

Flood Recovery Far From Over For Mo. Farmers

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KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Near Bean Lake in Platte County is a stretch of land known as Harpst Island, where farmer Bob Baker's family has worked the land for about 100 years.

The gravel road that snakes through the farm cuts past rows of sprouting corn stalks and tiny soybean plants just pushing out of the soil. But this year the scenery changes abruptly closer to the riverbank.

It could be mistaken for the Sahara Desert. The land is covered in fine, almost-white sand, and on the horizon a couple of bulldozers are shoveling it away.

One year after the flood of 2011, recovery is far from finished for local farmers whose land was devastated by the Missouri River.

Many still work to clear their land of debris and sand and wait for levees that are meant to protect it to be fixed. These farmers are in it for the long haul, prepared for the years it will take to remedy damage and hoping the fields they've been able to salvage will yield a successful crop.

While the full impact of the flood is unknown, it is clear that some land has been damaged beyond use, said Jim Crawford, a University of Missouri Extension natural resource engineer in Atchison County, Mo.

"There are a significant number of acres that were destroyed," Crawford said.

Baker was among the area farmers hit hardest by the flood, which occurred when heavy rain and snowfall to the north forced dam releases along the Missouri River, sending a slow-moving wall of water from Montana to Missouri.

The swelling Missouri River spared only about 150 of Baker's roughly 900 acres of farmland from sand deposits — a few inches on some land, up to 6 feet on other parts.

It took Baker two weeks just to clear the gravel road on his farm so he could get to his entire farm. Now, a year later, about 350 acres still aren't ready for planting.

"Sometimes you can work for 10 to 12 hours a day and not see that you've made any difference," Baker said. "I'm 62 years old, and I've never seen this much damage in my lifetime."

Baker estimates that fully clearing his land will be a two- or three-year project. He and his team began removing sand at the start of October and worked through the winter and spring.

"It's just kind of tough some days," Baker said. "You do what you've got to do to get the work done."

According to a November report completed by Scott Brown of the MU Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics, about 207,200 acres of cropland were flooded in 24 Missouri counties in the summer 2011 disaster. About 50 percent of the damage occurred in Holt and Atchison counties.

According to that report, those Missouri counties lost a total of \$175.9 million in crop revenue and \$109.6 million after crop insurance proceeds and disaster payments.

Last year, 375 acres of Jeff Gaskill's land near Rushville, Mo., were flooded and 50 to 75 acres badly damaged by



ABOVE: The flood-damaged home of Larry Hamby was demolished by workers from Marlatt Construction Co. on May 31, 2012, at Lewis & Clark Village on Sugar Lake in southern Buchanan County, Missouri. **RIGHT:** Frank, top, and Kathie Hudspeth salvage bricks, May 30, 2012, from a flood damaged home that will be torn down just north of U.S. 59 leading into Atchison County, Missouri. The Hudspeths live in the area on higher ground. (Photos by Keith Myers/Kansas City Star/MCT)

sand. Water that seeped under the levee that protects the main farm covered another 100 acres. He guesses he lost about a half-million dollars in crop revenue.

Cattails, a type of wetlands grass foreign to Gaskill's fields, have since sprouted on his land. This spring, he's had to work land four to five times more than he used to. And this past month, the sand deposits covering the farmland he rents along three miles of Missouri River were finally removed with bulldozers and haul trucks, in time to plant crops.

Sand as deep as 5 feet still covers 66 of the 1,100 acres that were flooded on Lanny Frakes' land last summer. It's too expensive to clear, and the land probably can't be farmed again, Frakes said. He doesn't plan on touching it soon.

Instead, Frakes, the secretary/treasurer of the Rushville-Sugar Lake Levee Association, spent most of the past year working with the Army Corps of Engineers to repair the levee and applying for a community block grant to help pay for 20 percent of restoration costs. (The corps paid the rest.) Repairs were finished in March.

