

NEWS

South and Midwest hit by potentially catastrophic rains and floods

GEORGE WALKER IV AND  
BRUCE SCHREINER  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

HOPKINSVILLE, Ky. — Torrential rains and flash flooding battered parts of the Midwest and South on Friday, killing a boy in Kentucky who was swept away as he walked to catch his school bus. Many communities were left reeling from tornadoes that destroyed entire neighborhoods and killed at least seven people earlier this week.

Forecasters warned of potentially catastrophic weather, with round after round of heavy rains expected in the central U.S. through Saturday. Satellite imagery showed thunderstorms lined up like freight trains over communities in Arkansas, Tennessee and Kentucky, according to the national Weather Prediction Center in Maryland.

In Frankfort, Kentucky, a boy died Friday morning

after floodwaters swept him away while he was walking to a school bus stop, Gov. Andy Beshear said on social media.

The downtown area of Hopkinsville, Kentucky — a city of 31,000 residents 72 miles (116 kilometers) northwest of Nashville — was submerged. A dozen people and more than 40 pets had been rescued from homes as of the afternoon, a fire official said.

“The main arteries through Hopkinsville are probably 2 feet under water,” said Christian County Judge-Executive Jerry Gilliam. “So the mayor has closed downtown down for all traffic. Our office is actually in the middle of it, and we were here before the water rose. So there’s only one way we could get out.”

Tony Kirves and some friends used sandbags and a vacuum as they tried to hold back rising floodwaters that covered the basement and seeped into the ground floor

of his photography business in Hopkinsville. Downtown was “like a lake,” he said.

“We’re holding ground,” he said. “We’re trying to maintain and keep it out the best we can.”

A corridor from northeast Texas through Arkansas and into southeast Missouri, which has a population of about 2.3 million, could see clusters of severe thunderstorms late Friday. The National Weather Service’s Oklahoma-based Storm Prediction Center warned of the potential for intense tornadoes and large hail.

The seven people killed in the initial wave of storms that spawned powerful tornadoes on Wednesday and early Thursday were in Tennessee, Missouri and Indiana. They included Garry Moore, chief of the Whitewater Fire Protection District in Missouri. He died while likely trying to help a stranded motorist,

according to Highway Patrol spokesperson Sgt. Clark Parrott.

Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee said entire neighborhoods in the hard-hit town of Selmer were “completely wiped out” and it was too early to know whether there were more deaths as searches continued.

**FLASH FLOOD THREAT LOOMS OVER MANY STATES**

Heavy rains were expected to continue in parts of Missouri, Kentucky and elsewhere in the coming days and could produce dangerous flash floods capable of sweeping away cars.

In Hopkinsville, 5 to 8 inches of rain (12.7 centimeters to 20 centimeters) had fallen by Friday morning, causing the Little River to surge over its banks.

A pet boarding business was under water, forcing rescuers to move dozens of dogs

to a local animal shelter, said Gilliam, the county executive. Crews rescued people from four or five vehicles and multiple homes, mostly by boat, said Randy Graham, the emergency management director in Christian County.

“This is the worst I’ve ever seen downtown,” Gilliam said.

Kentucky’s road conditions website showed scores of roads closed by high water, and a landslide closed a nearly 3-mile (4.8-kilometer) stretch of Mary Ingles Highway in the state’s north, according to the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet. A landslide closed the same section of road in 2019, and it reopened last year, WLWT-TV reported.

Flash flooding is particularly worrisome in rural Kentucky where water can rush off the mountains into the hollows. Less than four years ago, dozens died in flooding in the eastern part of the state.

Extreme flooding across a corridor that includes Louisville, Kentucky, and Memphis — which have major cargo hubs — could also lead to shipping and supply chain delays, said Jonathan Porter, chief meteorologist at AccuWeather.

Forecasters attributed the violent weather to warm temperatures, an unstable atmosphere, strong wind shear and abundant moisture streaming from the Gulf. At least 318 tornado warnings have been issued by the National Weather Service since this week’s outbreak began Wednesday.

**TORNADOES LEAVE A PATH OF DAMAGE, AND MORE COULD BE COMING**

Homes were ripped to their foundations this week in Selmer, which was hit by a tornado with winds estimated up to 160 mph (257 kph), according to the weather service.

Oklahoma man charged with murder in fatal shooting of beloved Kansas priest

AP

SENECA, Kan. — An Oklahoma man has been charged with first-degree murder in the fatal shooting a Catholic priest at a church rectory in northeast Kansas, authorities said Friday.

Officers called to the Saints Peter and Paul Catholic Church in Seneca on Thursday afternoon found Arul Carasala with gunshot wounds outside the rectory, the Nemaha County Sher-

iff’s Office said in a Facebook post. The 57-year-old priest was taken by ambulance to a hospital, where he died.

Sheriff’s deputies and officers with the Seneca Police Department later arrested Gary Hermesesch of Tulsa, Oklahoma. Hermesesch, 66, was charged Friday and held in the Nemaha County Jail in lieu of \$1 million bond, County Attorney Brad Lipert said Friday in a written statement.

TAX

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saving money this year, and I appreciate that, but I think Iowa has one of the highest property taxes in the nation compared to other states,” Hubbard said. “So, you know, people need some relief these days, especially people that they’re on a pension or Social Security, like we are. You know, we have to be careful.”

