Flash flooding claims four lives in Alabama

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Alabama saw heavy rains this week which triggered flash flooding in multiple communities, leaving entire areas only accessible via wading the waters or boat. The storm, which hit Wednesday through Thursday, is reported to have claimed the lives of at least four people, including one child. Dozens of people were left stranded. The National Weather Service (NWS) reported rainfall having reached 13 inches and that more drenching rainfall is to come.

The flooding resulting from the heavy rains has affected communities across the state in various ways: along the coast, the rainfall proved too much for the underground network of pipes, causing sewage to leak out from the pipes; in East Brewton, the waters of Murder Creek broke through the doors of a Piggly Wiggly grocery store, leaving the surrounding community without their main source of food. The rising water levels forced the closure of schools and caused portions of roads to collapse.

Moreover, the Birmingham-Hoover Metropolitan Area remained under a flash flood watch through Thursday. Heavy rain also affected the panhandle of Florida and other southern states, like Georgia, Tennessee and western South Carolina through Friday.

As the flood waters swept away vehicles and other debris, a 4-year-old girl and an 18-year-old woman perished in separate incidents, according to Marshall County Coroner Cody Nugent, when their vehicles were overtaken by rushing waters in northeast Alabama. Search-and-rescue operatives also found the bodies of a couple, both 23, inside a car that had been swept away. “Normally it’s just a trickle. It was raging,” Shelby County Coroner Lina Evans said of the creek which swallowed their vehicle. Evans identified the victims as Myles Jared Butler and Latin Marie Hill of Hoover, a southern suburb of Birmingham.

Some of the worst reported flooding hit the city of Pelham, just south of Hoover, where flood waters measured 40 inches. Eighty-two people were rescued from their homes, along with approximately 15 pulled from vehicles. More than 100 rescuers were on the scene, with 16 boats assisting in the rescues.

The Alabama deluge comes approximately seven weeks after flooding in Humphreys County, Tennessee where at least 21 people, including two toddlers, were killed, six weeks after Hurricane Ida laid waste to southern Louisiana, leaving the entire city of New Orleans without power, and five weeks after remnants of Ida ravaged New Jersey and New York, drowning residents in their basement apartments. However, these types of floods are not solely phenomena of nature, but are being exacerbated by man-made climate change.

Meanwhile, extreme heat in the western US is fueling a record fire season which has already engulfed about 10,000 square miles. According to the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise, Idaho, there are 52 large wildfires currently burning, 18 of them in Idaho, nine in California and nine more in Montana.

The devastating impact of global warming on wildlife and nature is revealed in part by the fate of the ancient Sequoia trees in California. Two groves that have been burned were home to more than 2,000 sequoias; however, as the fires rage uncontrolled, it could take months to determine how many of the trees have been killed. Giant sequoias can only grow along a narrow, 260-mile strip on the western slope of the Sierra Nevada mountains, between 5,000 and 7,000 feet. They can grow to be 300 feet in height and live up to 3,000 years. Notwithstanding the sequoias being one of the world’s hardiest trees—their thick bark proving to be quite flame-resistant—which rely on regular fires for spreading their seeds, 74 trees have been killed by intensifying fire storms.

Climate change is not only affecting the United States, but countries all over the world. In Siberia, the largest wildfire ever recorded has burned an estimated

65,000 square miles of land and has been raging since the beginning of the year; more than 100 forest fires have burned in the mountains in the Tizi Ouzou region of Algeria; and from November 2020 to June 2021, the Indian state of Odisha recorded 51,968 forest fires.

Europe experienced its hottest summer on record this year. In the Mediterranean, Greece hit a record-breaking temperature of 116.8 degrees Fahrenheit. Temperature records were also broken in historically colder regions, such as in parts of the Arctic, Canada and the Pacific Northwest of the US. The amount of carbon emitted from severe wildfires dominating the Northern Hemisphere over the summer broke records, according to data from the European Union's Copernicus Atmosphere Monitoring Service.

Intense blazes, including fires in hotspots in the Mediterranean, North America and Siberia, let off more than 2.7 billion metric tons of carbon over the summer, with July and August both breaking monthly records for emissions from fires. More than half of July's emissions could be put down to fires in North America and Siberia, according to Copernicus.

The emission of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere by the burning of trees, as well as fossil fuels, creates a greenhouse effect, trapping the warmth from the sun in Earth's lower atmosphere, leading to the warming of ocean temperatures, one of the key factors which bolsters the development of more intense hurricanes and cyclones. Hurricanes require high humidity, relatively constant winds at varying altitudes, and can occur when surface ocean temperatures exceed about 79 degrees Fahrenheit. The rising of warm, moist air from the ocean acts as fuel to power the storm.

Two other factors are shown to contribute to the ever-growing ferocity of hurricanes. According to the Union of Concerned Scientists, "First, warm air holds more water vapor than cold air—and the rising air temperatures since the 1970s have caused the atmospheric water vapor content to rise as well. This increased moisture provides additional fuel for hurricanes. Climate models project an increase in the average precipitation rate of hurricanes as a result of global warming."

Second, as ocean temperatures rise there is less cold, subsurface ocean water to serve as a bulwark, weakening hurricanes. However, "if deeper waters become too warm, this natural braking mechanism weakens." Notoriously, Hurricane Katrina was augmented when it encountered deep pools of warm water in the Gulf of Mexico, the same process was seen last month with the rapid intensification of Hurricane Ida.

The fight against climate change and its deadly effects depends on rational and scientific planning carried out on an international, socialist basis. This requires putting an end to the capitalist order, which subordinates social needs to private profit and divides the planet into competing nation states.