

Hour-by-hour: A chronology of the Northland floods of 2012

Hour-by-hour, here's a chronology of the first days of the Northland flooding of 2012, compiled from National Weather Service reports, posts on the News Tribune's flooding live blog and News Tribune staff reports.

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A week ago — though for many, it seems like an eternity — forecasters at the National Weather Service in Duluth were keeping tabs on the potential for heavy rain in the Northland in the days to come.

But no one could have predicted the forces of nature that came together to dump in excess of 10 inches of rain on parts of the region — sparking flash flooding in Duluth and up the North Shore, and a longer-duration river flood event for areas south and west of Duluth.

All through that first night and continuing over the following days, the News Tribune kept Northland residents apprised of the latest flood information and relayed storm reports from readers across the region via Facebook, Twitter and a live blog at duluthnewstribune.com.

Hour-by-hour, here's a chronology of the first days of the flood event, compiled from National Weather Service reports, posts on the DNT's live blog and News Tribune staff reports:

Monday, June 18

AFTERNOON

The National Weather Service in Duluth issues a flash flood watch for Northeastern Minnesota for Tuesday and Wednesday, with a forecast of “2 to 4 inches possible through Wednesday morning, with some spots receiving even higher amounts.”

News of the flash flood watch is posted online at duluthnewstribune.com that evening, and is included in Tuesday's print edition.

Tuesday, June 19

AFTERNOON

Severe thunderstorms roll across much of the Northland, dropping hail and an initial round of heavy rain in many areas, including 2 inches in Floodwood. Flash flood watch continues. The News Tribune starts its severe weather live blog, which will continue on-and-off, as time allows, for the next 2½ days.

5-6 P.M.

Reports start to roll in from Grand Rapids and the western Iron Range of torrential rain and street flooding as another round of storms slowly sweeps across the area. Spotters report 1.5 inches of rain in 45 minutes in Grand Rapids, with streets under 4 to 6 inches downtown.

An urban and small stream flood advisory is issued for Grand Rapids and the western Iron Range at about 5:30 p.m. That's upgraded to a more serious flash flood warning at 6:01 p.m., to be in effect until midnight.

6:28 P.M.

As the intense rainfall moves eastward, at 6:28 p.m. the National Weather Service in Duluth issues a flash flood warning for the Duluth area, eastern Iron Range and Two Harbors until midnight, noting that total rainfall in the area may reach 4 to 7 inches.

7:13 P.M.

Torrential rain starts to fall on the north side of Duluth.

7:21 P.M.

A flash flood warning is issued for central Lake and Cook counties.

7:27 P.M.

The Weather Service issues a forecast update reporting that a “high-end and life-threatening flash flood event appears to be developing across a large part of northern Minnesota.”

ABOUT 7:45 P.M.

Report of water running over Arrowhead Road between Haines and Rice Lake roads.

8 P.M.

Water reported over the Highway 61 Expressway and Scenic Highway 61 near Larsmont.

8:20 P.M.

Street flooding reported in Lakeside, followed minutes later by reports of water flooding down Sixth Avenue East in Duluth’s Hillside, and over lanes of U.S. Highway 53 near Minnesota Highway 194.

8:27 P.M.

Flooding reported on Interstate 35 in the downtown Duluth tunnels, with at least one car stalled.

8:32 P.M.

Flooding reported on Third Street between Sixth and Seventh Avenues East in Duluth, in the vicinity of what would become a massive wall collapse near Whole Foods Coop.

9-10 P.M.

The initial surge of heavy rain ends in Duluth, but radar shows many more storms lining up to the west. As the scope and severity of the flooding comes into focus, News Tribune journalists scramble to get flood photos and information; the front page is reworked to accommodate the news.

9:23 P.M.

Spotter reports 6 inches of water over Minnesota Highway 61 at Little Marais.

9:45 P.M.

Floodwood Police advise no travel in that community.

ABOUT 10 P.M.

