

INSIDE >>

Goldiggers learn a lot at cross-country meet

PAGE 10

Over \$75 in coupons are in today's Courant

INSIDE

Storms, flooding batter county

Schools shut down, homes inundated amid week of rain

By IAN NELIGH
Courant Editor

For county residents and motorists, Friday the 13th certainly lived up to its reputation. After a week of incessant rains, houses were flooded along Soda Creek Road south of Idaho Springs, and roads were impassable near Upper Bear Creek, stranding numerous residents.

Clear Creek County schools were closed Friday and Monday, and motorists were stuck for hours at various times in traffic that snarled for miles. On Friday, the Colorado Department of Transportation worked to clear 200 tons of rock from Interstate 70 at the base of Floyd Hill before the highway could be reopened.

Only one flooding-related casualty was reported, after a man fell into Clear Creek when the bank collapsed under his feet. His body was recovered downstream.

Clear Creek sheriff's Maj. Rick Albers, who has served as the county's incident commander, said a complete picture of the damage to the area, including roads, infrastructure and houses, was not yet available.

As of Monday afternoon, the road was still closed in the 900 block of Soda Creek where the pavement was sagging. Beaver Brook Canyon Road between the 1000 and 3200 blocks was closed, and residents in that area were stranded.

"There's no getting in or getting out because we've got a sinkhole in the 3200 block and a road washed out in the 1000 block," Albers said, adding he expected the county's road and bridge department to have those issues fixed by the end of Monday.

Clear Creek High/Middle School, which is on Beaver Brook Canyon Road, is not affected by the road closure.

However, not all of the damage from the rains and flooding in the county will be fixed so quickly.

"It's going to take awhile. We're trying to get the main roads open to get people in and out of the county, but it is going to be weeks before we get everything back to normal," Albers said.

County officials asked residents not to



Photos by KENNY DARNELL | For the Courant

ABOVE, MANY OF THE CULVERTS in Clear Creek County clogged with debris during the flooding that followed a week of rains, as with this bridge in the 800 block of Soda Creek. Below, floodwaters begin to erode Little Bear Creek Road Saturday.



travel on roads unnecessarily while county road crews assess damage after days of punishing rainstorms.

Clear Creek County is one of 12 counties to have a disaster declaration with the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

The county was sending regular Code Red phone alerts to people in the areas most affected, keeping them up to date on road closures and providing contact information for assistance.

"Our major emphasis right now is to

shore up what infrastructure problems we have now," said County Commissioner Phil Buckland.

Buckland said that once the rain had

Please see **FLOODING**, Page 8

INSIDE

- FLOODWATERS HAMMER DOWNTOWN EVERGREEN / PAGE 7
- MAN DIES AFTER FALLING INTO CLEAR CREEK / PAGE 17
- HOMES INUNDATED ON UPPER BEAR CREEK / PAGE 14
- OUTDOOR LAB STUDENTS HIKE 2 MILES TO SAFETY / PAGE 17



Visit www.clearcreekcourant.com for breaking news and updates.



Follow us on Facebook

Visit www.facebook.com/pages/Clear-Creek-Courant/171267532910583

FLOODING

From Page 1

stopped, the county would begin major repairs on roads.

According to data from the U.S. Geological Service in Lawson, Clear Creek on average over the past 60 years runs at about 90 cubic feet per second this time of the year. On Sept. 13, the creek was running at more than 400 cfs, more than double the record set in 1961.

Flood damage

Idaho Springs police Sgt. Jim Vogt said Soda Creek, Yankee Creek and Upper Bear Creek were the areas affected most by the rainstorms and flooding.

“Soda Creek overcame its bank in a number of places, and down by the (Indian) Hot Springs, it made a mess of things,” Vogt said. “(Water was) up against the building and running down the roads.”

Houses in the 800 block of Soda Creek Road about a mile from Idaho Springs suffered damage. Vogt said the county brought in equipment to dig up several front lawns to help stem the tide of water.

“(The residents) are digging themselves out with shovels and doing what they could to save (their properties),” Vogt said.

Town Administrator Tom Hale said Georgetown had escaped any serious damage from the storms.

“Just people being nervous,” Hale said. “At least south Clear Creek seems to be running discolored, and there’s some damage to (dirt) streets, and that’s about it. Knock on wood.”

