

Billings Gazette

Focused on football

Broncos vagabond QB keeps the sport atop his busy to-do list **SPORTS, PAGE B1**



Gardiner cut off by flooding

Thousands, including tourists, stranded in mountain town **LOCAL & STATE, PAGE A5**



MOSTLY CLOUDY, WINDY, COOL 64 • 49 FORECAST, A12 | **TUESDAY, JUNE 14, 2022** | billingsgazette.com



AMY LYNN NELSON, BILLINGS GAZETTE

The Rocky Fork Inn, located on Broadway Avenue in Red Lodge, is severely damaged as Rock Creek jumped its banks.

Rock Creek floods Red Lodge

Torrent leads to evacuations on southeast side of town

BRETT FRENCH
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RED LODGE – Runoff from rain falling atop five feet of snow in the Beartooth Mountains over the weekend turned Rock Creek into a torrent early Monday morning, forcing dozens of residents from their homes and closing secondary highways.

On the other side of the mountains, Yellowstone National Park closed all five of its entrances to deal with the unprecedented high water threatening bridges and roads.

Kristan Apodaca stood across the street from the washed out 19th Street bridge in downtown Red Lodge wiping away tears as she talked on her cellphone.

“That bridge I literally drove yesterday,” she said. “My mom drove it at 3 (a.m.) before it was washed out.”

The tears fell for her grandmother’s house, now flooded. Grandma Anne Woodruff died in March and the house was just listed for sale.

“It was their last dream home because my grandfather found out he had pancreatic cancer,” Apodaca said.

The log cabin was built in the

early 2000s on the banks of Rock Creek, a special place to Apodaca and her family. Her husband proposed to her in the now-flooded Rotary Park where a memorial bench had been erected in her grandfather’s memory.

“I am sixth-generation, this is our home,” she said.

Apodaca’s Joliet home was flooded in the big water year of 2011.

“That was nothing like this though,” she said. “We’ve never seen this.”

Torrential

Across from Apodaca the sounds of rushing water and boulders rolling unseen down the swollen chocolate milk-colored channel reverberated in the narrow valley. The fallen bridge diverted half the creek down Broadwater Avenue, the town’s main drag, for several blocks. Caught in the creek’s deluge from both sides was the Rocky Fork Inn. Water tore away and bent the garage doors as insulation and siding was also swept loose by water-borne trees smashed against the structure. A refrigerator, it’s door gone, floated down the street.

Nearby, neighbors used sand to route rivulets away from a home and everywhere friends, tourists and neighbors stood gawking and marveling at the unparalleled flows and destruction.

Cars left parked in one lot had

trees and branches piled against their upstream side while a 3-foot wave roiled next to a school crossing sign in front of a restored Victorian home, its American flag waving in the cool breeze.

Rock Creek peaked at more than 2,000 cubic feet per second (cfs) sometime early Monday before the stream gauge was torn loose. The previous record high flow on the creek was 1,320 cfs in 1935. Normally, the creek is at about 500 cfs this time of year.

“A disaster declaration is forthcoming,” a spokesperson for Governor Gianforte said in an email response to Lee Montana’s State News Bureau. “The state will continue to coordinate closely with local authorities.”

Wake up

Residents Bill and Lee Cooper were awakened at 1:30 a.m. by someone pounding on the door of their home on Platt Avenue South urging them to evacuate. With the power out, they quickly got dressed in the dark and grabbed medications, cellphones, their wallets and passports before hopping in their pickup and driving away from their home built in 1912 by Finnish miners.

“Some people are really upset,” Lee said, sitting in their truck at the Carbon County Fairgrounds where the American Red Cross was setting up an emergency shelter to house and feed evacu-

ees. “We’re not as upset because we’re hoping the main part of the house is dry.”

Their garage and guest house are probably soaked, however, and Bill worried his camper may have floated away.

“The main thing is him and me, we’re OK,” Lee said. “And our truck.”

Red Lodge resident John Clayton woke up at about 5 a.m. Monday when a neighbor pounded on his tenant’s door to move a car. Clayton lives at 13th Street West and Haggin Avenue near the creek.

