As I write this article for the “Prairie Flower,” only a couple of weeks after nearly 10,000 residents of Minot were forced to evacuate their homes, I’m still in somewhat of a daze as those of us affected are dealing with the aftermath, and may still be doing so for weeks (if not months) to come.

Sadly, we are by no means out of the woods when it comes to the flood fight, as the river remains precariously high, and within inches of the level that triggered the initial evacuation.

We all have reason to be nervous, as each new thunderstorm or “rain event” brings the possibility of flash flooding. Unfortunately, no one can accurately forecast—at least not more than 24 hours in advance—what impact those storms may have on river levels.

All of this begs the question, “What happened to Minot’s flood protection?”

When I bought my present home (816 1st Ave SW—two blocks west of Lincoln School) nearly 30 years ago, I was told that during the flood of 1969, our home was one of only a few in the neighborhood that did not get water on the main floor.

Being only 1½ blocks east of the river from 10th St. SW, we were still located in the historical flood plain, and consequently we were required to carry flood insurance.

This was the case until after Rafferty and Alameda dams in Saskatchewan were built. These dams were hailed as permanent flood protection for Minot; indeed, I contributed to the effort to get these dams completed (“Citizens to Save the Valley”), chaired by Lynn Aas, as I recall.

At any rate, once Rafferty and Alameda dams were completed, we all breathed a collective sigh of relief, as we truly believed that Minot would never flood again.

Perhaps we were lulled into a false sense of security, in light of the drought conditions that seemed to prevail during most of the 80s and early 90s.

We had a threat for the first time I can remember in 2009, but as quickly as the river came up that year, it receded equally as fast, with little or minimal damage, at least insofar as the city of Minot was concerned.

I had a much different feeling early on this year, in light of the record snowfall and the fact that the snow cover seemed to hang around for a lot longer than what I felt was “normal.”

I took out flood insurance in mid-February, due to the uneasy feeling I had about the situation. I remember calling Nancy Langseth, a neighbor just down the street, in early April, to get her take on the flood situation.

She basically indicated she felt Minot was safe from the flood threat, as the dams in Canada were built precisely to protect against a major flood event.

Ironically, Rafferty and Alameda dams—as well as the dam at Lake Darling—could not protect Minot from the record flows that came our way (and which are expected to remain that way for some time).

Cont’d on page 3
Secretary’s Corner Om Madhok 6/27/2011

PRESENT MEMBERSHIP: 107

NO MEETING DUE TO FLOOD

PRESENT AT PREVIOUS MEETING: Tim Vallely

Rotarians,

At this time, if you live in the south half of Minot, you are encouraged to attend a Sunrise Rotary meeting on Thursdays at the Sleep Inn at 7:00 a.m.

Sunrise Rotarians are encouraged to attend the Noon Rotary meeting on Mondays at the Grand International on North Hill.

Watch for details in this publication on when we will resume regular meetings.


Need a volunteer to pick up three RYLA students from Crookston, MN on Saturday, July 16, 2011. You will be reimbursed for gas. Please contact Teal Myre at tealjm@srttel.com

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Rotary Logo Wear: 100% is our Goal

The Prairie Flower is the official publication of Rotary Club of Minot, Minot, North Dakota. It is published every Thursday. Annual membership dues for the year 2010-2011 in the Rotary Club of Minot, ND are $588. 6/28/09 Om Madhok, Secretary.

Kalyan Banerjee of Gujarat, India— President, Rotary Int’l
Roly Turner of Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada—Governor District 5580

The Rotary Club of Minot meets 12:00 to 1:10 p.m. every Monday at the Grand International of Minot.

Board of Directors: Teal Myre, President; Ron Merritt, President-Elect; Dusty Zimmerman, Vice-President; Om Madhok, Secretary; Dave Lehner, Treasurer; Reed Argent, Past President.

