

# MISSOURI NEWS SCENE



**WATER-LOGGED:** This severely flooded farmstead sits in the Missouri River valley near Lexington.

# Flood disrupts state

PHOTO BY DEAN HOUGHTON

By JERILYN JOHNSON

**T**HE first warnings came out on Monday morning, May 7: "The Missouri River has reached dangerous levels and is predicted to continue to rise. Some levees in northwest Missouri have already been overtopped. ... Nonfederal levees will be threatened. ... Please pay close attention to the forecasted river levels over the next week. This is a dangerous situation."

Tom Waters, Orrick farmer and chairman of the Missouri Levee and Drainage District Association, made sure that fellow Missourians — especially farmers in river bottom areas — heeded this warning.

From May 5-7, torrential rains across the state and in regions north and west of

### Key Points

- Flash flood turns into major widespread flooding event.
- Tens of thousands of acres of cropland are damaged.
- Federal, state flood damages assessed; aid still to come.

Missouri saturated the ground and caused rivers and streams to overflow. At first, predictions were for flash flooding only. Then the National Weather Service bumped its warning up to "widespread river flooding." It wasn't long before people began comparing it to 1951 and even 1993 flood levels.

The Missouri Department of Agriculture sent out its own statement May 7, urging farmers in the flooding region to closely monitor the situation and take immediate action to move family, livestock and equipment out of harm's way.

By the end of the day, Gov. Matt Blunt declared a state of emergency. He enacted Missouri's Emergency Operations Center to assist with key resource needs. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers began operating on a 24-hour emergency shift to monitor the flood. It offered its technical assistance and began authorizing sandbag distribution to cities, towns and designated federal levee districts.

The flood severely impacted farmland along the Missouri River, as well as the Tarkio, Platte and Grand rivers. As of mid-May, tens of thousands of acres were still underwater; farmers have experienced sig-



**STOP!** Nearly 8 feet of water shut down Highway 24 west of Brunswick. High water stopped river barge traffic, as well.

nificant crop loss and damage.

Randy and Roseanne Meyer, Brunswick, appreciated the early warning of the impending flood and say their farming community's emergency response plan worked well. "We were better prepared this time," says Roseanne, who survived the flood of '93. Unfortunately, floodwaters of the Grand and Missouri rivers wiped out at least one-half of the Meyers' corn crop.

### Flood aid

Last month, Blunt requested joint federal and state damage assessment teams survey a total of 34 Missouri counties impacted by the flooding. He also sent Katie Smith, new director

of the Missouri Department of Agriculture, to survey damage in three northern counties.

The State Emergency Management Agency will analyze the information these teams collect to give an accurate picture of the statewide flooding damages.

U.S. Sen. Kit Bond and U.S. Rep. Sam Graves surveyed the flood-ravaged areas on May 11. They stopped on a bridge overlooking the swollen Grand River near Brunswick to listen to farmers and other flood victims, and to review recovery efforts with SEMA and Army Corps of Engineers personnel.

Attending that gathering was Bill Jackson, general manager of Agri-Services of

Brunswick, who pleaded for quick response. "Crop insurance checks should be processed with the same speed as election returns and give producers the option of planting something other than corn," Jackson said. "We also need assurance of the same 90-10 levee repair assistance from the Army Corps of Engineers as in the '93 flood."

After the tour, Bond and the entire Missouri Congressional Delegation asked the Federal Emergency Management Agency to expedite the governor's request for preliminary damage assessments in the affected counties, which will speed federal assistance. Bond said he also would use his position as a member of the Senate Energy and Water Appropriations Subcommittee to secure funding for critical flood protection projects.

Twenty-five nonfederal levees were breached and many more overtopped along the Missouri and Grand rivers. The Army Corps of Engineers-Kansas City District announced that public sponsors of non-federal levees could apply for rehabilitation assistance from the corps, says Jud Kneuvean, Levee Rehabilitation Inspection program manager for the corps. The deadline is June 19.

"It is critical that the federal government acts quickly on this request so we can get Missouri homeowners, business owners and farmers the help they need to begin rebuilding their lives and livelihoods," Bond says.

### By the numbers

**960,100** — number of sandbags distributed by Army Corps of Engineers to protect against May flood in Missouri and Kansas

**1.7 million** — number of sandbags left in corps stockpile at five locations in Missouri for flood defense

**15,000** — estimated number of sandbags filled by 300 volunteers and used in the Brunswick area

**\$10-\$15** — average annual nonfederal levee tax per acre for farmers in a Missouri Levee and Drainage District