- Minnesota State Patrol closes Highway 61 between Duluth and Two Harbors; closure also reported on 61 at the Silver Creek Tunnel north of Two Harbors.
- Duluth Police ask drivers to stay off city streets; flooding reports at the entrances to Morgan Park; on Kenwood Avenue; in the I-35 tunnels; and on Superior Street at 82nd Avenue East, among other places.
- Manholes reported to be blowing out in Lakeside.

10:48 P.M

Travelers reported stranded at Betty's Pies north of Two Harbors, unable to go either direction on Highway 61 because of flooding.

10:49 P.M.

Manhole spouting "like a water fountain" near Greysolon Plaza in downtown Duluth.

11:19 P.M.

Live blog reader reports 2 feet of water coming down Second Street in Proctor.

11:24 P.M.

Live blog reader, home after traveling from Split Rock Lighthouse to Two Harbors, reports Highway 61 "literally breaking apart, pieces of asphalt all over." Another reader reports flooding on Highway 53 at Canyon.

11:34 P.M.

Weather Service issues a new flash flood warning for Duluth and the North Shore until 5:30 a.m. Wednesday.

11:40 P.M.

Water reported to be knee-deep along Mall Drive near Wells Fargo in Duluth.

11:48 P.M.

Water reported to be reaching the bottom of parked cars near Fitger's in Duluth; at about the same time a text message goes out from the University of Wisconsin-Superior, reporting the school will be closed Wednesday because of flooding.

11:53 P.M.

Reader reports most streets south of Belknap Street in Superior are flooded, extending down into the Billings Park area.

Wednesday, June 20

12:01 A.M.

- Live blog reader comment: "I was waiting to hear the sump start up, then eventually realized it WAS on and was going nonstop."
- Sidewalk along Eighth Avenue East between First and Second streets in Duluth reported to be caved in.

12:07 A.M.

Longer-duration flood warning issued for areas including Cloquet, Moose Lake, Carlton, Floodwood, Aitkin, Grand Rapids, Hibbing and Ely until noon.

12:13 A.M.

Street flooding reported on Superior Street in Lincoln Park business district; gravel reported to be washing down 40th Avenue West from higher elevations along Haines Road in Duluth.

12:18 A.M.

Flood warning issued for Superior and the South Shore of Lake Superior until noon. Several county roads reported closed in northern Douglas County.

12:24 A.M.

Upper elevations of Glenwood Street reported to be “littered with chunks of asphalt.”

12:35 A.M.

- Estimated 6 inches of water in Superior Street from near Pickwick Restaurant to London Road, runoff from higher up the Duluth Hillside.
- Chester Creek flooding in Kenwood neighborhood.

12:41 A.M.

Water reported to be shooting from manholes along Boundary Avenue in Proctor.

12:47 A.M.

- Live blog reader comment: “I live near Grand Avenue and Raleigh Street and have a good view of Grand from my house. We always get some flooding on Grand, but this is the worst I can remember seeing in over 20 years here. Even emergency vehicles moving quite cautiously through there.”
- Car reported nearly submerged near 40th Avenue West and Grand Avenue.

12:52 A.M.

- Police reported to be blocking intersection of Woodland Avenue and St. Marie Street where Tischer Creek is flooding.
- Car reported to have just fallen in sinkhole on Skyline Parkway near Ninth Avenue East; four occupants escape.

1:11 A.M.

Report of flooding at both entrances to Morgan Park.

1:17 A.M.

Report of someone trapped in car partially submerged in sinkhole on Seventh Avenue East at First Street.

1:39 A.M.

The National Weather Service in Duluth reports: “This appears to be a flood reminiscent of the flood of 1972 and one that should not be taken lightly. ... We cannot stress what a major threat this is for the city of Duluth and along the North Shore.”

1:47 A.M.

Live blog reader comment: “First time in 25 years in my house that we have had water in the basement, in Duluth Heights.”

2 A.M.

A drive through Duluth reveals countless streets covered in running water, manholes spouting water and gravel and other debris strewn about. Lightning flashes in the sky as heavy rain continues to fall.

