

Big Sioux Flooding Impacts 3 States

BY DIRK LAMMERS AND DAVID PITT
Associated Press

SIoux CITY, Iowa — Record Big Sioux River flooding prompted residents in three states to hurriedly prepare for the rising water Thursday, with people lining up for sandbags and moving museum artifacts and other items to higher ground.

The fast-moving Big Sioux has been swollen by days of thunderstorms and is expected to crest Friday more than a foot above the previous record level set in 1969, threatening homes and businesses in Iowa, Nebraska and South Dakota.

In North Sioux City, South Dakota, dozens of National Guard soldiers were rushing to fill sandbags for residents of the McCook Lake neighborhood, where up to 400 homes were in danger of flooding.

Residents including Ashley Caskey waited for hours in a line of pickup trucks that inched toward the sandbag-filling stations.

"We are just happy to get sandbags at this point," Caskey said.

Tim Webster, who lives in an upstairs apartment on McCook Lake, said he wasn't worried about his place but was helping friends.

"Anybody who knows me knows I've got a truck, so let's do this," he said.

This is the worst flooding the region has seen since 2011, when the Missouri River remained high for months, causing tributaries to back up and testing the levee system. The fact that the levee held for long at that time

showed it's effective, said Jade Dundas, assistant city manager for public works for Sioux City, Iowa.

This time, the Big Sioux should begin receding Saturday and stop flooding even nearby agricultural land by Monday morning.

"This kind of a quick up and down does give us some sense of confidence," Dundas said.

The city had to extend one of its levees by about 600 feet and that work is finished. On Thursday, Sioux City crews helped property owners fill sandbags as a precautionary measure, he said.

At The Railroad Museum near the river in Sioux City, volunteers helped staff move artifacts to higher ground because the main building will likely get about 5 feet of water, said museum executive director Matt Merk. Vintage rolling stock including a 1943 General Electric diesel locomotive was among exhibits moved to safety, Merk said.

"At the very worst at this point we'll have cleanup and nothing completely damaged except for some sheet rock," he said.

Crews were building a temporary levee that will run across Interstate 29. It should protect much of North Sioux City but will close off a few miles of the interstate and force motorists onto local roads between Sioux City, Iowa, and Sioux Falls, South Dakota, to the north.

The river level is expected to peak at about 4 feet below the levee height, said Nathan Sanderson, a policy adviser to South Dakota Gov. Dennis Daugaard. He said the

interstate will be closed for at least 36 hours but that it's difficult to predict how much longer after that.

Floodwaters blocked most of the roads connecting South Dakota and Iowa between Sioux Falls and Sioux City.

Dennis and Dottie Oleson's house in Akron, Iowa, sits on high ground so they haven't had to deal with flooding. A levee breached early Wednesday in the town, causing flooding in a business district, but a temporary patch is holding.

"The water was a lot higher yesterday," Dennis Oleson said.

He and his wife drove about 6 miles south of the town to see how the floodwaters overtook the Iowa State Highway 3 crossing into South Dakota. The heavy rains created a giant lake far wider than the Big Sioux just to the east, and several tiny fish were trying to wiggle their way across the two-lane road against the flow.

Dakota Dunes, South Dakota, a community between the Big Sioux and Missouri rivers is potentially vulnerable. The existing levee has been raised and city officials said they're confident it will hold the Big Sioux back, but they have an evacuation plan.

Jefferson, South Dakota, about 7 miles north of North Sioux City, hired a local contractor to build a 3-foot-high berm around the northeast side of the town of nearly 550 to hold back the Big Sioux.

"If we get it, it would probably be just part of town," Police Chief Bill McKelvey said. "We're hoping the dike will keep it out altogether."

Deaf Student Appeals Order Favoring Creighton

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — A deaf student at Creighton University is appealing a federal judge's 2013 ruling that said the school did not have to reimburse him for more than \$100,000 he spent on special equipment and interpreters in his first two years of medical school.

Michael Argenyi's cross-appeal was filed Wednesday after lawyers for the Omaha school filed their own appeal earlier this month. Creighton's appeal challenges the judge's ruling that it must provide Argenyi with the special equipment and interpreters to allow him to finish his last two years of medical school.

Argenyi was accepted to Creighton's medical school in 2008 after disclosing that he was hearing-impaired and requesting accommodations for his disability to allow him to follow lectures and communicate with patients.

But Creighton's medical school refused to provide Argenyi with a system that transcribes spoken words into text on a computer screen and a cued-speech interpreter that Argenyi had used as an undergraduate student, earning a 3.87 GPA.

Instead, Creighton used a microphone system that emitted frequencies to be picked up by Argenyi's cochlear implants. Argenyi said the system was inadequate, and one doctor determined it actually reduced Argenyi's ability to understand his professors.

