

Area navigates flood warnings

By Sarah Sobanski

Bancroft and surrounding area residents were on edge as the region saw multiple rainstorms through the beginning of May. Multiple flood warnings were issued by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry throughout the week. On Thursday, May 4, Environment Canada issued a rainfall warning expecting the area to see between 50 and 70 millimetres of rain over the weekend. This, after a long week of rain already.

By Wednesday, May 3, a Combermere resort nestled along a bend of the Madawaska River was facing a mandatory evacuation. "It is massive destruction, it is unbelievable the amount of damage that is being caused by this," said office manager for Pine Cliff Resort Antia Phillips.

Heavy rains and the opening of Bark Lake Dam had led to a "whirlpool" that "[ate] away at the riverbank because it [was] all sand." Only emergency and authorized personnel were allowed on site.

Phillips told *Bancroft This Week* that the Bark Lake Dam had increased water flows to 330 meters of water per second.

"It's absolutely devastating what's happening. We're doing our best to save the homes that are on the waterfront," she said, but noted the dam had no other option but to increase water flows.

By Friday, Ontario had activated its Disaster Recovery Assistance for Ontarians program for the County of Renfrew and the City of Pembroke.

The announcement press release stated, "The flooding that began in late April has been extraordinary and widespread. Water levels are nearly a metre above their 12-year average and at their highest levels since record keeping began in 1947. The impacts are expected to be costly."

Hastings Highlands was faring better than Combermere and its surrounding county after the first week of flood watch.

Rains on Monday, May 1, caused road washouts, the worst at Lake St. Peter Road. Eight small culverts also collapsed. Bark Lake Dam was also affecting the municipality. It was 15 centimetres from capacity, according to Tomasini, by Thursday.

Mayor Vivian Bloom thanked Tomasini and the municipality's works staff at council Wednesday for their prompt response to flooding.

Tomasini confirmed thousands of sandbags were being prepared between the Bangor works yard and Y Road works yard. Work crews and local fire departments were behind these.

Four-men work crews were on watch all weekend for residents who needed assistance with flooding. Tomasini reported Monday a major culvert had collapsed Saturday along Hwy 62. Crews were out until 10 p.m. fixing it. Besides the culvert, everything seemed to have quieted.

Areas of concern included waterfront properties, off of Baptiste Lake "Hobo Lane and Glory Road, which had seen flooding over the past two weeks" and Kamanisseg Lake along Kamanisseg Lake Road. Also worrisome were water levels near the Siberia Road bridge. Luckily, the bridge saw water levels lower. By Friday, they'd receded almost 60 centimetres.

A similar situation could be seen in Bancroft.

Fire chief Pat Hoover told *Bancroft This Week* just after 1 p.m. Friday that area water levels were doing well.

"We're flowing about 58 cubic metres of water through the dams in Bancroft. Both dams are wide open, so it's just going to depend on the general increase of rainfall through today and into tomorrow that will dictate where we end up. Right now we have some capacity in the river and things are flowing well. We're holding in a good state at the moment," said Hoover.

By Monday, Madawaska Valley Mayor Kim Love announced, "Water levels in Kamanisseg Lake and the Madawaska River system will continue to raise slowly over the next 24 hours even though Ontario Power Generation has decreased the flow from Bark Lake Dam. Residents in low lying areas should continue assessing their situation closely and respond accordingly. All residents in waterlogged areas need to be aware that septic systems and wells could become compromised by these conditions."

Tomasini and Kelly suggested they remained on watch but with a lighter forecast predicted, the area could be in the clear.

"The water levels in the town of Bancroft have been rising very slowly. As far as infrastructure or flooding, there is no cause for concern at this time," said Kelly.

For more information on disaster relief from the province visit ontario.ca/DisasterAssistance or call 1-844-780-8925.

Bancroft This Week posts flood updates on its Facebook page. Check in regularly for updates.

The MNRF had extended its flood warning until Friday, May 12 on Monday, May 8.