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NEWS CLIPS

SOUTH CAROLINA-DR-4241

March 14, 2016

Issues:

- None.

Summary:

- Various articles regarding clean-up of Gills Creek watershed. Feature story about recovery efforts 6 months after flooding and Forrest Acres desire to use HMGP fund for new police station.

Analysis:

- None

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October flooding victims still dealing with FEMA headaches (Post and Courier)

By Bo Petersen and Brenda Rindge

Mike Schall's home sat in the roiling Ashley River for most of a week, the flood current strong enough that his foundation pilings no longer stand straight. His heating and air are gone. Wood under the house is rotting. The mold behind the sheetrock has climbed to the second floor and his wife is sick from it.

Schall has had flood insurance on his riverside home for as long as he has lived there. Despite waiting five months since the October flood, filing and refiling claims and refiling proof of loss, the National Flood Insurance Program so far hasn't offered enough of a payment to do any more than maybe cover the cost of setting the pilings right, he said.

"You have insurance for 39 years and they're fighting tooth and nail not to pay you what you paid them for," Schall said. "I'm at wits end. I don't know what to do."

So far, FEMA has disbursed nearly \$14 million in grants in Dorchester, Berkeley and Charleston counties to help people recover from damage in the historic October flooding. More than \$150 million in loans has been disbursed statewide. Nearly 25,000 applicants have been approved for help, according to FEMA.

The flood-insurance program has paid more than \$128 million in claims to 3,760 applicants statewide during the time span of the flood. But FEMA declined to say how many claims were disapproved or still are pending approval. A lot of the frustration with FEMA appears to be with its bureaucratic rigidity in handling claims.

"Sometimes people do not qualify for help," the FEMA release noted, for reasons including lack of records, proof of ownership and proof of occupancy in the claims.

It's little comfort for residents such as Schall and Yvette Shecut of Goose Creek who say they have filed claims including those proofs, had them rejected for lack of it, and were forced to refile. Shecut too has mold problems from a ceiling that collapsed when the flood rains leaked through her roof. And the ceiling isn't repaired yet.

"At first I was disgusted. Then I got angry. Now I'm just more and more frustrated," she said.

They are among at least a few thousand people in the coastal region still struggling in the aftermath of the disaster now estimated to have caused more than \$2 billion in damage.

Mitigation

More than five months after the flooding, some North Charleston residents in the back of Pepperhill subdivision are still trying to put their lives back together. They say the help that was so plentiful in the days following the Oct. 2 to 5 rain storm has dried up, leaving them to deal with the leftover mess.

Many of the homes in this working-class neighborhood were built in the 1980s on concrete slabs. In the back, on the loop formed by Peppercorn and Ginger lanes, and the three dead ends off it — Smoketree, Firetree and Waterford courts — lots are close to a creek and drainage canal.

For days, their homes and vehicles were filled with standing water, sometimes 4 feet high.

“Everything sat here for three or four days until we could get back in,” said Darlene Taylor-Williams, who has lived on Smoketree Court for 20 years. “The stink was so bad, there really wasn’t anything we could even try to keep. It was a mess. It was just sad for so many of us who have lived back here for so long.”

In the days after the flood, city inspectors, FEMA officials and others helped residents assess the damage and fill out paperwork. Teams of volunteers swarmed the neighborhood to lend a hand with tearing out carpet or hauling appliances to the curb.

Residents were thankful for donations, such as grocery store gift cards from the Coosaw Creek Women’s Club and appliances from church groups.

But since the Nov. 3 city council elections, “We haven’t seen a city official back here to say, ‘How y’all doing? Is everything OK?’ ” said Kevin Thompson, who lives on Smoketree Court. “Before the election, every other day somebody in a city vehicle came down the street.”

Pepperhill homeowners blame the flooding on the Palmetto Commerce Parkway that runs through a once-wooded area behind their homes that connects Ashley Phosphate and Ladson roads.

“When they made all of that construction, all of a sudden it made it a flood area,” Thompson said. “We have bad weather all the time and we never had floods back here. It’s kind of weird that we start having that type of disaster when they start building and scraping the land of all the trees and stuff behind us. You don’t sacrifice a neighborhood for development.”

In addition, a canal that winds through the neighborhood and drainage ditches were not properly cleaned, they say.

“If these drains are supposed to be clean and they don’t clean them or you allow development behind places where you don’t have any green space — no runoff or anything like that — and we end up with this, for nobody to be talking about it is wrong,” said Charleston branch of the NAACP executive director Dot Scott, who also lives in the neighborhood. “This is pure neglect and we are acting like it didn’t happen.”

North Charleston Mayor Keith Summey has said the development is not to blame for the flooding but the area is in a FEMA flood zone. The homes, he says, are not built to today’s codes.

“We are applying for a FEMA mitigation grant to have a flood-plain study completed for the entire area,” he said.

