

USGS GAUGE 05054000 - Red River | Fargo, ND
Peak 2012 Crest: 2012-03-18 4120 cfs 17.83 ft
(see page 2)

All signs point to another spring flood in valley

GRAND FORKS – The Red River Valley could be facing an “unprecedented fourth consecutive major spring flood threat” in 2012, according to the National Weather Service.

By: Kevin Bonham, Forum Communications Co., INFORUM

GRAND FORKS – The Red River Valley could be facing an “unprecedented fourth consecutive major spring flood threat” in 2012, according to the National Weather Service.

“If my experiences in the Red River Basin are a good guide, there is already a certain level of concern with the high water in many locations and implications for 2012,” Mark Ewens, senior hydrometeorologist technician, said Tuesday.

Usually, a wet summer has little correlation to the following spring’s flood potential. But this is more than a wet summer, he said.

“With the current wet summer, following one of the wettest years regionally, even normal rain and/or snow over the next six months will dramatically increase the 2012 spring flood threat,” Ewens said in a statement released Tuesday afternoon.

“Agricultural and infrastructure impacts aside, the current high water levels are unusual in their scope. Our concern is, barring a dry spell from here through October, we will enter the freeze-up in a potentially precarious hydrologic position.”

Ewens and Greg Gust, weather service warning coordination meteorologist, compiled a log of recent conditions throughout the valley, as well as the Devils Lake Basin, a sub-basin of the Red River Valley.

Rainfall above normal

In North Dakota, the Wild River, Bois de Sioux, upper Sheyenne and western Devils Lake basins, and Minnesota’s Ottertail, upper Red River, upper Red Lake River and Two Rivers basins, have had well above normal rainfall the past three months.

In excess of 20 inches have fallen in some spots.

Ewens and Gust said the only area that has not had extreme rainfall this summer is the central Red River Valley. Central portions of the Red River Basin and the eastern half of the Devils Lake Basin have had somewhat less extreme precipitation, but are still running from 2 to 5 inches above typical growing season year normals.

Devils Lake reached an unofficial record of 1,454.4 feet in June and has been hovering in the 1,454.25-foot elevation for the past few weeks. On Monday, it rose to 1,454.34 feet.

According to the U.S. Geological Survey, there are record or near record flows on the Red and most of the river’s North Dakota and Minnesota tributaries and streams.

South of Fargo, soil moisture remains excessively wet in both Minnesota and North Dakota.

Climate outlook

During the next two to three months, the risk for above-normal precipitation will continue, the weather officials said.

Typically, during September and October, the threat for heavy rainfalls decrease, but that might not be the case this year.

“Beyond the fall of 2011, there are no reliable outlooks available,” Ewens said. “It is pure speculation at this point.”

In October, weather officials may have a better idea of potential snowfall for the 2011-12 winter.

The best chance for the region to dry out may be the next 30 days, according to Ewens and Gust.

“Currently, we are seeing surface runoff and river responses with relatively light rainfalls, and just about any rain serves to maintain the excessively wet soils,” the weather officials said.

The region’s climate history prompted Ewens and Gust to advise area officials to be ready for another severe winter season and the possibility for major spring flooding.

Bonham writes for the Grand Forks Herald

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Surface-water: Peak streamflow ▼

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Cass County, North Dakota
Hydrologic Unit Code 09020104
Latitude 46°51'40", Longitude 96°47'00" NAD27
Drainage area 6,800 square miles
Gage datum 862.88 feet above NAVD88

Output formats

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Water Year	Date	Gage Height (feet)	Stream-flow (cfs)
2012	Mar. 18, 2012	17.83	4,120 ⁶

