



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE Mountain-Prairie Region



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April 1, 2009

Memorandum

To: All Employees, Region 6

From: Regional Director, Region 6 (*Signed: Steve Guertin*)

Subject: The Service Continues to Respond to North and South Dakota Floods

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service staff continue to work to protect people and property in response to severe flooding and potential flooding in parts of North Dakota and South Dakota. Approximately 50 employees from Regions 6 and 3 are onsite specifically to provide community support to help ensure the safety of residents and to limit damage to Service facilities. Recent and current efforts have focused primarily on the Fargo areas in North Dakota where weather and flooding have been most severe.

At this time, the Service is adding resources in the Minot, North Dakota, area where conditions are deteriorating and the potential for significant flooding is increasing. We are also monitoring the situation near Aberdeen, South Dakota, where flooding from the James River near Sand Lake National Wildlife Refuge is expected to increase. Later today, weather permitting, I will travel with regional National Wildlife Refuge System leadership to parts of North Dakota to see firsthand the flood impacts on Service resources.

To date, the Service has deployed 19 boats with operators and crews to the impact area. These crews, your colleagues, are working tirelessly alongside local law enforcement and other emergency management agencies to conduct flood response operations, including rescue missions.

As flood waters rose last week and during the weekend in the Fargo area, each boat crew deployed there assisted an average of 20 families per day. These operations included 88 rescue missions and the evacuation of 150 people. Such rescues often occurred during arduous, blizzard conditions and were all conducted safely, highlighting the commitment and professionalism of our people.

At day's end, the work is not over: each night, Service maintenance staff work with U.S. Coast Guard maintenance crews to service the boats and ensure they remain safe and ready for the following day.

I want to emphasize our crews are working in a true integrated fashion with other agencies. For example, a given rescue mission in the Fargo area may include a Service airboat and operator with U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Border Patrol, and other emergency response personnel on board. This seamless approach provides for a far more efficient and effective operation than if the Service or any one agency were to go it alone.

While these operations are ongoing, other Service staff are working diligently to protect Service facilities from weather-related damage. Preventive actions - including sandbag placement, dike repair, ice and debris removal to maintain road access, and a variety of other efforts - have reduced the amount of damage that has occurred so far to buildings, roads, and equipment on our national wildlife refuges and hatcheries. Planning is underway to clean up and restore these facilities as soon as weather permits.

In addition to staff in the field, numerous Regional Office employees are serving on the Regional Incident Management Team to support our mission on the ground and provide important resources to those in the field. I commend Incident Commanders Jim Kelton and Greg Langer and their team for their excellent leadership response to this emergency situation. The incident management team will continue to operate as long as necessary with the understanding that the safety of all employees and members of the community is our top priority.

In recent days, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) established itself in the Dakotas and the Service is now one of the agencies working cooperatively under FEMA's umbrella. We anticipate receiving reimbursement of some of the expenses related to our flood response.

I remain extremely proud of the response of Region 6 staff to this emergency and appreciate the strong cooperation, support and offers of additional assistance we have received from other Service regions. We also continue to receive numerous compliments and thanks from other agencies and people in the communities where we are lending our help.

I ask that all Region 6 employees remember many of the Service staff who are responding to this emergency live in these communities and are helping their friends and neighbors while also working to protect their own homes and families. Please keep them all in your thoughts as they work through these difficult times.

A website with current information about our response to this situation can be found at www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/floodinfo. The website provides daily status reports and includes photos and links to related resources.