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The News-Sentinel

Rivers still rising

Floodwaters have crept into homes on the south side and threaten downtown businesses; sandbagging continues in Decatur.

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Saving special belongings

Cody Pancake pulls a load through the water down Parkview Drive in Decatur on Tuesday, July 8. Like scores of other Decatur residents, he was helping a family rescue some of their belongings from a flooded home.

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Major flooding was likely along the St. Marys River in Fort Wayne today as the waterway could reach a historic crest of more than 28 feet.

That puts the level 2 feet above the record set in the Flood of 1913, the worst in the city's history when seven people died.

Rising waters forced evacuation of about 30 families from the Coventry Court and Fairfield Gardens apartment complexes overnight, and dozens of homes in surrounding neighborhoods also were flooded. A Red Cross emergency shelter was opened at Waynedale United Methodist Church, and 17 people were being housed there early today.

Fort Wayne Mayor Graham Richard declared a state of emergency for the city Tuesday and issued a plea for volunteers to fill sandbags as rising floodwaters forced some south-side residents to evacuate. "The state of emergency declaration is a necessary step to request state and federal assistance."

It also gives the mayor authority to set aside city resources and manpower to prevent and fight any flooding, and to close streets and restrict traffic in flooded areas.

South side, downtown flooding

Near Foster Park, water continued to creep up the 1400 block of Park Avenue and Waldron Circle, forcing American Electric Power Co. to turn off power to some homes.

AEP customers who have power in their house and a flooded basement should *not* go into the basement, said AEP spokeswoman Susan Banta. Customers should call AEP at 1-800-311-4634 for emergency disconnect service.

At the intersection of Bluffton Road and Vesey Avenue, the St. Marys was about 18 inches below the top of the dike. Chad Horn, 28, has lived in front of the dike on Vesey for 10 years and is trying to sell his home. He burned out the engine on his sump pump early today, and kept poking his head over the top of the dike wall.

"We're going under. I think we've all accepted it by now," Horn said. "I told my wife to box up some personal effects."

In the 4900 block of Southwood Avenue, on the other side of Foster Park, there was a drastic increase in flooding overnight. Some homes have been evacuated.

David James, 47, has lived on Southwood for five years. He said he lost everything to a flood three years ago and expects the same could happen again.

"The water isn't going to go down any time soon," he said. "Some of the neighbors have been here 17 or 18 years and they said they haven't seen anything like this."

Flooding has even affected the dead.

A memorial service for longtime Fort Wayne attorney Howard Grimm Jr. had to be moved to another location today after floodwaters closed the Sears Pavilion in Foster Park where the observance had been scheduled. Instead, the memorial service was held at a private residence.

A number of other events also were moved from Foster and Kreager parks. The Alzheimer Association Walk on Saturday has been moved to Heritage Park, 2001 Hobson Ave., and all parks and recreation soccer activity at Kreager has been moved to Blackhawk Middle School until North River Road reopens.

Downtown, the rising waters of the St. Marys were causing big headaches for at least one business today.

"If the water goes much higher, we're done," said an employee of Nowak Supply Co., 302 W. Superior St., watching the torrent surge just inches below huge compressors the business needs to supply oxygen to companies, fire departments and other customers. Sandbags placed in the company's parking lot were helping keep the flood from reaching the street but also were keeping the water near the compressors that much higher.

As of midmorning, the water level seemed to have stabilized.

Not all the people placing sandbags have been volunteers. Sheila Hudson, director of Allen County's Community Corrections program, said she had four crews out Tuesday after businesses along Tillman Road asked for help.

People in the community Corrections program have been convicted of various crimes and are allowed to work in the community - under strict supervision - as part of their sentence.

"They felt like they were able to give something substantial back to the community. And after they were done, Atz's gave everybody ice cream," she said.

Hudson said her crews could be available at a minimal fee to help others needing help fighting the flood. For more information, contact Vic Slayton at 449-7252.

Elsewhere

Decatur: As of 10:30 a.m. today, the St. Marys River was at 26.87 feet, breaking the previous record of 26.5 feet set in 1913, Mayor Fred Isch said.

Decatur emergency officials had not forced evacuations as of 9:30 a.m., but many homeowners have left voluntarily. Four families - 12 people - are staying at a shelter set up at South Adams Elementary in Berne, but many more are staying with friends or relatives, officials said.

Sharon Thornton, Adams County assistant director of emergency management, estimates 200 homes will be lost because of flood damage.

Bluffton: Flooding of the Wabash River in Bluffton had reached 18 feet, 3 inches by midmorning today, the highest since it topped 21 feet in 1913, the city said.

Some of the members of the National Guard who arrived in Bluffton on Tuesday are helping fortify the dike around the wastewater plant. The plant is already operating at half its capacity because of mechanical failure caused by the flooding.

Bluffton Mayor Ted Ellis asked residents to limit the amount of wastewater discharged from homes and businesses to save treatment capacity. The city also said the water supply is not in danger.

The Indiana Department of Correction was expected to send 50 prisoners to help with sandbagging.

