



TOP

The Floodwaters Recede

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The Floodwaters Recede

The Mississippi River crest has passed, our rivers are slowly moving back within their banks, and the enormous task ahead of us is being revealed as the floodwaters recede.

Across Missouri, federal and state officials are assessing the damage from these storms and floods. A major federal disaster has been declared in the counties hardest-hit, and more may be added before the month ends. Homes have been swept away, farmland scoured of its topsoil, highways washed out and one enormous levee blown to smithereens.

The Mississippi River flood is to Pinhook, Missouri, as Hurricane Katrina was to New Orleans. The town today is empty, totally evacuated, and no one knows when families will be able to return home. The cries from environmental extremists are the same now as they were then. “Don’t rebuild New Orleans” has become “don’t rebuild Pinhook.” But we can’t ask these Americans to permanently surrender their property rights in a place which was their home. And we can no more ask people in New Madrid and Mississippi Counties to live without the protection of a levee than we can ask people in St. Louis and Memphis to do so.

In Mississippi County, the productive ground of the New Madrid floodway grew roughly half of the crops in 2010. In 2011, that likely means the county’s agriculture economy will shrink by 50 percent at a cost of \$60-70 million. The economic effect of this disaster is

potentially devastating.

Although the floodway is the single-biggest disaster in our congressional district, there are many more instances where the destruction of a home, a road or a local economy is nearly total.

In Morehouse, an effort to save Highway 60 from being washed out by floodwaters resulted in middle-of-the-night evacuations for hundreds of residents. Some didn't even get the notice. And dozens of homes and thousands of acres of farmland were put several feet underwater for days. Just as in New Orleans, mold is starting to grow inside flooded structures.

In Wayne County, historic levels at the Wappapello Dam resulted in 400 feet of Highway T being totally washed out, and a key transportation route in our congressional district becoming impassable for months.

Rivers and lakes throughout our district have spilled over into nearby communities, washing out culverts, covering roads, and menacing the local economy. In most cases, the evidence of the flood is in debris, in a waterline, in visible erosion to a roadbed. In many cases, local communities have set things to rights in short order. In others, the resources to make needed repairs are not yet in place. Our role, however, is to be advocates for our region until the response to this disaster is complete. Region-wide, the Flood of 2011 tested the flood control infrastructure which protects 4 million Americans and hundreds of billions of dollars of economic activity. We must also use this historic flood to make the much-needed case that modernization and maintenance of our flood protection system has never in the history of our nation been more important. To do anything less is to tempt an awful fate.

As the floodwaters recede, the memory of the disaster will stay with us. Recovery will take months in many cases, years in others. It will demand perseverance and insist that we all work together to assure that the communities we love will continue to be wonderful places where we make our homes, earn our living, raise our children, and provide for our nation. Two things are in our favor: we're not alone, and we're up to the task.

Jo Ann Emerson, R-Cape Girardeau, represents the Eighth Congressional District of Missouri in the United States House of Representatives.

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