

S. Utah flood damage not over yet

Ruptured pipelines: Residents in Orderville, St. George and Gunlock are boiling water as they wait for infrastructure repairs to be finished

By Mark Havnes
The Salt Lake Tribune

ORDERVILLE - Residents in this southern Utah town get a reminder of last week's deluge every time they turn on the tap. They have to boil their drinking water - just in case.

Floodwaters tore through a 6-inch pipe along the town's northern edge Jan. 12, and officials fear the rupture may have introduced tainted water into Orderville's main line.

The broken pipe is just part of the estimated \$93,000 damage in Kane County from the flooding.

That total pales in comparison with Washington County's \$156 million tab after the rampaging Virgin and Santa Clara rivers swallowed homes, roads and bridges.

In all, three counties - Washington, Kane and Iron - are seeking combined federal assistance to pay for flood damage.

Gov. Jon Huntsman Jr. is expected to sign the aid request today. It will be delivered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency to President Bush for his approval.

Ann Rae Garrett, chief of staff for Utah's Department of Emergency Services and Homeland Security, said the governor's staff was reviewing the document Tuesday.

If the White House signs on, the damage estimates are expected to increase when FEMA conducts a more detailed assessment to determine projects eligible for aid, Garrett said.

But some financial help already is on the way. The state Drinking Water Board on Tuesday authorized a grant-loan package of \$543,000 for St. George and nearby Gunlock to begin putting their culinary infrastructure back together.

Gunlock will receive a \$100,000 grant and another \$105,000 as a no-interest loan. St. George will get a \$169,000 grant and a matching no-interest loan.

"FEMA will provide money [eventually]," board member Dianne Nielsen said. "But these people need help and resources right now. This will help."

Elsewhere in Kane County, Emergency Services Director David Owens said floodwaters washed away a 65-foot section of a county road near U.S. 89 just south of Mount Carmel Junction and eroded roads snaking their way through the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. Kanab Creek spilled over U.S. 89 east of Kanab producing minor flooding of 25 homes.

As the mercury begins its climb above 60 degrees this week in Utah's Dixie, some residents worry that the wild waters will return.

But Randy Julander of the Natural Resources Conservation Service in Salt Lake City said cold mountain temperatures should keep the snowpack from melting too rapidly.

He noted the snowpack has to be heated from top to bottom before any major melting occurs. That thawing usually begins in mid-February. If it melts too fast then, the region could see more major flooding this spring.

The biggest immediate threat, he said, would be from another heavy rainstorm - which isn't in the forecast in the next week.

"The soil is as wet as it can get and, if you get enough precipitation, you can get the same results," Julander said. "The hydrologic conditions that caused the flood are still there - saturated soil and big snowpack."

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