Flooding continues along Rock River and Lake Koshkonong

By Mark Scarborough
Reporter Staff

Last week's flooding in the Edgerton-area and throughout southern Wisconsin provided ugly reminders of how swiftly and steadily the waters of Rock River and Lake Koshkonong jumped prior to the high-water mark of 2008.

The Rock River's level at the mouth of Lake Koshkonong had reached 11.37 feet by Monday, April 15, and was anticipated to reach 11.7 feet by Thursday, April 18, exceeding a 10-foot major flood stage, according to measurements collected by the U.S. Geological Survey.

By 4 a.m. Monday, April 22, water levels at this site had reached 12.4 feet, with the water predicted to fall to 12.3 feet by the end of Tuesday, April 23.

Record-high water levels for the Newville area on Rock River were set at 15.1 feet on June 22, 2008.

Other recent, record high water levels for this portion of Rock River were experienced on April 25, 1993 (12.23 feet); April 18, 2008 (11.65 feet); June 5, 2004 (11.5 feet); and March 29, 2009 (11.37 feet).

Rising Lake Koshkonong waters, complicated by fairly steady rainfall last week, had surrounded half a dozen homes on Lake Shore Drive in Mallwood. What had been land-stored pontoon boats now float in flooded waters, while playground equipment in lake-edge parkland has been completely surrounded by the expanded lake. "Road closed" and "high water" signs on some roadways in Mallwood were being threatened themselves by the inching waters of Lake Koshkonong.

Meanwhile, a handful of homeowners on Newville's Ellendale Road struggled to place sandbags around the foundations of their dwellings. fighting the rising tide of the Rock River.

On the morning and afternoon of Thursday, April 18, some 150 students from Edgerton High School, accompanied by Principal Mark Coombs and Assistant Principal Clark Bretthauer, helped emergency response volunteers and other workers assemble sand bags at a staging area along Highway 59 near the Culver's Restaurant in Newville.

"This is just a good way of giving back to the community," Coombs said about the student volunteers, who worked in frigid temperatures to pack hundreds of sand bags onto the beds of trucks.

Other people, including a J.P. Cullen work crew at the Cullen cottage on Ellendale Road, assembled and placed their own sand bags, fighting the rising tide of the Rock River. The edge of the river lapped against the rough wood of the cottage as the members of the crew scurried around in hip boots, hauling sand bags with a wheelbarrow.

On Saturday, April 20, a handful of neighbors gathered along Ellendale Road, moving from one place to another, attempting to place sand bags where they could do the most good.

Flood gates were wide open at the Indianford dam, allowing for a free flow of flood waters draining down Rock River from Lake Koshkonong.

Flooding along the edges of the river and the lake had yet to reach the disastrous levels of five years past, nor were the river and lake expected to do so. Nevertheless, sump pumps worked around the clock and basements were threatened.

Area ground had been saturated with rain water, with temporary ponds materializing hither and yon, providing wet refuge for ducks. Geese and sandhill cranes occupied similar spots near Fort Atkinson.

Throughout the southern Wisconsin area, roadways flooded, especially those entering Fort Atkinson. Blackhawk Island Road near Fort Atkinson was also flooded out, with dozens of homes there surrounded by water.

According to the National Weather Service (NWS) in the town of Sullivan, Wis., the highest Rock River levels observed within the last 10 days have included 18.11 feet in Fort Atkinson, 12.37 feet on Lake Koshkonong, and 8.46 feet in Newville.

Major flood stage at Fort Atkinson has been set at 16 feet. Major flood stage at Lake Koshkonong is

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10 feet, while major flood stage at Newville is 8.5 feet.

The NWS reported more than knee-deep water over Blackhawk Island Road, as well as flooding on Lamp Road on the west side of Rock River. Lake Koshkonong had earlier merged with Mud Lake, with widespread flooding reported in the Jefferson County towns of Sumner and Koshkonong. Flooding was also reported on some roads in the Dane County town of Albion.

Almost five inches of rainfall was recorded in the Edgerton area from April 8 to April 15, adding to the rising river level. The waters of Rock River were tracked at 9,750 cubic feet per second as of April 15, besting a record set in 2011 of 6,630 cubic feet per second. The median cubic feet per second for this portion of Rock River is generally about 4,210, with a minimum of 2,110 cfs noted in 2012.

According to the NWS, the Rock River had flooded its banks last week at Watertown, Jefferson, Fort Atkinson, Afton, Newville and near Lake Koshkonong. The Crawfish River had flooded at Milford, while the Fox River had flooded at Berlin, near New Munster, and near Rochester. The Pecatonica River had flooded at Martintown.