

Flood Foresight

by *Ishbel Moore*

Manitoba Government press release issued late February:

Manitoba Water Stewardship's second spring flood outlook shows the 2011 spring flood potential remains high for much of Manitoba including the Red, Souris, Pembina, Assiniboine, Winnipeg, Saskatchewan and Fisher rivers as well as the Interlake region.

Flood potential is high in these areas due to high river flows, very high soil-moisture conditions at freeze-up, above normal snow-water content in the snowpack, and an expected cooler and wetter spring.

Average weather conditions along the Red River could result in a flood higher than 2009 while unfavourable weather conditions could result in Red River water levels reaching those experienced in 1997.

Localized overland flooding is expected in most of central and southern Manitoba and could occur during the early part of the run-off period due to ice jams, snow blockages or frozen culverts in river channels, drains and ditches.

See the full release and other articles on www.horsecountry.ca/archives

Your primary escape route may be impassable.

One frightening flood on your property is all that is required to bring home the need for planning and preventive measures. Or, you can do as much as you can – now – just in case!

There are different kinds of floods. There can be torrents of melted water streaming down hillsides. A quick early melt and/or excessive spring rains can cause overland flooding. The Red River becomes swollen as it passes through the USA and southern Manitoba, gathering debris, momentum, and volume. Ice jams at bridges send freezing water over the banks. Land that has not flooded before may become impassable. Red River Valley occupants become very interested in the effects of the Winnipeg Floodway! The province has an excellent flood forecast system in place and the media keeps us informed of the potential danger, but, it is easy to become complacent and be taken unawares. If you are a horse owner, you need to be prepared.

Reserve Ahead:

Don't wait until the last minute to arrange your evacuation, frantically phoning everyone and anyone you can think of, pleading for them to take your precious equines. Now the flood forecasts are out, if you are in a danger zone it is time to contact friends or responsible horse acquaintances who have high land and a horse-ready environment, and ask if they could take in your horses if the water starts to rise. An alternative is to research government equine evacuation sites that are not in danger of being flooded, and find out what you would have to do to ensure a space for your animals. Some horse owners who know they have flooded in the past will be moving their animals regardless. They don't care if the water doesn't come up, they want the horses to be out of there, just in case.



Provide high land:

Have an area in your “winter” field that is higher than the rest. For instance, it is possible get the municipality to dump some truckloads of dirt from construction projects onto your land. This will become a mini-hill on which your horses can stay as high and dry as possible. They will be easily seen by passers-by or aircraft, and provide somewhere for rescue efforts to leave a bale or two of hay.

Keep areas clear:

Keep those dead trees, old leaning structures and other forms of debris (such as discarded washing machines and tires) out of your fields. This will minimize danger for any rescue vehicles or boats, men up to their chests in water, or swimming horses.

Loading practice:

Be sure all your horses are trailer ready; that is they will load easily and quickly. Again, something that can be done far in advance is to have other friends with trailers come by one afternoon, and you can practice getting your horses off and on ‘strange trailers’, not only with you at the end of the rope, but with people they are not familiar with. Also

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Resources:


- Province of Manitoba; Animal care line: 204-945-8000 for coordination of requests for assistance from pet owners and hobby farms affected by flooding. (Staffed 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.; afterhours call go onto an answering machine.)
- Manitoba Horse Council rescue: 204-925-5718
- Winnipeg Humane Society: 204-982-2021
- Manitoba Farm and Rural Stress: 1-866-367-3276 or www.ruralstress.ca
- Additional information: www.gov.mb.ca/flooding/; www.manitoba.ca/flooding/index/html.

On www.horsecountry.ca:


- Evacuation checklist
- Current Manitoba Government situation updates
- Archived articles on emergency evacuation and reclamation of damaged land

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practice blindfolding the horses using bandanas or bags and leading them. Special care will have to be taken with mares who have new foals at side or are nearing term.

Entrances and Exits:

If possible have a hand-drawn map of your field/gate system. Gates, pathways, and driveways/culvert entries should be marked with a flag or some other identifying feature, such as a plastic pole and red flag. Someone unfamiliar with your property will not know the exact location and width of your tracks, and it is not good if the rescue vehicle gets stuck. Possibly a pain in the neck to do, but could be an easily achieved early spring or late fall project. This could also become part of your regular 'fence line' checking, as maintaining fencing and gates is all a part of normal farm/livestock safety.

Name That Horse:

Horses can have identification tags braided into their mane or tail. All in one plastic bag have copies of registration forms, proof of ownership, vet records. Labeled current photos are good, perhaps with other information such as breed, age, gender, training level, etc., and any vices or strong personality traits. If your property is flooded and your records unavailable, consider how you could prove to authorities that the horses actually belong to you.

Eyes and Ears:

Listen to news and weather reports. With a flood in Manitoba there is usually time to put an action plan to work. We have flood forecasts months in advance; certainly weeks and days. Watch the weather yourself. Check your ground saturation. Are the ditches filling; not just the river? Do the culverts flow adequately?



Gassed Up:

Maintain your truck and trailer. Keep it full of gas, and facing out of your yard. Again, there is usually some warning re flooding and there should be time to have the trailer hooked up and stocked, and ready to go as needed. Before leaving home however, check highway conditions, in case the route you have chosen is already closed or too unstable to drive over with a full trailer.

Hay Delivery:


If flooding looks imminent, be sure to take enough hay and food for all your horses to wherever you will end up boarding them. It's easy enough to go back and get it if the flood doesn't happen. Should it be that the wonderful people willing to take horses in for you, and who have great fences, do not have horses or horse knowledge, take time to teach them how to feed and water, especially if you will not be also living with these friends.

Owners who Board

While aimed more at the "ordinary" owner with one or more horses on some acreage, people with horses at boarding barns should also ask some questions of the stable owners, e.g. What will happen to my horse if the barn and the area around it floods? Do you have an emergency evacuation plan already in place? 🐾

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