



Flood Relief Efforts Rising to the Challenge

JEFFERSON CITY — I had the opportunity to survey flood damage in Lincoln County by helicopter last week and to meet with residents and state and local officials as we assessed the damage from the worst flooding of the Mississippi River in over a decade. The view was unbelievable, as it was impossible to distinguish land and water boundaries much of the time.

I accompanied Governor Matt Blunt, Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff and others as we took a closer look at the towns impacted by flooding. We saw firsthand that 95 percent of the small river town of Foley was affected by the flooding disaster, as was much of the town of Winfield. Many residents in those areas are now returning to their homes or signing up for assistance through state and federal agencies. I'm told at least 400 homes in the Foley, Winfield and Elsberry areas are still inaccessible due to floodwaters. So far, at least 650 Lincoln County homes and businesses have been affected by flooding, but we won't have final figures until water levels recede. St. Charles County was also hard-hit by flooding. The water has receded there, with damage assessments still underway.

I am very pleased both Governor Blunt and Secretary Chertoff have pledged continued resources to our region to assist communities and families as they begin to pick up the pieces from this disaster. Chertoff said he made the trip to Missouri because he was impressed with Winfield residents' efforts to save part of the town by shoring up the levee before it unfortunately breached. He applauded the community's spirit and our state's response to the flooding crisis.

Officials in both counties are currently assessing damages resulting from the widespread flooding. Part of that assessment includes determining losses to family farms. The governor has requested the Missouri Farm Service Agency conduct damage assessments in counties affected by excessive moisture and flooding, including Lincoln and St. Charles counties. We know at least 35,000 acres in Lincoln County were affected by the rising floodwaters.

Flood relief efforts now also include advising residents in flooded areas how to eliminate mosquitoes breeding in standing water and the importance of removing mold from flood-affected homes and buildings. More information can be obtained by calling the Lincoln County Health Department at 636-528-6117 or the St. Charles County Department of Community Health & the Environment at 636-949-7400. Or, you can visit their respective websites at www.lchdmo.gov or www.scchealth.org.

Both Lincoln and St. Charles counties do qualify for federal, individual and public assistance following the recent flooding. For those in Lincoln County wishing to apply for assistance, a FEMA disaster recovery assistance center has been set up at the Winfield-Foley Fire Department Station No. 3, located at 2663 E. Highway 47 in Winfield. The center is open from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. daily.

Anyone impacted by floods seeking assistance can register with FEMA until Aug. 25 by calling one of FEMA's two 24-hour toll-free numbers: 800-621-FEMA (3362), or 800-462-7585 for the hearing-impaired. Online registration is available at www.fema.gov.

It's hard to believe, but Missouri has been under a state of emergency since December 2007, with the exception of three days in March. We are still recovering from the effects of tornadoes in January, storms in February, flooding in March, tornadoes in May and the ongoing June-July flooding. Because of this, the governor recently signed an executive order extending state agency resources, including the Missouri National Guard, through Aug. 11.

While we sometimes have little control over Mother Nature, I want you to know I sincerely appreciate the efforts of all of our state and local officials, agencies and volunteers helping us recover from this flooding disaster. Your efforts are truly inspiring and can make us all feel proud of the way our state works together when a crisis like this occurs.

If you have comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by phone at (866) 271-2844.

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