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## Rain, rain, go away

### *Forecast worsens flood threat*

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**PHILLIP PINA, TOM MAJESKI, MURALI BALAJI and MARY DIVINE** STAFF WRITERS

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**H**eavy rain expected to fall over the heart of Minnesota today will likely push already bulging rivers to levels near and sometimes over those seen in 1997, when floods devastated river communities throughout the state.

Between 2 and 4 inches of rain is forecast over much of central Minnesota today and it could not come at a worse time. The state's four major river systems are flooding more or less simultaneously.

Many farm fields and low-lying areas are underwater. More than 100 homes across the state have been flooded, and at least two destroyed. At least five Minnesota counties have declared emergencies. One person has been injured, and two boys are still missing after falling into a water-filled ditch Thursday near Olivia.

“The calm before the storm appears to be over,” said Kevin Smith, spokesman for the Minnesota Division of Emergency Management.

Nonetheless, state and local officials are confident that flood-protection measures taken recently and since 1997 will largely succeed.

### **Red River**

The rain is expected to boost the Red River of the North even higher. On Tuesday, it was already 6 1/2 feet above flood stage in Wahpeton, N.D., and its neighbor Breckenridge, Minn. The water is expected to rise about another 4 feet over the next few

days.

``We are looking at the possibility of significant rains," said Lee Anderson, meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Grand Forks, N.D. ``The timing isn't the best."

When crews first started preparing for spring floods, they built levees to withstand flooding in Breckenridge 7 1/2 feet higher than flood stage. They've already added 2 feet to shore up those levees.

Now communities farther north on the Red River are faced with the same challenges. The Weather Service now expects the river to rise to between 37 and 38 feet at Fargo and neighboring Moorhead, Minn., by early next week. Crews there built five temporary levees, thinking the Red would crest at 36 feet. Now they must raise them and add a sixth, said Peter Verstegen, spokesman for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Farther north, the corps is raising levees in Grand Forks and East Grand Forks, Minn., both hit hard in the flooding of 1997. The Weather Service raised its crest projections for the Red River to 48 to 50 feet by the end of next week. The levees will be raised to about 52 feet and will be capable of being raised another 2 feet, Verstegen said. Grand Forks was swamped four years ago when the Red River hit 54.4 feet.

Along the Red Lake River tributary, residents in Crookston, Minn., are breathing a bit easier after waters began to recede. The river crested at about 26 1/2 feet Monday, well above the 15-foot flood stage.

### **Minnesota River**

Until Tuesday's weather forecast, battle-weary sandbaggers and dike builders along the upper Minnesota River thought their work was nearly over.

But that changed dramatically when forecasters predicted 1 to 3 inches of rain, boosting the predicted crest by about 3 feet.

If the rain comes as expected, crests will approach the record levels set during the 1997 flood, said Gary McDevitt, a hydrologist at the National Weather Service in Chanhassen.

``We're up to our necks in a battle here, but we'll get there," said Granite Falls Mayor David Smiglewski.

The corps has built a 1,050-foot-long earthen dike to protect part of the city along Minnesota Avenue. Meantime, hundreds of

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volunteers, many of them high school students from surrounding communities, have sandbagged houses in other parts of the city.

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