

River Hits Record Flood Level In North Dakota City

BY DAVE KOLPACK
Associated Press

MINOT, N.D. — Geese and airboats on patrol shared the streets of Minot on Friday as the Souris River set a new record for flooding, rising so quickly that its could be seen climbing up the side of homes in the North Dakota city.

The Souris broke a more than 130-year-old record at noon when it measured 1,558.52 feet above sea level at the city's Broadway Bridge. That was about 9.5 feet above flood stage and a half-foot higher than the record set in 1881.

The river is expected to go as much as 6 or 7 feet higher over the weekend, fed by heavy rain upstream and water releases from Canadian reservoirs.

Minot expected widespread flood damage, and as many as 10,000 residents, about one-

fourth of the city's population, were ordered from their homes earlier this week. Crews focused on protecting critical infrastructure to avoid an expanded evacuation.

"We don't like to lose," Capt. Jeff Hoffer, an Army National Guard officer, said during a tour of flooded areas Friday. "This is very disheartening. I feel badly for all the people."

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service launched four boats on Friday to patrol flooded neighborhoods, ready to respond to 911 calls. City officials said no injuries or incidents had been reported overnight. The evacuation zone was empty except for emergency officials and the geese, who paddled in about 5 feet of water washing down the streets.

George Moe, whose house was about a block from the water's edge, returned briefly to pick up some keys. Moe said the only

thing left in his house was the mounted head of an antelope shot by his wife, who died about three years ago.

Moe, 63, said he had lived in the house for 40 years. He worried about it as well as the shop where he works as a mechanic; it was taking on water and he was unsure he'd have a job after the flood.

"I hate to see something go to hell after 40 years," he said. "There ain't much you can do."

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on Thursday accelerated water releases from the upstream Lake Darling dam. In just four days, the predicted release of water from the dam more than doubled — from 11,000 cubic feet per second to 29,000. National Weather Service hydrologist Steve Buan laid the blame on 4 to 6 inches of rain that fell last week in largely rural — and saturated — areas to the north.

With peak water levels expected Saturday or Sunday, officials in North Dakota's fourth-largest city said they have done everything they can to protect critical infrastructure. Minot Mayor Curt Zimbelman said dikes have been raised as much as possible around the city's sewer lift station and can't be raised any higher. The city was confident the water treatment plant was protected.

"We need to hope that they hold," Zimbelman said.

The city issued a voluntary evacuation notice Thursday to 400 more people in the river valley, although officials said damage to those homes might be no more than water in basements.

City Council President Dean Frantsvog said authorities expect "a large portion of" the 4,400 homes and 200 businesses that have been evacuated "will be undated."

In Burlington, a town of about 1,000 people a few miles upstream on the confluence of the Souris and Des Lacs rivers, city officials abandoned sandbagging as hopeless. About a third of 320 houses are expected to be lost in the town that was founded in 1883 and is the oldest in Ward County.

"We're no longer able to save the city," Burlington Mayor Jerome Gruenberg said Thursday.

Burlington officials instead sent people to help with a frenzied labor around Minot, a town best known for its Air Force base but also an important agricultural center and home to many laborers drawn to the oil boom in western North Dakota.

Heavy equipment hauled dirt and clay to raise dikes wherever possible — an effort Zimbelman said would continue until rising water made it impossible. Workers and National Guard members

were the only people to be seen in evacuated areas.

Fast-flowing water had overtopped dikes in some places and risen to the first level on several homes. A trailer park was under water. In one area, an old Chevy was half-submerged.

Near the water treatment plant, water had risen above a bridge deck; orange barricades blocked any traffic at either end. Loose clothes, beer cans, dark trash bags, a tire and other assorted trash could be seen floating in the Souris, cast off by departing residents.

Kathy Sivertson, 52, who lives a block outside the initial evacuation zone, was opting to ignore the recommendation for expanded evacuations.

She spent part of Thursday moving her belongings out of her basement but said she'd stay in her house until "they kick me out."

Clinic

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two paramedics and one ambulance. The quarters contains two ambulances, a cleaning room, an area for training and a kitchenette.

Despite all the available services, Henry would rather see tribal members use the center before they develop illnesses and need medical care.

He noted the use of the wellness center's exercise and fitness equipment, along with its locker rooms and two family dressing rooms. A large pool is used for group and individual therapy, while a small pool is used for deep tissue and massage therapy.

"We are promoting wellness. We have a high prevalence of diabetes," he said. "We have the fitness and aquatic center. We are emphasizing a healthy lifestyle."

The multi-level facility includes an elevator and areas for mental health and social services, community uses and a shelter during bad weather. Looking to the future, one room has been set aside for future needs.

The Santee Health Center expansion marks the first joint venture between a tribe and the Indian Health Service in the Great Plains, Henry said. The project uses bonds for its financing.

"Normally, this would be a 2- to 5-year project. We finished it in 14 months," he said. "This came in on budget and ahead of schedule, and we were pursuing financing when the economy was

suffering a big drop."

During Friday's dedication ceremony, Santee Sioux tribal chairman Roger Trudell encouraged members to take advantage of the facility for their physical, mental and spiritual health.

Tribal secretary Cora Jones told the *Press & Dakotan* that the facility, which opened in February, has already received great use. Preventative care has received major attention, including the sixth annual health fair held in conjunction with Friday's program.

Jones hopes the health center's counseling and outreach programs will help address another pressing reservation problem — suicide. As she searched her memory, she could recall the number of victims in recent years.

"Since I have been back home (in Santee), for the past seven years, we have had five suicides, mostly younger people," she said. "We have too many. One

suicide is too many."

Rodney Cuny, Commander for U.S. Public Health with the Aberdeen Area IHS office, said the new Santee expansion provides outstanding facilities.

The challenge lies in fully staffing the reservation's primary care needs, he said. Patients needing specialty care will continue going to Yankton and other regional medical centers, he said.

"We (at IHS) are competing for doctors with the private sector. We have to compete for a limited amount of family doctors, pediatricians and nurses," he said.

"Right now, Santee has one contract doctor and one mid-level practitioner. They could use two to four family doctors."

Recruiting remains a challenge for all rural facilities, said Mark Schulte, chief executive officer of Avera Creighton Hospital.

Schulte attended Friday's dedication ceremony and toured the Santee facility.

"I am very impressed with the design of the structure. It has all the amenities for the community of Santee. They have the tools here to provide better care for their people," he said.

"It's a matter of getting the staff on board. Physician recruitment is such a big thing. It gets harder to find people to practice family medicine in rural Nebraska."

Schulte said he attended Friday's events as a show of support for a fellow Knox County facility. Dr. Ron Morse, a member of the Creighton staff, also sees patients in Santee.

Schulte admitted he was also curious to see the Santee expansion, which has generated a great deal of conversation throughout the region.

"In Knox County, you heard a lot of buzz, and I wanted to see

for myself," he said.

The facility also drew praise from a national official who spoke at Friday's program.

The Santee project stands far above many IHS facilities, said Robert McSwain, the IHS deputy director for management operations.

"The average age of an IHS facility is 33 years, and that's taking into account the new facilities that are opening. This (Santee clinic) serves as an example of what a partnership can do," he told the *Press & Dakotan*.

"It's one thing to see it on paper. But when it comes to life, there is something precious about it."

Henry, the tribal health director, said he was privileged to be part of both the old and new clinic.

"I was here for the first clinic

in 1993," he said. "I left in 1995 and returned in 2002."

Now, he has helped write a new chapter for his people's future.

"I'm an enrolled member of the Santee Sioux Tribe," he said. "I came because this is my heritage."

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