



Published April 17, 2013, 11:30 PM

## 'Prepare for flood of record'

'No more waiting' as crest forecast to near 2009's record

FARGO – Forecasters on Wednesday advised flood fighters to prepare for a new record crest on the Red River here, with a predicted range of 39 to 41 feet.

By: **Patrick Springer**, INFORUM

---

FARGO – Forecasters on Wednesday advised flood fighters to prepare for a new record crest on the Red River here, with a predicted range of 39 to 41 feet.

That would mean a midrange crest prediction of 40.3 feet, but forecasters cautioned that the range could be as wide as 38 feet to 42 feet, according to a new prediction released Wednesday by the National Weather Service.

"We encourage people to prepare for a flood of record," said Greg Gust, a weather service meteorologist.

Fargo now faces a 40 percent chance of seeing a new record flood, up from a 15 percent chance predicted in late March, in what is assured to be the latest spring flood on record.

The record 2009 flood crested at 40.84 feet, but this spring has produced an unprecedented late thaw caused by heavy snowpack – now ripe and ready to melt in the southern basin.

Flood fighters must scramble to prepare for a crest in Fargo that could arrive toward the end of the two-week period covered in the forecast.

"The latter part of next week could see a pretty significant warm-up and that could really kick things into gear," Gust said.

"The window for a likely crest for Fargo starts not next week but probably the week after that," he added.

A more precise crest prediction, based on flowing water, could come as early as this weekend or early next week. That's when forecasters expect to see the first significant river responses to the thaw.

Fargo Mayor Dennis Walaker said the time for skepticism about a significant flood is over, and the city will take the steps necessary to protect the city.

"What it is is reality," Walaker said of the new forecast. "We don't have any move right now other than moving forward with our preparations."

Fargo will build to protect against a 42-foot flood, the maximum in the forecast, with at least a foot of freeboard, Walaker said.

It wasn't immediately clear if the city should go beyond the 500,000 sandbags that now will be filled, starting today, a goal announced earlier this week. That would give Fargo 1.8 million sandbags in reserve.

Construction of clay levees will begin next week, starting with Oak Street, as will demolition of seven homes in the Oakcreek neighborhood, Walaker said.

Asked if Fargo will be ready by the time the crest arrives, possibly within two weeks, Walaker answered: "Absolutely. There is no question in my mind that we'll be ready."

Rural Cass County will likely see severe flooding from the Red River and its tributaries as well as overland flooding. Road closures and damage could be widespread, especially at the top end of the flood forecast, officials said.

If the Red River reaches 41 or 42 feet, much of Cass County will be vulnerable to flooding, County Administrator Keith Berndt said.

"Those numbers really start going up," he said of the list of flood-prone areas. "At 42 feet there really aren't very many homes in Cass County that aren't threatened, in those areas that don't have protection."

Along the Sheyenne River, which also could see a new record crest, areas between Kindred and Horace that weren't seen as threatened earlier now will be vulnerable in light of the new forecast, he said.

Downstream along the Sheyenne, the area north of West Fargo to Harwood will see flooding.

"That area is all vulnerable," Berndt said. "We have a lot of access issues there."

Rural subdivisions south of Fargo also are threatened, although houses in some of the lowest areas have been removed through buyouts, Berndt said.

"Those unprotected areas along the Red and Wild Rice rivers are especially troublesome," he said.

Subdivisions of particular concern on the south side of the Wild Rice River along Highway 81 include Kensington, Rivershore and Robinson.

Cass County staff will meet this morning to come up with a flood protection plan in light of the new forecast, including a decision about whether more sandbags will be needed, Berndt said.

Michael Redlinger, Moorhead city manager, said officials still are analyzing the new forecast and will bring recommendations to the City Council on Monday, including a plan for clay levee construction.

"We'll just continue to evaluate through the end of this week," he said, adding that city officials will determine whether new areas of protection will be necessary.

The 400,000 sandbags in storage should be adequate for a flood of up to 43 feet, Redlinger said. Since 2009, Moorhead has bought out more than 200 flood-prone houses. If those houses had remained, the city would need more than 2 million sandbags.

In Clay County, overland flooding from the Red River will be a problem, said Bryan Green, the county's emergency management director.

"Especially for Georgetown and the Oakport area, this is going to be a new adventure," he said.

Oakport now is largely protected by new levees up to 42 feet, which can be augmented to 44 feet, although a section including Broadway Street, a north-south thoroughfare parallel to the river, will require a temporary levee, Green said.

