

Bear Walkway under construction after flood damage

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Evanston city work crews work diligently to repair extensive damage to sidewalks along the Bear River walkway, which was caused by spring runoff. HERALD PHOTO/Becky Crum

High waters caused substantial damage to Evanston's city walkway along the edge of the Bear River from Bear River Drive to the state park.

City engineer Brian Honey said Evanston reached the 100-year flood event, a number calculated in past records, for the Bear River drainage on the peak day of June 8.

"They figure a frequency of basically 4,000 cubic feet per second will occur once every 100 years. They study the flow history of what the average runoff is and project what they believe will happen," Honey said.

Honey said they weren't expecting the waters to reach that level yet, but it was an unusual event this year with a dry winter and unexpectedly wet spring that put a lot of snow in the mountains.

Honey said this year late spring storms piled a large amount of additional snow on the lower elevations, causing the melt to occur at one time, raising waters levels in the Bear River to nearly 4,000 cubic feet per second.

"A cubic foot is equivalent to a box of water (one foot by one foot by one foot) that would hold seven and a half gallons of water," he said. "June 8 we basically had 30,000 gallons of water going down the Bear River every second. That is a lot of water for that little river."

Honey said the rock project they completed prior to the flooding helped a lot in the city limits. He said the water was directed in the center of the channel because of the rock structures they had installed.

"The velocity of the water was really scooting. You wouldn't want to fall in with it traveling that fast. I don't know exactly what it was, but if someone had fallen in, they would have been swept downstream a long way in a hurry," said Honey.

Rock wire encasings were filled with river cobble and placed south of the I-80 Bridge on the side of the river to protect the bank from being washed away.

"They call the wire encasings a rock mattress. They were placed along the river when they built the I-80 Bridge to keep the riverbank from washing out when the river rises. Some of those failed in the spot south of the freeway and it washed out underneath the mattresses. They rusted, causing the rock to fall out of the encasing," Honey said.

Honey explained that the rocks washed away leaving the bank exposed, and when the water rose, it washed away the bank as well.

“When the riverbank washed away, it undercut our trail we had constructed along the river. It was undercut so badly that we had to push the trail into the river because we couldn’t keep people off the path. They moved our barricades and walked right on down the trail even though it was hanging out in midair,” he said.

Honey said when the water receded Mayor Davis asked them to get it repaired as soon as possible and as cost effectively as they could so people could use the Greenway.

“When the state’s rock mattresses washed out, they came over to look at the damage. They decided it could wait until fall or maybe next year. It didn’t impact their structure and therefore was not as high a priority for them as it was for Evanston,” said Honey.

Honey said because the state didn’t suffer any damage that would cause them to start working immediately, Mayor Davis said he wanted to do something as quickly as possible to get the trail back in operation for the community.

“In trying to limit the expense, and do the job as quickly as possible, I contacted the division director for the department of transportation, John Eddins in Rock Springs. He gave permission for us to get rock from the same pit in Kemmerer that we had used previously when we did phase II of the river restoration behind the Super 8 Hotel and Bear River Yamaha,” Honey said.

Honey said the project is saving the city money by using city crews to haul the rock with minimal cost to Evanston.

“The cost is as minimal as we can get by with compared to doing something similar to what was there before it washed away. That cost would have been about \$30,000. But by doing it in-house and using city crews and equipment, we have saved a substantial amount of money,” Honey added.

Honey said the area being replaced is a little more than 20 feet wide and 100 feet along the river and about 15 feet high. He said next week the city workers will start to redo the actual trail, restoring it so it can be put back in operation as soon as the concrete has time to cure.