“Thirteenth Street has become a new channel for Rock Creek,” Clayton said. “All the basements on my street have been flooded.”

Evacuated

Inside the Red Cross shelter, Denver residents Casey Wieland and Krista Stippelmans rested on a cot with their dog, Adeline, as they attempted to figure out their next move. They were supposed to be on the road back to the city, but had to leave their car behind at the condominium they were

Please see **RED LODGE**, Page A4



VIEW: To watch video of flooding in Red Lodge, point your smartphone camera at the QR code, then tap the link.

NEWSVU

Series of weather events set up flooding

SEABORN LARSON AND THOM BRIDGE
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Meteorologists on Monday said a series of significant weather events during an unusual spring season created water levels “never ... observed before” in high mountain areas that translated to destructive flooding around Montana.

As officials evacuated Red Lodge residents and Yellowstone National Park closed its entrances due to extreme flooding, forecasters with the National Weather Service said larger towns downriver were set to see peak river flows starting Monday evening.

In neighboring southwest Montana, Jim Brusda, lead meteorologist for the National Weather Service in Great Falls, says three contributing factors lead to rivers rapidly rising.

First, the unseasonably cool April and May held mountain snowpack up high and late spring snowstorms considerably added to the snowpack.

Second, the temperature of the existing snowpack, measured by satellite, sat right at 32 degrees due to the sun angle this late in the year.

Third, Montana saw multiple days of considerable rainfall at higher elevations.

The three factors combining, Brusda said, caused the snowpack to “wash out rapidly versus melting out more gradually.”

“This is causing the Gallatin River to go above (minor) flood stage as we speak near the city of Logan,” Brusda said Monday afternoon. “But we are not expecting major flooding on the Gallatin.”

Brusda forecasted the Gallatin River flooding to last a couple days with the situation starting to improve on Thursday.

Dan Borsum, senior forecaster with the Billings National Weather Service office, similarly described “really significant” events that touched off the flooding in south-central Montana drainages: a snowstorm over Memorial Day that deposited moisture in the mountains and the recent series of rain episodes that dropped 2 to 3 inches in some areas.

Please see **WEATHER**, Page A4

Campers along Stillwater River rafted to safety

EMILY SCHABACKER AND ERIC YOUNG
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Dozens of people and several pets have been rescued from the Woodbine Campground after severe flooding along the Stillwater River closed five bridges, leaving campers stranded.

Justin Sheely, along with his wife and 5-year-old daughter were just finishing up breakfast when the camp host approached their tent site. Though it had been raining when the family arrived the afternoon before and all through the night, Sheely was surprised to hear they were being evacuated.

“We were learning about the flooding (around the state) as we were leaving...it was surreal,” he said.

Extensive flooding around

Absarokee, Nye and Fishtail left several roads under water and impassable early Monday morning. As a result, all campers were instructed to pack their essentials and leave the rest behind, locked in their vehicles at the campground.

For Sheely, that meant a cooler full of food was left to spoil in his car, and, unfortunately some other valuables were left behind. He estimated about 30 vehicles and campers were parked along the road up to the Sibanye-Stillwater Mine when they left.

Stillwater County Public Information Officer Tammie Mullikin said 68 campers and eight others near the area were rafted down the river by search and rescue crews Monday afternoon past the portion of the Nye Road that is now gone. Fireman’s Point, Rid-

dles Cliff, Johnson Bridge, Spring Creek and the Old Nye campground bridges were all reported as closed or gone.

“They rafted down the river and were taken to the Nye Fire Hall and then to the shelter center set up at Anipro Arena (in Absarokee),” Mullikin said.

There were two rafts transporting adults, babies and dogs downriver and over the flooded portions of road, according to Sheely. He estimated there was about 100 yards worth of road submerged. Sheely snapped photos with his cell phone as search and rescue directed the rafts to safety.

