

Officials expect more snowmelt upstream

River keeps rising

By JOSHUA WOLFSON - Star-Tribune staff writer | Posted: Tuesday, June 22, 2010



Water crashes down the Pathfinder Dam spillway into the North Platte River on Saturday. The high water is expected to continue as releases increase this week upstream from Seminoe Reservoir. (Dan Cepeda/Star-Tribune)

Federal officials plan to release more water into the North Platte River today, but the increase is not expected to cause damage downstream in Casper.

The Bureau of Reclamation expects the river will rise to roughly 7.4 feet in Casper sometime between noon and 2 p.m., said Natrona County Sheriff's Lt. Mark Sellers. The river reaches flood stage at 8 feet.

So far, flooding in Casper has been confined to parts of the Platte River Parkway. While emergency management officials don't expect today's increase will threaten structures, they might place more sandbags behind the Tate Pumphouse, where the water has crept within several feet of the building.

The Bureau of Reclamation opted to release more water into the already swollen North Platte to make more room in Seminoe Reservoir, about 70 miles upstream of Casper. Water levels flowing into the reservoir haven't decreased as much as projected, Sellers said.

"With the warm weather they are anticipating, they could get more snowmelt into Seminoe, and that is the true concern," he said. "If we don't create some space in Seminoe, if it gets to a point where it goes over the spillway, we lose any control."

"So by giving it a little increase now, we hope to create a pocket and make it easier down the road."

The Bureau of Reclamation sought and received approval for the increase from the cities of Casper, Evansville and Mills, along with Natrona County.

Although the river is running at more than triple its normal volume, it's still significantly below the levels that caused flooding in Casper in 1983 and 1984.

On Friday, officials estimated the river would run at 7,000 cubic feet per second for the remainder of June. Sellers said he didn't know how the additional release of water would affect that projection.

The Natrona County Emergency Management Agency established three sandbag distribution sites in the Casper area last week. Those sites are still open, Sellers said.

The North Platte's system of reservoirs remains at or near capacity thanks to a cool, wet spring. Water began flowing through the spillway at Pathfinder Dam last week for the first time since 1984.

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Want to know more?

The Natrona County Emergency Management Agency has opened an emergency operations center to deal with flood-related issues. People can contact the center's hotline at 235-9555.

More information is also available at www.natrona.net/flood and www.casperwy.gov.

Sandbags are available at the following three distribution sites:

- * The intersection of Johnstone and River Meadow roads in Dempsey Acres.
- * Cole Creek near the Platte River Bridge.
- * Near 1250 N. Center St.

Road closed near Lusby access area

A portion of the road to the Lusby Public Access Area on the North Platte River south of Casper has been closed due to high water flows and erosion, according to the Wyoming Game and Fish Department.

A 100-foot section of the road washed away downstream from the main parking lot, preventing vehicle access. The access area remains open for pedestrian traffic.

North Platte River flows might reach 7,000 cubic feet per second, said Al Conder, Casper region fisheries supervisor. Normal flows for this time of year fall between 2,200 and 2,500 cfs.

The department will repair and reopen the road once the water subsides.