

Watching the rivers overflow once again in our lifetime

Once again the waters are rising, and things are only going to get worse.

Will it be as bad as it was five years ago? We certainly hope not, but the “Road Closed” sign stashed along County Line Road on Thursday waiting to be put up “just in case” was not encouraging.

Back in '08, we walked along that road in waders, and bowhunted carp as they swam in the ditches. The water was so high that I could paddle my canoe from my deer stand all the way to Lake Koshkonong.

It was supposed to be one of those “once in a lifetime” floods, but here we are again.

At this writing, the water is already nibbling at the shoulder of County Line in places, and it goes all the way back to the lake.

Wildlife, at least the nonaquatic variety, has been forced out of the bottomlands and is having to find new places to move to. Around noon last Sunday as the water was coming up, we saw a herd of deer that had been displaced milling around on the road before heading south to dryer ground (perhaps trying to find Noah's Ark?).

I'm sure that the smaller animals like coons and possums had already departed.

The ducks and geese are loving it, though. There's plenty of waterfowl quacking and honking on the watery expanses as they swim around in their new expanded world. Competition for nesting in a few available water holes certainly won't be a problem this year.

One of the longer-term effects of the flooding is the impact that it has on the surrounding flora. In two fields adjacent to the road, there has been perhaps the largest concentration of the white-fringed prairie orchids in the U.S. This extremely rare plant seems to have liked whatever was in the soil, and the fact that the area is subject to controlled prairie burns every spring also helped them thrive.

After the big flood of '08, though, they all but disappeared. During the following years, they slowly began to reemerge again and were making a good recovery until last summer's drought nearly wiped them out again.

Now the survivors find themselves once again under a couple of feet of water.

Trees can only take so much flooding too. There aren't any cypress trees in Rock County, and our native trees have a limited tolerance for having their roots submerged for weeks or even months.

After the last flood, a large area of swamp ash in the Koshkonong flood plain where I hunt began dying off, and it looks like the rest of them might soon follow.

Another plant problem is what the standing water can do to the ground cover. The once deer-rich woods I frequent with my bow became marginal land after the last flood.

Much of the flora that whitetails fed on evidently died and was replaced by more water tolerant varieties that are of little interest to deer. With no browse to hold them, there are few deer around these days.

Of course, bellyaching about my hunting being screwed up by the high water won't get much sympathy from those who are having real problems, like cottage and home

owners who are watching their properties being inundated by the rising waters—something that wasn't supposed to happen again in this century.

Hopefully it won't be as bad as the last time, but as the season unfolds and the rain continues to fall it doesn't look good.

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Floodwaters will cause changes in both the animal and plant life in Rock County.