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SPORTS, PAGE B1

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Floods fouling state



AMY LYNN NELSON, BILLINGS GAZETTE

Water fills the streets of Broadway Avenue and floods homes in Red Lodge on Monday morning as flooding devastates the town and surrounding regions.

Yellowstone to remain closed for now; Montana declares ‘disaster’

JEFF WELSCH
jeff.welsch@lee.net

Gov. Greg Gianforte’s office declared Montana a disaster Tuesday as historic milk-chocolate flood waters roared eastward down the Yellowstone River system after devastating the northern regions of Yellowstone National Park and nearby communities along the Absaroka and Beartooth fronts.

Gianforte’s declaration came after surging waters spread over banks at unprecedented highs into the communities of Red Lodge, Nye, Fishtail,

Absarokee, Joliet and Livingston. By Tuesday afternoon, floodwaters in those regions had begun to recede, leaving destroyed homes, roads and bridges as well as rockslides and mudslides that stranded residents and tourists in Gardiner, Cooke City and Silver Gate.

“It is just the scariest river ever,” Kate Gomez of Santa Fe, New Mexico, told The Associated Press. “Anything that falls into that river is gone. The swells are huge and it’s just mud and silt.”

Yellowstone Superintendent Cam

Sholly announced that the world’s first national park would be closed for at least five more days as staff assessed damage. Celebrating its 150th anniversary and at the peak of tourist season, Yellowstone is shut down for only the third time in 34 years – most recently in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and also for the infamous 1988 fires that burned a mosaic over one-third of the park.

No injuries or deaths have been recorded from the flooding, Sholly said. “We’ve kept our teams out of harm’s way,” he said. “We won’t

know exactly what the damage looks like until the water goes down.”

Sholly added that Xanterra staff in the northern part of the park would be relocated and added that concessions at Mammoth and Roosevelt “will not reopen likely the rest of the year.”

Please see **FLOODS**, Page A4

■ MORE INSIDE: Yellowstone County closes roads, Billings prepares water treatment plant as river crests, **PAGE A9**

Northern Yellowstone blocked for season

BRETT FRENCH
The Billings Gazette

NICOLE POLLACK and MARY STEURER
Casper Star-Tribune

It will take months, if not years, for Yellowstone National Park to recover from the cataclysmic flooding that’s ravaged the region over the past two days, the park’s top official said Tuesday.

The damage will keep the northern half of Yellowstone National Park closed to tourists for the rest of the summer, Superintendent Cam Sholly told reporters. The area includes the iconic Lamar Valley, Tower Falls and Mammoth Hot Springs.

The southern loop of Yellowstone National Park may reopen to visitors in a week or less, he

added, using some type of reservation system or timed entry to control entry. Travel from Jackson, Wyoming, was already going to be hampered by road construction. Entrances that would be reopened for the southern loop include the East, South and West gates near Cody, Jackson and West Yellowstone, respectively.

“Trying to put normal visitation into one loop in Yellowstone is a disaster waiting to happen,” Sholly said.

The southern loop includes Yellowstone Lake, Old Faithful, Norris Geyser Basin and the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone. Mammoth Hot Springs, the park’s headquarters and location of a historic hotel, cannot

be reopened until the water and sewer systems have been assessed.

“We will not know exactly what the timelines are, what the costs are or any of that information until we get teams on the ground that can actually assess what happened and what it’s going to take to repair it,” Sholly said.

Please see **YELLOWSTONE**, Page A5

VIDEO: To watch footage of a home in Gardiner collapse into a river amid flood activity, point your smartphone’s camera at the code and click the link.

NEWSVU

DOUG KRAUS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE VIA AP

This aerial photo provided by the National Park Service shows a washed out road at North Entrance Road, of Yellowstone National Park in Gardiner on Monday.

Floods

From A1

U.S. Highway 89 in the Paradise Valley was closed just south of Emigrant until early afternoon, when residents were allowed to return and tourists were told to depart while they can.

Late Monday, people living in a sizable portion of southeast Livingston were required to evacuate, and the city’s hospital, Livingston HealthCare, closed and its patients taken to Big Timber as the river’s record-high waters crept into its parking lot. The evacuation order was lifted just before 9 a.m. Tuesday as the river’s peak surge raced downstream.

Numerous Yellowstone County roads were closed. And at Red Lodge, power was restored to most residents Tuesday a day after Rock Creek’s waters raged through the town, collapsing the 19th Street Bridge and swirling around homes. The waters were receding somewhat by Tuesday afternoon.

