

## **Chapter Three**

### **Emergency Operations**

#### **Introduction**

This Chapter outlines how the Corps' Emergency Management operates in general, what actions it took during the 2006 Spring Flood Event, and how effective those actions were. Included is a discussion of activities by local, state and other Federal agencies and internal and external communications.

#### **I. Corps' Emergency Management Activities**

##### **A. Background**

The Corps' Kootenai River Basin Flood Response Team (Flood Team) consists of personnel from both the Libby Operating Project and the Seattle District Office. Offices involved include Emergency Management, Engineering, Operations, Contracting, Planning, Environmental Resources, Programs and Public Affairs. The primary team members have flood response experience and have been trained within the last year. The flood team conducts annual flood response coordination meetings with the local response personnel, where they identify potential areas of concern during a high water event within the Kootenai River basin and brief locals on Federal flood response capabilities and procedures under PL 84-99. Reference appendix B for the chronology of emergency response activities. These flood response coordination meetings and field exercises allow the team to network with local governments, review policy and procedures, and conduct a brief overview of the condition of the river basins. They also contributed to the effectiveness of this year's efficient and successful response.

##### **B. Overview of Spring Flood Event**

On May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2006 Seattle District activated the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) for response to the Kootenai River Basin flood, and the Corps' Flood Team was deployed and began providing technical to the Bonners Ferry community. Deployment was based on reports of increased snow pack melting and runoff in tributaries to the Kootenai River and a verbal request from Boundary County. With the threat of local flooding, a District Reconnaissance team was sent to the area to monitor the situation. On May 19 LTC Leighow, Acting District Commander, declared a flood emergency (Appendix D.) This declaration of a flood emergency allowed the Corps to utilize its full range of PL 84-99 authorities to provide flood response assistance. The Corps' Flood Team began providing direct assistance in addition to technical assistance to the Bonners Ferry community, including assistance to the states of Idaho and Montana until the EOC ceased operations on June 28, 2006 (Appendix F).

## **C. Communications**

### **1. Internal**

The Corps' Seattle District staff prepared Daily Situation Reports (SITREPs) to brief the District Commander, the Crisis Management Team (CMT), and various other offices of the flood response activities. The CMT is comprised of representatives from each Seattle District office that controls the District's resources and can provide support to the emergency response team. In addition, email and phone calls were made as appropriate. A total of 35 SITREPs reports were prepared (Appendix G.)

Northwestern Division Reservoir Control Center (RCC) and the EOC held daily conference calls which allowed the EOC to provide timely information to both the Corps field team and the local community. Having access to the daily forecasts also contributed to the effectiveness of many field activities.

The District Environmental Resources Section (ERS) updated the resource agencies in a timely manner concerning flood developments and flood fight activities, consistent with the Corps' environmental coordination guidelines during the event.

### **2. External**

Public Affairs – During the high flows from Libby Dam, the Corps' Public Affairs Office (PAO) worked with local officials, citizens, and radio stations and other media to inform the public of any changes of the Libby Dam operations (powerhouse releases and spill levels) and changes in the river flows and stage downstream. From May 17<sup>th</sup> until the end of the flood event in June, PAO was active in responding and addressing the questions and issues of all interested parties, including Congressional inquiries (Appendix I). During the flood event, the Corps' message focused on protecting lives and property, responding to local and state government's requests for assistance, and managing the water resources in coordination with other federal and state agencies. Getting information out quickly on changing operations was facilitated by news releases, which were copied and shared out in the field by disaster response officials. The Corps' Seattle District Web Site was also kept updated with the latest news releases and information for easy reference by all interested persons.

Incident Command System - The local communities used their own incident command systems (ICS), and the Corps field team participated in the daily ICS meetings, keeping the incident commander, responsible for all aspects of the emergency response, informed of Corps activities. Also, the EOC informed the Idaho and Montana State Departments of Homeland Security of the flood response, and after the first day, updates in the form of SITREPS were provided to the states on a daily basis.

Media Coverage - Reporting, overall, was balanced during the flood event and focused on keeping their readership informed about the developing flood event. Almost all of the coverage was local; however the flood event was mentioned on MSNBC. Several television

stations from Spokane (KREM and KLXY) traveled to the community and focused on the flood event. A media opportunity was held by the Corps during the flood event, and was well attended. Appendix H has a detailed summary of Media coverage for this flood event.

#### **D. Field Operations**

The overall flood response was effective in preventing significant damage to public infrastructure and any loss of life. As a result of local and Corps activities, failure of the city's levees was prevented. This was due to early and aggressive flood fight activities.

The Corps expended over \$1.4 million on emergency response activities in the Kootenai river basin (see Appendix A). Emergency services included both direct and technical assistance. Direct assistance is provided at the request of a public sponsor, and supplements the local communities' flood response activities when they become overwhelmed by a flood event. The direct assistance furnished by the Corps during the 2006 event included emergency repairs to the right bank levee down stream of the Highway 95 Bridge in Bonners Ferry, delivering over 80,000 sandbags to the local community. The levee was severely damaged during the initial high Kootenai river flows in May 2006 and complete levee failure was imminent. A levee breach would have resulted in major flooding of the North Bonners Ferry community, and the resulting flood waters could have cut off access to the City's sewage treatment facility, damaged the above ground sewer line, released raw sewage, and damaged utilities, roads and local homes protected by this levee. These homes would have been inundated with up to 6-8 feet of flood water.

Technical assistance during a flood event such as this generally consists of providing engineering and flood response guidance to property owners and local, county and state governments, as well as supplies and materials that the Corps has stockpiled for public use (Appendix P). The Kootenai River flood team assisted Boundary and Lincoln County with technical assistance throughout the flood event. Examples of technical assistance provided were:

- Directing sandbag operations on the Moyie and Kootenai Rivers
- Teaching sandbagging filling and placement to local fire department emergency responders
- Providing flood proofing recommendations to individual property owners
- Assisting the Burlington Northern railroad with an erosion protection plan
- Supplementing Boundary County levee patrols
- Assisting with damage assessments during and immediately following the flood event
- Assisting local governments with flood response planning, including analyzing predicted weather and river forecasts.

- Providing information to downstream property owners as water elevations rose to help them determine pumping requirements.
- Assisting in repair of upstream levee breach.

#### **E. Contracting Activities**

The Corps' Contracting office supported the flood response effectively. Through pre-planning and assignment of a purchasing agent to each flood team, a database of available contractors for each river basin was accessed to quickly procure necessary equipment. On Friday, May 19<sup>th</sup>, Seattle District's Purchasing Branch procured equipment and material for the emergency levee repairs in Bonners Ferry. The contractor mobilized and started work that evening. The assigned purchasing agents were available throughout the flood event to support their field teams. (Reference Appendix E)

#### **F. Post Emergency Activities Environmental Coordination**

An after-the-fact coordination of environmental documentation of the emergency actions undertaken for the flood fight will be conducted. Both an Environmental Assessment and Biological Evaluation will be prepared. This will include addressing NEPA, ESA, Clean Water Act and cultural resources (see Appendix T). The Corps' environmental staff will be making a site visit to Bonners Ferry to make their evaluation.

### **II. Activities by Local, State and Other Federal Agencies**

As noted above, local agencies were actively engaged in the emergency response. The impacted Cities' and Counties' emergency response teams and public works and engineering departments as well as volunteers were patrolling levees, closing roads, sandbagging, and making emergency levee repairs and damage assessments. No Federal disaster was declared by FEMA Region 10 for this flood event. Reference appendix C for addition details on the Corps support to FEMA.