

UMATILLA RIVER FLOODING

Stanfield, Echo homes and roads flooded

Flood waters top Hermiston Irrigation District gates along the Umatilla River

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

UMATILLA COUNTY — Tona Clements sat in her car with her dog, Little Man, at 9 a.m. Friday, watching the flood waters begin to recede from her neighborhood on the west side of Echo. She pointed to the water mark on a stump showing the water had been roughly 8 inches higher in the early morning hours when she evacuated.

“I was asleep and the cops came, bam bam bam on my door,” she said. “I just got out of there, because they said, ‘It’s coming!’”

Some of her neighbors were driving through the water in pickup trucks, but she didn’t think her smaller car would make it through. A quarter-mile down Oregon Trail Road, waters covered that road, too, causing most non-pickup drivers to turn around.

“It’s never flooded like this before,” she said.

That was the refrain from several people who stopped to say hi to Clements. Lloyd Piercy, who was going to check on his daughter’s home, said the last comparable flood was in 1996.

Annette Kirkpatrick, manager of the Hermiston Irrigation District, said flood waters had overtopped district’s gates all along the Umatilla River. She said the flooding was far worse than last year.

“Even ‘96 wasn’t as bad as this,” she said.

The district received funds from the Federal Emergency Management Agency to repair damage from the April 2019 flood, and Kirkpatrick said it was a good thing they hadn’t finished the repairs yet, because they would need to be redone now anyway.

On the east side of Echo, where water lapped up the embankment of the railroad tracks, Shannon and Norman Rhodes were wading through thigh-deep water in rubber boots, carrying plastic totes of



Trucks sit in flood water covering Interstate 84 just west of milepost 188 at the Pilot truck stop at Stanfield.

Staff photo by Jade McDowell



An Echo home sits in flood water on Friday morning.

Staff photo by Jade McDowell



The Stanfield Moose Lodge sits in flood water on Friday morning.

Staff photo by Jade McDowell

belongings. They were helping Shannon’s mother, Geri Root, move items out of her flooded home.

“I’ve lived here since 1964 in this house, and this is the worst it’s been,” Shannon said.

Norman said he was glad everyone was safe — that was the important thing.

“Everything here is materialistic,” he said.

Umatilla County Commissioner Bill Elfering said 25 to 30 families had been displaced in Echo. The Echo City Council met early Friday morning to declare a state of emergency, echoing the county’s declaration.

City Administrator David

Slaght, who said on Friday he’d been up since 3 a.m., said Echo School was offering shelter to anyone who needed it, but only had one taker so far. They have cots, but were looking for some bedding to go with them.

At Echo Community Church, food donations poured in and the church offered breakfast, lunch and dinner Friday to anyone who wanted it, and planned to offer at least breakfast and dinner Saturday.

Slaght gave kudos to the church, the school district, and to Echo Rural Fire Department and others who evacuated people from their homes before the floods hit.

“I believe many lives were saved,” he said.

He asked residents to be cautious about not returning too early to their flooded homes, and noted that there was likely contaminants in the flood water.

In Stanfield about 8:30 a.m., people flocked to see the flooding along the intersection of Hoosier Road and Stanfield Meadows Road. Some were debating about whether to brave wading through the flood water to check on the nearby storage units that appeared to be flooded. Water also surrounded the Stanfield Moose Lodge, but no one was there yet to unlock the door and

check what damage may have occurred inside.

At the Interstate 84 interchange between Stanfield and Echo, an Oregon Department of Transportation vehicle blocked the westbound on-ramp to the interstate, and a sign stated the road leading down to Echo to be used by Echo residents only.

From the Pilot Travel Center near the interchange, it was clear why the interstate was closed. Less than a mile to the west, several semitrucks were partially submerged in flood waters covering the interstate.

Hermiston mostly avoided the flooding, other than floodwaters washing through Riverview Park, the Oxbow Trail

and Orchard Avenue along the park. Friday afternoon, Umatilla River Road was closed from Bensel Road to Cooney Lane.

To the east of Stanfield, flooding got steadily worse heading toward Pendleton.