When campers arrived in Nye, vehicles from the Sibanye-Stillwater Mine were ready to transport evacuees to Absarokee, but a



COURTESY JUSTIN SHEELY

Justin Sheely takes a selfie as he rides a raft while being evacuated from the Woodbine Campground Monday.

Please see **CAMPERS**, Page A4



■ **INSIDE:** Yellowstone National Park entrances closed due to unprecedented flooding, **A5**.

IN THE GAZETTE

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LOCAL & STATE

Officials monitor Yellowstone River flood

Levels will reach peak height on Tuesday

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The flooded Yellowstone River and the tributaries that feed it, which swept away roads and bridges from Gardiner to Red Lodge on Monday, will arrive in Billings Tuesday evening.

Billings officials will be keeping a close watch on river levels but believe the city should be able to weather it relatively unscathed.

“We really don’t have a problem until we get to 15 (feet),” Debi Meling, Billings Public Works director, told City Council Monday night.

The Yellowstone is expected to reach a height of 14.7 feet early Tuesday evening, according to the National Weather Service. After that, projections show the water level begins to recede rapidly over the next three days.

The biggest issue will be the handful of city storm drains that empty into the Yellowstone. Those drains sit around the 14-foot mark and so will be under water as the river rises. If any rain falls on Tuesday it will stay in the streets rather than drain out to the river because that water will have nowhere to go.

Currently no rain is forecast over Billings for Tuesday.

The last time the Yellowstone was in flood stage was 2018 and the water level reached 13.4 feet. That did some damage to city hardware along the river, Meling said.

Since then the city has updated the placement of some of its outfalls and installed a new flood control gate near one of the city’s storm drains at Washington Street to help stop back flows coming in from the river when it’s in flood stage.

The new gate has been working great, Meling said. But she and her staff anticipate that water from the Yellowstone will crest over the gate sometime Monday night. That water will spill into the drainage ditch that runs along Washington Street.

It’s been a turbulent 12 months for the city’s water and wastewater departments, which rely solely on the Yellowstone to provide water to Billings.

Record heat last June dropped river levels to historic lows and forced the city to put in place water restrictions in August through most of September. It was the first time the city had made such a move in four decades.

The flooding on Monday stranded residents and travelers in Gardiner, closed Yellowstone National Park, filled streets and basements in Red Lodge and washed out roads and bridges all along the river’s path.



LARRY MAYER PHOTOS, BILLINGS GAZETTE

The cars of trapped tourists fill the streets in Gardiner as historic flooding damages roads and bridges and floods homes along area rivers on Monday.

Flooding cuts off exits from city of Gardiner

Hundreds of tourists, residents trapped in gateway to Yellowstone

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Travelers and residents were trapped in the Yellowstone National Park gateway city of Gardiner on Monday after massive river flooding damaged roads.

The flooding was caused by rain falling on snowpack, turning what would’ve been several days’ worth of snowmelt into a few hours of rushing water, the Park County Sheriff’s Office announced in a Monday Facebook post.

Mudslides and rock slides piled onto already waterlogged U.S. Highway 89, forcing the road to be closed. The road between Gardiner and Yellowstone’s headquarters at Mammoth Hot Springs, Wyoming, was shut down due to rock and water damage to the narrow cliff-side road, eliminating the other primary route north out of Gardiner.

Even if the roads weren’t officially closed, most wouldn’t be able to be driven through the several feet of water rushing over the pavement. Resigned to staying in one place, many travelers have lined the Gardiner streets with their cars, campers and motor homes.

Fly shop owner and Gardiner local Richard Parks said he’s never seen the river this high — and he’s been in Gardiner since 1953. He said he watched 60-foot-trees



Highway 89 in Yankee Jim Canyon north of Gardiner is covered with Yellowstone River flood water as historic flooding damages roads and bridges and floods homes along area rivers on Monday.

float down the river and was reminded of the historic destructive floods of 1918.

“It’s one heck of a pile of water out there,” Parks said. Even after the roads clear of water, they may not be in usable condition, he said.

U.S. Highway 89 closed at Yankee Jim Canyon on Monday morning because there was 3 feet of water over the road.

Parts of East River Road southeast of Emigrant also closed because of flooding and much of the Yellowstone River flowing through Park County was either at or near flooding.

The Park County Sheriff’s Office said late Monday afternoon in a Facebook post that evacuations and rescues were going on

throughout the county.

“The state is coordinating with local officials,” Montana’s Department of Military Affairs said. The department deals with emergency services and the National Guard, and it said it’s been exploring options for transport and evacuation.

Additionally, there’s concern about the safety of water. While Gardiner residents were first advised to boil tap water before using it, they were told Monday afternoon that boiling may not be enough to make it safe.

The town of more than 900 residents plus hundreds of traveling tourists is facing what could be days without the freedom to travel out of town, and many are doing what they can to prepare.

Rebecca Demaree, owner of Gardiner Market, the only grocery store in town, said she saw more sales in her first five hours Monday than she’d seen in the store’s lifetime. When the road closures were announced, a massive rush of people came to buy kitchen staples like bread, chicken, ground beef and ready-to-eat meals. Typical camp sales like hot dogs and paper plates have also shot up, she said.

Demaree said many local restaurants were expecting a delivery within 24 hours of the road closures, so they’ve been buying out of the grocery store, too. Demaree herself was expecting a milk delivery Tuesday morning.

“No way,” Demaree said and laughed. “That’s not happening anymore.”

While the Gardiner Market may be running low on bread, Demaree isn’t too worried people will go hungry. By her estimate, everyone who would need food arrived in the five-hour rush, and the closed roads mean no new mouths will arrive any time soon. Plans are in place to possibly airlift food into a small airport nearby, and they have a large stockpile of reserve food they plan to restock shelves with, she said.

Please see **GARDINER**, Page A7

VIEW: For full coverage of flooding, including stories, photos, and video, point your smartphone camera at the QR code, then tap the link. **NEWSVU**

Record floods strand tourists in Yellowstone Park

Families seek shelter after 5 entrances close

NICOLE POLLACK AND MARY STEURER
Star-Tribune staff writers

Megan Hawks can’t get into Yellowstone.

Hawks and her family were en route to the national park when record rainfall and flooding over the weekend forced officials to close all of its five entrances Monday.

They’re among an unknown number of people hastily trying to figure out next steps amid upended travel plans.

The family was supposed to stay in Gardiner, Montana, for two nights. Now, the plan is to stay in Jackson on Monday night, and head to Island Park, Idaho, on Tuesday.

They’re safe, but Hawks is worried about getting their hotel costs refunded.

“As you know things are so expensive,” she wrote in a Facebook message.

No visitors will be allowed into Yellowstone until conditions stabilize. As of Monday afternoon, the closure was set to end no sooner than Thursday.



YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK
The swollen Rescue Creek flows over a washed-out bridge in Yellowstone National Park.

“We will not know timing of the park’s reopening until flood waters subside and we’re able to assess the damage throughout the park,” Yellowstone Superintendent Cam Sholly said in a statement. “It is likely that the northern loop will be closed for a substantial amount of time.”

Officials on Monday were evacuating those still inside the park,

beginning in its northernmost reaches, where the impacts — including road washouts, bridge failures, rockslides and mudslides — were most severe.

The park recorded 1.75 inches of rain at the north side of Lake Yellowstone as of 9 a.m. Monday, according to the National Weather Service, including 1.37 inches in 24 hours — more than triple the

previous single-day record. The far northern part of the park received an estimated 2-3 inches of rain.

With rain expected to persist through Tuesday night, concerns about rising flood levels and strain on wastewater and water treatment facilities prompted additional evacuations to the south.

“The heaviest rainfall has moved off to the east already, so they’re not expecting a lot of heavy rain,” said Jason Straub, lead meteorologist for the Riverton office of the National Weather Service. “But there still might be showers in the area today, tonight and tomorrow.”

Much of the park still has snow on the ground, according to Tony Bergantino, director of the Water Resources Data System at the Wyoming State Climate Office.

