

LOCALNEWS

Relief officials begin disaster assessment

BY SPENSER BICKETT
Staff Writer

Federal and state emergency relief officials arrived in Koochiching County Thursday to begin the process of qualifying the county for federal relief funding to help recover from recent flooding. Minnesota Homeland Security and Emergency Management and Federal Emergency Management Association officials met with county and city employees Thursday to begin reviewing documentation to see if the area qualifies for the president's recent disaster declaration. On Monday, President Barack Obama declared a major disaster in Minnesota after widespread flooding throughout the state. The initial declaration includes eight counties: Chippewa, Freeborn, Jackson, Murray, Nobles, Pipestone, Renville, and Rock, though more counties can be added as preliminary damage assessments are completed. The incident period for the disaster is June 11-July 11, Angie Brown, disaster

recovery coordinator with HSEM, said. "What we are trying to look at is to qualify your county for the presidential declaration," Brown said. Brown said FEMA and HSEM officials are evaluating eight different categories of eligible work: debris removal; emergency protective measures; roads and bridges; water control facilities; buildings and equipment; utilities; and parks, recreation, and other facilities. "We're taking what we can actually see, physically see on your invoices," Brown said. "Our goal today is to get your county qualified." Once the county meets the threshold for damage, Brown said, it'll be added to the presidential disaster declaration. Then, HSEM officials will return to brief county officials on the application process, at which point FEMA officials will return, and conduct a more in-depth damage assessment. "Hopefully, by the time we come back most of your water levels are down and we'll be able to get your damages," Brown said.

Falls officials: City Beach still closed

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

City Beach continues to be closed for swimming and camping until further notice, states a news release issued Thursday by International Falls staff. A sign is now posted at the gate of City Beach. People at the beach have been observed swimming in recent weeks when the gates have been open and no sign posted. Lifeguards have not been posted there since it was closed in mid-June after the level of Rainy Lake began to rise. The beach has tested for positive for high levels of bacteria, according to staff. The news release states, as a result of the continued high water levels: ■ Debris has accumulated and is periodically being removed from the swimming beach area by city staff. ■ Beach sand has eroded from the east and west sides of the beach leaving areas exposed to gravel and rock. ■ The receding water levels have carried debris and caused contaminated materials to run into the lake from a variety of sources. Early water tests have shown elevated levels of bacteria. The water quality is now being tested along the south shore of Rainy Lake at City Beach, Ranier Beach, Pat Roche Landing,



STAFF PHOTO

A sign posted Thursday at the gate of City Beach indicates the beach is closed to swimming and camping because of flooding. Early water tests have shown elevated levels of bacteria, according to a news release issued Thursday. Test will continued to be conducted. Some people in recent weeks have found the gates open and no signs posted and believed the beach safe for use, despite a lack of lifeguards.

Point O'Pines, Mary's Point and Sha Sha Point. Routine weekly testing will be conducted by the Koochiching County Public Health staff through the summer at both City Beach and Ranier Beach to ensure the waters are safe for swimming. ■ Many shoreland areas have been covered with flood water for an extended period of time. The areas with grass and other vegetative cover are subject to further

damage and erosion until such time as the ground dries and the soils stabilize. "As a result of these conditions, in the interest of public safety, the City Beach swimming and camping areas will remain closed to public use until further notice," said the release. The rest rooms and gates to City Beach are closed and the swimming beach is posted with caution tape and "No Swimming" signs.

The media will be notified immediately when City Beach is re-opened for public use. The public may monitor the city of International Falls website for further informational updates as they become available at www.ci.international-falls.mn.us. "We thank you for your strong volunteer spirit, understanding, and cooperation," said the release from the city.

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