The Record Flood of 2019

Ken Doke, Commissioner
Muskogee County
Beginning May 21st, the AR River near Muskogee rose over 20 feet in just a few days to the highest level in recorded history. It remained at historically high levels for nearly a week. Major flooding continued for weeks. River did not return to its banks for over 1.5 months.
• Thousands of homes were evacuated
• Water Rescue teams checked attics
• Lost utilities and all communications to much of the town of Fort Gibson
• Evacuated homes and farms all along the river in Muskogee County
• Evacuated the entire town of Webbers Falls
• Town was a total loss by the end of the event
• Flooded all municipal buildings, school, businesses, farm crops, etc.
• Destroyed town infrastructure
• Hundreds of road closures including major state highways and bridges
• Lost access across HW 62 between Muskogee & Fort Gibson
• Establishing routes for first responders became a huge priority
EMERGENCY RESPONSE

- Communities became completely cut off
- Many bridges were shut down
- Railways were under water
- 1.5 Hour round-trip to Fort Gibson and Braggs
EMERGENCY RESPONSE

- Lost Electricity
- Lost Water
- Lost Sewer
- Lost Communications
- Lost Supply Lines
EMERGENCY RESPONSE

- Nearly lost water to the 44,000 residents of Muskogee
- Dike & Sand Bag Operation
- Water was inches from topping the Dike
CRISIS SITUATION

- With flows of over 700,000 cfs, barges broke loose & hit the downstream dam
- USS Batfish was loosed
- Resources were maxed
EMERGENCY RESPONSE
Managing The Public Message

- Ease the panic
- Squash the rumors
- Dissemination of information
- Situation changed by the minute
- Social Media
PARTNERS RESPONSE

- Muskogee County & ODOT build “impossible road”
- Power Companies Back feed each other
- Union Pacific helps establish supply line to cut off communities
- Cherokee Nation, City of Muskogee, towns, national guard, churches, police, fire, EMS, etc.
AFTERMATH

• 833 Flooded Structures
• Nearly 500 Families Lost Everything
• Entire town of Webbers Falls devastated
• Damage to crops & homes estimated at over $100 Million
AFTERMATH

- Roads demolished
- Farms & Crops erased
- Bridges damaged
- Rail Lines rendered useless
- Port of Muskogee impaired
- Nav Channel impassable
- Comm Towers Damaged

Water has receded off of Hancock but still not passable due to this awesome hole. See More
AFTERMATH

- Companies wrecked
- Sewer & Water Plants offline
- Utility infrastructure annihilated
- Never-ending debris
ECONOMIC IMPACT

- Hundreds of layoffs
- Unemployment up 2%
- Housing Shortage
- Economic Impact of Impassable Nav Channel is $2 Million / Day
- Damage could exceed $500 Million
GOING FORWARD

• Application for EDA Grant to build a levee system around the Muskogee Port and Industrial Park area (estimated at $6 Million).
• Efforts to remove residents from areas prone to river flooding, or requiring home elevations to be raised to new standards.
• Leaving contingency drinking water options in place, along with; substations, backup roads, etc.
Closing Remarks

- We were fortunate
- Zero loss of life
- It takes resources to respond to catastrophic disasters
- If Muskogee County had not had the preparedness and resources, there could have been significant loss of life
- Information was critical
- We will be better prepared next time

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