

Record flooding ravages midwestern US

George Marlowe
26 April 2013

In the last week, record flooding has swamped multiple states in the Midwest and the prospect of more precipitation brings further threats to states as far as the South. The floods have displaced thousands and caused damage in several cities. Four people have died so far.

Rivers in Illinois, Missouri, Iowa, Mississippi, Indiana and North Dakota are swollen and continue to pose threats to residents and communities across the Midwest. While the flooding has receded in some areas, additional snow and rain will further delay any prospect of a recovery for cities already flooded.

By Tuesday, over 150 stream gauges had been in flood stage, the majority of which were in the upper Midwest. Illinois has declared over 44 counties disaster areas and thousands have been forced out of their homes with no prospect of returning in the near future.

There is growing concern among meteorologists that the spring rains are far from over. Many rivers and their tributaries continue to remain at flood stage, while larger rivers such as the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers will take much longer to recede. Flood recovery needs continue to be intensified. Waterways are expected to remain high until early May and this will put further stress on decades-old levee systems that are already heavily stressed and weathered.

Residents of Grafton, Illinois, north of St. Louis will see increased flooding through Friday as the Mississippi River floods over 11 feet above flood stage. Flooding is also expected north of Chicago in the Des Plaines River.

The 2013 spring floods are occurring just a few months after a record drought disrupted barge traffic along the Mississippi River. On Sunday, the effects of torrential rains and heavy flooding along the Mississippi caused a barge to hit a railroad bridge and 30 other barges broke free from a towboat.

Grand Rapids, Michigan received in a few days the amount of rain it normally receives every April.

Numerous residential areas and homes were flooded and the Grand River threatened flood damage in the downtown area as well. The sewage treatment facility and other basic services were placed in immediate danger. Bridges had to be closed owing to the record-breaking flood. Suburbs surrounding Grand Rapids saw the greatest flood damage and families have been forced to evacuate homes that are now under water. It is still unclear when hundreds of people can return to their water and mud-damaged homes.

The city of Peoria, Illinois also saw significant flooding and damage. The Illinois River reached a 70-year high at 29.35 feet and flooded homes and businesses. Extra efforts were made to ensure that flooding did not reach the headquarters of heavy-equipment maker and multinational corporation Caterpillar, Inc. While floodwaters are now receding a bit, the flood has taken a heavy economic toll on many residents and small businesses.

Firefighters have been especially concerned about fuel leakages from businesses which pose the possibility of fires. Numerous roads are flooded and impassable making the scenario of building fires especially dangerous.

Levee systems in southeast Missouri have already been breached, especially in Lincoln and Pike counties. Vulnerable Missouri towns such as Clarksville and Duchtown are being protected largely by fragile sandbag levees.

The city of Fargo, North Dakota is also bracing for a major flood of the Red River, expected to crest at 30 feet this weekend. Residents in low-lying areas are particularly in danger of severe flood damage. Conditions are also expected to get worse with melting snow and additional precipitation.

While these record floods will be treated largely as an inevitable event, the social consequences are expected to be devastating for thousands of people. For those

without proper flood insurance, they can expect little by way of government aid. Hundreds are already displaced with no prospect of returning to damaged homes anytime soon.

The economic impact on industry and agriculture is hard to ascertain at present, but it is bound to worsen deteriorating local and state economies as well as having an impact on the national and global market. The floods have already made it hard to plant crops such as corn this spring. Wheat areas in the Dakotas could also face distress with late snow melt and increased precipitation. Corn and wheat prices have been in decline and new crop futures have lost more than 20 percent since the fall.

Climate change and global warming is playing no small part in the increasing volatility of annual weather patterns in recent history, with a record flood in 2011, a record drought in 2012, followed by record flooding events this year. Damage from the drought last year is conservatively estimated at \$35 billion.

The impact of such floods also pose significant health, social and environmental risks including death and injury, contaminated drinking water, hazardous materials spills, increased populations of disease-carrying rodents and insects, molding houses and the displacement of entire populations and their livelihoods.

Levee-systems are decades old and are in deep disrepair. According to the 2013 Infrastructure Report by the American Society for Civil Engineers, the nation's levee system was given a "D-minus." To fully inventory the patchwork levee system and upgrade it on a national basis is estimated to cost around \$100 billion. Nearly 43 percent of the US population lives near levees with 10 percent of those expected to fail.

The crumbling flood-management system in the US poses grave risks every year for thousands of people. Broad sections of the population, particularly the poorest who live in poorly-planned areas near floodplains, are increasingly exposed to financial ruin and life-threatening disasters.

Adapting to climate change and thwarting its devastating social consequences, including major flood events, requires significant resources and scientific planning on a global scale. Hundreds of billions of dollars need to be invested in flood management

methods on a rational and planned basis. Such resources are thrown at the feet a parasitic ruling elite that is wholly indifferent to the plight of those most affected by social negligence and volatile natural disasters.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact