

Recovery, repairs continue after northeastern Minnesota floods

By Jessica Wiens. MnDOT Newsline July 11, 2012.



Todd Campbell, District 1 project manager, discusses Hwy 210 flood damage with Bernie Arseneau, deputy commissioner and chief engineer. Eight miles of Hwy 210 through Jay Cooke State Park remain closed due to major flood damage. *Photo by Jessica Wiens*

Widespread rain engulfed Duluth and the surrounding area June 19-20, causing the worst flooding the region experienced in recorded history. The powerful water ripped pavement from the roads, destroyed bridge decks and created several sinkholes throughout northeastern Minnesota.

“The flooding affected almost every corridor within 50 miles of Duluth at one time or another,” said Duane Hill, District 1 engineer. “As the water receded in some areas, it rose in others. In particular, the McGregor and Moose Lake areas had flood crests much later than the immediate flooding in Duluth.”

According to Hill, Lake Superior rose four inches after the event, and the storm dropped enough water in the area to fill Mille Lacs Lake. “The remarkable thing is there were no deaths or serious injuries in Minnesota caused by the flooding,” said Hill. “I’m so thankful for the MnDOT employees from District 1 and other areas who dropped their regular work to help when we needed it.”

Closures remain

The Minnesota State Patrol and District 1 crews closed about a dozen highways and Interstate 35; many of these roads were closed in multiple locations. Most roads are now open because crews completed temporary repairs, but work remains to finish more permanent solutions.

Two roads are still closed:

- Hwy 2 from Proctor to Duluth
- Hwy 210 through Jay Cooke State Park (eight miles)

Crews plan to complete permanent repairs to Hwy 2 this season, but Hwy 210 is another story. Work to clean and repair several washouts, landslides and inslope failures on Hwy 210 will take much longer to complete. But Hill says it may be possible to construct temporary repairs on Hwy 210 this season. “We need to get creative with the Hwy 210 repairs and try out a few innovative things we haven’t done before to find the best solution,” Hill said.

Jay Cooke State Park remains closed because Hwy 210 is the only access to the park for vehicles.

Current estimates to repair all flood damage is \$55 million.

Help by the hundreds

District 1 employees responded immediately to monitor flood damage, set-up barricades, create GIS maps and establish internal and external communications channels.

Soon after, Districts 2, 3 and Metro arrived with personnel and traffic control equipment to assist. The Metro District also brought some heavy equipment to help with initial repairs. The Bridge Office and Materials Office also helped in the field with reviewing damage and planning repairs.

“Northeastern Minnesota is accessible thanks to hundreds of MnDOT employees and other emergency responders who came together in a time of crisis,” said Commissioner Tom Sorel. “The department will continue to use every resource we have to manage the current situation, complete permanent repairs and help out our partners where we can.”

Through State Aid, MnDOT is also dispatching teams to inspect about 180 bridges and structures on county, city and township roads that were most affected by flooding. These inspections will help local governments submit documentation for federal and state assistance. The inspections will take about two weeks, and all repairs are anticipated to be complete within six months.

Just the beginning

The District 1 engineering staff broke into assessment teams for each major repair area to initially get roads open and then to coordinate permanent fixes. Several of the flood-damaged locations had construction projects occurring in the area, so contractors were already on site and able to help with immediate responses. Other areas will take a bit more time to get contractors out.

The process to get federal emergency relief funding for all of the permanent repairs continues. The Legislature also plans to hold a special session to discuss flood relief at the state level.

“We have a long road ahead of us to get back to the way things were,” Hill said.