“From the study findings, we can determine if improvements can be made to mitigate future flooding. Any improvements would most likely involve federal permitting and wetlands mitigation, which could take several years to accomplish.”

“Whatever the problem is, they need to fix that,” said Taylor-Williams, Scott’s daughter. “They need to figure out how we can not have this happen anymore. We don’t want to go through this no more.”

Despite the donations, help from volunteer workers and low-interest FEMA loans, the residents say putting their lives back in order has also taken a toll on them financially.

“You say to yourself, ‘I was barely making it before this happened, so how am I going to do this now?’ ” said Taylor-Williams, a single parent to two sons. “We are parents so we are going to do what we have to do, but it’s frustrating because I have to pay this back for something that probably never should have happened.”

“I’m thankful for what they gave, but the bulk of it is a loan that we’re responsible for paying back,” said Brenda Wrighton. “That’s a debt incurred that I didn’t want. I really did not want to take that loan, but if I didn’t I would have lost my house. So now I have a mortgage, I have a car note that I didn’t want because my car was paid for, and now I’ve got this loan I have to pay back.”

Unmet needs

Others, though, are pleased with FEMA’s response. Kay Horres-Durst, whose Edisto River home near St. George was swamped, said her trouble has been with her insurance company. FEMA has been helpful.

Any widespread frustration with FEMA hasn’t reached state agency and legislators’ ears. Sen. Tim Scott, R-S.C., whose office is working with Schall, didn’t reply when asked for comment about people approaching him with concerns.

“It’s always a Rubik’s Cube trying to make your case before a government bureaucracy. You essentially become a plaintiff. But there’s been no major blowup,” said Rep. Mark Sanford, R-S.C.

Few complaints have been made to the state Emergency Management Division, Department of Consumer Affairs and

Department of Insurance, according to spokespeople.

“Not a lot coming to the state at this point, but most of the affected counties have established long-term recovery groups that are addressing any unmet needs locally and primarily through voluntary agencies,” said Emergency Management spokesman Derrec Becker.

“Every single person’s situation is unique, that’s why many disaster organizations will work one on one on an individual basis with each flood survivor. When we hear that someone has an unmet need that’s not covered by disaster aid through insurance, FEMA or the Small Business Administration, (the Division) makes sure to pass along information about the appeals process through FEMA and about what help there may be through our volunteer organizations,” he said.

Anyone with unmet needs can call 2-1-1 or go to the division’s [website](http://scemd.org), scemd.org, he said.

More than a thousand families in the coastal region of the American Red Cross Lowcountry chapter have fallen through the cracks of coverage, largely in Williamsburg and Georgetown counties, said chapter director Louise Welch-Williams.

The chapter is part of a long-term recovery coalition working to help what she characterized as vulnerable populations. Mold is constant problem. “We’re hearing a lot of complaints of upper respiratory issues,” she said.

In Ashborough, Schall heaves a breath as he sorts through a thick file of his paperwork. Space heaters kept the couple warm through the winter. Now that the weather is warming, the lack of air conditioning worries him. And the mold just gets worse. His wife is having dizzy spells.

“There’s mold growing in the walls and under the walls,” he said. “We’re going to have to tear up the floor.”

Volunteers Clean Piles of Flood Debris (WLTX)

Columbia, SC (WLTX) -- Although it's been six months since rushing waters sent contents of dry land down stream, the trash from that day still remains along Gills Creek.

The Gills Creek Watershed Association and volunteers have cleaned the creek several times already, but continued their efforts Saturday.

Erich Miarka with GCWA said there is so much trash, they will be back to clean several more times.

"There's still a ton of litter and debris that needs to be picked up," he said. "Some of it's just way to big for volunteers, it's going to take some heavy equipment to get out."

The county still needs to get out bigger items like dumpsters and a shopping cart corral that remains in the water around Rosewood and Divine streets.

Volunteers said they will do what they can in the meantime.

"I'm really happy that we did this," Volunteer Sarah Mott said. "It makes you feel good about yourself like you've done something positive."

Group Needs Volunteers to Clean Up Gills Creek (WLTX)

Columbia, SC (WLTX) - The Gills Creek Watershed Association is organizing efforts to clean up the waterway, and they need your help.

Walking through Gills Creek, Valerie Marcil with the Gills Creek Watershed says she envisions a clean, healthy greenway.

"It's hard to believe it's been five months since the historic flood swept through out cities because there's still a lot of debris in our creeks," she explains. "We have what's left of an old shopping cart here, plastic bags and even some plastic trash bins back there. That's exactly what this watershed is trying to do is pick up a lot of this."

On the morning of the flood, the area was the epicenter of much of the flooding, and the waters swept all kinds of garbage into the creek. "It seems like an infinite amount of garbage and trash," Marcil says.

