

The Natchez Democrat

Flood fight begins in Louisiana

By **Vershal Hogan** (Contact) | The Natchez Democrat

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VIDALIA — The Miss-Lou is in a stage 1 flood fight.

The Louisiana Fifth Levee District entered the flood fight Thursday morning, Fifth Levee District Board President Reynold Minsky said.

The district has someone patrolling the levees, watching for anything that might indicate damage to the levee.

“We are watching the whole levee system, riding from one end of the levee to the other, from Arkansas to the Old River Lock and Dam structure and up the backside,” Minsky said.

The Mississippi River is expected to stand at 50.3 feet above gauge zero this morning, more than two feet above flood stage.

Currently, the levees are free of sand boils, which occur when water forces its way under the levee and displaces the soil, though there is some seep water coming through, Minsky said.

Should a sand boil come to the surface, it would be addressed by building a pressure well of

sandbags around the boil until the water pressure equalized and stopped displacing soil from under the levee.

Concordia Parish Emergency Director Morris White said he has between 10,000 and 12,000 sandbags ready, and another 20,000 on standby in Alexandria should he need them.

“But we have never had Concordia Parish flood since they put the levees in,” White said.

The National Weather Service has projected the river will reach a crest of 53 feet on May 25.

The rise has been caused by rain that fell over the Lower Ohio River, portions of the Tennessee Valley and the Arkansas River Basin, NWS hydrologist Marty Pope said.

“When you get all that combined together that will push the river up,” Pope said.

While there is a greater chance of rainfall over the course of the next 4-5 days, Pope said a frontal system may move through during the weekend that will bring drier weather to the local area and the Ohio Valley.

“We are going to have a front between now and Sunday that will dry the area out,” Pope said. “High pressure will build in, and we will see the possibility of below normal rainfall between the 6-14 day period. That would allow the river to continue to fall on out.”

The only problem is that the crest isn’t expected until May 25, Pope said.

“That leaves us with the possibility for something to come on through,” he said.

In Adams County, the water has crept into low-lying areas, and Thursday the county supervisors closed Carthage Point Road to the public after water crossed the road in several places, Supervisor Mike Lazarus said.

The road is blocked by a gate, and landowners and other people who have businesses in the area have keys that will allow them access, he said.

“Kids know the river is up and they go down there with their four-wheel drives, and it costs the county thousands of dollars to fix what they mess up,” Lazarus said.

In Natchez, city officials will be meeting with Isle of Capri casino officials to discuss what to do since the forecast has been revised, City Engineer David Gardner said.

“Last time we met, it was forecast for 51 feet, and now it’s 53,” Gardner said. “I think we would have to go back and change our strategy and see at which point the boat will have to move downstream. We need to decide when that is going to happen.”

The city has guidelines in place that say at 51 feet, the boat should be moved from Silver Street to D.A. Biglane Street at Natchez Under-the-Hill. At 52.5, Silver Street has to be closed, and at 54 feet, D.A. Biglane Street has to be closed.

Gauge zero at the Natchez-Vidalia pass is set at 17.28 feet above sea level.

In 2008, the river level reached 57.03 feet.

The highest recorded crest is 58.04 feet on Feb. 21, 1937.

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