

Red River Crests In Fargo Without Flooding

FARGO, N.D. (AP) — Longtime Fargo resident Dan Holm returned from his winter travels to an unusual spring sight behind his home on River Road: There was no water lapping at his back yard.

After dealing with three years of record flooding from the Red River, Holm and other residents in the Fargo and Moorhead, Minn., area quietly celebrated Monday after the river crested below flood stage.

This time, the 77-year-old Holm didn't have to meander around pallets of sandbags in his neighborhood, where many vacant lots have replaced houses bought out by the city and demolished.

"It has been sad to see all these houses go," Holm said. "A lot of people have suggested that I move out, but I'm not going anywhere. I like it here."

Jeff Makowski, a weather service meteorologist in Grand Forks, said the Red River was measured at 17.1 feet Monday morning and "looks to be on its way down." Flood stage is 18 feet. The river was above flood stage for a record 77 straight days last year, until the middle of June.

The river has peaked the last three years between about 37 and 41 feet, including a record crest in 2009.

Fargo Mayor Dennis Walaker, the leader of the city's ongoing flood fight, marked the harmless crest with Sunday brunch and a performance of the Fargo-Moorhead Symphony Orchestra. He noted that Elm Street, a low road next to the river on the city's north side, has stayed open for the first time in many years.

"I think everybody deserves a break," Walaker said. "I hope everybody enjoys it."

Roger Gress, director of Fargo parks, said the last three years of "water and muck" have been difficult on residents, many of whom took advantage over the weekend of an early opening for parks and two of the city's golf courses.

"I think it's one of the biggest boosts we've had for morale in the F-M area for many years," Gress said. "It's kind of overwhelming."

County

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"Had this project required a full grade raise, the added width implementing the 10-foot clear-zone would have been acceptable," it read. "If Yankton County elects to utilize the 10-foot clear-zone or to place guardrail along the shoulder, it has been deemed that those expenses will need to be paid by the county."

Commissioner Garry Moore said the finding was unfortunate because SDDOT officials had agreed that both of those improvements would be wise.

"At this point in time, we quite frankly don't have the money to widen it, which would be the prudent thing to do," he said. "People are just going to have to use some caution when moving wide farm equipment across it."

Ultimately, the commission voted unanimously to go with the \$410,000 option to place riprap along the roadway and repair the shoulders. Commissioner Allen Sinclair was absent from the meeting.

"It's not where we want to go," Commissioner Mark Johnson said. "But I think it's where we have to go."

Commission Chairman Bruce Jensen added, "It's what we can afford. At least we're doing something, and it's going to help."

The county hopes to receive approval from the state to proceed with the project by the fall.

In other business Monday, the commission:

- awarded Doug Larson a conditional-use permit to proceed with plans for Larson's Landing after extensive damage during last year's Missouri River flooding. The item was tabled at the commission's last meeting, but the concerns have since been resolved. Commissioners said that, despite some concerns about traffic in the area, they felt the need to approve the permit based on past zoning actions;
- canceled three years of back taxes owed on two mobile homes in the Eastwinds Mobile Home Park. The people who owe the several hundred dollars of taxes on each structure cannot be found. John Blackburn requested that the taxes be forgiven so he could have the unlivable homes demolished and rent the grounds to new mobile home owners;
- agreed to move ahead with a study that will identify potential solutions to a scouring situation along Old Highway 50 at the James River that threatens a bridge. A new bridge may be the answer, they acknowledged.

Burn

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least as of right now," he said late Monday afternoon. "If we don't get something substantial (Monday night), I'm going ahead with the resolution."

The commissioners can give immediate approval to the burn ban resolution, Vavruska said. The resolution would need to appear in the county's legal weekly newspapers, which could prevent it from officially going into effect until next week, he said.

In the meantime, Vavruska wants to get out the word in the Press & Dakotan. He wants to raise public awareness of the ongoing fire dangers and to inform the public of the burn ban.

"We only ask that people don't burn if at all possible," he said. "And we ask that they call the dispatch at the sheriff's office if they do plan to burn. That way, we know whether somebody is planning a controlled burn or if a fire is something else."

The recent fires have created tremendous challenges for area fire departments, said Tyndall fire chief Ron Wagner.

