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A cold front stalled over the area, and 'it just kept raining and raining and raining'

By **Cindy Larson**
of *The News-Sentinel*

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About the time revelers were firing up the barbecue the evening of July Fourth, Mother Nature was firing up a recipe of her own: a batch of intense thunderstorms in northeast Indiana.

Heavy rain, wind and lightning swept through the area around dinnertime, moving east into Ohio. A small tornado passed through Huntington and Wells counties.

People went to sleep Friday, July 4, to the sounds of thunder and rain, and awoke to similar sounds Saturday, July 5.

It turns out all that water was just foreshadowing what was to come.

The heavy rains of July 4 and 5, followed by more rain until Thursday, July 10, sent the St. Marys River to a record 26.9 feet in Decatur, setting off massive flooding there and near the St. Marys in south Fort Wayne.

"We had a stationary cold front that stalled over us," said John Taylor, a National Weather Service meteorologist from North Webster. "When you're in that situation, you don't really dry out."

As several weak, low pressure systems moved along that moist, unstable air, "it doesn't take much to cause thunderstorms," he said.

In layman's terms, "The big key to the whole thing was, it just kept on raining," Weather Service hydrologist Greg Lamberty said. "It just kept on raining and raining and raining."

By Monday, July 7, the Weather Service had predicted record-breaking flooding for Decatur. From July 4 to 9, 4.6 inches of rain fell in Decatur, and



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Ominous warning of weather to come

Lightning crashes across the sky over the south side of Fort Wayne, providing its own fireworks on Friday, July 4.

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5.71 inches at Smith Field in Fort Wayne. As of Monday, 7.33 inches of rain had fallen for the month in Fort Wayne. In an average July, 3.58 inches of rain would fall here in the entire month.

Getting day after day of rain is "pretty rare," Taylor said, especially in July. The front also stalled over western Ohio -- part of the St. Marys basin -- so that rain, too, was flooding the St. Marys, Adams and Wells counties in Indiana, and Van Wert and Mercer counties in Ohio were particularly inundated.

Throughout the Flood of '03, between rainshowers, the warm, humid air made a miserable job even worse for sandbaggers and flood-fighters.

The big break in the weather -- when a low pressure finally moved the front out of the area -- came Thursday evening in the form of a brief thunderstorm. This one was different, though. Unlike previous storms that week, which just left hot, muggy weather in their wake, Thursday's storm brought cooler, drier air.

The pleasant weekend weather, though, was small consolation for flood victims beginning to clean up their homes.

Stocks

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