2:25 A.M.

Reports on police scanner of evacuations under way in and near the Fond du Lac neighborhood of Duluth.

2:27 A.M.

Report of 6.38 inches of rain and counting in Duluth’s Lester Park neighborhood.

ABOUT 2:30 A.M.

Reports on police scanner that Minnesota Power plans to increase water flow from its hydroelectric dams on the St. Louis River. Dams are reported to not be at risk of failure — but water levels may rise more in areas downstream, including Fond du Lac.

2:40 A.M.

Report on police scanner of a seal swimming on Grand Avenue near the Lake Superior Zoo.

2:55 A.M.

Water reported to be rising to level of windows on Grandma’s Restaurant on Maple Grove Road in Duluth.

3:19 A.M.

- Evacuations reported at homes along 59th Avenue West in Duluth, near Keene Creek.
- Four feet of water reported on streets in central Proctor.

3:36 A.M.

Water reported to be several feet deep on South Street below London Road; spilling over onto Interstate 35.

3:49 A.M.

Roads reported to be flooded as deep as car windows near Superior High School.

3:50 A.M.

Live blog reader comment: “The creek at Columbus Avenue and Arrowhead is raging over its banks and homes along the creek are flooded. Unreal!”

3:52 A.M.

Initial reports of a polar bear missing from its enclosure at the Lake Superior Zoo. Police and fire officials assisting zoo staff in tracking down animals unaccounted for on zoo grounds.

4-5 A.M.

Reports of flooding in Duluth start to make way to media outlets in Twin Cities and at the national level.

4:07 A.M.

Reader comment: “Mission Creek is very high in Esko and is within 40 feet of my house, normally 250 feet away.”

4:51 A.M.

Reports of roads caving in near Barker’s Island in Superior.

5 A.M.

Duluth Police advise emergency travel only in the city.

5:08 A.M.

Water rescue situation reported on Wahl Road in Lakewood Township.

5:18 A.M.

Duluth city officials announce City Hall will be closed Wednesday.

5:21 A.M.

Flash flood warning for Duluth and North Shore extended until 4:30 p.m.

ABOUT 5:30 A.M.

Carlton County Sheriff’s Office recommends no travel in county; evacuations recommended in Thomson area; Highway 210 closed in Jay Cooke State Park.

5:38 A.M.

Storm total of 6.91 inches of rain and counting near Floodwood.

5:58 A.M.

Superior Police report flooding on Tower Avenue near 46th Street, 28th Street near Superior High School and Hill Avenue between North 21st Street and Belknap Street, among other areas.

ABOUT 6 A.M.

Duluth police officers at the Lake Superior Zoo report all animals, including the polar bear, are accounted for.

6:30 A.M.

White Pine River reported to be flowing 2 to 3 feet deep over Highway 33 north of Cloquet.

6:30-7:30 A.M.

Evacuees from the Fond du Lac neighborhood — residents and campers — wait aboard a Duluth Transit Authority bus parked on Highway 23 in view of floodwaters covering the road. After a brief break, heavy rain begins again. When the last evacuee arrives, the bus heads to an evacuation center at Duluth's First United Methodist (coppertop) Church.

7:15 A.M.

Estimated 3 feet of water over Maple Grove Road east of Midway Road in Hermantown.

7:26 A.M.

Irving Park in West Duluth reported to be completely under water.

7:30 A.M.

The Minnesota Department of Public Safety's Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management activates the state emergency operations center to respond to the flooding in Northeastern Minnesota.

7:32 A.M.

Wisconsin Highway 105 closed between Village of Superior and Oliver.

7:34 A.M.

Parts of Martin Road west of Rice Lake Road, north of Duluth, reported to be flooded.

8 A.M.

- Evacuations under way in Thomson after Thomson Reservoir and spillway overflow into the community.
- Jay Cooke State Park evacuated

8:15 A.M.

