

Ripple Effect # 55

It's Not Over Until It's Over

Here in the Red River Basin, every spring confronts us with the potential for flooding. From thaw until freeze up, we are at the mercy, as it were, of the precipitation in the Basin. And it's not over until it's over—until the growing season is past and the streams and rivers of the Basin freeze up once again.

That lesson has been lapping at portions of the Basin since early spring. In early April Selkirk, Manitoba, was taken by surprise when an ice jam caused flooding that forced 100 senior citizens out of their homes. In Fargo-Moorhead, the Red River has been outside its banks in Fargo-Moorhead for much of the spring and early summer—44 of 61 days according to the US Geological Survey's report. In the southern part of the Basin, late May thunderstorms, capped off by another round in early June, put the North Dakota Wild Rice River out of its banks, causing flooding problems for the cities of Wahpeton and Breckenridge and adding to the already strained capacity of the Red.

Farm fields from northern South Dakota to the Fargo-Moorhead area in particular are suffering significant losses. Not easy losses for this area. For, like parts of the more northern parts of the Basin in the Pembina/Roseau area, this southern part of the Basin has experienced a number of years of severe set backs due to excessive water. Many of us may not directly witness these losses—but that does not diminish their effects on individual farmers or on the economy of the Basin.

The constancy of the threat of flooding in the Red River Basin. That's why a number of groups are working to reduce the damage caused by floods. For instance, both Prairie Public Television and the International Water Institute host flood information websites (www.riverwatchonline.org; www.rrbdin.org). The International Water Institute encourages research on Basin flooding, while the Red River Basin Commission encourages communication among the Basin's political entities and water managers so as to foster cooperation in planning ways, as a whole Basin, to reduce flood damage.

And both the Red River Basin Commission and International Water Institute are working to add new tools to help manage the physical event of flooding with more know-how. The Red River Basin Commission has supported the development of Main Stem Modeling, a method used to predict the impact of tributaries on the “main stem” of the Red River during flood events. This model will make possible a more coordinated approach to controlling flooding on the Red River. And the International Water Institute is seeking to bring comprehensive LIDAR mapping to the Red River Basin, a technology that draws precise topographical maps that can allow water and land managers, businesses and residents to make more informed decisions.

It will take all these efforts, together with those of other organizations, local communities and watersheds to help mitigate the fact that, in the Red River Basin, “it's not over until it's over.”

Until the next Ripple Effect,

The Red River Basin Commission (RRBC)

The RRBC is a grassroots organization that is a chartered not-for-profit corporation under the provisions of Manitoba, North Dakota, Minnesota, and South Dakota law. Our offices in Moorhead, MN and Winnipeg, MB can be reached at 218-291-0422 and 204-982-7254, or you can check out our website at www.redriverbasincommission.org.

