



# United States Department of the Interior

## FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE Mountain-Prairie Region



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March 24, 2009

### Memorandum

To: All Employees, Region 6

From: Regional Director, Region 6

Subject: Region 6 Response to Flooding in the Dakotas

Region 6 is currently responding to flooding in parts of North Dakota and South Dakota, including the James, Red, and Souris River Basins. Significant late season rainfall, which saturated the soil, and subsequent above normal snowpack have created the potential for severe flooding in these areas. The National Weather Service now predicts that extensive additional precipitation and warmer temperatures will accelerate flooding in the very near future to record or near-record levels.

The flooding is expected to impact several Service facilities in the Dakotas, including units of the National Wildlife Refuge System and National Fish Hatchery System, and to have serious effects on communities in these areas, similar to the damage, disruption, and threats to public health and safety caused by the 1997 floods in the same areas. The overall duration of the flood event is anticipated to last for many weeks, and there will be a need for clean up and restoration activities after the flood waters subside.

In response to this situation, I have established a regional incident management team to coordinate the Service's flood response operations, which are focused on (a) impacts to Service lands and facilities, such as units of the National Wildlife Refuge System and National Fish Hatchery System; and, (b) assisting local, State, and Federal emergency response efforts through deployment of Service resources ranging from boats, heavy equipment, aircraft, law enforcement personnel, and other emergency and technical resources. This approach is designed to both safeguard Service trust resources and the infrastructure that supports those resources and to protect human health and safety in a flood scenario.

I have delegated the leadership of our response organization to Incident Commanders Jim Kelton and Greg Langer and have charged them with ensuring the Service's flood response efforts are delivered in a safe, efficient and effective manner. Jim and Greg have assembled a team of field and regional staff with the skill sets necessary to accomplish this mission (please see the accompanying flood response organization chart). This team is responsible for coordinating all

flood response efforts in R6 and is actively supporting Service operations in the impacted area through a variety of means, ranging from physical preparation of Service facilities for flood onset to allocating resources (equipment and people) to assist other governments with flood response operations, including search and rescue, and internal and external communication efforts.

Current conditions in the affected area are proving challenging. Flooding predictions continue to vary across North and South Dakota for the next week. Water levels are expected to peak in smaller streams over the next 36 hours, and larger rivers are expected to peak by Friday, March 28, 2009. The National Weather Service has increased the expected crest for the mainstem Red River at Fargo to 40 feet by March 28, 2009. (The record flood level for the Red River at Fargo is 40.1 feet.) Water levels are anticipated to remain high for at least another month. Blizzard and winter storm conditions in North and South Dakota are hampering response to flood relief efforts. Road closures due to winter weather, as well as flooding, are hampering ground transportation and travel into the affected area.

At present, the Service is actively engaged in numerous flood response activities. For example, Valley City National Fish Hatchery in Valley City, ND, is currently hauling in additional clay to improve dikes around the station to protect station structures from the rapidly-rising waters of the Sheyenne River. Arrowood National Wildlife Refuge Complex (headquartered near Pingree, ND) has dispatched an airboat and operator to Fargo, ND, in response to a request from the Cass County Sheriff's office and is responding to requests for additional airboats from the county to assist with evacuations in Fargo in the Red River Basin. Other stations are moving equipment from buildings facing inundation. Yesterday, a NWRS Law Enforcement team assisted a local sheriff's department with evacuation of a residence in a flooded area. The list of activities related to our flood response efforts is long and will surely grow as this event develops further.

In an earlier memorandum to the Regional Directorate Team, I indicated to Assistant Regional Directors and other regional leadership the flooding situation in the Dakotas is Region 6's highest priority and will remain so until further notice. I asked the RDT to be responsive to and cooperate with any and all requests for assistance coming from our regional flood response team. Similarly, I ask all of you to prepare as necessary for any role you may be asked to play in the days ahead as we work to deliver our flood response mission. In addition, I ask you to keep your colleagues, and their families, who are currently in the flood impact area in your thoughts and remain sensitive to the fact that this situation is and will likely continue to dominate their time and outlook for the duration of this event.

Region 6 has a strong tradition of pulling together in the face of natural disasters and helping others, especially our public, affected by such events. I have no doubt we will continue that tradition with this current situation in the Dakotas. I will continue to keep you informed about the situation, and thank you for your strong support. We are in the process of updating flood information on our website: [www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/floodinfo](http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/floodinfo).

*(Signed: Steve Guertin)*

Attachment