Residents and tourists in Gardiner at Yellowstone’s North Entrance and Silver Gate and Cooke City just outside the Northeast Entrance were stranded due to roads made impassable by high water and damage that could take weeks or even months to repair, park officials said. The Montana Department of Environmental Quality also issued a “Do Not Consume” order for Gardiner over unsafe drinking water, but by Tuesday afternoon repairs were made and testing begun.

Employees at park headquarters in Mammoth, who remained without power Tuesday, planned to buy groceries and other essentials in West Yellowstone. A generator was providing power to Mammoth’s cell tower, enabling communication to the outside world.

The serpentine road from Mammoth to Gardiner in the Gardner River Canyon was badly damaged, as was the road between Tower Junction and the Northeast Entrance where the Lamar River surged well beyond its record flood level. Sholly said the park would explore using the gravel Old Gardiner Road between Mammoth and the North Entrance to bring supplies to park headquarters.

The Yellowstone River crested at just over 49,000 cubic feet per second (cfs) at Corwin Springs in the upper Paradise Valley on Monday, shattering its previous records of 32,200 set in June 1996 and matched a year later. In the



KARA SCHLABACH, COURTESY PHOTO

A helicopter hovers over what used to be the Cooke City softball field and helicopter landing zone on Monday as it arrives to help rescue stranded visitors.



EMMA H. TOBIN, ASSOCIATED PRESS

A road is closed by floodwaters along the Clarks Fork Yellowstone River near Bridger on Monday.

park, the Lamar peaked at 16.7 feet Monday, breaking its 1996 record by more than four feet and rising

multi-family house for Park Service employees was pried loose from its foundation by the raging waters and spun downstream, splintering when it collided with a bridge. At least a dozen GoFundMe pages were set up for displaced residents.

The Montana National Guard evacuated 12 people from the communities of Roscoe and Cooke City on Monday as the flooding cut off vehicle access to the towns. Aircrews from the 1-189th General Support Aviation Battalion deployed a UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter and a CH-47 Chinook helicopter to assist in search and rescue efforts at the request of local law enforcement.

“We are standing by for additional requests for support,” said Maj. Ryan Finnegan, Montana National Guard Public Affairs

Officer. “As local law enforcement requests assistance, we will continue to provide what resources are available.”

A Florida family of eight were plucked by a helicopter from a flooded rental outside Cooke City after high waters stranded them. A Cooke City man was air lifted by the National Guard after he suffered hypothermia from cold waters as he self-rescued.

On Tuesday morning, the Guard unit conducted a third evacuation operation for recreationists around East Rosebud Lake.

The first stark hint that the Yellowstone River meant business Monday was when the iconic Carbella bridge leading to Tom Miner Basin was loosened from its supports and swept into the river like a toy.

Meteorologists said the unprecedented flooding was caused by a convergence of an unseasonably cool spring that retained snowpack, late-spring snowstorms and multiple days of considerable rainfall at high elevations. Parts of the park received more than an inch of rain over 24 hours Monday, more than tripling the previous single-day mark.

Most of the flood damage was centered on YNP and the streams flowing north from the Yellowstone Plateau, including the Gallatin River, which reached flood stage at Logan about 25 miles of Bozeman in the wee hours Tuesday.

YNP gateway communities not immediately affected by the flooding began working overtime Tuesday to accommodate either stranded visitors or tourists who had plans to visit.

The Teton County Fairgrounds in Jackson, Wyoming, was a landing site for a few dozen displaced Yellowstone campers Monday. About 38 RVs parked there overnight, according to Trista Hiltbrunner, a staff member at the fairgrounds. Some came from inside the park, she said. By noon Tuesday, just a couple remained.

West Yellowstone, at the park’s West Entrance, also announced late Monday that it would permit temporary camping in town for people impacted by the closure.

Also Tuesday, the Flathead River at Columbia Falls in northwest Montana was expected to surpass flood stage by 2-1/2 feet.

The floods highlighted the beginning of a week in which as much as two feet of snow has been forecast for some mountain areas and 100-degree temperatures later in the week for other parts of the state, accelerating runoff even more.