Argenyi took out more than \$110,000 in loans to pay for the assistance, but said he was forced to take a leave of absence in his third year when the university refused to allow him to have an interpreter to interact with clinical patients — even if he paid for it himself.

A Helping Hand



ELIZABETH FLORES/MINNEAPOLIS STAR TRIBUNE/MCT
Elliot Jun gives a hand to his girlfriend Beebie Boo, with her umbrella as they battled the wind and rain early Thursday along Grand Avenue in St. Paul, MN.

Panel Begins Work On Nebraska Tax Incentives For Businesses

BY GRANT SCHULTE
Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — A group of lawmakers on Thursday set to work creating specific goals to ensure that Nebraska's tax incentives for businesses are working as intended.

The special Tax Incentive Evaluation Committee met for the first time to start writing recommendations for lawmakers to act on next year. Its possible goals could include strengthening the state economy, revitalizing rural areas, or promoting entrepreneurship, tech jobs and renewable energy.

For lawmakers, the challenge lies in deciding how to measure each. Senators formed the special committee earlier this year amid concerns that state law was too vague in explaining what each tax break should accomplish.

"What's missing there, from

an evaluation standpoint, is a 'How much?' question — how much of those things did the Legislature hope to see?" Legislative Auditor Martha Carter said during a presentation to lawmakers.

For instance, the Nebraska Advantage Act, which is the state's largest tax incentive program, was written to create new jobs in Nebraska, but at one point it didn't specify whether those jobs should be full-time or part-time. Earlier this year, lawmakers tweaked the law to require that businesses create "quality" jobs, but they never defined "quality," according to the Legislative Audit Office.

The committee chairman, Sen. John Harms, of Scottsbluff, said the panel wants to improve the tax incentives, if possible, instead of just scrapping them. Despite the concerns about the incentives, several senators said Nebraska still needs some to

compete with other states trying to attract businesses and new jobs.

"It's like a nuclear arms race," said Sen. Galen Hadley, of Kearney. "Unless everyone stands down, we've got to compete."

Sen. Paul Schumacher, of Columbus, said lawmakers should try to find a way to compare businesses that receive tax credits with those that don't, to see if the incentives made a difference.

A report released in September by the Legislature's Performance Audit Committee found that state officials don't have enough information to measure how well Nebraska's tax incentives stack up against other states. State programs and economies vary so widely that it's difficult to tell whether Nebraska's tax breaks have given the state an edge, according to report.

Overall Index Down In Banker Survey

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — The overall index for a monthly economic survey of bankers in 10 Midwestern and Plains states has fallen from May but remains in positive territory, suggesting slower growth in the near future.

The Rural Mainstreet Index fell to 53.6 in June from 55.6 in May.

The survey indexes range from 0 to 100. Any score above 50 suggests growth in the months ahead.

Creighton University economist Ernie Goss oversees the survey. He says June's results indicate that areas highly dependent on agriculture and energy are experiencing slower growth than a year ago.

Almost half of bankers surveyed reported that higher beef and pork prices have increased overall economic activity in their area.

Bankers from Colorado, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wyoming were surveyed.

District To Phase Out Coal At Neb. Plant

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — The Omaha Public Power District board has decided to phase out coal to generate electrical power at its Omaha plant.

The board said Thursday that the changes will let the utility comply with government regulations to reduce future greenhouse gas emissions.

The board has approved a plan to retire three units at its north Omaha plant by 2016. The two remaining generating units would remain on coal but be retrofitted with more emission controls. They eventually would be altered to run on natural gas by 2023. A station unit in Nebraska City also will be retrofitted in 2016.

OPPD President Gary Gates said the decision was based on customer feedback, combined with extensive research and analysis conducted by the district.

"It maintains our commitment to affordability, reliability and environmental sensitivity, which is what our customers told us they wanted," he said.

According to the district, customers who provided input said they realized that the new federal changes would lead higher energy costs, but they indicated that they were willing to pay a slight increase. OPPD said in a statement that the new measure will have a "minimal impact" on customer rates, ranging somewhere from 0 to 2 percent over a 20-year period.

Ken Winston, a policy advocate for the Sierra Club's Nebraska chapter, said the decision represents a major step toward cost-effective, clean energy in Nebraska. Winston praised the district board for showing strong leadership on the issue, and said his group hopes to carry the message to other power districts.

"It's a win on a lot of levels," Winston said. "It's economically viable, it's environmentally responsible, and it's also responsive to the will of the ratepayers."

OPPD serves nearly 789,000 people in eastern and southeast Nebraska and covers all or part of 13 Nebraska counties.

SD High Court Paves Way For Wal-Mart

PIERRE (AP) — The city of Sioux Falls can annex land which is slated for a Wal-Mart supercenter, the South Dakota Supreme Court ruled Thursday.

A group of residents near the site called Save Our Neighborhood had challenged the annexation, arguing it was illegal because the city didn't first get the approval of Lincoln County.

