

Maine Department of Defense, Veterans and Emergency Management

State House Station 72 Augusta, Maine 04333

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

AUGUSTA:. This winter's weather has resulted in normal river flows throughout the State. Even after recent snow melt, snowpack levels are normal throughout Maine with the exception of southwest coastal sections, where levels are below normal for this time of year. "We want to remind Maine citizens and local officials that spring conditions can change rapidly. Rainfall is the single most important factor in determining the timing and magnitude of significant floods in Maine," said Bob Lent, District Chief, US Geological Survey and co-chairman of the Maine Riverflow Advisory Commission, following the Commission's meeting yesterday in Augusta. Snowpack is an important secondary factor which can add to flooding problems, as occurred in the April 1987 floods. Ice jams can produce locally severe flooding.

At the meeting held on March 2nd, the Commission reviewed statewide hydrologic conditions and determined that river flows were normal statewide. River basin managers report headwater storage levels are normal to slightly above their normal pre-spring drawdown.

The ice in mainstem rivers in central and southern Maine appears to be eroding normally. Tributaries and rivers in northern Maine remain ice-covered. Ice thicknesses in Northern Maine are slightly below normal. Despite the seemingly natural erosion of ice on many rivers, the potential for flooding associated with ice jams still exists with the start of spring runoff, as ice is carried down from the headwaters.

On February 28th through March 1, snow depths ranged from several inches near the coast to up to 3 feet in western and northern Maine. Snowpack water equivalents generally ranged from 5-6 inches in the St. John River Basin, 2-5 inches in the St. Croix, 3-9 inches in the Penobscot River Basin, 3-9 inches in the Kennebec River Basin, 2-10 inches in the Androscoggin River Basin, and 1-6 inches in the Saco Basin and 1-4 inches in the Presumpscot River Basin. Average snowpack water equivalents are near normal in northern, western and eastern Maine, and below normal in southern coastal Maine and the lower Penobscot River Basin.

Tom Hawley of the National Weather Service office in Gray reports that 2.0 to 2.9 inches of combined rainfall and snowmelt over a 12-hour period would be sufficient to cause flooding in small streams and adjacent lowlands in Maine. Hawley also indicated that above-normal temperatures and normal precipitation are predicted for the next 10 days. For the remainder of March, normal temperatures and normal precipitation are expected.

According to Art Cleaves, Emergency Management Director in the Maine Department of Defense, Veterans and Emergency Management and co-chair of the Commission, citizens should stay aware of National Weather Service forecasts as the spring progresses, and talk to their local officials and County Emergency Management Agencies if they have questions about flood preparedness in their communities. Members of the Maine River Flow Advisory Commission monitor conditions on an ongoing basis. The Commission has launched an Internet site, www.state.me.us/rfac, linking to many sources of current information on streamflow and snow survey maps and data, weather forecasts, preparedness, flood insurance and risk reduction measures. In addition, The National Weather Service Forecast Offices in Gray and Caribou are planning a Flood Awareness Day on March 16. NWS will use many avenues of public information to focus attention on flood preparedness and safety.

The Maine Department of Transportation reminds Maine motorists that during a flood they should not drive on submerged roads, as the stability of the road may have been severely damaged by flood waters. Highway crews will place signs and barricades to warn of flooded sections of road. Motorists who ignore these warnings and drive through flooded areas are gambling with their own safety and that of their passengers. Motorists should always seek an alternate route around flooded areas and avoid taking unnecessary chances by driving through flooded areas. A flooded road may be damaged to the point that it will not support a vehicle.

Important factors for springtime floods in order of relative importance are as follows:

- **RAINFALL:** This is the most important factor in determining the magnitude of significant floods in Maine. If precipitation during April and May are normal and evenly distributed, then streamflow will be in the normal range. However, if significant rainfall occurs over a short period of time, flooding could result.
- **SNOW COVER:** This is a secondary factor and can add to rainfall events. As the snow pack becomes more "ripe" (nearly saturated), it can melt quickly and significantly add to a flood peak. Snow melt alone should not produce major floods.
- **RIVER ICE:** Ice jams can cause increased damage by temporarily blocking rivers and streams and causing higher water levels behind the jam. Peak flows downstream increase when jams break up and quickly release stored water.
- **TEMPERATURE:** Warm days with freezing night temperatures allow a gradual melting and runoff of the snowpack.
- **RESERVOIR STORAGE:** Maine's headwater storage reservoirs typically reach their annual low water levels in March. These reservoirs can moderate downstream flood peaks if rainfall occurs above the storage dams while the reservoir's water levels are down. The reservoir systems have limited ability to moderate flood peaks in the lower parts of the river basins if large amounts of rain fall or if heavy rains fall downstream of the storage dams.

The Maine River Flow Advisory Commission is composed of representatives from eight major river basin management operations, seven state agencies, two federal agencies and the University of Maine. The Commission was originally formed after the spring floods of 1983 to improve the exchange of hydrologic information collected by the members, to review the data, and to provide information to emergency action agencies and the public. It was created in [statute](#) by the Legislature in 1997.

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