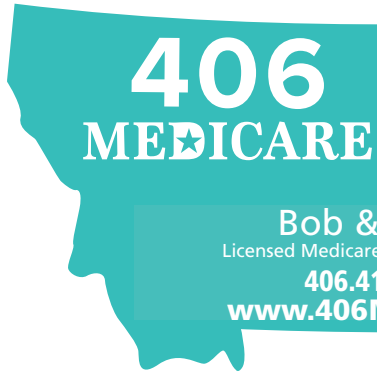


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Yellowstone

From A1

All visitors have been removed from Yellowstone except for a dozen backcountry campers who have been in contact with the Park Service and are making their way out. He estimated park staff urged about 15,000 people to leave Yellowstone on Monday.

Before anything else happens, park crews have to wait for flood waters to recede enough to assess the damage and develop a plan for repairs. Assessment of the damage could be complicated because a foot of snow still remains in the Beartooth and Absaroka mountains that may send more snowmelt downstream this weekend.

“We’ve kept our teams out of harm’s way,” Sholly said, although six park workers did lose their housing when a building outside the park was washed away by the Yellowstone River.

No deaths or injuries have been reported as a result of the record-setting flooding, although one park visitor did die from a cardiac arrest in an incident unrelated to the high water, Sholly said. The historic flooding is unfolding amidst the 150th anniversary of the park’s founding.

Meanwhile, park, state and county officials are scrambling to figure out what bridges and highways near the park may need repairs.

The park’s Montana border towns of Gardiner, Silver Gate and Cooke City were temporary islands, along with nearby residential areas in Cinnabar and Tom Miner basins due to road-way damage and lost bridges.

“It’s kind of hurry up and wait to see what the national park does and what kind of federal assistance comes in,” said Patrick Sipp, manager of Flying Pig Adventures and Whitewater in Gardiner, a rafting business. “Hopefully, the Highway 89 repairs come in quickly.”

The Park Service closed all five entrances as a precautionary measure on Monday to assess the damage to its network of roads and bridges. Six washouts of the road between the community of Gardiner, at the park’s North Entrance, and park headquarters in Mammoth Hot Springs, Wyoming — only five miles south — could be counted in a helicopter video the Park Service posted online. Whether that road will



ASSOCIATED PRESS

The empty west entrance to Yellowstone National Park is seen in this image from a National Park Service webcam Monday.

even be rebuilt is doubtful, Sholly said. Also badly damaged is the highway connecting Mammoth to Cooke City, cutting off the only route in the park that is open year-round.

Roads

Highway 89 is the main route to Gardiner from the north and the community of Livingston. The North Entrance is the second most popular in the park.

“Many bridges and roads are no longer operational,” the Park County Office of Emergency Management reported on its website. On Monday the Yellowstone River was flowing atop the highway in a narrow stretch known as Yankee Jim Canyon.

The river posted a record-high flow of 510,000 cubic feet per second on Monday at the U.S. Geological Survey’s Corwin Springs gauge downstream from Gardiner before dropping to 27,800 cfs by Tuesday.

Two years ago, Sipp said his company was running rafting trips down the Yellowstone River at that water level.

“I’m an optimist,” he added. “If 89 opens up we’ll have some semblance of a season.”

With little notice or fanfare, the Montana Department of

Transportation and the Park County Sheriff’s Office opened Highway 89 at Yankee Jim Canyon late Tuesday morning. The route was only open to delivery and service vehicles, residents and outbound visitors. Whether it will remain open to residents is uncertain, said Park County Commissioner Bill Berg.

People displaced

The Teton County Fairgrounds was a landing site for a few dozen displaced Yellowstone campers Monday.

About 38 RVs parked there overnight, according to Trista Hiltbrunner, a staff member at the fairgrounds. Some of them had come from inside the park, she said. By noon Tuesday, just a couple remained.

Cities and towns located just outside of Yellowstone were busy Tuesday connecting displaced visitors with lodging, and helping them figure out next steps.

“We really do operate as one,” Rick Howe, vice president of the Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce, said of Yellowstone’s gateway communities.

At this point, the chamber’s mostly getting calls from people who were planning to visit the park this week, and suddenly

had nowhere to go, he said. The chamber extended its phone services by three hours so it could accommodate the rush of calls. It’s now live from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. daily.

Howe said Jackson is preparing to accept more displaced travelers and evacuees, but is waiting to hear more from park officials.

Earlier Tuesday, communication from park officials was limited. But Yellowstone-themed pages and groups on Facebook — some of them aimed at tourists — were exploding with activity.

