

Minto, Mapleton, Huron communities contend with dangerous flood levels Friday

NEWS Jun 28, 2017 by [Kelsey Dunbar](#) Wingham Advance Times

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SOUTHWESTERN ONTARIO – Some say water levels hadn't been as high as they were on Friday, June 23 since Hurricane Hazel in 1954, while others reported that overnight the area received rainfall that exceeded a 100-year event.

Maitland Valley Conservation Authority (MVCA) estimated that between 160 and 180 millimetres of rain fell over a 6-8 hour period in the early morning on June 23, creating a state of emergency in the Town of Minto and in the Township of Mapleton. Roads and properties in Wellington North were also flooded. Water levels traveling downstream created issues in the neighbouring communities of Gorrie, Wroxeter, Bluevale and Wingham.

“The storm traveled inland from Goderich, with Harriston getting the most rainfall,” Jayne Thompson, MVCA communications coordinator said in a phone interview with Metroland Media.



Town of Minto Mayor George Bridge declared a state of emergency Friday morning due to flooding in the areas of Young Street, King Street, Mill Street and George Street in Harriston, where several homes had been evacuated and several rural roads were closed, as they were not passable. The Palmerston District Community Centre was opened for evacuated residents. Minto Fire, the Ontario Provincial Police and public works crews were on scene directing the travelling public around Harriston on Friday and Saturday.

Floodwaters in the Town of Minto receded to the Young Street area, trailer park, and flood plain by Saturday morning.

Minto Fire assessed several homes and businesses in the communities of Palmerston, Clifford and Harriston that have flooded basements and other areas.

“Words can’t be spoken of how proud I am of our Minto Fire and Town of Minto team for their dedications and professionalism the last two days,” Chris Harrow, Minto Fire Chief, stated via Twitter. “Thank you to the Minto residents for their support and patience. The unity shown during the flooding was impressive and humbling.”



NEWS

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Upstream, Wellington North received over 150 mm (or more than 6 inches) of rain in a 24-hour period ending at 8 a.m. on Friday morning.

Wellington North Fire Services received five calls related to the flooding on June 23.

Most significant was a situation at Spring Valley Park located on Sideroad 5 East – 35 people had to be evacuated after being separated on a causeway away from the main park. One child was brought out by the fire department, the rest were able to leave in their own vehicles when the water receded.

The other calls related to flooded basements and alarms being tripped.

“Things happen and we respond accordingly,” said WNFS chief Dave Guilbault. “The issues (to the south and west) were far greater than what we experienced here. I’m proud of how our guys responded to the problems that did arise during the course of the day.”



Downstream from Harriston, the dams in Gorrie, Wroxeter, Bluevale and Wingham faced the dangerous water levels Friday afternoon. Thompson said the North Maitland Watershed carried the bulk of the flow.

Midday on June 23, MVCA issued a statement advising the public that there was potential for failure at the Gorrie Dam. MVCA provided mapping of the potential impact of a downstream surge and more than 150 property owners were notified.

“In Gorrie the dam did what it was designed to do,” Thompson said.

She explained that the dam was operating at full capacity with water spilling over and into the berm (a flat strip of land, raised bank, or terrace bordering a river or canal).

“Because it (the dam boards) eroded slowly we didn’t see a massive water surge,” Thompson said.

With the Wroxeter Dam being immediately downstream from Gorrie, community members sprang into action and began pulling boards from the dam upon the potential dam failure statement last Friday.

“In this emergency event, the Wroxeter dam was operated correctly,” Howick Township Deputy Reeve, Robert Clarkson said.

Water levels exceeded the height of the boards, not only in Gorrie but also at the Bluevale dam. Thompson said, “This occurrence didn’t cause significant damage to the dam structures.”



Thompson said the Bluevale area received approximately 90 millimetres of rain.

“That is still a significant amount of rain, however the forecast only called for 40 millimetres of rain,” she said.

MVCA staff attended the Bluevale dam and adjusted the dam boards on Thursday for the forecasted rainfall.

“The problem is we didn’t get 40 millimetres of rain,” Thompson said.

In Bluevale the extent of the damage is unknown as water levels are still higher than normal and a tree is resting against the dam, making assessing the damage difficult for MVCA staff.

The dams and the conservation areas in Gorrie and Bluevale will be closed to the public for clean up this week. Assessments and any actions moving forward will include the involved municipalities, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry as well as the MVCA.

As water levels began to recede in Harriston and flow through Howick Township last weekend, downstream in Wingham, levels continued to slowly rise and peaked Saturday afternoon, flooding the south end of Wingham.

North Huron Emergency Services notified approximately 150 property owners in low-lying areas and recommended temporary evacuation of their properties. An evacuation centre was set up at the North Huron Westcast Community Complex in Wingham. No significant property damage occurred and residents who left their homes as part of precautionary measures were safe to return Saturday morning.

MVCA previously said in a public statement that this was a 1 in 100-year event, however Thompson said they are seeing this happen more frequently.

“That statement doesn’t mean this will only happen once in 100 years, it could happen tomorrow for all we know,” she said. “It just means this was the highest in our records in over 100 years.”

FLOOD RECOVERY EFFORTS

Mayor Bridge and Town of Minto staff participated in a conference call with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs regarding disaster relief on June 26. A link to the Ontario Disaster Relief Assistance Program is available on the Town of Minto website for homeowners, small business, small farms and non-profit organizations.

“The province will first need to deem Minto eligible based on a disaster assessment,” the Town of Minto wrote in a media release. “To help with this please fill out the form online so the town has a firm number on impacted properties.”

To participate in the program you will need pictures and receipts; more information is available online at www.town.minto.on.ca.

Thompson said MVCA’s Watershed Conditions Statement on water safety, issued on June 23, remains in place for all areas of the Maitland Watershed.

“The public is reminded to exercise caution around all watercourses. Recreational users of the river are advised that flows will remain elevated for several days making activities such as fishing and canoeing unsafe.”

MVCA recommends avoiding all waterways in the watershed until the end of the week.

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