A circuit court judge had ruled that Sioux Falls officials didn't do anything wrong, and Supreme Court justices agreed. The owner of the property brought it to the city to annex in early 2013.

The Sioux Falls City Council rezoned about 40 acres of land from agricultural use to commercial for a Wal-Mart supercenter. Save Our Neighborhood collected signatures to have voters decide on the rezoning. In April, residents voted to support the rezoning for the store.

None of the residents who challenged the annexation immediately returned requests for comment.

City Council member Kermit Staggers said the council always believed its actions were legal.

"We're not surprised by the decision, and we thought it was the right decision," Staggers said.

Indictment Filed Against Bosworth

PIERRE (AP) — Attorney General Marty Jackley says a Hughes County grand jury has filed an indictment accusing defeated U.S. Senate candidate Annette Bosworth of violating election laws.

Jackley says the indictment Tuesday comes after he filed charges earlier this month accusing Bosworth of six counts of perjury and six counts of filing false documents related to election campaign laws.

Bosworth was arrested on June 4 and charged with multiple counts of perjury and filing false election documents. The 42-year-old Bosworth turned herself in to the Minnehaha County Jail and was released.

Authorities say she fraudulently attested to gathering voter signatures when she was really on a Christian mission trip to the Philippines.

Bosworth lost the Republican primary with just 6 percent of the vote.

MMC

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mation. We have had a lot of things that have happened since (the November visit from CCNE) that we couldn't bring to the table during the appeal."

At a MMC board of trustees meeting Monday night, it was recommended that the appeal be withdrawn. That recommendation was affirmed by staff Thursday.

Now, the institution will start a new application. The process will begin this fall.

With a consultant on board and adjustments already made in the MSN program, MMC officials believe they are on track to tackle the accreditation process. Concerns expressed by CCNE about the program included a lack of meeting and office space, not enough staffing and a need to work more standards into the curriculum.

"It is a tough situation. It simply is," said MMC interim president, Dr. Thomas Lorang in a media release. "But we care a lot about our students and believe wholeheartedly that we have a high quality, solid program and are going to work our hardest to make this situation right. We have positive options for our graduates and current students going forward, and that is our main

focus right now."

The MSN program was started in January 2011 but could not be accredited by CCNE until its first cohort of students had graduated.

"The students knew (that the program was not yet accredited), but you make assumptions it is going to go well," Kalsow said.

She noted that the MSN program still maintains its accreditation as a degree through the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), which accredits post-secondary educational institutions in the North Central region. All of the other Mount Marty College nursing programs — the bachelors of science in nursing, the practical nursing and the master's in nurse anesthesia — maintain their approved accreditation status and are not involved in the MSN process.

"These MSN students have master's degrees from an accredited college. It's not like their master's degrees don't count," Kalsow said. "They could even teach. The issue comes when they take their boards. Twelve of the 16 students who have taken the boards have passed the first time around."

However, the state boards will not officially release those scores until they know the student has graduated from an accredited program.

Each of the 19 graduates has been spoken with about

the situation personally, according to Kalsow.

"Our biggest challenge has been how to help these students. It's been priority number one since we found out," she said. "I called dozens of colleges asking if our students could transfer credits. Some would say yes, but it was a 45-credit program and they would accept 12. That's time and money these folks don't have."

Kalsow said school officials are advising the students to attain a post-master's certificate.

"The post-master's certificate would allow those boards to release the scores for students to get jobs and begin working as a nurse practitioner," she stated. "That's what we think is the fastest and most efficient way we can help students."

Colleges that offer a post-master's certificate would analyze the potential student's transcript and from there determine what credits it would accept and what credits need to be obtained.

"The shortest one we've seen is nine credits," Kalsow said. "It would probably be a minimum of a semester."

When the announcement was made, Kalsow thought it was a very real possibility that the remaining 36 students in the program would leave — and she couldn't blame them.

"It's amazing. As of three days ago, we lost one who de-

decided to sit out for the summer to wait for more news on the accreditation and another one who left entirely," she said. "The rest keep emailing and saying, 'I want to stay with you, but can I and should I? What can we do?'"

"We do have a group that is supposed to graduate in December, and we need to extend their program out so the CCNE visit happens while they are still in it," Kalsow added.

She said it could be a year to 18 months before accreditation is granted.

The situation has opened a dialogue with other learning institutions that could result in future partnerships that make for a better program, Kalsow said.

"The enthusiasm some other colleges have been demonstrating has surprised me," she stated. "What has helped us is our solid reputation for our nursing programs. When I thank these colleges for their help, they say, 'Part of the reason we are here is because we have hired several Mount Marty nurses, and they are very well prepared.' They know we are producing good nurses, and that is our saving grace."

You can follow Nathan Johnson on Twitter at twitter.com/AnInlandVoyage. Discuss this story at www.yankton.net/.