- Rainfall total of 7.72 inches and counting reported at Alborn.
- Bayfield County closes Wisconsin Highway 13 from Cornucopia west to the Douglas County line.

8:27 A.M.

Lake Superior Zoo reports that "all zoo animals have been secured. Sadly the zoo experienced the loss of several animals, among them many of the barnyard residents. Due to flooding, the zoo's polar bear Berlin was able to exit her exhibit. She was darted by the zoo's vet and is safe in quarantine. At no time did any dangerous animal leave the perimeter fence."

8:45 A.M.

Residents of West Duluth gather to look at homes flooded by Keene Creek along 59th Avenue West, which is closed because of the flood.

9:13 A.M.

The Western Lake Superior Sanitary District reports that the heavy rain caused sewer overflows.

9:15 A.M.

- Residents survey the buckled remains of pavement on Olney Street above 57th Avenue West in West Duluth.
- Communications in Lake County difficult if not impossible all morning long because phone and Internet service is down.

9:30 A.M.

A crowd has gathered along West Third Street at Lincoln Park in Duluth, where the raging Miller Creek has covered the lower part of the park. Below Third Street, it has flooded homes and cars.

9:41 A.M.

- Camping area at Cloquet's Spafford Park reported to be evacuated because of flooding from the St. Louis River.
- Weather spotter reports storm total of 9 inches of rain and counting near Denfeld High School in West Duluth.

10 A.M.

Trucks — and a few brave cars — ford overflow from Tischer Creek as they make their way up Vermilion Road and St. Marie Street to Wallace Avenue in Duluth. Crowds gather to watch the scene there, and also a couple blocks away where a kayaker paddles across St. Marie west of Woodland.

10:26 A.M.

The National Weather Service issues a new flash flood warning for Duluth, Superior and Cloquet until 10:30 p.m.

10:30 A.M.

Interstate 35 reported closed near Carlton.

10:30-11:30 A.M.

Severe thunderstorm warnings issued for Twin Ports as another round of storms sweeps across the area.

10:45 A.M.

As torrential rain starts yet again, U.S. highway 53, Maple Grove Road and Mall Drive are flooded near the Miller Hill Mall. The parking lots of the Target and Savers stores are underwater, and several feet of water are flooding the Grandma's restaurant. Amid the pouring rain, three men waded out to a flooded car in the Savers parking lot in an attempt to tow it away. A high-clearance 4x4 truck spins circles in the water nearby.

11:17 A.M.

News Tribune staffers report that the Ninth Street bridge over Chester Creek is closed to be inspected for damage; Chester Parkway closed because of washouts; major damage in Chester Bowl.

11:30 A.M.

- Midway Road closed because of flooding from the Midway River, between U.S. Highway 2 and Interstate 35.
- The car remains in the sinkhole on Skyline Parkway near Ninth Avenue East.

11:34 A.M.

City of Superior declares a state of emergency.

11:36 A.M.

City of Hermantown declares a state of emergency.

NOON

Heavy traffic, including vehicles detoured off I-35, moves slowly along First Street at Seventh Avenue East, dodging water, rocks and gravel still washing down from the massive washout three blocks uphill at Whole Foods Coop.

12:23 P.M.

County roads being used as a detour for Highway 61 between Duluth and Two Harbors are reported to be deteriorating.

12:30 P.M.

r Reader reports lots of washouts of roads along and crossing the Lester River from eastern Duluth up into Lakewood Township.

r Reports of a child washed into a culvert near Proctor; child is found, injured but alive, within the hour.

r Interstate 35 remains closed across much of Duluth.

12:40 P.M.

Piers and docks reported to under water, some floating away at Little Grand Lake.

1 P.M.

Passersby stop to watch floodwaters eating away at the bed of railroad tracks near Spirit Mountain in Duluth. The damage causes a disruption to train traffic between Iron Range mines and Duluth.

1:50 P.M.