Angela Cossitt lives on Birch Creek Road with her boyfriend, two children, cousin and niece. She said that at 9 a.m. Friday, a sheriff’s deputy knocked on her door and let her know it was time to evacuate.

“We’re not sure where we’re going to go,” Cossitt said.

She parked her car on a nearby hill, and hopes her boyfriend’s truck can brave whatever waters they’ll need to drive through when necessary.

The sheriff’s office stated this morning that Echo Meadows, Stanfield Meadows, Reith Road and Theislen Road are all currently closed, along with Highway 207. According to the Umatilla County Sheriff’s Office, any roadway to and from Echo is closed due to high floodwaters.

“The backyard is starting to fill up from the ground,” she added.

At 11 a.m., she said her neighbor’s house across the street was surrounded by at least 2 feet of water.

County Commissioner John Shafer said Friday morning that marine deputies from the sheriff’s office headed out to help people in the Reith area.

Umatilla County Fire District 1 issued a boil water notice for all homes and businesses served by private wells in the Stanfield and Echo areas. City water is still OK to use, the district stated, but anyone on a well should drink bottled water or bring their tap water to a full rolling boil for at least three minutes before drinking.

The district also noted that a staging area for Stanfield residents, who have been evacuated, is set up at the Stanfield fire station. Fire district personnel performed multiple rescues from homes and vehicles on Friday morning.

East Oregonian Reporter Jessica Pollard contributed to this report.

Umatilla County schools deal with flood impact

By SHEILA HAGAR
Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

ATHENA — Umatilla County school officials are dealing with flood conditions, even as all local superintendents reported no school facilities have yet been affected by rising river and creek levels.

Athena-Weston Superintendent Laure Quaresma decided Thursday night to close her schools for Friday due to water on bridges and roadways.

Weston’s Water Street has standing water that makes bus passage unsafe and the Pine Creek area has been hit hard by flooding, she said.

“Those roads closed down yesterday and we could not get kids home, they had to go to relatives’ houses,” Quaresma said. “We had one family where the dad was on the roof, waiting for a helicopter to rescue him.”

That came with flooding of the small community of



A sign warns of the floodwaters ahead on South Walla Walla River Road on Thursday evening in Milton-Freewater.

Walla Walla Union-Bulletin Photo/Jedidiah Maynes

Thorn Hollow near Weston, and the resulting collapse of its bridge Thursday. Two of the district’s bus routes rely on that bridge; the district will need to devise alternate routes, Quaresma said.

“We’ve been told the river

has yet to crest.”

In Milton-Freewater Unified School District, Superintendent Aaron Duff said while he is not concerned about his four school buildings, he is unwilling to put students or staff in any dan-

ger getting to or from school.

Nor was he willing to gamble on Friday’s weather and what it might bring, Duff said.

“If we had to evacuate, I couldn’t do that quickly enough,” he said.

MILTON-FREEWATER UNABLE TO STAFF SHELTERS, VICTIMS DIRECTED TO WALLA WALLA

MILTON-FREEWATER —The three temporary shelters in Milton-Freewater for people displaced by flooding are being shut down due to a lack of volunteers available from the American Red Cross, said City Manager Linda Hall. For now, people from the area are being directed to seek shelter at the Walla Walla County Fairgrounds instead. The city declared a state of emergency and issued mandatory evacuations of everything east of Highway 11 and South Main Street earlier on Friday, Hall told the East Oregonian in a voicemail. Hall said there is “amazing, miraculous and dangerous work” being done by crews

of volunteers and emergency personnel to protect the levee within the city’s limit and so far they’ve kept it intact. But she said the evacuation order will remain in effect until the National Weather Service has lifted its flood warning.

The city is asking people to stay clear of the evacuated area to avoid safety risks or interfering with the efforts of those working on the levee. While the levee within the city has withstood the water, she said, there has been a levee breach at Marie Dorion Park along Walla Walla River Road and the Couse Creek Bridge has been destroyed by the floods.

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The Rhythm Section (R)
4:10p 9:30p

Little Women (PG)
1:10p* 6:40p

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