

# FLOOD

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Norman said he was glad everyone was safe — that was the important thing. “Everything here is materialistic,” he said.

Echo School quickly jumped into action, setting up cots in the commons area to form a shelter for anyone in need. Echo Community Church started taking donations of food, clothing and other items, and offered up three free meals a day to anyone who needed it throughout the weekend and this week’s cleanup efforts.

As many as 50 homes in Echo were directly affected by flooding late Thursday and early Friday across the Echo Rural Fire Protection District area, according to the district. However, people at Echo Community Church remained optimistic.

“Things are good, considering everything,” Pastor John Marcum said on Saturday.

Marcum and his wife fled their own home on the west side of Echo early Friday morning, and when they returned later they found waters rising at least 3 feet. They will likely lose some of their belongings, Marcum said, but the house should be OK, noting that others were probably not so lucky.

“Some houses will be inhabitable,” Marcum said. “The flooding was much worse this year than in a long time.”

Rushing past Echo, the flood waters made their way to Stanfield, crossing Interstate 84 to do so. Rescue personnel from area fire districts had to rescue drivers from semi-trucks and vehicles as the vehicles got mired in high water on the interstate during the predawn hours of Friday morning.

The interstate remained closed between mileposts 182 and 188 until Sunday evening, when one lane was opened in each direction. The Oregon Department of Transportation does not have an estimate for when the remaining lanes will open.

While most of Stanfield escaped damage, homes on Stanfield Meadows Road were damaged, along with ministorage and other businesses in the Hoosier Lane area. The Stanfield Moose Lodge got a few inches of water in its kitchen, but volunteers had restored the building to working use by Monday, according to the service club’s Facebook page.

Next, the water made its way to Hermiston, where flood levels in the Riverfront Park area blanketed Riverfront Park in rushing water and washed away a section of Orchard Avenue.

Parks and recreation director Larry Fetter said the park’s 2019 flood, which he estimated caused about one fourth of the damage of this year’s flood, qualified for some financial assistance from FEMA, so he hoped this year’s would as well.

“The parking lot has been broken up into chunks and distributed all over,” he said. “There really is no parking lot. The driveway is gone, fencing is gone, the restroom appears to be off its base, portions of the trail are gone .... Our irrigation system is completely compromised.”

For now, however, the park remains closed and Fetter said it was far too early to have a timeline for reopening or an estimate of the damage costs. He said people walking or driving in the damaged area were making the damage worse — not to mention putting themselves in danger — and asked that everyone steer clear.

Brian Mack, an area resident, said he knew homeless families that had been camping along the Umatilla River near Hermiston, mostly in the Oxbow area, who had been displaced by the flood. He said many of them lost tents and other belongings.

“I know six or seven families that had to grab their families and get out,” he said. “It just sucks because they lost everything.”

Mack said he hoped in the event of future flooding in the area, emergency responders would make an attempt to alert anyone in makeshift camps along the river and in the wooded Oxbow property that floods when the river overflows.

After hitting Hermiston, flood waters rose downstream, shutting down Umatilla River Road Friday evening and putting the athletic complex behind Umatilla High School underwater.

Superintendent Heidi Sipe said Monday the mud was still too thick to properly assess the damage, but she should know more later in the week. The school leases the property from the Army Corps of Engineers, and Sipe said she was working with both the Corps and the school’s insurance company.

“As soon as we get the all clear to start removing debris, we will have a work party and we will invite the community,” she said.

Sipe said it was unclear yet how quickly all of the elements of the complex would be useable again, but spring sports could start early practices indoors if need be, and she had confidence they could work with neighboring communities to find other options for practices as well.

“I know Eastern Oregon is amazing about banding together in situations like that,” she said.



Contributed photo by Larry Fetter

Flood waters tore large chunks of asphalt out of the Riverfront Park parking lot in Hermiston.

# RECOVERY

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for financial assistance or volunteer labor to assist in cleanup. Echo City Hall is 541-376-8411 and the City of Stanfield can be reached at 541-449-3831.

On Friday, Echo city administrator David Slaght gave kudos to Echo Community Church and Echo School District for their assistance in making sure displaced residents have food, water, bedding and shelter. He also praised 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 posted on Facebook Tuesday that there were volunteers ready to assist people with cleanup of their property, if people ask at city hall for assistance. Dumpsters for

flood-damaged materials are set up beside city hall and between Thielsen Street and the railroad tracks.

A webpage with flood information and resources county-wide has been set up on the county’s website, [co.umatilla.or.us](http://co.umatilla.or.us), and updates will continue to be posted to the Facebook page of the Umatilla County Sheriff’s Office.

For those looking to donate, the county said Community Action Plan of East Central Oregon (CAPECO) is collecting donations for all of Umatilla County via PayPal on their website, while the Blue Mountain Community Foundation is collecting donations in the Milton-Freewater area through [www.bluemountainfoundation.org](http://www.bluemountainfoundation.org).

Pendleton Salvation Army is handing out “cleaning kits” of mops, garbage bags and other supplies to area residents, and vouchers

for clothing at their store.

Echo Community Church is collecting donations of cleaning supplies such as shovels and rubber gloves, and Altrusa International of Hermiston took a load of supplies over to them on Tuesday. Desert Rose Ministries in Hermiston is also looking to assist homeless families that were reportedly displaced by the flooding in the Oxbow area.

The Red Cross has also been assisting in cleanup, and people can earmark donations at [www.redcross.com](http://www.redcross.com) to stay in the region. More than 100 volunteers showed up Sunday and Monday to assist in cleaning up the hard-hit Riverside neighborhood in Pendleton, and people wishing to assist in cleanup efforts there and other heavily damaged areas this week should visit the Red Cross shelter set up at the Pendleton Convention Center.

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