

# A Fresh Look At Nebraska

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By LuAnn Schindler

When it rains, it does more than pour.

Since May 30, just over 13 inches of precipitation have fallen at our farm. Both the Cache and Clearwater creeks have poured out of their banks, flooding fields and washing away bridges.

Sunday, as we journeyed home from Norfolk, we drove past Neligh's Penn Lake. The Elkhorn River appeared to have expanded to three times its normal channel width, connecting Penn Lake with the rapid-flowing river.

In Clearwater, a commotion along the north edges of town drew our interest. Volunteers constructed a dike and filled sandbags to keep water from seeping into the already soggy town.

We continued to Ewing, where Summerland Road was barricaded. Warning signs kept passengers from crossing the South Fork Bridge. The 45B spur to Highway 20 turned into the newest river channel overnight. Remnants of trees and debris floated across the highway and water inched its way south into Ewing.

In all three communities, volunteers of all ages assembled sandbags and built sand and dirt berms. Sore, tired and drenched, these enlisted helpers labored into the early morning, protecting their towns and property.

Water receded once the moonlight peeked through clouds, but when light greeted morning sky, the high waters returned, rising to another record of 13 feet, two inches. On Monday, the burly Elkhorn flees its banks and holds geographic regions hostage through limited travel.

Ewing Fire Chief Ryan Schrunk summed up the general mood from June's gloom: "It could get really messy."

Nebraska is no stranger to the rage of the rollin' river.

In 1881, Niobrara experienced its first flood when an ice gorge broke, causing settlers to scramble to higher ground. Repeated flooding from the Missouri River and high ground water levels in the Niobrara River forced residents to make a permanent move.

In 1935, heavy Colorado rainstorms soaked the Arikaree and Republican Rivers, causing a 200-mile path of destruction and death. Nebraska historical records indicate over 100 individuals lost their lives in the deluge, primarily because many did not listen to the warnings.

After 14 inches of rain poured down in southeast Nebraska on May 8, 1950, 23 people died from flash flooding along the Big Blue River.

The Nebraska Department of Natural Resources believes the most damaging flood in Nebraska's history occurred in 1993, when spring ice jams wreaked havoc along the Elkhorn and Platte Rivers. When June storms dumped between 10 and 26 inches of rain and combined with the spring blockages, the Missouri set record crests and river levels from Omaha to Rulo.

Throughout Nebraska's history, natural disasters, including floods, have struck the state. Communities struggled to keep their heads above water, literally in several instances. But Nebraskans are tenacious and fight to keep their towns from sinking.

Those courageous acts proffered by the family next door or the fireman from the town down the road alleviate fear of unknown waters and the natural flood of sentiment accompanying it.

This week's floods and the reaction to adversity prove that Nebraskan's will weather the storm.