In the Army Corps of Engineers' Kansas City District, half of the 48 reported levee breaches have had contracts awarded to begin repairs.

Five of the levees have been restored to pre-flood conditions, said Robin Wankum of the corps' Kansas City District.

She said the corps is hoping to have all projects in the area finished sometime in November.

But some farmers like Baker are footing the bill themselves because their levees are private, and they're proceeding cautiously until the levees around their land are fixed.

Baker estimates that when he cleared his first 80 acres of sand-covered land, he shelled out \$2,000 per acre. Finishing repairs on his levees is his top priority,

he said.

Clearing sand is another cost for farmers.

The hardest-hit areas in Platte County were near Bean Lake. Don Boyer, executive director of Platte County's Farm Service Agency, said the county still has about 10 percent of its sand to clear. The agency has approved \$500,000 for removing it, but the payments have yet to be made.

Farmers' "biggest concern right now is soil recovery and getting debris off their land so they can farm," said Beverly Maltsberger, an MU Extension community development specialist in Buchanan County. "They've been working at it frantically since the water went down in August."

Brian Miller, who rents land near Bob Baker's, shares a 4,000-acre tract with another farmer. Miller began clearing his corn and soybean farm at the beginning of this year, moving and piling sand that covered 300 acres. About 100 acres still won't be ready for planting this year.

Miller, president of the Rushville-Sugar Lake Levee Association, said he is shouldering a large percentage of the cleanup costs. To clean about 8 acres near a breach in the levee, Miller said he had to pay about \$24,000. He received \$4,000 in government aid.

Frakes said he's chosen to focus on what he can do, and not what he can't as he works to plant what he can this season.

He filled scour holes — holes dug by the flood current — with extra sand. He scattered smaller sand deposits in large fields and plowed it into the earth. He hired an extractor to remove silt and sand that blocked his drainage ditches.

Other farmers, such as Gaskill, pushed sand deposits to the side of their fields. Right now, one of his fields includes a large sand ring — "like a big, white dam," he says — surrounding a soybean crop. The piles are as high as 12 feet.

The problem is that wind can blow



sand back onto crops and cover or destroy them, Crawford said.

"It's (sand) got to be removed, but that tends to be expensive, time-consuming and generally not economically feasible," he said.

Many farmers have ignored the acres most severely damaged by sand for now and work to plant where they can, despite the uncertainty of what this year will yield.

Wayne Flanary, a Holt County MU Extension Center agronomy specialist, said that because floods disrupt soil structure and decrease biological activity in the soil, flooded ground affects yields.

"If you take flooded ground and unflooded ground and compare those, there will be a lower yield in flooded ground," Flanary said.

Still, most farmers say they understand that flooding is a reality when you work near the Missouri River, and they still hope for a good crop this season.

"That's the life of a farmer," Gaskill said. "There are no guarantees."

Not for homeowners near the river, either.

Last summer, when officials warned the Rushville community of the oncoming flood, Ken Knox and his wife, Mary Ellen, moved belongings out of the main level of their home on Woolston Road. Flood water covered the basement and reached about a foot in the main level before draining out.

One year later, they still salvage

items from their house. After a flood inspection, Knox learned that his house sits too low for county standards.

He said the high cost of raising his house made it unrealistic to keep and they hope to move to Easton after their home is knocked down.

"I would have been quite happy to be living there on Woolston Road for the rest of my life," said Knox, 70, a Navy retiree.

For Knox and others, 2011 was easily the worst disaster since the major flood of 1993, and in some ways it was worse.

"In Atchison County, I would say certainly it was more land covered, and it was underwater for a longer period of time than in '93," said Blake Hurst, president of the Missouri Farm Bureau and an Atchison County farmer. "The sand deposits are just as bad, or maybe worse."

While surveying his land last week, Baker kneeled to scoop up a handful of the fine sand that blew across what was once part of his farmland.

