

Waiting game

Officials observe damage as Osage River residents ride out flooding

- News Tribune
- 1 Jun 2019
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Though still mostly superficial, Osage County Sheriff Michael Bonham said Friday the damage from flooding he saw along the Osage River around Osage City is worse than what he had seen two weeks ago.

Bonham went out on the Osage River last week with a deputy to observe damage and make sure there wasn't anyone in need of rescuing south of the railroad bridges that cross the river at Osage City.

The high water blocked the boat from going any farther downstream then, but on Friday, Bonham and Osage County Emergency Management Director Andrea Rice launched from Chamois on the Missouri River and entered the mouth of the Osage to check on Bonnots Mill and Osage City.

"We've been through it a lot," Rice said of flooding on the Osage — which she said has also happened in 2008, 2013, 2015 and 2017.

She said the current flood — which is particularly high closer to where the river is supposed to empty into the Missouri River, but the water is piling up behind the swollen Missouri — has been something like the 2008 flood.

Rice said the level Friday was about a foot higher than the week before.

National Weather Service data showed Friday the Osage River was at about 28.2 feet at Mari-Osa Campground, with a crest of 28.8 feet forecast for later in the day Sunday, maybe into Monday morning.

Rice said there's not a whole lot of response to be had at the moment, but she continues to monitor the situation; sandbags are on hand in Chamois, if they would be needed.

On Friday, she took pictures from the boat Bonham drove to document damage.

Rice said most of the dwellings in Bonnots Mill are weekend homes, but there are a handful of people who live there full time.

Residents did have some time to prepare, as evidenced by trash cans and patio furniture that were neatly stacked high and dry on elevated decks.

Several residents in Osage City have stayed in their homes during the flood.

Bonham said the increased damage he noticed in Osage City from his previous trip included things like collapsed porches on homes and sunken or capsized docks, though he knew water had also infiltrated some homes.

He advised homeowners who do get water inside to clean those spaces as quick as they can to avoid mold taking hold.

When the waters do recede, Rice outlined the next steps her office will take.

“We try to issue (homeowners) permits for repair,” she said, as well as try to get federal assistance for homeowners.

She said she focuses on gathering information for primary residences, as she knows the federal government won’t reimburse secondary homes.

Rice added, once the flood recedes, the county health department issues mosquito tablets and tetanus shots.

In the meantime, given road closures, she works to make sure emergency response times are not delayed.

Bonham also took the sheriff’s office’s boat to Portland in Callaway County, and no homes were yet being affected by flooding on the Missouri River.

Bonham and Callaway County Sheriff Clay Chism had gone out on the river earlier in the day to strategize about how they might better be able to respond to a body being found in the water during flood conditions, if need be. That situation happened earlier this week when fishermen recovered the body of an unidentified man in some brush on the Missouri River, 300 yards from the mouth of the Osage River.

The Osage at St. Thomas was at 17.34 feet Friday, and was forecast by the National Weather Service to crest at 17.7 feet Monday morning — still more than 5 feet below minor flood stage.