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More rain, snow could lead to more flooding in river communities

GRAFTON, Ill. — The Mississippi River is topping out at some problematic spots, but there is growing concern that spring floods are far from over.

By: Associated Press, INFORUM

GRAFTON, Ill. — The Mississippi River is topping out at some problematic spots, but there is growing concern that spring floods are far from over.

The river was at or near crest at several places Sunday between the Quad Cities and near St. Louis. Some towns in the approximate 100-mile stretch of river from Quincy, Ill., to Grafton, Ill., reached 10-12 feet above flood stage.

The good news was that most businesses and homes were high and dry, though hundreds of acres of farmland were under water, bridges were closed at Quincy and Louisiana, Mo., and countless roads were shutdown.

But river towns aren't yet in the clear: An inch or more of rain is in the forecast as well as continuing accumulation of snow to the north, especially in Minnesota and the Dakotas. Flood watchers along both the Missouri and Mississippi rivers know that once that snow — record levels in some cases — melts, a lot of it ends up in the big rivers.

The current flooding is bad enough. In scenic Grafton, a small tourist town 40 miles north of St. Louis, floodwater 3 inches deep seeped into the basement of Pam and Dennis Bick's home where they've lived for four decades.

"We have time to figure out what to do, where we would go and where we would put everything," Pam Bick, 57, said. "I don't want it to come up any more. But I can't stop it."

Rain last week started the whole mess, causing the Mississippi and many other rivers to surge in Missouri, Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin, Michigan and Indiana. Flooding has now been blamed in three deaths — two at the same spot in Indiana and one in Missouri. In all three cases, vehicles were swept off the road in flash floods.

Spots south of St. Louis aren't expected to crest until late this week, and significant flooding is possible in places like Ste. Genevieve, Mo., Cape Girardeau, Mo., and Cairo, Ill.

Adding to concern is the forecast. National Weather Service meteorologist Julie Phillipson said an inch of rain is likely in many places Monday night into Tuesday, some places could receive more than that.

"That's not what we want to see when we have this kind of flooding, that's for sure," Phillipson said.

In La Grange, Mo., sandbags were holding back the murky Mississippi River water at City Hall, a bank and a handful of threatened homes, and the water was dropping. This flood was little more than an inconvenience, Lewis County emergency management director David Keith said.

"What we're worried about now is all that snow melt in North and South Dakota and Minnesota," Keith said, referencing the state's mounds of April snow.

Forecasters said up to 6 inches of new snow were possible in the Black Hills area of South Dakota through Monday morning. But AccuWeather meteorologist Alan Reppert said it may stay cold long enough to the north to make for a gradual melt. Of greater concern, he said, is the Red River in North Dakota, which could see significant flooding in the coming weeks.

Sandbagging was beginning this week in Fargo and Cass County to prepare for forecast record amounts of high water along the Red River and its tributaries.

By Sunday, sandbagging had all but stopped in Clarksville, Mo., evidence of the confidence in the makeshift sandbag levee hurriedly erected to protect downtown. The river Sunday was about 10 feet above flood stage and expected to rise another foot before cresting Monday.

"We believe we'll have a successful conclusion," said Jo Anne Smiley, longtime mayor of the 442-resident hamlet.

In Grand Rapids, Mich., the Grand River peaked at 21.85 feet Sunday night, topping the previous record of 19.64 feet set in 1985, the National Weather Service reported Monday. Flood stage is 18 feet.

Hundreds of volunteers filled sandbags to stack around downtown buildings. Mayor George Heartwell, who declared a state of emergency, has estimated that the city will spend at least \$500,000 on flood defenses, MLive.com reported.

"We have prepared for the worst," Heartwell said.

Illinois Gov. Pat Quinn declared at least 41 counties disaster areas from flooding. Flooding along the Fox and Des Plaines rivers has left many roads impassable in communities such as Lisle, Gurnee and Des Plaines, and in some cases residents are getting around in canoes.

Indiana officials were still determining if flooded communities like Kokomo, Tipton and Elwood will be eligible for disaster aid.

Salter reported from St. Louis.

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