



Friday, April 12, 2013

Old Man River's on rise

By Lydia Statz and Ryan Whisner
Union staff writers

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JEFFERSON - With the probability of minor to moderate flooding imminent through June, Jefferson County Emergency Management director Donna HauAgom is on edge.

She reports that flood warnings remain in effect for the Crawfish River at Milford and Rock River, from Watertown south into Rock County. All currently are at or above flood stage.

According to the National Weather Service in Sullivan, 3.84 inches of rain fell between April 7 and 12, with another damp week still to come.

"We're expecting just some light rain or drizzle today, kind of just another damp day. And then tomorrow, we're looking at just some flurries, maybe some really light snow showers at the most," a meteorologist from the National Weather Service said. "And then on Sunday, it actually starts to get a little warm, but it comes with another push of rainfall. We're looking at, for the Fort Atkinson area, another quarter- to half-inch of rainfall with that system Sunday and Sunday night."

The current flood forecasts take that precipitation into account, but with rain predicted every day until Thursday, it is difficult to tell whether the flood forecasts will rise.

"Right now, I think it's hard to tell how much precipitation will fall that far out, but we could see probably not as much as this week, but even more precipitation, which wouldn't help the flooding," said the NWS metrologist.

That greatly concerns Hauagom, who remembers all too clearly the record highs that were reached during the 2008 flood.

The worst of the flooding that year came in early June, when the state was inundated with several inches of rain on the weekend of June 7-8. That pushed river levels up all across Wisconsin and caused extensive damage, including the washout of a levy that formed the popular Lake Delton near the Wisconsin Dells.

Locally, between June 7 and 8, heavy rain also washed out dams that formed the 17-acre, 11-foot-deep Upper Spring Lake near Palmyra and the Cushman Millpond.

The cities of Fort Atkinson and Jefferson both issued flooding emergencies as the Rock, Crawfish and Bark rivers continued to rise above record levels, putting residents near the rivers on notice and advising those who chose to remain in flood areas that they did so at their own risk.

Essentially cutting Jefferson in half, both the Main Street and Wisconsin Drive bridges were closed to vehicular and pedestrian traffic for 18 days. City officials said they were concerned that the structural integrity of the bridges might have been compromised by the floodwaters.

Recent heavy rains already have caused area waterways to rise to moderate flood level stages. To date, nearly 100 local high school and collegiate athletic events have been postponed or canceled. In addition, numerous Parks and Recreation activities in area communities also have been impacted by the ongoing rainfall.

Due to potential wave damage from high water, Jefferson County has enacted its Slow/No Wake Ordinance for all rivers and streams within Jefferson County.

Slow/no wake means that boats shall operate at the slowest speed possible and still maintain forward motion and steering control. Due to current conditions, it is recommended that boaters stay off rivers and streams until the water has receded to a safe level. The slow/no wake is in effect from Watertown and into Rock County.

In Fort Atkinson, officials notified residents living near the Rock River of the potential flood dangers. Firefighters were dispatched Thursday evening to the following areas: Zida Street from Milwaukee Avenue to Haumerson's Pond; Milwaukee Avenue East from Zida Street to the Bark River bridge; the east side of North High Street from Heth Street south to McMillen Street; the 400 block of McMillen Street and then covering down to Florence Street; State Highway 106 West of Sinnissippi Drive and one home in the city limits on the east end of East Sherman Avenue.

Handouts included information about flood safety, flood related mold prevention and cleanup, and keeping food and water safe, all provided by Gail Scott, director of the Jefferson County Health Department.

Forms were filled out for any residents who would need special care (medically) in the event of any evacuations.

Fort Atkinson City Manager Evelyn Johnson said she did not anticipate any evacuations being required, but she felt it was best to be prepared.

Johnson also has issued an emergency order banning all uses (such as fishing) within 50 feet of the banks of the Rock River in Fort Atkinson until further notice due to safety concerns. Violation of the ban might result in a citation and forfeiture for disorderly conduct.



WATER "WORLD" Residents and officials throughout Jefferson County continue to brace for more flooding as forecasters have predicted more rain heading into early next week. Over the past week, a total of 3.84 inches of rain fell, sending the Rock, Crawfish and Bark rivers over flood stage. Above, a truck hauls a boat over the water-covered Rock River Road in the Town of Koshkonong. Below, water levels in Fort Atkinson were recorded at 16.73 feet this morning, just below moderate flood stage of 17 feet, spilling over the riverwalk. The line on the sign marks the height of the 2008 flood which reached 20.9 feet. A ban on all activities within 50 feet of the riverbank in the city has been put into effect until further notice.



In addition, due to the current flooding situation, the Fort Atkinson Water Utility will be delaying its spring hydrant flushing, originally slated to start today, to a later date.

The high waters have led to a few road closures, as well.

In the Fort Atkinson area, the following roads are closed: Sinnissippi Drive, Bark River Road from Kutz Road to Rock River Road; Rock River Road from State Highway 106 to the Fort Atkinson city limits; and Blackhawk Island Road, from the Highway 26 overpass to the end of the road. Only emergency management officials and local residents are allowed on the road.