"On Friday, we thought we had the fires blocked, and then the wind changed 90 degrees," he said. "We had the fire departments from Tyndall, Tabor, Scotland and Springfield all out on the call, helping each other. Then, Scotland had to go over for a while and help the Menno fire department with a call."

The Sunday fire occurred at a Tyndall landfill site reserved for trees and leaves, Wagner said. The fire was contained at the site, south of South Dakota Highway 50 near Tyndall, he said.

"We think sparks may have started some things on fire that were still smoldering from two weeks ago," Wagner said.

"We tried to put some foam on the pile, but the wind kept blowing the foam off and the fire re-ignited every 15 or 20 minutes. We kept trying the foam and finally just called in the city to put dirt on (the blaze)."

The Tyndall department is taking the fire danger on a day-by-day basis, Wagner said.

"We are supposed to burn some (Conservation Reserve Program) acres by May 1, but we are seeing how these conditions turn out," he said.

The greatest help will come from outside the firefighters' control, Vavruska said.

Flood

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complacent and felt that we had tamed it when we put in the dams," he said. "But 2011 showed us that a lot can still happen to overwhelm what engineers put on the river. We need to keep that in mind as we go forward."

The lasting impact of the flood and the movement of sediment were on the minds of people who spoke to the *Press & Dakotan* prior to Monday's meeting.

To capture the flood's ongoing impact, MSAC commissioned more than 700 aerial images last November after the floodwaters receded, according to MSAC executive director Sandy Korkow of Springfield.

An estimated 89,700 acre-feet of sediment accumulates in the six Missouri River reservoirs annually, Korkow said.

However, she wasn't prepared for what she saw in the aerial photos.

"It has always been shocking to see how much sediment is in the river. But to see its movement from the air, it just puts things in perspective. You know it's there and it's not going to run away," she said.

"We're not sure how much more sediment entered the reservoirs as a result of the flooding. We know the energy involved gave the sediment more fuel to

move, but it wasn't going past the dams as some might feel. People thought the sediment would get flushed down the system, but we know it didn't and is still in the reservoirs."

MSAC is finalizing a 16-minute video using the November shots, showing sediment's threat to all of the river's authorized purposes, Korkow said.

"I did hear a presentation at a river conference in Pierre on Friday, and the Corps is looking at different modelings and methods of forecasting (the river)," she said. "I think everyone is trying to gather more information and move forward in a positive way to better predict the future."

Mary Hurd and her husband, Rick, are still dealing with the flooding's aftermath for their riverfront property. The Hurds live about 15 miles west of Springfield.

Mary Hurd said several friends last weekend brought back the couple's dock that had floated downstream to Niobrara, Neb., even with a 1,000-pound weight attached to the structure.

"We have reclaimed 250 acres of our bottom ground. We thought we would try planting, but it just didn't look very good, so we may hold off a year," she said. "We still have a lot of sand that blew out of our family park and picnic shelter. Yesterday, the wind blew so hard from the south that we had such a sandstorm that we didn't see any fields south of the road."

The remaining sediment after the massive force of floodwater at 160,000 cubic feet per second — more than twice the old record —

shows that flushing isn't a likely option for moving sediment, said MSAC technical coordinator Howard Paul.

"We could look at Dr. (Howard) Coker's proposed pipeline. We are also trying to find ways to reduce the amount of sediment getting into the river," he said. "This sediment issue is a major problem. It has to be addressed because it's not something that's quietly going away."

Despite the remaining sediment problems, MSAC has raised the issue's visibility since the organization was founded in 2000, according to MSAC chairman Larry Weiss.

"The flood last summer raised the visibility of sediment and how it impacts us," he said. "We are continuing to push what we can with the resources available to make improvements."

Weiss saw the flooding and sediment impact as a Pierre resident, but he was still shocked at what he saw downstream.

"The amount of sediment on the banks right below Sioux City was amazing," he said. "In Pierre, there was a lot of sediment moved, which brings to light the fact that there is bed erosion and bank erosion."

Despite the challenges of sedimentation, Weiss remains hopeful for the future.

"This (problem) didn't start yesterday, and it's not going to end tomorrow," he said. "People shouldn't become discouraged. We have made a lot of progress since we started this organization."



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