



Nelson County Emergency Management

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Honorable Senator Conrad and Committee Members:

For the record, my name is Sharon Young, Emergency Manager for Nelson County.

I thank you for this opportunity to present testimony about the flooding issues & their impact within the Nelson County portion of the Devils Lake Basin, and in particular the Stump Lake area. I also thank you for this opportunity to provide input as you work towards a plan of action to deal with the chronic flooding and the threat of an uncontrolled spill to the Sheyenne River.

- Stump Lake was at an elevation of 1414.6 when I became Nelson County's emergency manager in October of 2003. Earlier this summer it reached an all time high of 1452.10 on June 27, 2010. That is an increase of 37.5 feet in the time I have been emergency manager.
- The elevation of Stump Lake on Monday, August 23 was 1451.55.
- The lake has risen almost 50 ft since the wet cycle began in 1993. In just the past two years, it has risen almost 5 feet, with an increase of 77,477 acre ft, and an increase of 1,855 acres. That's almost 3 sections of land that have disappeared under the water in just the past two years.
- Stump Lake flooding has taken homes, farm buildings, and productive agriculture land along with its property tax valuation. Area residents have lost portions of their livelihood, with little or no compensation for their loss. Some have relocated to nearby farmsteads; others have been forced to move their home.
- The lake has devoured 18 miles of county and township roads. Citizens are travelling many miles out of their way because of all the roads that are closed or under water in their area. County Road 23 north of the lake will be lost if the lake rises another 2 feet. The elevation of this road is 1454.5. This is a major route between Lakota and Tolna, and is very important for emergency responders.
- Flooding has resulted in increased response time for ambulance, fire and law enforcement vehicles, and increased travel distances for school bus routes, mail routes, getting to work, and for farmers getting to their fields.
- Flooding has caused mental health issues related to long term stress. We have experienced problems with water on private driveways, water in basements & the accompanying mold, mildew, & clean-up issues; damage to electrical systems, plumbing systems, furnaces, water heaters, appliances, furniture, carpet. We have had requests for pumps and sandbags by citizens trying to fight flood affects.

- Rising Stump Lake has created flooding issues at Stump Lake Park. Stump Lake Park is county owned and as such is a critical source of revenue to Nelson County. Over 16,000 people use the park annually, enjoying the park's 100 campsites, three ball diamonds, docks, fishing stations, café, bath house, pavilion, and Pioneer Village. The county has spent over \$200,000 on improvements over the last few years. The park property, buildings and infrastructure are currently valued at \$2 million. The 90 year old pavilion is a historic landmark, and was recently added to the National Register of Historic Places
- Much of northern Nelson County has also been flooding for more than a decade, also a result of the prolonged wet cycle that began in 1993. The flooding has washed out roads, flooded crops and forced some rural residents from their homes. Over the past several years, Lake Laretta & McHugh Slough have spread over thousands of acres of land.
- The high water table in this part of the county has taxed the water and sewer system in the city of Michigan. The city has a legal drain that moves water from town to Lake Laretta to the northwest. In May, heavy rains along with lagoon problems caused a water emergency wherein the city was without water for over a week.
- Nelson County has had Presidential Declarations in 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2004, 2005, 2009, and 2010 for flooding and ground saturation. We have received Public Assistance each of those years, but Individual Assistance only two.

Nelson County has, however, been proactive in its approach to the flood fight:

- In 2005 the County Commission & others lobbied the legislature for funding and received \$500,000 earmarked for Nelson County flooding (half to cover road repairs and half for various water management projects).
- In November 2008 because of numerous flooding problems, Nelson County residents voted their approval of an increase of 10 mills to fund maintenance of farm to market roads.
- The county contracted with the Red River Regional Council & the USDA in May 2009 to develop the Stump Lake Master Plan. The purpose of the document was to review the existing park facilities and make recommendations on how to develop future activities. Relocation of the pavilion and café were also addressed within the plan.
- Nelson County has requested assistance from the US Army Corps of Engineers in constructing a levee in Stump Lake Park. HESCO barrier installed in May 2009 currently provides protection to only 1453 msl, and the HESCO began leaking and eroding this spring due to wave action. Governor Hoeven has sent a letter to the USACE requesting flood protection techniques, emergency construction methods, and inspection of existing flood protection projects.
- Nelson County supported and sponsored a home acquisition (buyout) in 2009 through the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program for a residence with a history of flooding. Citizens have relocated threatened structures.

- The county has obtained sandbags, Red Cross clean-up kits, and maintained a close working association with the Red Cross, Salvation Army, and other VOAD (Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster) groups.
- Our County Highway Department has worked diligently maintaining and repairing roads, working within the often-times cumbersome parameters of FEMA requirements.
- Recently landowners voted to approve the \$2.66 million Michigan Spillway flood control project that will divert pooling sheet water away from the city, and relieve about 40,000 acres of agricultural and rural road flooding. The project is estimated to lower the level of Lake Laretta by about 7 feet. If the spillway operates at 50 cubic feet per second, it will remove about 18,000 acre feet annually.

The state faces water quantity and water quality challenges in its quest for a workable solution to Devils Lake Basin flooding. Ground saturation level is so high that we are just a couple heavy rains away from a possible uncontrolled overflow. We need a control structure on the natural outlet from Stump Lake to Tolna Coulee to the Sheyenne River to manage water releases.

When I first became emergency manager, one of my tasks was to go through everything from past years and to sort, throw, and reorganize. I have an entire file drawer full of past studies done on Devils Lake flooding. Studies provide important information to those having to make big decisions, and those trying to do their best to come up with a solution that is the best for all. But we have just about run out of time for more studies.

Senator Conrad and Committee Members, we need help now. And we need to be a part of the solution. Nelson County asks for your support of a control structure on the Tolna Coulee. Thank you very much for your time, effort, and cooperation.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon Young
Nelson County Emergency Manager