



The Black Hills Flood of 1972 struck 50 years ago this week, June 9-10. 238 people in Rapid City were killed, and eight people perished in Keystone. The peak flow of 50,000 cubic feet per second was carried through Rapid City via Rapid Creek at about midnight on June 9 when



many people were asleep and unaware of the impending flood. The stage of Rapid Creek rose more than 13 feet in five hours during the flood. The above pictures on right and left both show the devastation left behind from the raging flood waters in the Rapid City area.

Black Hills Flood of 1972 struck 50 years ago this week, worst disaster in S.D. history

Fifty years ago this week, arguably the worst natural disaster in South Dakota took place. The 1972 Black Hills Flood, also known as the Rapid City Flood, struck June 9-10 in the Black Hills of western South Dakota. It was the worst flood in South Dakota history and one of the deadliest floods in the history of the United States, killing 238 people.

The first week of June, 1972 and a few days before the Rapid City Flood, there were saturating rains that came through the area, leaving the soil more prone to runoff of the flood to come.

Then, on the afternoon of June 9, almost stationary thunderstorms produced intense rain and continued until after midnight on June 10. The Black Hills received four inches to more than 12 inches in the Rapid Creek watershed between Pactola Dam and Rapid City. In the

Boxelder Creek watershed, 15 inches of rain during a six-hour period was measured at Nemo. The resulting runoff produced record flooding over the Rapid, Boxelder, Spring and Battle Creeks.

Although the Pactola Reservoir was effective in storing runoff that originated upstream of Pactola Dam, the heaviest rainfall occurred downstream of the dam. Most of the flow that passed through Rapid City via Rapid Creek originated in the 51-square-mile drainage area between Pactola Dam and Canyon Lake.

Flood waters that reached Rapid City between 9:30 and 10:00 p.m. on June 9 carried large amounts of debris that clogged the spillway of Canyon Lake Dam, creating a barrier in front of its spillway. The water quickly backed up behind the dam 11 to 12 feet which caused the

release of more water adding to the already fast moving floodwaters. The Canyon Lake Dam failed at about 10:45 p.m. Some waters rose as much as three and a half feet in just 15 minutes.

The failed dam, along with the amount of water coming down from Rapid Creek and several tributaries, resulted in Rapid City getting hardest hit around midnight on June 9. Rushing waters overtook homes, businesses, vehicles and damaged anything in its path. 238 people lost their lives, 5,000 automobiles were destroyed and 15 bridges were crippled. The city of Keystone was also hard hit at the same time. Eight people were killed, and much of the town was washed away.

As published in the *Clark County Courier* June 15, 1972 edition, South Dakota's worst disaster pro-

vided many concerned moments for local residents. Some were in the Rapid City area during the flood, and then there were many anxious people at home in the Clark community waiting for word regarding friends and relatives that lived in the Black Hills.

Sherylyn Croninger and her husband, Terry Towner, were swept away in flood waters as their mobile home was cut in half. They were able to cling together for a short time, but they became separated. Sherylyn was able to get ashore, but Mr. Towner was carried downstream. The couple is the daughter and son in law of Mr. and Mrs. Franklin Croninger of Clark.

Virginia Clemens, 19 year old granddaughter of Mr. and Mrs.

Black Hills Flood (continued on page 8)

Healthy law enforcement discussion held at City Hall

A festering city hall problem came to head Monday at the June meeting of the Clark city council.

It was noted that this issue was discussed in executive session at the May council meeting, but with a large delegation in attendance, the closed meeting must not have provided closure.

Should Clark police chief Jeremy Wellnitz, who also is a certified Emergency Medical Technician, answer accident dispatcher calls outside the Clark city limits?

County law enforcement and ambulance employees were in attendance to show backing of Wellnitz.

Councilman Shane Hagstrom started inquiring about what the county thought, and all aspects were discussed of the city police chief going outside city limits to provide assistance, with the final thoughts being if it's not broken, don't fix it, and Wellnitz' role as an EMT and law enforcement officer is seen as a positive, life-saving move, rather than tax dollars or jurisdiction issues.

Said Wellnitz, "We all have to work together. I would request if you have a problem, come see me," he told the council, as only one council member had spoken to him about this problem.

Said Sheriff Rob McGraw, "We have a good working relationship. Don't want to see it get wrecked."

In other business:

* The council, acting as a Board of Adjustment, approved a garage addition at the Chris and Mel Bokinskie residence on N. Smith Street. It will be 10 feet from the sidewalk and five feet from the property line.

* Clark County Game, Fish and Parks Conservation Officer Zach Thomsen presented the Cooperator of the Year Award to Clark Police Chief Jeremy Wellnitz for responding to two major events in 2021.

* Businessman Tony Werdel told the council that he will donate the pressure washing of the base of the Ulyot Building.

* Wayne Heilman would like to use the southern part of the city lagoon area, southeast of the city for a clay target shooting area.

* Lead maintenance worker Darin Altfillisch spoke of two concrete projects that need to be done, one being the corner of the bowling alley, and the other being the parking area in front of the Farmer's Daughter Boutique on Commercial Street.

