



PHOTO: DAVE TUNGE/DAKOTA AERIALS
This photo taken by Dave Tunge of Dakota Aerials shows the damage done Monday by two tornadoes to the small town of Pilger in northeast Nebraska. The storm claimed two lives, with at least 19 people taken to hospitals.

Tornadoes Flatten Northeast Neb. Town

2 Dead, At Least 19 Taken To Hospitals

BY JOSH FUNK
Associated Press

PILGER, Neb. — As two giant tornadoes bore down on this tiny farming town in northeast Nebraska, Trey Wisniewski heard the storm sirens, glanced out at the blackening sky and rushed with his wife into their basement.

"My wife was holding our animals, and I was holding on to my wife. We could feel the suction try to pull us out of there," he said Tuesday.

Suddenly, their house was gone, leaving them to dodge debris that rained down upon them. And then, the storm that hit so suddenly Monday afternoon was gone, allowing them to emerge and see what was left of the 350-person farming town of Pilger.

They found that much of the community was gone and two people had died. The disaster, delivered by twin twisters rare in how forcefully they travelled side by side for an extended period, left some townsfolk doubting whether the town could rebuild, even as they marveled that the death toll hadn't been worse.

"This is by far the worst thing I've ever seen as governor," said Gov. Dave Heineman, who flew over Pilger in a helicopter Tuesday morning and then walked through the town, trailed by reporters.

One of those killed was a 5-year-old girl, Calista Dixon, said Stanton County Sheriff Mike Unger. Cody Murphree, the girl's brother, said in a

statement that his mother, 42-year-old Kandi Murphree, was in a medically induced coma in Omaha after the tornado destroyed their home.

The other fatality was a motorist killed during the storm, David A. Herout, 74, of Clarkson, Nebraska. He died in Cuming County, a few miles east of Pilger.

At least 19 people were taken to hospitals.

Up to 75 percent of the buildings in Pilger were heavily damaged or destroyed. The tornado destroyed much of the small downtown, leaving piles of bricks that had been storefronts in the street. Several grain bins on the south end of Main Street were swept away, and others remained crumpled on the ground. Between 45 and 50 homes in Pilger were demolished, about a dozen others were damaged beyond repair in Dixon County.

Homes south and west of downtown fared even worse, with most reduced to piles of debris or gone entirely.

"I am amazed that ... out of all of this destruction only two people were killed," Wisniewski said.

While the governor said he was confident the community would rebuild, cafe owner Linda Oertwich wasn't so sure.

"Pilger's too small and the devastation in these homes will cost too much to rebuild," said Oertwich, who will decide whether to rebuild her Village Bar and Cafe after hearing from her insurance company.

"My wife was holding our animals, and I was holding on to my wife. We could feel the suction try to pull us out of there."

TREY WISNIEWSKI

The tornado swept away the house Larry Nelson, 73, had lived in for 23 years, leaving nothing but the cinderblock foundation. Because he didn't have a basement, Nelson rushed to a neighbor's house when sirens sounded.

"I'm grateful that I was over there," Nelson said, pointing to his neighbor's house.

The storm was part of a larger system that tracked across the nation's midsection Monday.

Pilger was hit by one of twin twisters, which roared for miles through northeast Nebraska. The tornadoes were of roughly equal size, about a mile apart. The northern twister, confirmed as an EF4 tornado, struck the town before the two merged, according to the National Weather Service.

The storm appears to have produced four tornadoes in all, said Van DeWald, lead meteorologist for the National Weather Service in Valley, Nebraska.

It was the size and intensity of the dual tornadoes that made them rare, said Nebraska State Climatologist Al Dutcher, noting that usually one tornado weakens and shrinks in such a situation.

Dutcher said a lack of thunder-

storms helped increase the tornadoes' strength because they had no competition for wind and moisture in the atmosphere.

"It speaks wonders about the amount of instability that was in the atmosphere," Dutcher said. "This was a highly volatile situation where once something got going, it really got going."

Authorities said the first tornado touched down around 3:45 p.m. and downed several power lines before it leveled a farmhouse. The second tornado was spotted southwest of Pilger, according to the Stanton County Sheriff's Office. Shortly afterward, the town suffered a "direct hit" that leveled several buildings, including the Fire Department building.

Heineman declared a state of emergency, and the National Guard was preparing to assist local emergency responders and help with the cleanup. A shelter for displaced residents was established at Wisner-Pilger Jr.-Sr. High School in nearby Wisner.

Tornadoes also caused damage in Cuming and Wayne counties, the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency said in a news release. Meteorologists also tracked a reported tornado near the town of Burwell, in central Nebraska.

