

# In Mississippi backwater, flood rises after weeks of waiting

Associated Press

For decades, Peggy Sellars and her husband George have warily watched periodic floodwaters inundate the land around their home in the Mississippi Delta, but the dwelling always remained dry — until this year.

After weeks of fearful waiting, rising water finally got their house on Monday.

Two weeks ago, they had moved out of their residence east of Rolling Fork, correctly concluding the worst flooding since 1973 would overtop a small levee around their neighborhood. They returned twice a day to check things, worried about potential looters and the watery peril to their uninsured house.

Finally, a Monday afternoon boat ride showed the fate Peggy Sellars had feared.

“I’m devastated,” she said. “The water is in my house.”

The Sellars and the farmers who plant crops in the nearby Delta flatland are the latest victims of an unusual flood that involves flood-control structures.

Weeks of rainfall have fed high waters in the Mississippi River, which is lined with a levee that keeps those waters contained. Meanwhile, the Yazoo Backwater Levee also protects thousands of square miles from inundation that could back up the Yazoo River north of Vicksburg.

But the rain that swelled the Mississippi has also sent water rising between the backwater levee and the even taller levee along the Mississippi.

When water is low, the Big Sunflower River, the Little Sunflower River, Deer Creek and Steele Bayou exit the closed-in region through a floodgate along Steele Bayou, eventually reaching the Mississippi. But when the Mississippi is high, the gate is closed to protect against even worse flooding and water backs up across the flat land of the Mississippi Delta. And every time it rains

upstream, more water heads south.

This year, the Steele Bayou floodgate has been closed since Feb. 15. Sharkey County Supervisor Bill Newsom said residents began noticing the water rising out of the wooded swamps about 10 days later. Now, engineers say the region is on track for the worst flood since 1973, before the levee was completed. The water’s steady, inch-by-inch rise is cutting off highways and isolating communities.

Without the backwater levee, the flood would actually be worse. But it’s bad enough. Peter Nimrod, chief engineer of the Mississippi Levee Board, says the flood will cover at least 500,000 acres (200,000 hectares), swamping fields 60 miles (100 kilometers) or more to the north.

In the sparsely populated area, most homes remain dry for now. Newsom estimates about 50 families have moved out across Sharkey County. A Red Cross shelter in nearby Mayersville has no occupants.

But the big economic blow will fall on farmers. By the time things dry out, it will be too late to plant corn. It may still be possible to plant cotton, but farmers might be limited to a late planting of soybeans. Albert Dornbusch, who farms 5,000 acres with his son, said they’ll probably limp by with the assistance of crop insurance payouts linked to their inability to plant, but he’s not sure.

“Tell me when it goes down,” Dornbusch said.

When the backwater levee was built, the plan was to pair it with giant pumps that would suck water out of the area, pushing it over the levee into a flooded Mississippi. But environmentalists fought the pumps for decades, saying they would dry out and destroy wetlands dotting the region. They also argued the pumps, estimated to cost \$220 million, were too expensive and would mainly

benefit farmers.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency vetoed the project in 2008. Advocates made a last-ditch attempt at getting Congress to mandate construction last year before U.S. Sen. Thad Cochran retired and left his powerful post as chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, but they failed.

Newsom remains an advocate of the pumps, saying agriculture is the region’s only industry. He said he doesn’t want to drain wetlands, just control high-water crests like the current one.

“We’re just wanting to have a flood level we can live in,” Newsom said.

But the water isn’t done yet. Forecasters had predicted a brief but sharp drop in the Mississippi River later this month, which could have allowed the floodgate to reopen. That relief now appears unlikely, which could mean weeks more of the long, slow siege.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers announced Monday it was releasing enough water into nearby Eagle Lake to raise already swollen levels by 4 feet (1.2 meters), aiming to prevent a flood-control structure from being undermined. The Mississippi Emergency Management Agency delivered 10,000 sandbags Monday to Sharkey County officials, and heavy rain is possible later this week.

Lance Lowrey, who lives near the Sellars, told Newsom on Monday that he’s ready to evacuate with his daughter and two grandchildren. Water is beginning to submerge part of the state highway leading to Lowrey’s home. That dwelling remains dry for now, but he relies on his truck to make it down his flooded driveway.

“I ain’t got no boat,” Lowrey said.

Standing in a cold, driving rain outside his front door, Lowrey said things are getting worse.

“It keeps raining,” he said. “It’s going to get deeper.”



**Backflow waters flood Mississippi 16 near Rolling Fork, Miss., Monday, March 11, 2019. This week the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency (MEMA), along with select local emergency management offices will be conducting joint damage assessments in response to the severe storms and flooding are impacting the state.**



**In this Monday, March 11, 2019 photo, Peggy and her husband George Sellars sit by the “lake” that was the driveway to their home, along Mississippi 16, east of Rolling Fork, Miss. The couple said the backwater flooding is the worse they have encountered and correctly concluded that water would overtop the retention levee that protected their house and three others. This week the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency (MEMA), along with select local emergency management offices will be conducting joint damage assessments in response to the severe storms and flooding are impacting the state.**



**As backflow waters flood home property and farm land along Mississippi 16 near Rolling Fork, Miss., some residents have taken to using small boats to reach their homes, Monday, March 11, 2019. This week the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency (MEMA), along with select local emergency management offices will be conducting joint damage assessments in response to the severe storms and flooding are impacting the state.**

(AP Photo/Rogelio V. Solis)

## AG launches “Students Against Violence” app

Attorney General Jim Hood launched an app Monday for students struggling with depression, bullying, drug use, and other problems common among teens.

The “Students Against Violence” app is a place where students who are struggling with thoughts of suicide or are in a home where there is domestic violence can turn to local and national resources to help them through such situations. The app includes categories for depression/anxiety, self-harm, sui-

cide prevention, youth drug abuse, bullying, school violence, teen dating violence, domestic violence, underage drinking, and electronic cigarettes.

The app, which is available for free download on iPhone and Android phones, breaks out the situations listed above into separate sections, describes what a person may feel, think, or experience during that scenario, explains warning signs to identify in yourself or others, and lists resources for more


help, such as the Mississippi Department of Education’s “Connections” Hotline for school violence reporting or the Mississippi Department of Mental Health’s Helpline. The phones numbers are directly linked so the user can call from within the app.

“This information isn’t new, we’re just presenting it in a new way to students who do everything from the palm of their hand,” General Hood said. “I encourage teachers, school counselors, coaches, and anyone else who works with teenagers to encourage

them to download this app. It could be the thing that prevents them from causing harm to themselves or others.”

“I am proud that General Hood and Mississippi are the first in the nation to provide this valuable resource, not only for Mississippi’s youth but for those who work with youth,” said Jason Foundation President Clark Flatt. This project is a collaboration between General Hood and the Jason Foundation, with input from several state agencies and partners such


as the Department of Mental Health, Mississippi Department of Education, Mississippi chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, and The Partnership for a Healthy Mississippi. The Jason Foundation, Inc. is a group dedicated to the prevention of the silent epidemic of youth suicide through educational and awareness programs that equip young people, educators, youth workers, and parents with the tools and resources to help identify and assist at-risk youth.



**Bridal Registry**

Lorene McCoy  
Ben Courts  
March 9

Jenny Clare Christopher  
Garrett Holland  
May 25



**Peoples Drug Store**

Court Square 834-2721 Lexington