Seasoned Yellowstoners spent Monday and Tuesday diligently posting updates about the park and its surrounding cities, and fielding questions from confused tourists.

One company, Yellowstone Tour Guides — based in Big Sky, Montana — is pooling resources for travelers on its Facebook page. A post Tuesday morning pointed displaced tourists to scenic destinations across Montana, Wyoming and Idaho that were open and safe for travel.

Tourism

The communities next to the park are heavily dependent on Yellowstone to drive the summer tourism season, which for

two years was hampered by the pandemic and COVID-19 precautions.

On Sunday, Kara Schlabach had the busiest day of the year so far at the Cooke City coffee shop she co-owns, near the park’s Northeast Entrance. Then flooding hit on Monday and now the streets are bare of tourists needed to keep her small business alive.

“It brought tears to my eyes because it’s a ghost town,” Schlabach said. “It’s really devastating.”

On Monday, Schlabach witnessed a Florida family of eight being plucked by a helicopter using a short haul line to lift them from a flooded rental after high waters stranded them. A different helicopter landed on the town’s main street, since the landing pad was underwater, to evacuate a man suffering from hypothermia after he waded floodwaters to self-rescue.

Meanwhile, Pahaska Tepee Resort — located outside Cody, just two miles from Yellowstone’s East Entrance — is shuttered through at least Thursday.

The resort boasts cabins, a restaurant, gift shop and outdoor activities. Pahaska was booked at about 90% capacity at the beginning of the week, said Angela Coe, who runs the resort.

But rainfall over the weekend caused the North Fork Shoshone River to swell so much, it got into the lodge’s water system, Coe said. Staff shut off the system Monday to prevent it from getting into the resort’s tap, and sent all guests home.

The river has since receded. Coe said Pahaska Tepee is currently sending water samples to the Wyoming Department of Health in Cheyenne. The water needs to test safe two days in a row before the lodge can open up again, she said.

If all goes well, the resort will reopen Friday.

Coe said she doesn’t expect Cody’s tourism business to recover until the park’s southern region reopens, too.

“It’s gonna be a ripple effect,” Coe said.

For now, the park’s future remains a big question mark. And prospective vacationers aren’t waiting for answers, Coe said. The phones at Pahaska Tepee have been ringing nonstop with cancellations.

“People are wanting to cancel in July and August,” she said.

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LOCAL & STATE



AMY LYNN NELSON PHOTOS, BILLINGS GAZETTE

Part of a home sits in Rock Creek in Red Lodge as historic flooding continues to devastate the town and region.

Red Lodge power restored

Rock Creek slowly recedes in unprecedented flood

BILLINGS GAZETTE

Rock Creek has crested and flood levels have declined slightly in Red Lodge a day after water tore through the southeast side of town following the 19th Street Bridge's collapse.

"It's still a river flowing" down the streets, said resident John Clayton whose house was flooded. "But it's an almost ford-able river now."

The creek was forecast to crest Monday afternoon around 1 p.m., but 80-degree temperatures are predicted for later in the week raising concerns that the tragedy is not yet over.

"I'm not sure we're out of the woods yet," Clayton said.

Although power was out from around 2 p.m. to 11:35 p.m., NorthWestern Energy crews had electricity restored for customers by the time they awoke. A power-line to the town was compromised by the flooding taking out power to about 2,441 customers. Power remained out to isolated residences and for about 108 customers in the Luther and Roscoe area, according to a NorthWestern spokesperson. Today, crews will be working on a permanent fix.

"The power came back on amazingly," Clayton said, so he could charge his phone and keep updated on the emergency situation.

Red Lodge's water service was also restored on Monday after initially being shut down, but a boil order remains in place.

"To be able to have power and water is amazing," Clayton said.

A community meeting is scheduled for 5 p.m. at the Red Lodge High School to update residents. The Carbon County incident command was meeting Tuesday morning to formulate plans.

Any effort to remove the 19th



Water and debris fill Broadway Avenue in Red Lodge on Tuesday as historic flooding devastates the town and region.



Severe flooding washes out portions of Highway 212 in Red Lodge on Monday morning.

Street Bridge is going to have to wait until water recedes so that heavy equipment can be brought in. The bridge is county owned.

Red Lodge resident Lee Cooper said she heard from neighbors on both sides that they had three feet of water in their basements and

evacuation shelter has been set up in the Bridger High School gym, according to the carbonalert.org website.