Voting Technology Expanding In SD

PIERRE (AP) — The just-finished primary election gave South Dakotans an app they could download to find out where to vote. It also offered some residents the chance to ditch their precincts and cast ballots at voting centers where staff used an electronic system to check in voters.

The new technology has put off some older poll workers. A few employees had to troubleshoot internet connectivity issues the day of the primary.

But the upgrades mean financial savings for counties as fewer workers are needed. There were voting centers in seven counties and others are considering the upgrade.

Meanwhile, the Secretary of State's office has tapped into the app world to drive more voters to the polls. Vote605 was launched during the primary season and will be revamped for the November election.

SD Awards \$500K For Mosquitoes

PIERRE (AP) — The state has awarded \$500,000 in mosquito control grants to nearly 100 cities across South Dakota.

The grants are intended to help control mosquitoes and help prevent the spread of the West Nile virus.

The South Dakota Department of Health says all applying communities received funding. The grants range from \$1,000 to \$3,000. The awards were based on each city's population and its history of West Nile virus cases through 2013.

Health officials say the state has seen more than 2,100 confirmed West Nile virus cases since 2002. Thirty-two people have died as a result of the virus during that period.

ND Now At 1M Barrels Of Oil Daily

WILLISTON, N.D. (AP) — North Dakota is now producing 1 million barrels of oil per day, with a large part of the credit due to the rich Bakken shale formation in the western part of the state.

The state's Department of Mineral Resources on Tuesday released the April production numbers that show the oil fields' record level. In March, the state produced 977,000 barrels per day.

The director of the department, Lynn Helms, says only Texas, Alaska and California have also reached a million-barrel-a-day production.

The Bakken and the Three Forks formation below it account for the vast majority of North Dakota's oil production. Experts knew the Bakken held millions of barrels of crude, but it wasn't until oil prices reached record levels that the technology was developed to be able to exploit it.

U.S. Senate Candidates Take Opposite Sides On Pipeline

BY DIRK LAMMERS
Associated Press

SIoux FALLS — The Democratic candidate for the seat being vacated by retiring U.S. Sen. Tim Johnson says the proposed Keystone XL crude oil pipeline is a "big money con" that would bring great risk and little benefit to South Dakota.

Rick Weiland said the only ones who will benefit from the project are TransCanada and the company's investors. He cites a U.S. State Department report that found that although pipeline construction would create thousands of temporary jobs, it would result in just 35 permanent full-time positions.

"That's not a jobs program for the United States, but that's the way they've tried to sell it," Weiland said.

Keystone XL is intended to transport more than 800,000 barrels of Canadian tar sands oil a day to refineries on the Gulf Coast. Supporters say the pipeline will create thousands of jobs and aid energy independence. Environmentalists warn of possible spills and say tar sands oil is especially "dirty" and will contribute to global warming.

The project requires State Department approval because it crosses an international border.

Weiland's Republican opponent, former South Dakota Gov. Mike Rounds, said the project has been held up for political reasons as part of President Barack Obama administration's vendetta against carbon-based energy. Rounds said he'd prefer that the country develop energy domestically rather than send its money overseas to the Middle East and Russia.



Pressler



Rounds



Weiland

"Once it's in the market, it's part of the world market," Rounds said. "But the more that you bring in and the more that you develop on the North American continent, the more independent we are of those parts of the world that really cause problems for us."

The Obama administration in April said it was putting off its decision on whether to approve the pipeline indefinitely. A decision now isn't expected until

after the November elections.

Former Republican Sen. Larry Pressler, who is running as an independent, said South Dakota state officials "gave away the store" in allowing the original Keystone pipeline to pass through the state. Officials should have insisted that the project allow for a needed Missouri River water pipeline with the right-of-way and include a triple-damages agreement for any environmental breaches, Pressler said.

"They'd be much more careful," he said.

Pressler said Keystone XL will do little to ease the strain

that North Dakota Bakken oil production has put on the rail system that also moves agriculture commodities in and out of the state. The majority of the oil moving through the pipeline will originate in Canada, and most of it will be placed on cargo ships and sent to China and Japan, he said.

"South Dakota gets nothing out of this, and the United States of America gets very little out of it," Pressler said. "What South Dakota really needs is the Bakken oil to be moved by pipeline."

Former state lawmaker Gordon Howie, who also is running as an independent, said Keystone XL is a good project that needs to move forward. Howie said Congress needs to strip away unnecessary regulations so the coun-

try can explore energy sources that won't need long-term government subsidies to be profitable.

"America is rich in resources and we have a government that wants to limit the development of those resources and keep America dependent on foreign energy," he said.

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