It’s been too warm during the past couple of nights for any of the recent rain to turn to snow. So all that water is pouring freely into the park’s rivers.

Gauge height on the Lamar River peaked at 16.7 feet early Monday, shattering the record of 12.15 feet set in 1996 and surpassing the maximum recordable height by nearly 2 feet. Flood lev-

els on the Yellowstone River near Corwin Springs, Montana, broke the local record, which has stood for more than a century, also by about 2 feet.

Gateway towns

Cody — located about 50 miles from Yellowstone’s east entrance — is one of several gateway towns tourists travel through to get to the park.

Right now, the city’s preoccupied with finding marooned visitors places to stay, said Tina Hoebelheinrich, chief executive officer of the city’s chamber of commerce.

The city’s calling up area hotels to see who has space for unexpected guests, she said. As of 1 p.m. Monday, two of Cody’s 100-odd hotels were booked full, she said.

The Shoshone River, which originates in Yellowstone, flanks Cody’s northwest corner. It’s not close enough to town to pose any problems, Hoebelheinrich said. But she’s worried about all the guest ranches outside the city. She heard anecdotally that one had flooded and evacuated its guests.

Please see **YELLOWSTONE**, Page A7

Jo Anne Arney



BILLINGS—A kind, considerate, soft spoken lady who grew up in the small town of Absarokee, graduating from high school in 1956. She married Charles Arney and had three children: Crystal, Curtis & Sherri.

Jo Anne later moved to Billings where she worked at KG Men's Store then Cenex as a cashier until retiring at age 67. She enjoyed many years residing with her daughter Sherri on Clark Avenue. She loved her pets, flowers, a good cup of coffee and visiting with friends


& family.

She is survived by her son Curtis (Marlene) Arney; grandchildren: Jennifer Gerttula, Kimberly Arney & Justin (Raechyl) Arney and four great-granddaughters: Paige, Lily, Harlen & Oakley; great-grandsons: Dylan and one on the way (due Aug. 1), along with many special friends, nieces and nephews.

She was preceded in death by her two daughters Crystal Gerttula & Sherri Johanson grandson Travis Gerttula, parents Joseph & Dorothy Campell, brother Eugene Campell and sister Shirley Linn.

We know she would want to extend a sincere thanks to granddaughter Kimberly for the special care & personal assistance. Also to Sharla Lane and all those at Aspen View, Chapel Court at St Johns.

Memorial service at Dahl Funeral Chapel Saturday June 18 at 2 p.m.

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HOWE—Shirley B., 91, of Billings, passed June 3. Memorial Service will be held Wednesday, June 15, 2023 at 10 a.m. at Smith West Chapel, 304 34th St. W. (15)

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DAILEY—Erin. Memorial Service 2 p.m. Tuesday, June 21 at Elks Club. Reception to follow. (14-17)

ARNEY—Jo Anne. Memorial Service 2 p.m. Saturday, June 18 at Dahl Funeral Chapel. (14-17)

MOELLER—William. Memorial Mass 12 p.m. Friday, June 17 at St. Patrick Co-Cathedral. (14-17)

SANCHEZ—Dennis. Graveside Service 11 a.m. Saturday, June 18 at Holy Cross Cemetery. (14-17)

Candidate joins race last minute

MAYA SHIMIZU HARRIS
Casper Star-Tribune

Republican State Superintendent of Public Instruction candidate Jennifer Zerba said she decided to join the race last-minute because she was “alarmed” at the platforms of other candidates and wanted to give voters another option.

There are six candidates running for the superintendent’s post, five as Republicans and one as a Democrat. Gov. Mark Gordon appointed the current superintendent, Brian Schroeder, to the job in January after former superintendent Jillian Balow left to take a similar job in Virginia. Schroeder is among those running for election.

Zerba, a Casper native, cosmetologist and Natrona County School District substitute teacher, filed her candidacy on May 27, the last day to do so.

