

Finding Help for Flooded Families and Farms in Wisconsin

Written by Kathleen Vinehout, State Senator 31st District

Tuesday, 23 August 2016 08:39 - Last Updated Tuesday, 23 August 2016 09:20

<http://newiproggressive.com/images/stories/S5/flood-wi-road-s5.jpg>



Western Wisconsin was hit with severe rainstorms in the past few weeks, floodwaters washed out roads and left silt everywhere, in the house, the garden, the barn, and the farmyard. Sen. Vinehout provides important information for flood victims and others.

ALMA, WI - "It gets overwhelming," my neighbor told me. We were walking through her flooded barnyard. Floodwaters left silt everywhere: in the house, the garden, the barn, and the farmyard.

Family members were working hard to clean up. But they were filled with unanswered questions: where to go and what to do?

Western Wisconsin was hit with several severe rainstorms in the past few weeks. Early morning on August 11 parts of Buffalo County received 5 ½ to 11 ½ inches of rain in just 45 minutes. The beautiful rolling hills intensified the power of the water as it raced towards the lowest point.

Huge gullies opened up. Roads washed out. Crops were damaged. Fence lines washed away. Pastures became lakes. Cattle and pigs were lost. Concrete buckled. Trees were uprooted. Small sheds floated away. Farm machinery flooded. Flower and vegetable gardens were covered with black muck.

Roads and driveways acted as dams with water pouring across and eventually washing away the road. Many people lost all or part of their rural driveway. But others lost their home and nearly every possession. The flood seriously affected farms and homes along creeks or rivers.

Rain continued to fall in the coming week. New storms frustrated cleanup efforts and discouraged many people. Temporary road repairs washed away as more water came racing down the bluffs.

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County and town officials worked hard to keep people safe and roads open. However, the rural nature of Buffalo county made it hard to get word out to every one affected by the storms.

County workers set up a hotline to call and report damage and to collect details on the problems people face. If you have flood damage, please call 211. If you are using a mobile phone you should call 1-800-362-8255.

It is important for people to report all types of flood damage, even if the damage is covered by flood insurance. The type of damage and the estimated costs of repair are details county officials need when applying for state and federal help. Under federal emergency management rules, the cumulative totals of damage and repair costs determine the level of help available.

Immediate help is available including free flood cleanup kits, bottled water, and rural well testing for areas where flooding may have caused well contamination. These supplies are available at four locations in the county: Gilmanton and Lincoln Town Halls, Ponderosa Bar and Grill in Cream, the Waumandee State Bank and the county Health Department at the courthouse in Alma. The Red Cross and county staff are working to help families displaced by the floods.

Long-term problems are going to take the work of many to solve. Town, county and state officials are meeting to go through options and programs that may assist people.

Repairing rural roads is a huge challenge for every town board. For many years, the state budget provided less money than towns needed to keep up with routine wear and tear on roads. With the recent floods, new problems appeared and old problems are worse.

Likewise, conservation structures – dams and so forth – were not built to handle the storms we experienced. Again, state support has lagged behind needs.

Representative Chris Danou and I will be working with our local officials to find any available emergency assistance. But we need your help in compiling a list of damage and needs.

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If you lost crops or fencing or if your farm needs grading or repair of conservation structures, please report the damage. The application process for various programs takes time and your phone call will get that process started.

Disasters bring out the best in the community with neighbors helping neighbors. However, when the damage is more than one person or a whole neighborhood can take care of, it is important to call the county hotline at 211. By calling, folks can get assistance and the county gets a better understanding of the extent of the damage.

You can reach me at 608-266-8546 or toll free at 1-877-763-6636 or email at sen.vinehout@legis.wisconsin.gov

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Cleaning up our neighborhood is going to take a long time. Taking a break from the cleanup to make a phone call is a very important first step.