



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS, NORTHWESTERN DIVISION
PO BOX 2870
PORTLAND, OR 97208-2870

May 31, 2019

Honorable Joni Ernst
United States Senator
730 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Ernst,

Thank you for the letter dated May 3, 2019, concerning the recent flooding in the Missouri River Basin and sharing the concerns you have received from your constituents regarding communications from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) before and during the flood event. We take this feedback from you and your constituents very seriously and we are making changes to our communication.

Since 2012 season, from January to June, our Missouri River Water Management office conducts monthly webinars, inviting Congressional, Tribal, state and local government officials, levee sponsors and emergency managers, as well as members of the media, to participate in a webinar. During these sessions the National Weather Service provides updates on basin weather and runoff conditions and the Corps provides updates on the reservoir System storage status and expected operations from the Corps. There is also time allotted for all participants to ask questions of the agencies. We increase the frequency of these sessions, to daily if warranted, when conditions indicate significant runoff or flooding is imminent, as we did in March.

Your letter requests that within 30 days the Corps start sending weekly e-mail updates to local sponsors of Corps levees in the basin from January through June with updates on a variety of Corps and NWS information/forecasts. I have made changes and we will conduct weekly calls beginning the first week of June this year that will continue throughout the 2019 flood season. We will provide the information you requested and the webinar has the added benefit of being interactive with subject matter experts so any questions can be immediately answered. In addition, we will send out a weekly update via email to all levee sponsors in the basin notifying them about these webinars and will also include the link to our webpage where they can access similar information anytime, and as frequently as they deem necessary, on their computers or smartphones.

The Missouri River Water Management offices also recently created links to their web page for the public to access official agency forecast information from the National Weather Service, the U.S. Geological Survey, as well as the Corps, that can be saved to a smartphone and accessed on demand <https://go.usa.gov/xmQFV>. This page was

created on March 16, has been referenced regularly in our communications, and has been accessed 5,500 times since its creation.

We understand the importance of ensuring the public receives timely and clear communication from the appropriate public agencies to be able to monitor river conditions, prepare for potential flooding, and make informed decisions about their property and safety. The National Weather Service is the official government provider to the public of weather forecasts which includes river stages. They issue precipitation forecasts, climate outlooks and river stage forecasts and did so on numerous occasions before the flooding in your states occurred in March. The Corps then accesses these forecasts issued by the NWS to evaluate conditions and determine impacts to the operation of our system of dams and levees.

Corps personnel also communicate regularly with levee sponsors and emergency managers on the status of their levees and the risks associated with the levee systems. In fact, on March 11, the Omaha District was hosting its annual flood-fight training that was attended by 100 local levee sponsors and emergency managers who were presented the spring flood outlook and the forecast for the bomb cyclone from the NWS.

Thank you again for your feedback and please be assured the Corps continually strives to improve how best we can communicate to all basin stakeholders how we are operating the System in light of current and ever-changing basin conditions.

Sincerely,



D. Peter Helmlinger, P.E.
Brigadier General, US Army
Division Commander