

Historic flooding devastates US Midwest

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Historic flooding continues to devastate large swathes of the Midwestern United States. Reports are beginning to emerge of levees breaching along three major rivers in two states.

In Arkansas, the levee at Dardanelle, about 60 miles northwest of Little Rock, breached Friday night when rapid currents from the river ripped out a 40-foot section. The Arkansas Department of Emergency Management reported that crews went door to door to recommend evacuation for about 160 homes.

City officials are attempting what they are referring to as a “last ditch effort” to save the south side of the town from the floodwater that is pouring through a breached levee.

Mayor Jimmy Witt said Saturday that he does not believe the temporary levee being constructed would be able to stop the water. Instead, officials hope that it will buy time for residents of up to 800 homes to make preparations.

A resident in Dixie, Arkansas, Carl, spoke to the WSWs about his experience evacuating over the weekend. “I knew there was flood warning in Fort Smith which I think was the first place to be flooded. I hear the water is over top of the roofs of houses now. For us the evacuation notice came really late Friday night, right before I was about to go to bed. The police knocked on my door to tell us the area was in serious danger and we would need to leave.”

Carl explained that all the members of the community pitched in to help prepare the town beforehand: “We knew that the Arkansas River was about to crest and in my community we were all making sandbags to put over the grates so that the water flows correctly. But it was ineffective. We were told the water would be 4 to 6 feet above the houses. It is just too much to handle. The Army Corp of Engineers told us that the river is supposed to crest Tuesday night into Wednesday.”

“Most of the people in Dixie left with whatever they

could gather. We put everything we could in a truck which some family members of mine own. We were lucky that we had the resources to pack up most of our things. A lot of people in this area will lose everything. I have a neighbor who owns a few plots of land and lives a sort of self-sustained life. But everything is going to be washed away. What’s worse is that people don’t have anywhere to go.”

The second reported breached levee over the weekend was on the Missouri River in the central part of the state of Missouri. There is much less information on the devastation from the second breached levee. However, authorities are reporting that a body of a drowning victim was found at a Missouri lake.

The reports of failing levees mean thousands of additional homes could be in danger.

Four major rivers, the Illinois, the Missouri, the Arkansas and the Mississippi all remain at risk of spilling over in the coming week. As of Sunday evening, 80 flood gauges running through 10 different states—from North Dakota to Louisiana—were indicating major flooding, the highest possible category.

The scale of the damage thus far is difficult to quantify, as many official reports continue to be tallied. However, photos on social media reveal devastating scenes.

In Sand Springs, Oklahoma, houses are flooded to their rooflines. Dozens of photos show flooded cars abandoned on local streets throughout Missouri. The Department of Transportation in Missouri reported Friday that more than 300 roads were already underwater, with the potential for more to come.

In St. Louis, National Weather Service (NWS) hydrologists are anticipating the second-highest flood on record with a forecast crest (the level at which a river peaks) near 46 feet this week.

Cities all along the four rivers have begun to evacuate hundreds of homes and shut off power in anticipation

of further flooding. On Wednesday alone, an average of 2-4 inches of rain is forecast from central and southern Texas to central Kansas and Missouri. Some areas are expected to get up to 10 more inches of rain in the coming week.

The record-breaking levels of water are due in large part to historic rainfall in the region. Portions of northern Oklahoma through central Kansas have seen 15 to 20 inches of rain this May, which is nearly 400 percent of the normal amount.

Mississippi River flooding has been ongoing for three months or longer in some locations, making it the longest-lasting flood there since the 1927 crisis, the worst flood in modern history on the lower Mississippi.

In Baton Rouge, Louisiana, the river first rose above flood stage in the first week of January, and has been above that threshold ever since. The stretch has already broken records and could extend well into June, topping the record from 1927.

Of particular concern for officials is the floodgate system which regulates the flow of water leaving the Mississippi River into the Atchafalaya River, in Vidalia, Louisiana, known as “The Old River Control Structure.” The system is designed to prevent the Mississippi River from permanently altering its course down the Atchafalaya River to the Gulf of Mexico, bypassing Baton Rouge and New Orleans. So severe is the current strain on the system that the Army Corps of Engineers is concerned that it may fail, causing the Mississippi River to change course. Many meteorologists and experts in the area are reporting that the change in the river would cause a disaster for shipping.

Over the weekend the Army Corps of Engineers was scheduled to take the rare step of opening a flood-control structure near Morganza, to divert water from the Mississippi, inundating 25,000 acres of rural Louisiana, in the hope of preventing even worse flooding in Baton Rouge and New Orleans. This move would delay putting additional water into the Atchafalaya Basin but would cause major flooding to thousands of homes in the small Louisiana town of Butte La Rose and surrounding communities.

The opening of Morganza had been planned Sunday, but is now planned for Thursday, June 6. If the Corps goes through with the opening, it will be just the third time in history such measures were taken. The last time

the spillway was opened was eight years ago. As in 2011, the flooding caused by opening Morganza will have devastating consequences.

The unfolding crisis in the Midwest lays bare important aspects of the fragile state of life in the most “advanced” capitalist country in the world.

First is the dilapidated state of infrastructure throughout the country. In the US the average age of dams is 56 years. The lack of funding and preparedness for such catastrophes will have repercussions for all manner of life throughout the region, from large-scale displacement of people to a significant loss of wildlife. Roads, homes, schools, hospitals and entire communities will be destroyed, needlessly.

The second major deficiency underscored from the flooding in the Midwest is the complete inability to control, let alone prepare for, the immense dangers inherent in global warming and climate change. The Plains and Midwest states have witnessed the most extreme weather in the US so far this year, setting records for cold, snow, flooding and reports of tornadoes.

This extreme weather, widely agreed on by scientists to be the product of climate change, has wiped out entire livelihoods for thousands of families. The vast majority of those people living in areas where the threat of flooding has always been viewed as unlikely, if not virtually impossible, did not have flood insurance ahead of the storm, and will bear the enormous losses themselves.



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