

Emergency Flood Response

All of us at the Department of Natural Resources are committed to managing and protecting our state's natural and cultural resources while providing positive outdoor recreational opportunities for all. Time spent outdoors in nature is always time well-spent. Unfortunately, nature occasionally has other plans for us, and those sudden calls to unexpected duty can be absolutely heartbreaking.

Our jobs at DNR are varied. If you spend any time in nature, you've probably encountered DNR personnel. Perhaps it was a Conservation Police Officer making a routine drive through a state park, or conducting a boating safety inspection on a busy holiday weekend. Maybe it was a ranger at a state park answering your questions about trail conditions or local plants and animals. Maybe you called your local fisheries biologist who sampled one of your favorite lakes, or a wildlife biologist who helped provide habitat management on your property.

These are but a few of the truly rewarding tasks we perform as stewards of our state's resources. But then there is the one job for which none of us ever wishes to be called. When natural disasters strike, such as the catastrophic spring flooding that devastated entire communities at the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers in late April and early May, DNR personnel were among the first to respond. It was an epic tragedy. Biologists, CPOs, site technicians, rangers and even office staff suddenly became flood-relief workers overnight. Scores of DNR staff set aside their normal activities and



stepped forward to assist with the protection of life, property and the environment throughout much of southern Illinois.

Flooding is a perfectly natural event in Illinois and few other states have more flooding than occurs in our Prairie State. In fact, more than 90 percent of the state's declared disasters are flood-related. It's why DNR staff remain prepared to respond quickly to public

needs and lessen the impact of flooding on communities. For example, following these torrents of spring 2011:

■ State park staff filled and transported hundreds of thousands of sandbags used to protect critical infrastructure in local communities and state parks. They assisted in evacuations and monitoring and repairing levees at Cairo, Metropolis and Olive Branch and helped coordinate flood-response efforts with other state and local agencies. State parks provided free camping for those evacuated from their homes.

■ Illinois Conservation Police and Division of Fisheries staff deployed more than 50 watercraft, which resulted in 700 evacuations, 700 welfare checks and assistance with seven emergency medical-assistance situations. They conducted more than 500 levee patrols, delivered Red Cross and medical supplies to citi-

zens and rescued 40 domesticated animals, including a 6-day-old colt. Officers and fisheries biologists investigated 10 oil and fuel spills in flooded areas, and secured more than 500 potentially hazardous floating LP, gasoline and diesel tanks. Watercraft security patrols were provided in towns inundated by water to prevent looting and criminal activity, and 24-hour security was maintained on low hanging power lines supplying electricity to a community water-treatment facility.

■ Office of Water Resources personnel provided continuous river forecasts, levee and dam-risk assessments, and levee monitoring to inform the state Emergency Operations Center with critical, up-to-the-minute data. OWR staff work with local officials after the flood to assess damages, enforce local floodplain regulations and coordinate the National Flood Insurance Program.

Despite the challenges Mother Nature throws our way, floodplain management programs in Illinois have placed the state at the forefront of flood-damage reduction.

For nearly 100 years, DNR's Office of Water Resources has focused on risk identification, floodplain regulations and mapping, and flood forecasting, insurance coordination and mitigation. During drier times, such measures can seem unnecessary. However, when natural disasters strike, such as the ceaseless downpours that inundated the south this spring, the wisdom of planning ahead and being prepared becomes obvious. As communities continue to recover and rebuild from this unprecedented flood, DNR will be there to reduce future losses through sound floodplain management practices.

Flooding is an inevitable and natural event in nature. It should be expected—and we should always be prepared.

A handwritten signature in red ink, reading "Marc Miller".

Marc Miller, Director

In early May, DNR staff at Fort Massac State Park near Metropolis responded with sandbags and pumps to hold back rising Ohio River floodwaters.

