

6. Description of the 1982 Flooding in Fort Wayne Indiana

This report is an excerpt from the United States Geological Survey (USGS) and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) report titled "Floods of March 1982 in Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, and Illinois". The pictures below are from the report.

The effects, of the March 1982 flooding, were devastating particularly on the City of Fort Wayne.

After the record amounts of snowfall recorded at Fort Wayne Indiana, in the winter of 1981-1982 there was no question that a spring flood was probable. As early as mid-February, NWS bulletins warned of the increasing flood potential. Local officials planned how Fort Wayne would deal with the floods. Some people felt that the city was prepared for a flood they knew was coming. The question was when it would occur and how bad it would be. Partial snowmelts in late February, 1982 reduced the snow cover but low temperatures and additional snow and rain during the first week of March maintained a high water content in the snowpack, then came the warmer temperatures, moderate rainfall, and the March snowmelt.

On March 11th, rivers in Fort Wayne began to rise as light rain fell and the temperature rose to 45 °F. That night the temperature dropped below freezing for the last time until March 25th. On March 12th, the temperature kept rising, melting more of the snow cover. Mayor Winfield Moses called his task force members together that afternoon to review the flood-fighting plans. The Emergency Operations Center was activated to coordinate the response to the rising flood waters. Early on March 13th, thunderstorms dropped a quarter inch of rain on the city. The rainfall and runoff from the last of the melting snow caused the St. Marys, St. Joseph and the Maumee Rivers to rise quickly. At 6 am on March 13th, the Maumee River was 5 feet over the 15 foot flood stage and still rising. Water bubbled into the streets as sewers backed up. Low area began to flood and warnings were issued via radio and television. For part of the city it was already too late.

The St. Marys River was the first to crest, and the Nebraska Neighborhood in the western part of Fort Wayne became the first battleground. During the night of March 13th the river rose quickly. Water backed up into Fairfield Ditch and Junk Ditch. As water spilled over the lowest dykes, sandbags were hastily laid, but the dikes gave way or were overtopped and water surged into the surrounding areas. Emergency teams call for rescue boats and more than 3,000 people were forced from their homes by the morning of March 14th. Nebraska had been lost, and other areas were being threatened.

Fed by the St. Marys and the St. Joseph River, the Maumee River continued to rise. Concern also rose as to the stability of the dikes protecting many areas of the city. The river remained above flood stage from March 12th through March 26th, and this prolonged high stage saturated and strained many of the dikes. Thousands of volunteers most of them students, spent days filling, transporting and placing more than a million sandbags in an effort to reinforce the dikes. The best known of their efforts was at Pemberton Drive dike, which protected the Lakeside area in Northeast Fort Wayne. On March 17th, the

Maumee River threatened to top the dike and flood thousands of homes and businesses. More than 6,000 people already had been evacuated from the area as a safety precaution. However through the efforts of the volunteers, the Pemberton Drive dike held and an estimated \$25 million in additional damages was prevented. Their labors won them the cheers of the Nation and of President Reagan, who visited Fort Wayne on March 16, 1982.



Courtesy of the Fort Wayne Journal Gazette



FIGURE 21.—Flooding on Elm Street in the Nebraska neighborhood, Fort Wayne, Ind., during the early stages of the flood. Photograph courtesy of *The Journal-Gazette*, Fort Wayne, Ind.

Courtesy of Ft. Wayne Journal Gazette



FIGURE 23.—Aerial view looking east along West Main Street toward downtown Fort Wayne, Ind. Photograph courtesy of *The Journal-Gazette*, Fort Wayne, Ind.

Courtesy of Ft. Wayne Journal Gazette



FIGURE 26.—President Reagan passing sandbags to reinforce the dike at Sherman Boulevard and Herman Street, Fort Wayne, Ind. Photograph courtesy of *The News-Sentinel*, Fort Wayne, Ind.

Courtesy of the Fort Wayne News Sentinel



FIGURE 27.—Convoy of trucks filled with sandbags. Photograph courtesy of *The Journal-Gazette*, Fort Wayne, Ind.

Courtesy of Ft. Wayne Journal Gazette