Georgetown has a ring dike, but temporary reinforcements must be added, including a gap for Highway 75.

"Basically it's a lot of new protection we're going to have to put into place," Green said. "It's a lot of work. People have to get busy pretty quick. No more waiting."

The National Weather Service forecast is based on predictions for temperatures and precipitation over the next two weeks.

The low end of the flood predictions, around 38 to 39 feet, would result from a gradual melt with no significant rains.

The high end of the scale, 41 to 42 feet, would result from a very rapid thaw coinciding with heavy rains in late April and early May, forecasters said.

Temperatures are expected to continue a slow warming trend, though cooler than normal. Temperatures are expected to fluctuate widely in the last week of April, with an enhanced risk of moderate rain.

Bare spots are seeing a few inches of topsoil melt, which might hold an inch or so of snowmelt, but the ground beneath still has a deep layer of frost, limiting the ability of the soil to hold water until it thaws, Gust said.

The Red River in Fargo this spring has a 95 percent chance of hitting 39.3 feet, a 90 percent chance of 39.4 feet, a 75 percent chance of 39.8 feet, a 50 percent chance of 40.3 feet, a 25 percent chance of 41.3 feet, a 10 percent chance of 42.1 feet and a 5 percent chance at 42.4 feet, the weather service said.

Before the Sunday-Monday storm dropped wet snow over the valley, the forecast called for a 50 percent chance of a flood surpassing 38.1 feet, with a 5 percent chance of topping 41.3 feet.

#### **50-degree day record likely to be shattered**

FARGO – Spring now is officially tardy in record-smashing fashion: Today was for more than a century the date marking the latest arrival of a 50-degree day here, a record set in 1881.

"We're going to probably end up shattering it," WDAY meteorologist Daryl Ritchison said of the 132-year-old record.

Today's snowy forecast calls for a high of 36 degrees, and highs aren't expected to surpass the 40s in the week ahead.

Coincidentally, 1881 was the first year official weather records were kept in Fargo.

The winter of 1880-81 was made famous by Laura Ingalls Wilder through her novel, "The Long Winter," describing her pioneer family's experience near DeSmet, S.D.

That winter, which set many weather records in the Midwest, stretched from October to April, a weather feat now duplicated.

"A lot of people always joke about our six-month winters," Ritchison said. "This year we literally had one."

When will Fargo see its first 50-degree day?

"The earliest I could foresee it happening is late next week," he said.

Last year, Fargo saw its first 50-degree day on Jan. 5, the earliest on record.

Fargo's latest 60-degree on record is May 6, and May 28 is the latest arrival of a 70-degree day.

#### **Forecast calls for more of the same**

FARGO – The weather forecast for the next week calls for more of the same: abnormally cold temperatures, with light snow possible today and a chance of rain and snow this weekend.

Lows will be in the 20s, with highs this weekend expected to reach the low 40s, according to the National Weather Service's forecast Wednesday.

Today has a 50 percent chance of around an inch of snow.

A mild warm-up is expected Saturday, with a high of 40, followed by a high of 43 forecast for Sunday and Monday.

#### **Ice jam causes abrupt rise of Buffalo River**

SABIN, Minn. – An ice jam caused an abrupt, 6-foot rise in the south fork of the Buffalo River here Sunday and Monday, but the river has returned to its banks, where it is expected to remain for the next week.

Bryan Green, Clay County emergency management director, said Wednesday that the brief spike flooded a couple of township roads, one of which has

since cleared.

The Buffalo River is often one of the first Red River tributaries to flood, officials said.

---

Have a comment to share about a story? Letters to the editor should include author's name, address and phone number. Generally, letters should be no longer than 250 words. All letters are subject to editing. [Send a letter to the editor.](#)

---

Readers can reach Forum reporter Patrick Springer at (701) 241-5522

**Tags:** [north dakota](#), [news](#), [flood](#), [minnesota](#)

#### **More from around the web**

- ['Dancing With the Stars' Salaries \(American Profile\)](#)
- [4 Surgeries to Avoid \(AARP\)](#)
- [Satellite Sees Russian Meteor Explosion From Space \(redOrbit\)](#)
- [Earthquake and Tsunami Disaster in Japan: An Infographic \(Digital Surgeons\)](#)
- [Mars Rover Finds Evidence of Dogs on Mars \(The Dogington Post\)](#)