there was a breach under the railroad track and a whole bunch of volunteers showed up, praised Turner. Fifteen homes in that area became targets.

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The road and bridge crew brought sand, equipment came in, and they got a berm built to successfully ward off the waters when they hit at 1:30 a.m. Wednesday, Sept. 18.

The water crested at the Julesburg bridge Wednesday afternoon at about 1 p.m. It was a record crest at 10.97 feet, as the previous record was 10.44 feet, according to Turner.

After devastating parts of Colorado, the flood waters entered Nebraska on the South Platte River last Wednesday. The National Weather Service posted flood warnings for the South Platte River, the North Platte River and the main Platte River in at least three Nebraska counties—Deuel, Keith and Lincoln.

Some flooding was reported around Big Springs, Neb., as the Platte waters moved east.

Although water backed up into North Platte, Neb.'s storm sewers and caused some minor flooding in the city Sunday, Sept. 22, city workers quickly capped the storm sewers and used a trash pump and two fire engines to pump water out of the city. By Monday morning, the streets of North Platte were virtually dry.

Floodwater reached Cozad, Neb., Monday, Sept. 23, causing river levels to rise more than 5 feet since Sunday morning.

“Water will continue to move down the Platte River,” said Earl Imler, response and recover manager at the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency. “We’ll continue to see high water levels move east down the river for the rest of the month.”

The water level at Cozad was forecast to crest at minor flood stage sometime Tuesday, Sept. 24. Minimal impacts were expected.

The flood warnings end at Grand Island, Neb., where the water level is forecast to reach 6.7 feet for minor flood stage by Thursday, Sept. 26.

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Logan County hit hard

Logan County was hit hard by the floodwaters. Late last week, Logan County Emergency Manager Bob Owens gave preliminary information indicating 180 residences were affected by the flood. That includes 15 homes that were destroyed.

Federal Emergency Management Agency personnel teams were in Logan County Tuesday, Sept. 24, going home to home in two-man teams to hand out information on registering for FEMA assistance.

Friday, Sept. 20, 73 miles of asphalt and dirt roads were compromised, and it was unknown as to the severity due to the water level.

All of the main bridges in Logan County were compromised, including eight state bridges and one county bridge.

A federal assistance team provided support to the state agencies. It was a great collaborative effort among many entities to help the residents of Logan County.

The Colorado Division of Homeland Security Office of Emergency Management along with the Division of Fire Protection and Control, Department of Corrections, Colorado Department of Transportation and the Colorado State Patrol provided support to local agencies. The Salvation Army and Red Cross provided services and support to the public, as well.

After being closed to students since Saturday, Sept. 14, Northeastern Junior College in Sterling was to resume classes Wednesday, Sept. 25.

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While the campus remained dry all last week, not seeing any water damage from the flooding from the nearby river area, the City of Sterling issued a no-flush order for the entire city due to an inoperable pump station serving the wastewater treatment plant that was damaged when the floodwaters came.

The no-flush order was followed by a no-food-service order put out by the Northeast Colorado Health Department.

With no ability to provide food service, indoor showers, laundry and restrooms, the college evacuated all students with the exception of a few who were unable to leave campus for various reasons.

Special provisions were made for that group of students, allowing them to stay on campus with access to necessities.

Ironically, when Sterling lifted the no-flush order Monday morning, Sept. 23 and restaurants and fast-food establishments began opening for business, the Logan County area saw record rainfall. As much as 4 inches was reported in some areas, which brought some flooding and other water-related issues to the city and campus.

These issues were expected to be short-lived, although one parking lot on campus saw water levels come up over the doors of a few cars parked in the area.

Last week, some Sterling-area residents who work in Holyoke were forced to travel west to get on Interstate 76, then exit at the Sterling-Holyoke ramp in order to travel east to Holyoke. Highway 6 out of Sterling was closed from Monday through Friday, Sept. 16-20.

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Economists begin to assess disaster impact

In the aftermath of flooding that devastated northern Colorado, state economists have begun to assess the financial impact of the disaster and are predicting a boost for some sectors.

Employment in the construction labor and materials industries, along with lodging businesses, should increase, the legislature's chief economist said last week.

After a sharp immediate economic decline, natural disasters park "a sharp rebound in economic activity as resources are poured into rebuilding and restoring the infrastructure of homes and other things," said Natalie Mullis, speaking to lawmakers during a quarterly review.

The full economic effect of the disaster is unknown. The floods damaged or destroyed nearly 2,000 homes. More than 200 miles of state highways and 50 bridges were also damaged in the state.

AP news reports contributed to this story.

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