She earned an associate’s degree in business administration from Casper College, a bachelor’s in business administration from Eastern Oregon University as well as a masters of public administration from the University of Wyoming and is currently getting a doctorate of education in learning, design and technology at UW. She has worked in various management, leadership and communication positions for over 17 years, including



Zerba

Here are Zerba’s positions on a few education topics:

On educator shortages

Zerba said Wyoming needs to make sure educators’ “mental, emotional and physical needs” are met.

“That starts with me communicating with them,” she said. “I envision myself walking the halls of our schools, getting to know our educators. I want to have an open-door policy, that they are welcome to come to me and talk to me.”

She thinks the Wyoming Teacher Apprenticeship Program, a new project of the Wyoming Department of Education meant to lower costs barriers for people who want to become teachers, is “another waste of money.” She thinks Wyoming already has plenty of options to lower financial barriers without making another program that costs money; community colleges, scholarships and an affordable public uni-

versity, for example.

“Ultimately, I feel this is a quick fix,” she said of the apprenticeship program. “It’s not been well thought out, and it’s not good for the future.”

A better solution to lowering these barriers, she said, would be to advertise what’s already available and support guidance counselors so they can connect students with resources.

On parental control

Zerba said she thinks that if parents disagree with what their child is being taught, they should ask the teacher for an alternative rather than going to the school board to demand a change in curriculum.

“It’s up to the teacher to come up with an alternative,” she said. “That’s where parental control lies. Parental control means parental control over your children, and I need to stress your children. Somebody else will not tell me what my child will be learning unless they are their teacher and have been board certified.”

On school choice

Zerba is “very much a proponent of upholding” what the state already offers in education. She’s not in favor of throwing charter schools into the mix.

“Financially, we cannot afford it,” she said, noting teacher shortages and a

recent survey by the University of Wyoming and Wyoming Education Association showing that 65% of the survey participants would quit their job in education if they could afford it.

“These are very alarming numbers,” she said. “So here you are wanting to throw charter schools in there? We simply can’t afford it.”

She pointed to the Natrona County School District as a good example of how education can be reinvented without charter schools. Students can attend any school in the district, rather than just the school that’s in their neighborhood. And there are a variety of education options: bilingual immersion education, technical education and classical education, for example.

“I think that Natrona County School District should get a gold star for reinventing education,” she said.

Zerba’s other goals

■ Work with educators to improve the use of state resources;

■ increase financial transparency by having all school districts publish their budgets online;

■ increase technology and the number of teachers in rural areas; and

■ change stigmas around trade school education.

Gardiner

From A5

The other question some tourists are facing is where they’ll sleep. Nancy Parks, wife of Richard Parks and owner of Gardiner Guest House B&B, said she had guests return after they faced rock slides and downed power lines on the road. They, like many other guests at Gardiner, will be continuing their stay until they find a safe way to leave.

However, those who planned to camp their way through town are facing different troubles. One person on a Gardiner Facebook page asked where he could set up a tent until the roads reopen.

Despite the chaos and surrealism, Demaree said the town is trying to hold itself together, thinking of community members who helped her bag groceries during the rush.

Richard Parks agreed, saying many have no choice but to grin and bear it.

“It’s not the government’s fault or the Russian’s fault or your in-



LARRY MAYER, BILLINGS GAZETTE

The highway between Gardiner and Mammoth is washed out trapping tourists in Gardiner as historic flooding damages roads and bridges and floods homes along area rivers on Monday.

law’s fault,” Parks said. “Jumping up and down and swearing isn’t going to do anything.”

Bill Berg, a Park County Commissioner, said Monday that there are limited emergency responders in Gardiner, with both ways

in and out of Gardiner shut off.

The Gateway Hose Company — Gardiner’s volunteer fire and ambulance service — had already been “up for hours already.”

“But that’s what we got for ambulance services

with Mammoth cut off,” Berg said. “I don’t know if we have the ability to respond at all. We’re a little bit vulnerable in that regard as well.”

— The Bozeman Chronicle contributed to this report.

Yellowstone

From A5

Shoshone National Forest — located about 25 miles west of Cody — is also experiencing high waters. As of Monday afternoon, two campgrounds at the park, Big Game and Wapiti, were closed because the Shoshone River was swelling.