Directors: 2011—Mike Berg and Tom Will; 2012-Jen Guidinger and Peter Hankla; 2013-Jo Khalifa and Roscoe Streyle

Standing Members: Peter Hankla, Exchange Students, Ken Kitzman, Scholarship Fund; John MacMartin, Rotary Foundation.
It’s as if we had no flood protection at all. What happened?

While the exact reasons for the flood of 2011 will be debated for some time, the more I think about the situation, the more I am convinced it was and is a management issue.

A lot of officials seem content to dismiss the flood as the “perfect storm,” caused by the record amount of snowfall within the Souris/Mouse River basin, and the heavy rains that threatened to over-top the dikes over the Memorial Day weekend.

In fact, it was not the “perfect storm,” as Minot and the surrounding area were extremely fortunate to have an ideal thaw this spring.

Conditions were very favorable, as the temperatures did not rise dramatically during the day, and cooled down at night but remained above freezing, so the ice/snow melt could proceed gradually.

This was in stark contrast to 1969, when as I understand it, the temperatures rose very suddenly almost overnight, and everything turned to running water almost instantaneously.

Additionally, Minot has been lucky to dodge a number of storms and thundershowers as of late, which would have only exacerbated an already tenuous situation.

No, I personally believe that the Corps of Engineers has a great deal of culpability in their management of the river system.

The Corps manages the system of dams and rivers in our area based on long-term historical averages.

However, in a year where there was nearly 250% of the average annual snowfall, perhaps that would suggest an anomaly and the need to deviate from the management plan, to provide for additional storage capacity above Minot.

While I can appreciate the fact that the modeling used is imprecise at best—and that there is generally a variance of plus or minus 10%--for the Corps to have missed the mark by as far as they did would seem to indicate a serious flaw in their methodology.

One need only look at those poor folks along the Missouri River in Bismarck/Mandan, and the unprecedented releases coming from Garrison Dam, to understand the situation on a much larger scale.

It is my opinion that the Corps of Engineers drastically underestimated the amount of water coming down the Mouse River and once they realized the sheer volume of water that was coming our way, they knew that it could not be held back and therefore citizens were told to prepare for a record flood fight.

I am just not convinced the whole phenomenon can be blamed on record snowfall (whether in the immediate drainage or to the north and west of Minot) and major rain events this spring.

After all, we have had large amounts of snow and rain in the past, and they did not produce the size and scale of flooding we are presently experiencing.

In my estimation, the reason for major flooding in these river systems is because pool levels were not drawn down soon enough to facilitate additional storage, in a year in which it had to be obvious that record snowfall and snowpack in the mountains would eventually turn into unprecedented amounts of water.

As a property owner, my real concern is that this whole scenario could easily be repeated next year. Everything that I have heard and read indicates that we are in a wet cycle, and in fact the long range forecast calls for a wet and cool summer.

If that indeed plays out, we may not get the drying conditions we need to alleviate the situation, and we could very possibly head into the winter with ground that is not only saturated, but super-saturated, if you will.

If we get even average to slightly above average precipitation next winter (and if they get the same or similar conditions again farther to the north), another major flood threat for Minot is well within the realm of possibility, and our city leaders certainly need to be mindful of that.

In fact, the situation could even be worse next year if we would get a very rapid thaw. In that eventuality, the frozen ground would be like cement, as a practical matter, and the water would literally have no place to go but run off.

This would contribute to a much more rapid rise in the river level, making mandatory evacuations another distinct possibility. I don’t believe we can put the people of Minot through that again; I certainly hope it is something I will never have to deal with again.

“What happened to Minot’s Flood Protection?” I believe a better question is “What needs to be done differently to avert a similar situation next year?”

I think the answer to that question lies with the Corp’s overall management of the system.

They need to aggressively monitor reservoir levels to gain additional storage capacity (including a healthy reserve) and then release water as necessary—including all year long if need be—to prevent major flooding in Minot and all along the Mouse River next year and in the future.

Permanent flood protection should be just that; let’s put the issue to rest once and for all.