

## Part 2: Historic floods inundate Midwest

# Seized by water

The floods of 2011 impacted communities throughout the Midwest, but none caused more concentrated devastation than the Mouse River's wrath on the communities along its banks.

Sheds in Holiday Village in Minot, ND, were no match for fast-moving floodwaters that tossed them around the neighborhood.

Photo credit: Tom Rafferty, Verendrye Electric

By Andrea Blowers

**I**t's crazy. Like nothing I've ever seen," says Tom Rafferty, community relations manager for Verendrye Electric Cooperative.

"It" is the worst flood in Minot's history, surpassing the record of 1881 – not by inches, but by feet. In fact, every community along the Mouse River in north central North Dakota was impacted by flood waters that crested June 25 four feet above the previous record.

"The water came so quickly, many residents didn't have time to protect their homes and get all their belongings," Rafferty says. More than 11,000 Minot residents were evacuated from their homes, a quarter of the city.

"They've estimated that in Minot more than 4,000 homes received some kind of damage and about 800 were totally destroyed." (Read how one Minot resident and Basin Electric employee was able to save his home on page 23.)

Verendrye Electric is a Basin Electric Class C member, which serves about 12,500 meters in seven counties surrounding Minot. About 1,100 of Verendrye Electric's members have been affected and 633 of them lost power due to flood waters. "We were able to keep a majority of the membership on, even though we have dozens of problems up and down the river valley," says Bruce Carlson, general manager for Verendrye Electric.

"So far, we've been able to restore power to more than 200 homes," Rafferty says. But, more than 400 are still without power. "We had entire neighborhoods flooded. In the Holiday Village Mobile Home Park, we're going to need to totally rebuild the infrastructure there."

Rafferty says other neighborhoods near Burlington have transformers, underground line and meters that will need to be replaced. "The water was up to the roof in some homes," he says. "There's so much damage; quite a few of them will

### Area cooperatives make donations for flood relief

Basin Electric along with member cooperatives Central Power Electric Cooperative, Minot, ND, and Verendrye Electric are donating \$25,000 toward the Minot Area Community Foundation's Minot Area Recovery Fund to assist flood victims in the region. The donation is in conjunction with a benefit concert planned for Sept. 3 at the North Dakota State Fair Grandstand. Internationally renowned Black Eyed Peas are scheduled to perform. This donation is in addition to \$50,000 jointly donated by Basin Electric, Central Power, Verendrye Electric, SRT Communications and CoBank in late June to the Mid-Dakota Red Cross in Minot to assist with flood relief efforts.

have to be torn down.” He says they’ve estimated damages for Verendrye Electric’s system to be around \$2.4 million. Estimated damages for Minot are reportedly about \$1 billion.

Verendrye Electric’s crews were working 10-hour days from the time the flooding began. “I have so much respect for our linemen,” Carlson says. “It’s one thing to be working on dry ground and working with a 7,200-volt energized conductor. It’s another thing to be standing in hip waders with water up to your waist and wearing a pair of rubber gloves and a hot stick, checking line we don’t know for sure where faults are.”

To help get all the work done, the cooperative is lining up contractors. “We’re still working on repairs in the western part of our system from a spring storm that came before the flooding,” Rafferty says. “It’s going to take a long time to recover from this.”

In addition to repairs, Rafferty says Verendrye Electric will need to build new infrastructure to accommodate living facilities FEMA is placing in the cooperative’s service area for flood victims. Basin Electric donated the use of land where its former William J. Neal Station had operated. “Once the FEMA homes are ready sometime in September, they’ll place about 200 to start and will be adding more as they’re needed. The homes will be all electric heat.” To learn more about the FEMA homes read “Basin Electric, Verendrye helping FEMA help flood victims” on Basin Electric’s blog: <http://bit.ly/HelpingFloodVictims>.

For the most part, water has receded back into the river, except in a few areas. “Most of the yards are dry, but a few residents still had water in their basements. There are some low spots where residents had to pump water back into the river,” Rafferty says.

What the water has left will take months to remove. “The water left mud and mold and sewage. It’s a blackish stinky mud all over,” he says. “But people are in their homes and cleaning them out. There are heaps and heaps of garbage in front of almost every house affected by the flooding.”

Rafferty says residents are still wondering what’s going to happen next. “The city is in the process of developing flood protection plans, so it’s kind of a waiting game until we know anything for sure. There might not be too many answers for a while.”

In the meantime, Carlson says they’ll just continue to try and help each other out through this disaster. “It’s really hard as a co-op employee when you’ve got people whose lives are devastated.”

Watch a video of the flood impact produced by Verendrye Electric and the North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives: <http://bit.ly/MouseFlood>.

## Northern Plains continues 18-year battle with Devils Lake

Working in flooded conditions is not new for Northern Plains Electric Cooperative linemen. Since 1993, the lake in Northern Plains’ service area, Devils Lake, has slowly swallowed 170,000 acres of farmland in North Dakota, and with it caused an economic loss of \$195 million and 1,100 jobs, according to North Dakota State University. The Northern Notes blog states, “it has inundated at least two communities and imposed on countless homes and farms.”

Northern Plains has been at the heart of the struggle with the persistently swelling lake. “As the lake rises, so too does the miles of cooperative line that are impacted,” the blog article continues.

Read more about this issue on the Northern Notes blog at <http://blog.nplains.com> and watch Northern Plains video, Roads to Nowhere: <http://bit.ly/RoadsToNowhere>.

Northern Plains is a Basin Electric Class C member with headquarters in Carrington and Cando, ND.

## Missouri River receding

Cooperatives and members in Basin Electric’s service area have been fighting to save their homes since the Missouri River began flooding in late May and early June. Read “Co-op Communities battle Mouse and Missouri” in the July-August issue of Basin Today: <http://bit.ly/MouseMissouriBattle>. It has been a long and difficult few months and though the water is receding, water levels in both the river and lakes remain high.

The Missouri River crested July 1 at 19.23 feet in Bismarck, ND, with releases from the Garrison Dam at 150,000 cubic feet per second (cfs). Though releases have dropped to 85,000 cfs, the river has only dropped to 16.19 feet as of Aug. 17. Also on Aug. 17, the spillway gates that were opened June 1 were closed after 77 days.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers issued their new releases July 29, which show the Corps will slowly ratchet down flows into autumn for all the dams. In its news release, the Corps states, “This plan provides the opportunity for the Corps to begin inspection and repair of levees and other critical infrastructure and ensures adequate storage for the 2012 runoff season.” Read the release at <http://bit.ly/CorpsStrategy>.