When the wind blows, he said, people in town wonder if there's a massive fire in the fields because the amount of sand thrown in the air looks like a cloud of smoke.

Baker joked that he sometimes feels he puts more money into the land than he should. But when something has been in your family for a century, moving on is hard to do.

Flood

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selves right in the flood itself. As they tried to drive away from the rising waters, Peterka said they knew something serious was happening when they saw houses floating away.

But that was far from the worst image he saw that night.

"We turned the truck to shine the headlights over there, and we started to see people floating by," Peterka said. "Some we assumed were drowned and others were obviously alive."

Peterka said, "Something kicks in — I don't know if it's adrenaline or what — but something kicks in and we just started pulling people out of the water and putting them in the back of our truck. We picked up as many as we could, and then we'd haul them back to the hotel."

Peterka said he knew once he got to the hotel, he had to go back and save more people.

"Between the three of us, we picked up 52 bodies over five days," he said. "It just seemed like it was 24 hours a day just hauling bodies — pulling them out of cars, digging them out of sand. It was terrible."

List said the 2011 Missouri River flood was bad, but it could have been worse, like the Rapid City flood.

"There was damage, but we had a lot of help available with the flooding down the river," List said. "It kept moving and they took care of the situation — if Pierre had a problem then a week later Dakota Dunes had a problem and it could be taken care of."

Sgt. 1st Class Brooks Schild is a current SDNG member in Yankton's Charlie Battery. He said the



This photo by Don List shows a house destroyed by torrential flooding during the 1972 Rapid City flood. The catastrophe occurred 40 years ago this weekend and resulted in 238 deaths.

flood in Rapid City offered an opportunity to learn.

"With tragedy comes better planning," Schild said. "There's nobody to blame that caused the Rapid City flood, but from it they developed better ways to work with the city, the county and the state to be ready for natural disasters."

Maj. Anthony Deiss is the public affairs officer for the SDNG and said the National Guard, first and foremost, works with local emergency management agencies to react when natural disasters occur.

"Of course, we don't respond until we get the call from the governor's office and local county emergency management facilities," Deiss said. "Once they make

the determination that they need some help, they call the emergency operations center in Pierre and we get the call for assistance."

The SDNG always has plans in place to making sure the available

equipment is ready and available, Deiss said.

The SDNG is constantly training and performing checks and balances to make sure everything is in place to be able to immediately start making the coordination effort to get the people, the resources and the equipment in place to head off on a pending disaster, he said.

What distinguishes a National Guard member, Deiss said, is their willingness to go into harm's way and to serve people.

"That's one of the reasons people sign up — they want to serve in a part of something that is bigger than themselves," Deiss said. "That means sacrificing their time and taking time away from their families in service to their state and nation."

Peterka said he and the two other SDNG members saved 26 lives. They were awarded medals of honor for their service.

Peterka said he will never forget the horrible tragedy.

"We could hear death cries in the night, but there was nothing we could do about it — we didn't know where they were at," Peterka said. "You couldn't cross the street because it was just a raging river, and so we just continued to pick up people all night long. That was the most horrid thing. I wouldn't wish that on anybody."

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South Dakota Department of Health

American Heart Association

Rain, Strong Winds Cause Damage In The Dakotas

SIoux FALLS (AP) — Thunderstorms brought heavy rain and strong winds to much of the Dakotas, flooding streets and damaging buildings and vehicles.

In South Dakota, Mobridge Police Chief Justin Jungwirth tells the American News that wind gusts of nearly 80 mph blew down the screen at a drive-in movie theater and blew the roof off another building.

In North Dakota, WDAY-TV reports that high winds blew over a semitrailer on Interstate 29 north of Fargo. The driver wasn't injured.

Other damage included street flooding in the southwest North Dakota city of Dickinson and hail and wind damage in southwest South Dakota.

The National Weather Service says more thunderstorms are possible in the two states through the weekend.

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