

# THE FLOOD CURRENT

MARCH-APRIL 1993

## Officials Address East Cache Creek Flooding

Complaints by local residents and landowners of flooding south of Lawton have prompted local governments and federal and state officials to seek a permanent solution to the problem.

According to Harold Springer, OWRB chief engineer, while residents and landowners around East Cache Creek point to upstream Lake Ellsworth as the source of repeated episodes of inundation, the problem is primarily a result of increased urbanization in the area.

"Over the past 50 years, the construction of streets, parking lots and buildings has gradually limited the access of runoff to permeable soil," Springer pointed out. "As a result, the volume of runoff has increased, leading to a greater magnitude and fre-



Walters resident uses boat to herd cattle out of harm's way during a May 1987 flood.

quency of flooding." Springer also alluded to problems within the creek, such as sedimentation and the gradual accumulation of brush and other debris which has reduced the stream's water-carrying capacity.

Individuals from a multitude of agencies and organizations—including the OWRB, Association of South Central Oklahoma Governments, Soil Conservation Service, Corps of Engineers, Cotton and Comanche County Boards of Commissioners, City of Lawton and local tribal governments—have gathered to identify likely solutions to the historic flooding problem.

"The piece-meal implementation of flood control projects is not the answer. Only a comprehensive and dedicated basin-wide approach can ultimately mitigate future flooding," Springer said.

Recent meetings on the flooding issue have determined that potential solutions must embrace channelization and other upstream flood control/retention projects; land-use planning; maintenance; reservoir

management and planning; and flood-warning systems.

The East Cache Creek problem also will be a major focus of the Oklahoma Floodplain Managers Association Spring Technical Workshop scheduled for May 13 at the Howard Johnson's Motor Lodge in Lawton. The theme of the workshop is "Training Exercise, Multi-Objective Analysis of Floodplain Management: Case Study—East Cache Creek." For details, contact Greg Scheffe, of the OWRB's Woodward Office, at 256-1014.



An unidentified youngster, oblivious to this East Cache Creek flood, is taken to higher ground.

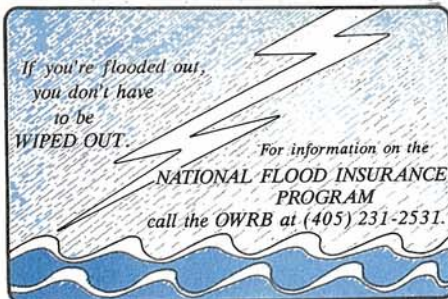
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## Flood Awareness Observed

For the third consecutive year, Governor Walters has proclaimed March "Flood Awareness Month" in Oklahoma.

"This proclamation is important because it helps us to inform and educate Oklahomans on the availability of affordable flood insurance, floodplain management techniques and flood safety procedures," said Ken Morris, State NFIP Coordinator. Between 1978 and 1990, more than 11,000 Oklahoma citizens were victims of flood damage, yet had no flood insurance protection, he added.



As part of Flood Awareness Month, the OWRB and FEMA are sponsoring flood insurance/floodplain management workshops throughout the state. Dates and locations were March 16, Idabel; March 23, Miami; March 24, Woodward; and March 25, Altus. Government officials were on hand to review new regulations and update local floodplain administrators on compliance requirements.

## Weather Pattern to Continue

A continuation of the unpredictable weather phenomenon known as El Nino will increase the need for flood insurance throughout much of the U.S. this year, according to the National Weather Service (NWS).

El Nino, or "The Child," appears every three to five years for a period of 12 to 18 months. Sporadic warming of the Eastern Pacific Ocean and disruption of the jet stream caused by El Nino normally spawn increased flooding and drought activity worldwide. As a result, now more than ever, national and state floodplain officials encourage eligible citizens—especially those residing in the southeast, Gulf states and southern California—to purchase federal flood insurance.

## Personal Impact of Flooding Described

*Presented here is an account by Roy Sedwick, executive director of the Texas Floodplain Management Association, of the Christmas floods of 1991. This story, which was originally printed in Texas' Summer 1992 Floodplain Management newsletter, brings home the personal devastation of flooding suffered by thousands each year.*

When the level of Lake Travis rose 16.7 feet in 24 hours, many residents were facing an important decision. I was among those lakeshore dwellers trying to decide if I should remove my home's contents. The decision was made for us. New projections indicated the lake would crest at 710 feet, just four feet below the spillway.

My home was built by my father in 1961, long before FEMA maps were published showing the 100-year flood level of Lake Travis to be 716 feet. The deed records did show that the lot was below the lake's spillway, but many (like my father) simply elevated several feet above the historical flood level of 707 feet. When I obtained the house in 1973, the downstairs was remodeled to include a den, one bedroom, an office, bathroom and triple garage. **Major mistake!**

Late December 21st, I began calling around for a moving van. It took almost an hour before I located what I believe was the last van in Austin. By the time I made the 80-mile round-trip, darkness had fallen, but an army of friends were waiting to help with the evacuation. By 11:30 p.m., the van was full and I walked out of the house, closed the doors and shut off the power. By morning, water was two feet over the lower floor.

I continued to monitor the lake level over the next day or two, worried about all of my possessions on the second floor. When new predictions indicated that the lake might reach spillway level, I decided to evacuate my second story. On Christmas Eve, using a small barge, the remaining furniture was removed. Thank God for good neighbors and family and for a day without rain.

On Christmas Day, the level of Lake Travis crested at 710.5 feet, a new record. It was a Christmas I will never forget as I stood on the road staring helplessly at my home with several inches of water over the carpets on the second floor. Water would not leave my home until several days into the new year.

During my career with Texas' water agencies, I have worked with FEMA in more than 20 flood disasters. I have been in many flooded homes, so I thought I knew what to expect. But, when I opened the garage door for the first time, I was not prepared for the sight that greeted me. Clean-up has been slow and mold is growing at a rapid rate. I am considering opening my home to the local school for a science project.

In retrospect, I wonder why my family was put through this ordeal. Perhaps I needed to experience a flood first-hand to truly understand the emotions and feelings of flood victims. Many in my profession feel that people who live in floodplains deserve what they get. Believe me, no one deserves to go through such a living hell. Many have asked me how I am doing. Physically, I am okay, but emotionally, I will never be the same. I compare my feelings to those of a mugging victim. Just as a crime victim feels that he or she has been physically violated, my home, my center of stability, was violated by muddy floodwaters. I can never look at my home again and feel the comfort and safety it once offered.

I continue to promote flood insurance, but no amount of money will ever compensate me for the loss of my home. The only thing that really counts is the love and support of family, friends and neighbors. Without this support, flood victims will never survive the ordeal and the only reality is—**If you live in the floodplain, you will be flooded.**