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Park County to declare emergency due to flooding

By Freddy Monares Chronicle Staff Writer

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An excavator cleans up the site where a temporary bridge fell into the Shields River on Monday.

Rachel Leathe/Chronicle

Park County commissioners are slated to declare a state of emergency for the area after flooding closed five roads, damaged 14 and wiped out a temporary bridge east of Livingston.

Steve Caldwell, Park County commissioner, said the declaration does several things, including raising awareness of the issue and putting the county in a better position to receive federal money to cover costs for road repairs.

Caldwell said this year may be the worst flooding he's seen, adding that it's different from typical runoff in years past. He said the flooding was considered sheet flooding, which is broad sheets of water filled with sediment that can potentially be a high erosive force.



“This is a little different than what we would normally see,” Caldwell said. “It’s affecting areas that wouldn’t normally be affected.”

Caldwell said he’s not sure what’s causing that type of flooding but suspects it could be because the ground is still frozen.

However, he said, Thursday’s cooler temperatures were helping. If the weather remained in the 30s or 40s, Caldwell said, that would likely give the remaining snow time to gradually come off.

“I think that will help a lot,” he said.

Greg Coleman, Park County emergency manager, said flooding started last Friday and was caused by rapid snow melt from a dramatic rise in temperatures since late February. That caused flooding from Paradise Valley north to Wilsall, Coleman said.

The county declaring a state of emergency allows the county to tap emergency money to pay for damages caused by the flooding, Coleman said.

“Given the extent of the damage, I believe that we will need that funding,” he said.

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks temporarily closed the Mallard’s Rest Fishing Access Site and campground, located about 12 miles south of Livingston, because of flooding. In a FWP news release Wednesday, the agency said water flowing alongside U.S. Highway 89 caused a steep part of the embankment to collapse into the site, creating hazardous conditions.

FWP is working with the Montana Department of Transportation to evaluate the stability of the slope. The closure will last until public access is deemed safe, the release said.

Boaters wishing to float that section of the Yellowstone River can exit at the Pine Creek Fishing Access Site, about three miles from Mallard’s Rest.

On Monday evening, the Shields River rose unexpectedly and washed out a temporary bridge’s foundation on Convict Grade Road, east of Livingston, said Parks Frady, Park County public works director. A contractor installed the temporary bridge in November, Frady said. It was used to build a permanent bridge in its place.

The contractor working on the project removed the bridge parts from the river, Frady said.

Frady said the completion date for the permanent bridge is scheduled for May 1, and that the flooding would likely have little effect, if any, on that date.

Until the bridge is installed, Frady said, residents on the east side of the river have to get on Interstate 90 through Springdale to get to the west side of the county.

Park County is providing sand at its fairgrounds. However, county officials said they are not providing sand bags because they do not want to compete with private businesses.

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