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## Storms take toll on state's rivers, farmers

### Several parks, trails have been closed

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The weekend deluge is beginning to run itself out on many rivers in southeastern Wisconsin.

But conditions on many rivers still remain above flood stage. And the heavy rainfall also is exacting an early toll on the state's farmers as produce crops lie in water-choked fields and traditional crops such as corn are struggling to take root.

On the recreation front, several state parks and three popular state trails have been closed.

In Sheboygan County, the state Department of Natural Resources closed Kohler-Andrae State Park through today because of storm damage and flooding on the Black River.

Wildcat Mountain State Park in Vernon County was also evacuated and closed. Rocky Arbor State Park also is closed.

The DNR has also closed the Elroy-Sparta State Trail, the La Crosse River State Trail west of Sparta and the 400 State Trail between Elroy and Reedsburg.

Northern stretches of the Milwaukee River, as well as the Fox and Root rivers, were expected to crest today, according to the National Weather Service.

The Fox and Root are still predicted to remain above flood stage.

The Milwaukee River at Waubeka in Ozaukee County also was at flood stage and still rising this morning, while downstream in Cedarburg the river was cresting.

Still farther south at Estabrook Park, the Milwaukee continued to rise slowly, but at below-flood stage.

To the west, the Wisconsin River at Portage, at flood stage, is not expected to ebb until later Wednesday.

And the Mississippi River at Guttenberg, Iowa, south of Prairie du Chien, was also expected to rise to nearly half-a-foot below the flood stage.

### **Many factors at play**

The rivers are responding in their own peculiar ways - influenced by tributaries, geography and other local factors, according to experts.

Herb Garn, assistant director of the U.S. Geological Survey office in Madison, said the Root and Fox rivers are shallow and relatively slow moving. So are the Crawfish and Rock between Madison and Milwaukee, he said.

All of them are less capable of accommodating big slugs of water.

Some of the rivers are influenced by streets and parking lots, so water has little time to soak into the ground, said Brian Hahn, a hydrologist with the weather service.

To the west, the flood-prone Kickapoo is the most notable of rivers influenced by the unglaciated hill country.

"These floods have been really affected by the intensity of the rains," Garn said.

Both said flood conditions in southern Wisconsin were exacerbated by the cool damp spring. The ground - like a giant sponge - can take in only so much rain.

The effect is bound to cause pollution from sediment and animal waste, said Gordon Stevenson of the DNR.

Stevenson monitors non-point pollution for the agency. "We're just taking the approach that there will be problems out there," he said.

The DNR works with farmers and other landowners to plan for events with 4 to 5 inches of rainfall. "We've gone way beyond that," he said.

Stevenson's biggest worry is southwestern Wisconsin, a marriage of hills and livestock.

### **Crops lost or threatened**

State Agriculture Secretary Rod Nilsestuen drove north from Madison to south of Green Bay over the weekend and observed field after field submerged in water.

This could spell higher costs for replanting - a year already marked by higher prices for fertilizer and diesel fuel.

Nilsestuen said corn is only a couple of inches high and unable to handle standing water for more than a few days.

For agriculture, another peculiarity is that it was a "very broad-based storm - many farmers are going to be affected," he said.

Organic produce farmers who supply fruits and vegetables directly to Milwaukee area residents are unsure how much of their spring and early summer crops will suffocate under water - and how much will need to be replanted.

"Oh, did we have floodwaters down here," said David Kozlowski, co-owner of Pinehold Gardens at 1807 E. Elm Road in Oak Creek, which each week delivers 180 boxes of produce for 400 to 500 members.

More than 12 inches of rain fell over three days, and some produce was under water all weekend, even in raised beds. It's too early to tell how extensive losses will be, Kozlowski said.

"Some of the potatoes are washed out. The first cutting of spinach doesn't look good. The second cutting of salad greens and spinach is gone. A lot of what we were going to deliver in the first three weeks doesn't look good." The farm was to deliver the season's first boxes of produce to customers next week. . Strawberries were underwater, but could survive. Many plants in the greenhouse haven't gone into the ground yet, including peppers and eggplants.

### **Trying to stay optimistic**

In southwestern Wisconsin, the deep valleys are home to some of the state's most prolific and successful organic produce farms for markets in Madison and the Twin Cities.

Several of these farms - hard hit last August when the Bad Axe and Kickapoo rivers raced out of their banks - were hit again by flash floods over the weekend.

This time, the water didn't cover quite as much land or stay as long on fields flush with young crops, said Richard de Wilde, of Harmony Valley Farm near Viroqua, at the north fork of the Bad Axe.

Harmony Valley last year lost about half of its 100 acres - about \$500,000 - when items such as tomatoes and peppers were ready to be harvested.

This time, floodwater quickly returned to the riverbed, leaving behind washed-out fields and farmers such as de Wilde wondering how 100-year floods could happen twice within one year.

"I'm trying to stay optimistic," de Wilde said. "But with global climate change, this is probably going to be the norm. If we're going to see more and more wild weather, it's going to become more difficult and risky to grow food crops. When we put crops on high ground, we run the risk of loss through drought. And planting on low ground - close to a water source - can turn around and bite you, too."

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