* Councilman Brandon Kottke

asked Altfillisch whether or not a bid should be required. Altfillisch will have two bids by the July council meeting.

* The July council meeting will be Wednesday, July 6.

* The live feed cameras at the golf club haven't been figured out, so nothing different is to be done at this time.

* Linda Dreher's wedding reception at the fairgrounds was approved.

* A policy manual change was made regarding new businesses to have up to 5,000 gallons of water for the first year. The previous policy was 'unlimited'.

* Resolution #858 is about a \$22.50 drinking water surcharge which will go into effect in the far future.

* The council approved a \$2,700 monthly rental rate for the Sanford Clinic-Clark. It now has to go through the Sanford approval process.

* Finance officer Alaina Wellnitz said the city has 68 water meters that need replacing. Each meter costs between \$200 to \$400. ARPA money is available, so Helms Engineering will start the bid process.

* The city approved leaving the tax mill levy at 6.628 by forfeiting the CPI (consumer price index). The CPI to be used for tax purposes is 3.0%.

* Abatements are ongoing in Clark. Letters are being sent out. Several individual eyecores were discussed.

* No executive session was necessary. Present were council members Andrew Zemlicka, Shane Hagstrom, Derrick Dohmann, Nick Dalton and Brandon Kottke. Absent was Melissa Nesheim and city attorney Chad Fjelland. Also present were mayor Kerry Kline, finance officer Alaina Wellnitz, lead employee Darin Altfillisch and police chief Jeremy Wellnitz.

WEATHER

Robert Cole - Official
Weather Observer

	HI	LO	PR
May 31	64	54	0.70
June 1	57	45	0
June 2	63	46	0
June 3	72	44	0
June 4	71	44	0
June 5	72	55	0
June 6	68	56	0.07
2022 precipitation to date	9.76		
2021 precipitation to date	7.10		



School is out for the summer

The temperature hasn't quite been summer-like lately, but that will surely happen some time soon.

As school is out for the summer break, these four girls were spotted

riding scooters and bikes. Left to right are Alayna Arthur, Chloe Hagstrom, Marley Wray and Hannah Hagstrom.

Lax enforcement allows for legal conversion of wetlands into croplands

Stu Whitney
South Dakota News Watch

Wildlife and water quality in South Dakota are sometimes put at unnecessary risk due to a lack of oversight and accountability of farmers who illegally drain their properties or convert protected wetlands into farmable acreage.

In addition, those who violate the law frequently avoid punishment when they are caught or are given "good-faith waivers" by local oversight groups often made up of fellow farmers and neighbors.

As a result, South Dakota and other Great Plains states are seeing a continuing decline in wetland areas that are crucial for breeding and hosting of wildlife, including the wetlands that are critical to propagation of South Dakota's lucrative pheasant population.

The Government Accountability Office, an investigative arm of Congress, raised concerns last year about the destruction of wetlands for agricultural use in the Prairie Pothole Region, urging tougher compliance measures in portions of South Dakota, North Dakota, Iowa, Minnesota and Montana.

The report was critical of agencies within the U.S. Department of Agriculture that are responsible for enforcing "Swampbuster" provisions from Farm Bill legislation dating back to the mid-1980s. The report found that the agencies identified fewer than five violations a year among more than 417,000 tracked properties in South Dakota and North Dakota, the states with the most wetlands. The agencies granted "good-faith waivers" in more than 80 percent of cases, in-

cluding those involving people with multiple offenses.

Farmers often control water flow on their properties through so-called "drain tiling" systems that use a series of underground pipes to remove water from wet areas and transport it into ditches or onto non-farmlands. The systems create more dry, usable cropland but are somewhat controversial because they upset the natural flow of water and ultimately reduce the number of ponds or wetlands where animals live and breed.

Part of the problem is political. State agencies representing the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and Farm Service Agency are mindful of the importance of agriculture, which accounts for nearly 30 percent of South Dakota's total economic output.

"When it comes to regulating agriculture in a state like South Dakota, the political will doesn't exist," said Don Carr, a Sioux Falls native who served as senior advisor to the Environmental Working Group in Washington D.C. "The regulations are on the books, but there's no enforcement on the ground."

Farm Bill legislation cracked down on the practice of converting wetlands to cropland and regulated the use of drain tile and open-ditch systems to drain seasonal and flooded marshes and sloughs in the pothole region.

In addition to ecological benefits, such as improving water quality and sequestering carbon, wetlands support breeding populations of North American waterfowl and oth-

Wetlands to Croplands (continued on page 2)



Thomsen presents Wellnitz with 'Cooperator of the Year' Award

Clark City Police Chief, Jeremy Wellnitz, left, was honored with the 'Cooperator of the Year' award by the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks.

Presenting Wellnitz with this award is Conservation Officer Zach Thomsen, right. Thomsen recognized Wellnitz for his rapport with the GF&P and responding to two major events in 2021, one in which was a life-saving event.