Hoebelheinrich said she and others visited the campgrounds Sunday night to check in on the conditions.

“I just remember very plainly that Wapiti was at the top of the bank,” she said.

Dubois — a smaller city located about a hundred miles southeast of Yellowstone — wasn’t seeing as much traffic Monday.

“So far, I don’t think there’s been a huge difference,” she said.

Most people passing through Dubois that afternoon were leaving the national park, said Julie Gerona, executive director of the Headwaters Arts and Conference Center.

They might get more visitors Monday evening or on Tuesday, she guessed.

Dubois’ busy season is July through September, Gerona said, so Yellowstone-bound vacationers looking for a plan B can probably find room to stay



YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK PHOTOS

The swollen Gardner River damages North Entrance Road in Yellowstone National Park.

at the town’s hotels and short-term rentals.

“We have plenty of things to do,” she said.

Widespread destruction

Flooding and related damage shut down at least 20 roads in Wyoming and Montana on Monday.

Cody Beers, a spokesman for the Wyoming Department of Transportation, said the agency is keeping a particularly close eye on highway bridges that cross the rising waterways.

Two major bridges — one on Highway 120 and one on Highway 296 — stick out as problem areas, Beers said. Both cross the Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone River, which was so high on Mon-

day that it touched the bottom of the bridges.

The water level was causing debris to get caught and pile up on the bridges’ up-river sides.

Accumulated debris can “cause water to run around the bridge and potentially damage the bridge and the roadway,” Beers said. He said WYDOT personnel will likely have to go in and remove it all.

And WYDOT will have to put off other road improvement projects to repair destruction wrought by the floods, he said.

Damage from the flooding will be felt all across Wyoming, Beers said. Tourism is one of Wyoming’s biggest industries — not least because of Yellowstone, Grand Teton and

other recreational hotspots nearby.

Wyoming pulled in \$258 million in tax revenue from outside visitors in 2021, according to a report commissioned by the state’s tourism office. That represented a 60% increase from 2020, the report said.

Yellowstone enjoyed record attendance that year, with 4.8 million visitors, up from 3.8 million in 2020. Officials expect 2022 to be another busy year.

The Montana side

Patrick Gorman and his family traveled to Yellowstone from Marion, Iowa, on a Western camping trip that also included a stop at Mount Rushmore.

“Rain won’t stop us from enjoying our vacation,” Gorman tweeted Sunday,

alongside a photo of his umbrella-wielding kids.

But by Monday, the Gormans and roughly 20 others were stranded at a campsite in Gardiner, Montana, just outside the north entrance to the park, after the overflowing Yellowstone River washed out the only roads into town.

“The river right now has overtaken half of the tent camping,” Gorman told the Star-Tribune on Monday afternoon via Twitter.

People with campers and RVs — Gorman included — were safe, he said. They still had power and internet, but hadn’t received word from officials on when they might be able to leave.

The floodwaters also left Red Lodge, a city of about 2,200 near the park’s northeast entrance, simi-

larly isolated.

Michelle Owen Camper and her family, who live between Roberts and Joliet, Montana, were visiting the city Monday morning when the flood hit. She took a video of waters rushing past houses on its south end.

Owen Camper runs a painting business in the area. She’s been checking in with her customers to see how they’re doing. A few people have already lost their homes to the flood, she said.

It’s the second natural disaster the community’s grappled with in less than a year — about 40 acres near Red Lodge burned in a wildfire last July.

“You didn’t see as much destruction at all,” Owen Camper said of the fires.

Now, water is rushing through Red Lodge’s streets. Several key bridges are gone. Residents are piling up sandbags to save as much as they can.

“I don’t think it’s ever it’s never been this bad,” said Sherry Weamer, director of the Red Lodge Area Chamber of Commerce.

But the world outside the storm is still catching up.

“Travelers don’t know,” Weamer said. “So they’re calling here as they usually do, just to, you know, get information and then we’re sharing what we know and trying to divert.”