Huntington: The J. Edward Rusch Reservoir, which takes on excess water from the Wabash flowing from Bluffton, has reached its highest level ever.

Tom Harvey of the Army Corps of Engineers said the normal water level sits at 749 feet above sea level. As of 6 a.m. today, the reservoir sat at more than 793 feet.

"We have guidelines for what to do in a situation like this, but right now we have more water coming in than we can take out," Harvey said.

Huntington officials said the Salamonie Reservoir is also above normal levels. The reservoir also is used for flood control.

Seeking disaster designation

Gov. Frank O'Bannon requested President Bush declare 25 Indiana counties - including Adams, Allen, Huntington, Wabash, Wells and Whitley - federal disaster areas. Indiana's two U.S. senators - Democrat Evan Bayh and Republican Richard Lugar - also wrote the White House, urging Bush to grant the governor's request.

A federal designation would make many victims of the flood eligible for federal loans to repair damage.

Rising rivers

The Maumee River is expected to crest at 22.6 feet Friday in the Fort Wayne area, according to the National Weather Service.

The Maumee reaches flood stage at about 17 feet.

But the real concern is the St. Marys River, which is expected to crest at a record 28.5 feet today.

Richard said volunteers to fill sandbags should report to the Anthis Career Center parking lot, 1200 S. Barr St., where they'll be shuttled to the Street Department, 1701 S. Lafayette St.

Residents also can fill their own sandbags for use at their own property at three locations: the soccer field at Bluffton and Winchester roads; the Tillman Park parking lot; and Portage Middle School, 3521 Taylor St.

People needing sandbags can pick them up at the Allen County Highway Department's south barn, 8317 Tillman Road, and the north barn, 2234 Carroll Road.

Allen County also was supplying sandbags where needed. About 40,000 bags have been sent to fight floods in Fort Wayne; another 10,000 have been sent to Decatur.

The mayor also implored people to stay out of floodwater and keep children away from it, for health and safety reasons.

"People need to understand this water is dangerous, even though it might not look like it's dangerous," he said.

RAINFALL

July 4 through July 8:

Fort Wayne: 6.86 inches

Bluffton: about 12 inches

Decatur: 5.03 inches

RIVER LEVELS

St. Marys River, Decatur:

- 26.9 feet (7 a.m. July 9)

- Flood stage: 17 feet

Wabash River, Bluffton:

- 18.2 feet (12:30 a.m. July 9)

- Flood stage: 10 feet

Maumee River, Fort Wayne:

- 19.39 feet (4 a.m. July 9)

- Flood stage: 17 feet

STREET CLOSINGS

Flooding has closed the following major roads and streets until further notice:

Fort Wayne

- Calhoun Street and Tillman Road
- Orchard Lane
- Dalevue Drive
- Fernwood Avenue
- South Anthony Boulevard at Tilden Avenue
- Southfair Court, Fairfield Avenue to Harrison Street
- Winchester Road, Airport Expressway to Shamrock Road
- Hartman Road at Sherwood Terrace
- Calhoun Street, Concord Lane to Tillman Road
- Old Mill Road, Pettit Avenue to Old Farm Circle

Allen County

- South County Line Road, U.S. 27 to Winchester Road
- Bostick Road, U.S. 27 to South Anthony Boulevard
- Parrott Road, Hartzell Road to Estella Avenue
- Winchester Road, Morton Road to Marion Center Road
- Maples Road, Trentman Road to Hessen Cassel Road
- Paulding Road, Morgan Road and State Line Road
- Lortie Road at Flatrock Road
- Morgan Road, Rider Road to Carrier Road
- Marion Center Road, U.S. 27 to Winchester Road
- Muldoon Road, Winchester Road to Ferguson Road

Decatur

- U.S. 224 on east edge of city
- Monmouth Road near St. Marys River
- East Monroe Street near U.S. 224

Bluffton

- Indiana 116, railroad tracks to Indiana 124 bypass
- Indiana 116, near Vera Cruz
- Indiana 301 at Vera Cruz
- Indiana 201 near Ouabache State Park

Sources: City of Fort Wayne, Allen County, National Weather Service and U.S. Geological Survey

Helpful numbers

For non-emergency, flood-related questions in Fort Wayne:

- Call the city's emergency operations center at 427-5858. The center will be open around the clock until flooding subsides.
- Call 911 for emergencies.
- Donate to the Salvation Army:
- By credit card, call 1-800-725-2769 or online at salvationarmyindiana.org
- By check, earmark to "Disaster Service" and mail to: Salvation Army Indiana Division, 3100 N. Meridian St., Indianapolis, IN 46208

Call if you want to volunteer with the American Red Cross:

- Northeast Indiana chapter - 484-9336
- Adams County chapter - 1-260-724-9106

Volunteer with sandbagging:

- Anthis Career Center parking lot, 1200 S. Barr St.
- In Decatur, go to the Wal-Mart on U.S. 27 and bring a shovel.

Shelter from the storm:

Waynedale United Methodist Church, 2501 Church St. Call 747-7424.

Sources: Salvation Army Indiana Division, American Red Cross of Northeast Indiana

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