A shelter has been set up in the Gruell Building at the Carbon County Fairgrounds in Red Lodge offering meals, drinks and cots. The hotline for information is 406-426-2425.

Several secondary highways in the region remain closed including the Beartooth Scenic Byway, Highway 308 between Belfry and Red Lodge, Highway 78 between Red Lodge and the junction with Highway 419 south of Absarokee, Highway 419 from that junction past Nye and Highway 420 from Absarokee west along the Stillwater River.

Elsewhere, Highway 191 between Big Timber and Harlowton is closed; highways 89 and 540 south out of Livingston are closed to Gardiner; and all entrances to Yellowstone National Park were closed on Monday.

Adam Kaylor, owner of the Red

Box Car restaurant said his business is doing its best to support Red Lodge from down the road while it works to recover.

The Red Box Car usually serves up burgers and fries to passing drivers from the edge of Rock Creek, but after recent floods destroyed the road leading up to his shop, he's been trying to deliver goods to Red Lodge neighbors from his food truck.

The food truck, which normally only works on weekends, has been hauling pulled pork sandwiches, potato salad and beans into town to hand out, free of charge. With hundreds of pounds of pork cooking in his BBQ, Kaylor said his first priority is helping everyone stay safe and healthy during the disaster.

Kaylor remembers driving some of his college-aged employees to their homes around 1 a.m. Tuesday and seeing a police officer. The officer had lost his entire house to the floods the day before but was still doing his patrols and keeping people safe. That sight convinced Kaylor that Red Lodge would survive the floods, no matter how hard they became, he said.

"It's a tough town," Kaylor said. "I think everyone will be fine."

Kaylor said he feels the same way towards his own restaurant. The Red Box Car depends on summer sales to keep itself running throughout the year. With the road to the restaurant destroyed, the food stop's future is a mystery to even Kaylor. That being said, Kaylor doesn't doubt the Red Box Car will survive — even if it's a rough summer.

"We're just trying to cook," Kaylor said. "That's our happy place."



VIEW: To see video of the Yellowstone River rushing with flood waters near Billings, point your smartphone camera at the QR code, then tap the link.

NEWSVU

Yellowstone County closes several roads

Billings prepares for Yellowstone River to crest

ROB ROGERS
rrogers@billingsgazette.com

A cresting Yellowstone River has spurred Yellowstone County officials to close several roads from the Blue Creek area to Shepherd as water begins to spread beyond the riverbank.

County officials are also getting the word out that sandbags are available at Huntley and Worden fire stations, as well as the Shepherd, Blue Creek and Laurel fire stations.

"They've got 'em on hand," said Tim Miller, the county's road

and bridge director.

So far the county has closed Cerise Road in Lockwood, Byam Road outside Laurel and Rudio Road where it turns into Duck Creek Road southwest of Billings.

As the Yellowstone River flows through Billings, it is expected to hit the top of its flood stage around 6 p.m. Tuesday, cresting at 14.8 feet, according to the National Weather Service.

The NWS forecast for the rising Yellowstone has slowly increased over the last 24 hours. On Monday afternoon, the river was expected to top out at 14.2 feet. That was adjusted Monday night to 14.7 feet and then adjusted again Tuesday morning to 14.8 feet.

By late Tuesday afternoon

NWS bumped it up again to 15.2 feet, an increase that's deeply concerning to the city.

If the river hits 15 feet, water will begin encroaching on Billings' water and wastewater treatment plants, potentially impacting the city's ability to deliver and process water.

"That means we may have to pump water we normally wouldn't," said Debi Meling, Public Works director for the city. "We may have water getting into electronics causing outages."

But by 5 p.m., both plants were looking good.

"So far our facilities are good with some help from sandbags," Meling said.



LARRY MAYER, BILLINGS GAZETTE

A man had to be rescued from rising water on Island Park Road in Lockwood as the Yellowstone River nears a flood level crest on Tuesday.

Please see **RIVER**, Page A15



AMY LYNN NELSON PHOTOS, BILLINGS GAZETTE

Water and debris fill Broadway Avenue in Red Lodge on Tuesday as historic flooding devastates the town and the region.

Rock Creek wreaks havoc

HISTORIC FLOODING DEVASTATES RED LODGE



A home in Red Lodge is torn apart as historic flooding devastates the region.



Water and debris fill Broadway Avenue in Red Lodge on Tuesday as historic flooding devastates the town and the region.



Part of a home sits in Rock Creek in Red Lodge as historic flooding continues to devastate the town and region.