Town of Koshkonong public works director Gary Kutz said there is water on the road on Ralph Road, Veterans Lane, Fox Hill Road and Oxbow Bend.

He noted that the general rule is that if there is more than 4 inches of water over the roadway, then the road is closed. It is possible some of those mentioned might close as the water continues to rise.

Although Veterans Lane is not closed, the Edwin Frohmader Post 1879 of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Clubhouse is closed until further notice.

There are no road closures in the City of Jefferson currently; however, due to flooding, the Tensfeldt Park boat launch has been closed.

Boaters wishing to launch below the Jefferson dam may utilize the West Riverview Drive boat launch, which will be reopened temporarily. Those wishing to launch above the dam may continue to utilize the Candise Street boat launch.

"We are asking municipalities to be responsible to their residents regarding sand and sandbags," Haugom said. "If anyone wants sand or sandbags, they should contact their town, village or city."

Sand and sandbags for residents of the Fort Atkinson are available at the Department of Public Works at 700 James Place from 7 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

The City of Jefferson has acquired sandbags for distribution to property owners. They may be obtained at the City of Jefferson Police Department located at 425 Collins Road. The cost per sandbag is 25 cents.

Property owners may obtain sand at no charge at the Tensfeldt Park Boat Launch parking lot located directly west of the Jefferson Wastewater Treatment Plant, 221 East Henry St. For all other municipalities, residents are asked to contact their town officials for information on sandbag availability.

Meanwhile, along the Rock River in Watertown, the water levels were at 5.07 feet this morning, just below flood stage of 5.5 feet. At flood stage, there is widespread lowland flooding in rural areas around Watertown. Current projections show a crest at just above flood stage of 5.6 feet over the weekend.

Flood stage is labeled as a 10-year flood by the National Weather Service office.

Historical high-water marks in Watertown include 7.81 feet in 2008, 6.96 feet in 1997, 6.32 feet in April 1959 and 6.19 feet in March 1979.

Downstream in the City of Jefferson, the Rock River water gauge surged above moderate flood stage to 11.08 feet Friday. Major flood stage is 13 feet. Based on available records, the 2008 flood, which peaked at 15.64 feet, marked the first time the water levels had ever surpassed the major flood stage level.

The previous record in Jefferson, according to National Weather Service records, was 12.84 feet set on April 2, 1979. Additional high-water records were in April 1993 with 12.29 feet, June 2004 with 11.51 feet and April 2008 with 11.35 feet.

Current projections still show a likely crest on Monday as high as 11.9 feet.

Water levels in Fort Atkinson were recorded at 16.73 feet this morning, just below moderate flood stage of 17 feet. The water levels are projected to remain on the rise to as high as 17 feet by Sunday.

Record levels were seen in June 2008 when the water reached 20.9 feet.

All current river forecasts take into account past precipitation and the precipitation amounts expected within the next 24 hours.

Prior to 2008, based on Daily Union archive records, it was the flood in 1929 that topped the record books in Fort Atkinson. The recording gauge at the Rock River in Fort Atkinson was installed in 1998 and the method of recording the levels was altered.

Historically, crests in 1929, 1979, 1959 and 1993 respectively have generally been considered to be among the highest levels recorded. Additional high-water marks occurred in April 2008, June 2004, April 2009 and July 2010.

Downstream on Lake Koshkonong, water levels were recorded at 10.61 feet and rapidly climbing. At 10 feet, water spreads into low-lying areas around Lake Koshkonong.

As the high waters continue to move downstream, the water is just now starting to impact the low-lying areas around Lake Koshkonong.

Water likely will start to impact homes and docks in the Blackhawk Island Road area in the Town of Sumner as it continues to rise.

Current projections indicate the water levels might rise to major flood stage of 11.5 feet by Monday. The record is another four feet higher set in June 2008 at 15.12 feet.

At Newville, the water levels rose to above moderate flood stage Thursday and were recorded at 6.73 feet this morning. Major flood stage is 7.5 feet.

No accurate records are available to reflect the water levels achieved during the 1929, 1979 and 1959 floods at Newville.

A flood warning also remained in affect for the Crawfish River at Milford, where the latest gauge reading was 7.76 feet over the minor flood stage level of 7 feet. Projections are that the river will rise to a high of 8.3 feet by Sunday.

As with other monitoring stations within Jefferson County, the record high along the Crawfish River was recorded in June 2008 at 13.59 feet. Previous records were in 1959, 11.15 feet, and 1979 10.06 feet.

Haugom pointed out that as long as the Crawfish River continued to "behave," the overall flooding situation should be more manageable.

Part of the problem in 2008 was the flooding at the confluence of the Crawfish and Rock rivers in the City of Jefferson.

Also, the Bark River was reported at 3.67 feet, only a foot below the record high of 4.6 feet.

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