"Agencies you'd think are responsible for cleaning up like the county, the city, the federal government are all waiting to find out how much money is available and for what and they're in the process of prioritizing that money," she says. So they're taking matters into their own hands. Once a month since December, the Gills Creek Watershed Association has been out here picking up debris.

"We just got tired of waiting for that money and said we need to go ahead and start cleaning up so we're just doing the best we can with manpower," Marcil says.

They're looking for volunteers to come out Saturday from 10 until noon. "They need to wear old clothes they can get dirty and muddy and also they need to wear clothes that can protect them from branches and briars," Marcil adds.

But because safety is first, DHEC wants you to remember there are risks if you're going out there.

"The floodwaters have dissipated but some items still might have some harmful, so that's why it's a really good idea to use basic safe hygiene tips--washing hands often, wearing gloves to protect you against any potential harmful

substance," says Mary-Kathryn Craft with DHEC.

The group is meeting behind Midlands tech off Beltline Boulevard. People can call Erick Miarka at 803.727.8326 or go to the [Gills Creek Watershed Facebook page](#).

Volunteers come together to clean up Gills Creek after October floods (WISTV)

By Mike DeSumma

COLUMBIA, SC (WIS) - Months after the historic flooding, some Midlands residents spent part of their Saturday morning cleaning up sections of Gills Creek, which topped its banks last fall.

For several residents the problem is what the flood waters carried into the creek and then left behind. Couches, office equipment and even a large dumpster are just a few of the items that have been said to be in the creek.

That's why the Gills Creek Watershed Association has been organizing cleanups like the one that took place Saturday morning.

Volunteers have been getting up earlier the past few Saturdays, meeting at the Beltline Boulevard campus of Midlands Technical College and then going right to work on the creek side. On Saturday alone, they were able to collect a whole lot of items left behind by the high waters.

"You look at couches, business signs, file cabinets, trash cans, children's toys. You just name, it's been caught up in the creek," volunteer Ann Yancey said. "You can actually participate in this and make a difference as a citizen."

If you feel like you want to get involved and help out, volunteers are planning more cleanups along the creek in the coming weeks.

They say they're already expecting several USC students next weekend as part of the university's service week.

Forest Acres seeking federal aid to move flood-damaged police station (The State)

City unsure of how much it will request

Officials want to move police station out of flood plain

Columbia, Richland County, other communities competing for help

By Avery G. Wilks

RICHLAND COUNTY, SC - Forest Acres is hoping to build a new police station with a slice of the \$36 million pie available to South Carolina communities in a new round of flood recovery aid.

The city wants to use money available from the Federal Emergency Management Agency to open a new station on higher ground after the current one was heavily damaged by flooding from record rain in October.

Forest Acres Police Chief Gene Sealy walks through the gutted police station. Matt Walsh. mwalsh@thestate.com

"We need to move that building out of the flood plain," City Administrator Mark Williams said.

Forest Acres will be competing with Columbia, Richland County and likely more communities for the aid.

If approved, Forest Acres would build the new station next to City Hall just behind the current one on the 5200 block of Trenholm Road, officials said. City Hall is on higher ground and was not damaged by flooding.

The city for now is undecided on how much to request.

It could ask FEMA for roughly \$7 million to build a new station large enough to also house municipal court as the current station does, Williams said.

But it could decide instead to request \$4 million to build a station large enough only for police, he said.

The FEMA aid can cover 75 percent of the cost, so Forest Acres would pay for the remaining 25 percent of the project.

If able to build a new police headquarters, Forest Acres could consider tearing down its current one, which flooded with 18 inches of water and sewage.

Forest Acres police officers after the storm [worked out of a nearby church](#) for more than a week. They spent the next two months crowded into the station's second story as the first floor received a [renovation](#).

"Our police station suffered quite a bit," Mayor Frank Brunson said. "We thought this might be a logical option to explore."

The station was constructed in 1955, according to Richland County tax records. It was renovated in 2014 before the flood..

"It's a tired old building with lots of problems," Williams said.

He said the city hadn't considered building a new station until the storm.

"We really didn't think we had a flood risk there," Williams said.

Columbia officials have said they plan to request \$175 million from FEMA for 11 projects, knowing that only a fraction of that could be approved. Richland and Lexington counties also are working on applications.

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Cannon Creek Bridge in Newberry reopened after historic flooding (WACH)

By Matthew Stevens

NEWBERRY, SC - A major bridge that has been shut down since October's flooding in Newberry has reopened.

The Newberry County Sheriff's Office announced that Cannon Creek Bridge has reopened.

The bridge runs over route 176 which is a main road that connects the upstate to Columbia.

"Much appreciation is given to SCDOT for the rapid response and repair of this transportation corridor," the sheriff's office said in a release.

In a release Thursday, the SCDOT said that 17 other bridges damaged from the historic flooding have been handed over to contractors to begin work.