

FLOOD OF 2019: Governor Pays Visit to Flood Ravaged Grafton

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June 6 2019 1:59 PM





GRAFTON — Governor JB Pritzker paid a special visit to Grafton on Tuesday and announced he has activated an additional 200 Illinois National Guard soldiers for State Active Duty to engage in the state's active flood fight along the Illinois and Mississippi rivers.

This came as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers confirmed an overtopping at the Nutwood Levee, which forced the closure of Illinois State Route 16 at the Joe Page Bridge near Hardin. In all, more than 400 guardsmen are reinforcing the state's efforts to fight raging floodwaters as more precipitation takes aim on river communities.

Task Force 2 (TF2) is made up of approximately 200 soldiers supporting flood operations in the Metro East area of Illinois. The soldiers of TF2 are drawn from the 233rd Military Police Company based in Springfield, 933rd Military Police Company based in Fort Sheridan, 1844th Transportation Company based in East St. Louis, and the 709th Medical Company from Bartonville, Illinois.

“The State of Illinois will use every resource at its disposal to protect our residents and our communities from devastating floods,” said Governor JB Pritzker. “As we continue to strengthen our levees in west-central Illinois, we must also plan and prepare for this force of nature to move downstream to our southern Illinois communities. These soldiers will help not only bolster our current numbers on the ground but allow us to pre-position key assets in downstream communities to prepare for what's to come in the days ahead.”

On Tuesday, state and local leaders joined Governor Pritzker, Illinois Emergency Management Agency Acting Director Alicia Tate-Nadeau, Illinois Department of Transportation Secretary Omer Osmen, Illinois Department of Agriculture Director John Sullivan and Director of the Illinois National Guard Joint Staff Michael Glisson for an operational briefing at the State's Unified Area Command (SUAC) in Winchester.

The briefing included updates on the health and stability of levees by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, troop deployments and mission overviews from the Illinois National Guard and a report on deployed state assets. To date, the state of Illinois has provided more than three million sandbags, more than 2,700 rolls of plastic, 27 pumps and five dozen IDOC offenders to assist local communities as they fight rising floodwaters and protect our state's critical infrastructure.

“The State of Illinois has been a victim to a seemingly constant wave of storms that have generated significant rainfall, extreme levee saturation, and devastating river flooding,” said Tate-Nadeau. “Our priority has been protecting the life, health and safety

of our state's residents. As we press forward, our local and state emergency managers remain steadfast and committed to protecting our state's critical infrastructure which helps to ensure continuity of key community lifelines."

Illinois State Police Director Brendan Kelly said the Illinois State Police is diverted some of its manpower from other parts of the state to assist in flood issues.

"We are trying to support IEMA, ILEAS, the local sheriff's departments and police," he said. "Long-term, we have to build up our manpower in the Illinois State Police. We have a long list of tasks that we are expected to do. "

Grafton Mayor Rick Eberlin appreciated the visit by Gov. Pritzker and the future help. He said the pressure of the river water now is so great it is getting in between cracks in the pavement. We are glad to see the crest forecast lessened. The flood has been devastating on Grafton businesses. A lot of businesses are accessible but can't afford to open because there isn't enough traffic."

Emergency Management officials are advising residents in river communities to have a family evacuation plan in place, in the event an evacuation is necessary due to rising floodwaters.

In an effort to encourage everyone in Illinois is prepared for emergencies, the Illinois Emergency Management Agency's public preparedness website, Ready Illinois, is available in multiple languages, including Spanish, French, German, Filipino and more. To learn more about emergency preparedness for all hazards, man-made or natural, visit www.ready.illinois.gov.



