

FLOOD WATCH 2017: River Road to close as Alton braces for more water

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
May 3 2017 10:53 AM



ALTON - While Alton Public Works Director Bob Barnhart is considering current flooding Alton still relatively minor, he said more than a foot of water was still coming following a predicted Wednesday morning crest.

Currently, Alton's river level is at 31.8 feet, Barnhart said. That number still ranks it among lesser floods in Alton, especially when compared to the last five years. The National Weather Service (NWS) predicted the Mississippi River in Alton would crest

Wednesday morning, but Barnhart said that timing may be as late as Thursday with an additional 1.7 feet expected by then.

"It all depends on where the rain hits," he said. "That forecast is considering rainfall expected in the next 24-48 hours. Northern rains may negatively affect downtown."



Closures so far include portions of the Great River Road, or Highway 100, which connects Alton and Grafton. Barnhart said the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) closed the road at the corner of Broadway and State Street due to its inaccessibility, and parts of the River Road are seeing water creep over the pavement as of Wednesday morning. The entire road is expected to be closed by noon today.

Businesses in Downtown Alton, where most of the flooding is currently taking place, are still open, Barnhart said. Many of them, however, are pumping water from their basements. A newly-utilized Muscle Wall has been built around the path of the flooding, and it is being aided by as many as 400 sandbags, with as many as 700 still in reserve if needed. That Muscle Wall is designed to handle floods resulting from river levels as high as 35 feet, Barnhart said.

"The Madison County Emergency Management Agency lent us the sandbagging machine," Barnhart said. "We were able to fill about 1,000 of them."

Barnhart said the Muscle Wall will protect the town from minor floods like these, but may have to institute former measures with larger floods. The portable plastic barricades are placed in segments, much in the same fashion as side-by-side Lego blocks. Each section of the wall is approximately 100 pounds, and may easily be put into place by two workers. The cost for the wall is roughly \$100 a foot, or \$20,000 for all of them currently held by the city. They are also reusable.

Unfortunately, these plastic barricades will be ineffective against flooding with river levels above 36 feet, Barnhart said, because it is not possible to add elevation to the barricades, which are around five feet tall. In those cases, concrete blocks and sandbags will have to be utilized, much in the same fashion as the 1,000 foot long flood wall built from December 2015 to January 2016 for unprecedented flooding.

"Everything is going according to plan so far," Barnhart said Wednesday morning. "This should be considered a minor flood compared to what we've experienced the last four to five years."

However, Barnhart has since updated that information to reflect the fact this flooding could break into top 10 recent floods, even if it is still relatively minor.