Water and debris surround a destroyed home on Broadway Avenue in Red Lodge on Tuesday as historic flooding devastates the town and the region.

John Ancil Stark



BILLINGS—John Ancil Stark passed peacefully in the presence of his family on Wednesday, June 8, at Riverstone Hospice Home.

John was born at home on the Moss Ranch near Pass Creek in Parkman, Wyoming August 29, 1933, to Keta and Floyd Stark. At the age of 17, John decided he “no longer liked the smell of paper and pencils” and with the approval of his parents, he enlisted in the United States Army where he proudly served in the 504th Air Division and became a paratrooper. He was honorably discharged in 1954. While attending a local dance, John met the love of his life, Nadine Alice Stricker, and they were married in Hardin, Montana November 24, 1956, and were blessed with 4 children. John moved his family to Hardin in 1960. Ten years later, John’s lifelong dream of owning a ranch presented itself and he purchased a ranch in Grass Range. John and Nadine spent some of their best years ranching and raising their family in the community of Grass Range where they made treasured life-long friendships and memories. John collected stories and friendships throughout his life and PAYS and BLS stockyards became his home away from home and many there were like family to him.

A very special thank you for the extraordinary and loving care John received from everyone at Riverstone Hospice, in particularly from Sue, Donna and Mark. You are earthly angels and greatly appreciated.

John was preceded in death by his parents, brother Gene and cherished in-laws Vic and Elizabeth Stricker. He is survived by his wife Nadine, their children John (Mary), Steve (Kymm), Victor (Kyra) and Sandy (Keith), grandchildren Jonathan (Jen), Jesse (Jen), Kaylee, Casey, Taryn, BreAnna, Wyatt, Kendall, and Sienna, great-grandchildren Brocton, Bailey, Mason, Leighton and Emerson, as well as his sister Betty, along with many nieces, nephews, cousins and other loving relatives and friends.

John’s love and devotion to Nadine and their family were evident until his time on earth came to an end. Happy trails to this extraordinary man and a life well lived.

To enjoy John’s complete obituary, please go to [Smithfuneralchapels.com](#).

The family requests any desired memorials be made to Riverstone Hospice Home, 2230 Mission Way, Billings, MT 59102. A private family VA memorial service is planned for 1 p.m., Wednesday, June 15th at Sunset Memorial Gardens and a celebration of John’s life will take place at the Rhoadside Event Center in Huntley, Sunday, July 10, 1 p.m.-4 p.m.

Andrew “Andy” Dale Heggen




BILLINGS—Andrew “Andy” Dale Heggen was born March 21, 1963, in Williston, North Dakota, and passed away June 9.

A celebration of life will be at 2 p.m. Saturday, June 18, at the Squire Lounge, 1525 Broadwater Ave. Full obituary available at [www.michelottisawyers.com](#).

How to submit obituaries

For obituary information, call 406-657-1222. The deadline is 2 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Obituaries can be submitted on our website [billingsgazette.com/obituaries](#) or emailed to [obits@billingsgazette.com](#).

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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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406-259-7155

[office@heightsfuneral.com](#)
[www.heightsfamilyfuneralhome.com](#)

No Services Planned



Ms Michelotti-Sawyers
Mortuary and Crematory

Trust When It's Needed Most
1001 Alderson Ave.
406-252-3417
[www.michelottisawyers.com](#)

NIELSEN—Doris Joan, 80, of Billings. Services pending. (16)



DAHL FUNERAL CHAPEL

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)

In Our Care

To share memories or send condolences please go to [www.dahlfuneralchapel.com](#)

10 Yellowstone Ave.
406-248-8807



DWIGHT HARRIMAN, LIVINGSTON ENTERPRISE VIA AP

Flooding from the Yellowstone River is seen in front of Livingston HealthCare’s hospital in Livingston on Monday evening. Livingston HealthCare evacuated its patients and staff on Monday because water over the driveway made access to the building unsafe. While an urgent care clinic remained open, emergency patients were being diverted to other facilities.

Flood zone hospitals move patients

CHRISTINE COMPTON
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As rivers across south-central Montana spilled over their banks Monday, flooding into nearby communities, one of the roads overtaken by water leads to the new Livingston HealthCare facility.

With the floodwater creeping closer and closer to the hospital, officials there were told at about 6:15 p.m. they had 45 minutes to evacuate the building.