“A property tax increase of 100 bucks, okay,” Hubbard said. “But if it jumps up to \$300 or \$400, well then that’s a serious issue for people.”

Residents’ concern over property taxes wasn’t directed at the county’s budget specifically, but rather their overall tax bill. Numerous entities, like cities and counties, levy taxes that are part of the bigger bill. Public schools take the biggest chunk, State Rep. Helena Hayes (R-New Sharon) told the crowd.

Supervisor Mark Groenendyk explained how the county levies will be used in Fiscal Year 2026.

The county’s budget is divided into three parts, each with its own purpose and fed by its own levy, he said.

He said the county saved the \$500,000 because of a number of reasons, including combining the offices of General Assistance with Veterans’ Affairs, and the county being allowed to keep more of the fees paid to the auto department.

“And then nobody’s (been) suing the county the last few years. So we don’t have those legal bills, if you want to be quite honest,” Groenendyk said.

Supervisor Steve Wanders said the only real tool supervisors have to keep their portion of property taxes low is to lay people off and reduce services.

“A terrible lot of our expense is labor. I mean, probably 80% of our budget’s labor,” Wanders said. “But where most of ours is labor, we’re going to have to cut staff in order to keep our property taxes low. So people just got to realize, what you ask for and get, sometimes you don’t like.”

Supervisors will hold another public hearing on April 21 about the budget itself. The public hearing will be at 9 a.m. in the third floor conference room of the Mahaska County Court-house.

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CUTS

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— depends on NOAA to open and close fisheries, the lawmakers and experts said.

But those missions were imperiled in February by the firings of 7% of NOAA’s staff of scientists and others overseeing federal research and monitoring of weather and oceans, the group of Democrats said.

“These critical functions are being dismantled by the sweeping, indiscriminate layoffs of nonpartisan public servants and facility closures,” U.S. Rep. Seth Magaziner, a Rhode Island Democrat who led the forum, said.

The reductions in force at NOAA, which houses agencies including the National Weather Service, National Ocean Service, National Marine Fisheries Service, National Environmental Satellite, Data, and Information Service and the Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research, were part of across-the-board cuts to the federal workforce sought by President Donald Trump and billionaire White House adviser Elon Musk.

The group of Democrats, who met without involvement of the committee’s Republican majority, said the cuts would hurt a wide range of Americans who depend on the agency’s data collection and rulemaking.

**DATA COLLECTION AND DISSEMINATION**

One of NOAA’s core missions is collecting and publishing weather data across the country used in forecasting apps and other common sources of weather information.

“There is no weather forecast that’s produced in this country that isn’t dependent on NOAA, none” Mary Glackin, a former deputy under secretary for operations at the agency under presidents of both parties, said.

The availability of federal data made possible the creation of companies like Accuweather, which started by collecting data in a garage, Glackin said.

U.S. Navy Rear Admiral Jon White told the panel NOAA’s extensive forecasting data was also critical to naval operations, saying reductions in that data would hurt the military’s readiness, both shipping out of domestic stations and in potential conflict zones.

“Hurricane forecasting and typhoon forecasting rely on the data from NOAA, whether it’s satellite data,” White said. “Reductions in that data and that information provide critical threats to our military infrastructure. Ships that (start) out of Norfolk and San Diego rely on that information about upcoming storms, especially hurricanes on the East Coast. ... It’s not just billions of dollars of ship damage: It’s lives that are at stake.”

**INDUSTRY NEEDS NOAA**

Magaziner was the one who called the commercial fishing industry’s connection with NOAA “a love-hate relationship,” but he and witnesses noted that the agency oversees the most basic functions the industry needs to operate.

Sarah Schumann, a fisherman with operations in Rhode Island and Alaska, criticized President Joe Biden’s administration for allying too strongly with offshore wind developers, but said the new

administration’s actions were also detrimental to the industry.

“These cuts will bog down the agency’s ability to serve the public for fishermen,” Schumann said. “Because of climate change, we desperately need faster, more nimble and more collaborative data collection and decision-making, and there is a very slim chance we’re going to get that with this.”

Trump’s slowdown of regulations — requiring federal agencies to withdraw 10 regulations for every one new regulation put into place — has also hampered commercial fishing operations.

Opening and closing fisheries for a season are done through NOAA rulemaking, environmental attorney Lizzie Lewis told the panel. Bluefin tuna fisheries were not closed on time and were overfished by 125% and fisheries in New England are unlikely to open on time, she said.

**EFFICIENCY?**

The cuts, part of Musk’s initiative to make govern-

ment more efficient, are not having their intended effect in streamlining government, Magaziner and others on the panel, including New Mexico’s Melanie Stansbury, said.

“The assertion that mass layoffs will somehow improve efficiency is not only misleading, it is outright dangerous,” Magaziner said. “Real people, real jobs and real lives are on the line. Without NOAA’s real-time data, emergency responders are left without the critical information they need to respond to impending disasters like wildfires, hurricanes, floods and severe storms putting millions at risk.”

The layoffs also decimated morale at the agency and made attracting qualified young people to its public service mission more difficult, Lewis told the panel.

“We are losing an entire generation of scientists and leaders who can help this country,” Lewis said. “We can keep its people safe and can grow its economy. And that to me is the devastating human cost.”

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