City of Duluth sends out a flooding update, reporting that:

- Major streets closed include Interstate 35 from Central Avenue all the way across town to 26th Avenue East; Minnesota Highway 23 in Fond du Lac; U.S. Highway 53 near Miller Hill Mall London Road at

43rd Avenue East; Superior Street between 34th and 40th avenues West; large parts of Skyline Parkway; Superior Street at Eighth Avenue East; Arrowhead Road near Woodland Avenue; Kenwood Avenue near Skyline Parkway.

☐ Miller Hill Mall is without power and closed.

2 P.M.

Weather spotter reports 9.93 inches of rain near Two Harbors.

2:15 P.M.

Reports that parts of the city of Carlton near the Thomson Reservoir are being evacuated; a few hours later 1 to 2 feet of standing water is reported in the center of town.

2:40 P.M.

The Knife River bridge on Scenic Highway 61 is drawing lots of onlookers as it's strewn with trees and debris from the river, which is well out of its banks.

3:29 P.M.

News Tribune reports that Duluth city officials say damage is in the millions of dollars, and the city will seek federal disaster aid.

3:34 P.M.

State of emergency declared in Wrenshall.

4:42 P.M.

Spotter reported storm total of 10.10 inches of rain northeast of Duluth.

4:45 P.M.

The St. Louis River at Scanlon, reaches its highest level on record: 16.62 feet, more than a half-foot above the previous record set in 1950. The River Inn in Scanlon is damaged by the high water.

4:50 P.M.

Interstate 35 is reported to be open again within the city of Duluth, but remains closed south of Carlton.

6:14 P.M.

The city of Superior reports that the rising Nemadji River has overtopped Woodlawn Drive, and is threatening traffic on highways 2 and 53.

6:23 P.M.

Officials in Floodwood evacuate several homes near the rising St. Louis and Floodwood rivers.

EVENING

- On the buckled pavement of Vermilion Road, as is the case over much of the city, residents gather to watch and explore the damage caused by rushing water earlier in the day. In some places, floodwaters continue to run down the new channels they carved.
- After staying open during the day, Jean Duluth Road suffers a major collapse at the Lester River culvert near Zimmerman Road, north of Duluth.

Thursday, June 21

EARLY MORNING

Rising waters of Moosehead Lake start to encroach on homes in Moose Lake; water continues to rise throughout the day. Floodwaters from the St. Louis River continue to affect homes in Floodwood and Brookston.

5:15 A.M.

Car remains in sinkhole on Skyline Parkway at ninth Avenue East. After more than a day of clouds and rain, a beautiful sunrise dawns over Lake Superior.

6 A.M.

Interstate 35 remains closed in both directions between Carlton and Mahtowa, and Highway 23 remains closed at Fond du Lac. With so many county and town roads also flooded, finding alternate routes between Duluth and the Twin Cities is difficult if not impossible without traveling long distances.

7 A.M.

Miller Hill Mall reports it will be closed for a second day because of a power outage; a handful of businesses reopen late in the day after electricity is restored.

7:48 A.M.

Large traffic backups reported in Superior as highways 2 and 53 remain open, but are reduced to a single lane in each direction because of flooding from the Nemadji River.

8 A.M.

Residents of Rice Lake and Lakewood townships stop by the gaping hole on Jean Duluth Road, looking down at the massive, mangled remains of the Lester River culvert.

8:19 A.M.

Little Cloquet River rising, now at base of bridge at Pequaywan Lake Road; washouts reported on Fox Farm Road northeast of Duluth.

MID-MORNING

Minnesota Gov. Mark Dayton, Duluth Mayor Don Ness and other local and state officials tour damage at several locations in the city. Dayton pledges quick help from the state for the “terrible devastation.” Damage estimates exceed \$100 million region-wide — and that’s just for public roads and facilities, not private property.

In large parts of Duluth, the focus for city officials and residents alike turns to assessing the damage and starting the long cleanup process.

In the Fond du Lac neighborhood and towns south and west of Duluth, the battle against rising waters continues.