By 7 p.m., the patients were gone, on their way to Pioneer Medical Center in nearby Big Timber, with the Livingston hospital’s staff close behind. At 8:15 p.m., the hospital was empty.

“It was remarkable,” said Deb Anczak, Livingston HealthCare’s chief executive officer. “An absolute demonstration of teamwork.”

On Tuesday morning, with water on the road slowly receding, hospital staff waited for a declaration from the Montana Department of Transportation that the road would again be safe to drive on.

The Livingston hospital wasn’t the only medical facility affected by the widespread flooding. In Red Lodge, a nursing home threatened by flooding sent 27 patients to Eagle Cliff Manor in Billings.

The evacuation of patients can be tricky, said Livingston’s Anczak. Patients need to bring along their medical documents, personal items and medications. Facilities also may have to transport medical



LARRY MAYER, BILLINGS GAZETTE

The Stillwater Billings Clinic is adding acute care patient rooms, laundry facilities and increasing rehab space with CARES Act money.

equipment if the host facility doesn’t have the resources to support the new patients.

Billings Clinic is a regional health care company covering Montana, Wyoming and the western Dakotas. When the rivers began to endanger medical facilities, the hospitals were able to communicate with sister locations and make a quick emergency plan, said Hannah Shirkey, vice president of Billings Clinic’s regional operations.

Shirkey also said that areas where hospitals are shut down can still access medical care through satellite locations.

“We’re still open in surrounding areas, and we’re working together to provide care,” Shirkey said.

Eagle Cliff Manor in Billings quickly made room Monday for 27 patients from a Red Lodge nursing home.

“They arrived by 3 (p.m.) and were in bed by 8:30,” said Brian Huso, who works at Eagle Cliff Manor. Eagle Cliff had nearly an entire wing available for the patients, so they were able to be kept together. Huso said the patients took

the change of pace rather well and were quickly entertained by TV, bingo and enjoying the pleasant Billings weather.

But transporting these patients required some skill as well. Like other facilities, patients had equipment and personal items they needed to bring, such as wheelchairs, medication and clothes.

There are also some people who may need medical assistance that aren’t in the care of hospitals right now, according to Luke Kobold, CEO of Stillwater Billings Clinic.

“There are still some people throughout the county who are stranded,” Kobold said. Those people are stuck in areas where roads are flooded and aren’t easily accessible. Kobold said plans are in place to provide air transport or care if necessary.

Anczak said Livingston HealthCare hopes to open back up by Wednesday. Keeping patients at other locations can put stress on surrounding medical facilities, she said, and prolonged closures can also put medical facilities in financial risk. However, the hospital can only open

when it is safe to do so.

There is concern about the warm weather this weekend, which may increase snowmelt, causing more floods. There are also worries about the long-term effects of the damaged roads on medical accessibility and the communities at large, Shirkey said.

“I’m sure there will be concerns and impacts about this we don’t know about,” Shirkey said. “I’m sure we’ll feel this for years to come.”

RiverStone Health, a health service provider in Yellowstone County and south-central Montana, issued a warning to Billings residents on Tuesday warning people not to drink or play in river water. River water can be contaminated with raw sewage, trash, household or automotive chemicals.

If food comes in contact with river water, do not eat it, RiverStone Health said. If power outages happen for longer than six hours, throw out any perishable food left in the refrigerator.

If the area around your home floods, don’t flush or use your toilet until you know all pipes are intact. If you need to clean water from your house, wear protective clothing and gloves. It’s also important to keep an eye out for electrical hazards.

Above all else, keep an eye out for flood advisories and be prepared to evacuate if you live near water. Anyone who needs sandbags for their property should contact their local fire department, said Yellowstone County Disaster and Emergency Services.

River

From A9

Public Works crews have spent the last two days preparing for high water levels and working at the water and wastewater treatment plants to ensure equipment and machinery will continue to function even if the river tops 15 feet.

“We are protecting everything we can. So even at 15 (feet) our plan is to still be able to provide water and sewer service,” Meling said. “But it’s going to take work.”

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, she 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, but the high water levels meant that by Monday night the river had crested the gate. That water spills into the



LARRY MAYER PHOTOS, BILLINGS GAZETTE

A truck drives through floodwater on Duck Creek Road as the Yellowstone River nears a flood level crest on Tuesday.

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.



A view upstream from Yellowstone River Road shows the Yellowstone River as it nears a flood-level crest on Tuesday. Two Moon Park is on the right.