Forest officials were warning visitors not to travel or recreate in the Clear Creek Ranger District until further notice.

“Visitor safety is very important to us,” Forest Supervisor Glenn Casamassa said in a written statement. “We appreciate people staying out of these areas until we can assess conditions, address safety issues and better understand the work we have ahead of us.”

Evacuations

Albers said Clear Creek County Commissioner Tom Hayden and Clear Creek sheriff’s Sgt. Rick Safe organized and assisted in the evacuation of 130 sixth-grade students and their teachers from Jeffco Public Schools’ Mount Evans Outdoor Lab on Friday afternoon. The students came from Swanson and Thomson elementary schools in Arvada.

“(Hayden) was a major part of that. He’s actually been a major part of my eyes as commander on the east end of the county, he and Sgt. Safe,” Albers said.

As deputy incident commander for east Clear Creek County, Hayden helped Safe turn people away from Upper Bear Creek Road because cars were essentially being washed away by the overflowing Bear Creek.

Law enforcement soon realized Upper Bear Creek Road at the intersection with Yankee Creek Road was washing out.

Hayden’s was the last vehicle over the spot before it was impassable, and he was asked to go to the Outdoor Lab and see if they needed anything or had any medical issues.

“So I went up there, and they wanted to evacuate, get those kids out of there,” Hayden said.

It was the last day of the week-long outdoor program.

“They were concerned about food, and they were concerned about some medicine for a few kids, who only had a five-day supply,” Hayden said.

Jeffco Schools officials considered allowing the children to remain an extra day or calling the National Guard to bring helicopters to evacuate them.

Hayden suggested transporting the



ABOVE, FLOODWATERS RAVAGE THE LANDSCAPE at a home in the 1600 block of Highway 103 on Saturday morning. Below, the intersection of Miner Street and Soda Creek Road was closed throughout the weekend.



students with pickup trucks about one mile, where they would then walk an additional 2 miles up the old Bear Creek/ Idehoe Wagon Road to Old Squaw Pass Road to meet the Jeffco school buses.

Hayden said the old wagon road wasn’t vehicle accessible but could be hiked on. Hayden said he helped shuttle out as many as 12 to 16 students at time.

Alpine Rescue was also called to assist in the operation. Hayden said five other pickup trucks from Jeffco schools were used in transporting the students, and a pregnant teacher was transported out on an ATV.

“The kids sat in the bed of the pickup. We took it slow and easy, and took them about half the distance ... and they got a memory for a lifetime,” Hayden said.

During the evacuation, the weather behaved, and it didn’t start raining again until the last student got on the last school bus.

“Tom (Hayden) was a true hero that day,” said Mount Evans Outdoor Lab principal David Epp.

Epp said that in years past Hayden helped develop an alternate route for the school in case of a fire. It that route which Hayden used to help evacuate the students.

“Tom was very instrumental in identifying that route and making it available to us in case of an emergency, and (Friday), it came into play,” Epp said. “He helped scout out how we would get kids over there and actually showed us the route itself. ... He got us over to the trailhead and got us started on our hike.”

Interstate 70

CDOT spokeswoman Amy Ford said that early Friday morning a couple hundred tons of rock slid off the hillside in the area east of the Twin Tunnels.

I-70 was shut down at the Beaver Brook exit, and CDOT crews, after waiting till daylight, cleaned up the slide and began rock-scaling efforts.

“We had some large boulders up above that we needed to stabilize,” Ford said.

Phyllis Adams, an Idaho Springs city council member and mayoral candidate, was among those stuck on Floyd Hill for the evening while they waited for crews to reopen the road.

“I do not recommend it,” Adams joked.

Adams said law enforcement initially told her that the spill could be cleaned up in four to five hours, so she decided to just stick it out. Area parking lots were full, and semi trucks waited along the side of the road.

“(I) got the two blankets I’ve been carrying in the trunk of my car for years that I never had need of, reclined my seat and actually got about four hours of, I wouldn’t say ‘good sleep,’ but sleep,” Adams said.

Work was completed and traffic began to clear up about 2 p.m.

PHOTOS BY KENNY DARNELL
| FOR THE COURANT