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Flooding intensifies

By R. Bruce McIntyre
Staff Writer

Eganville -- It has been more than 20 years since the ice storm devastated the area leaving a trail of frozen destruction and local residents have not seen anything nearing that scale of widespread declarations since 1998.

That is until last last week when several municipalities, including Renfrew County itself, issued their respective declarations of emergency in order to qualify for financial assistance when the time comes to pay the bills for the damaged municipal infrastructure.

Whitewater Region was the first out of the gate after several reports were received about the rising level of water in and around LaPasse and parts of Westmeath, some of the most north-western areas of the township along the Ottawa River. The township's Emergency Control Group, which includes Mayor Michael Moore and Fire Chief Jonathan Wilker, agreed to issue the declaration following a committee meeting on Thursday, April 25.

"We decided to go ahead and file with the province so we are eligible for provincial funding after it is over and we have completed the repairs," Mayor Moore said.

As the former deputy-fire chief of the township prior to his election victory last fall, Mayor Moore appreciates the efforts of the department and all the volunteers who have been working tirelessly over the last week.

"This has been tough on everyone involved and we owe them a lot and some of our residents are having a bad time," he said. "As of Monday, we had about 50 homes evacuated and luckily the eight members of the Red Cross were here and that has helped. We will be so happy when this is over."

He said it is unfortunate a large number of the 50 residences evacuated belonged to seniors because although they know it is for their own safety, having lived there for several years makes it hard to suddenly pack up without knowing when they will return.

Mayor Moore urges residents and any visitors to keep unnecessary travel to an absolute minimum so crews and volunteers are not compromised.

"We were fortunate to have about 50 soldiers from Petawawa down to help this week and along with nine Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry staff members and our own volunteers, they have been doing a great job in trying to remain caught up," he said.

The greatest concern is the unknown and what will happen next. Mayor Moore and his emergency committee have daily meetings and all they can do is wait and try to prepare for all eventualities.

"One thing we do know for sure is the Ottawa River is rising...fast," he said. "We have people constantly measuring the water level in the La-Passe watershed and it rose almost 18 inches in a 24-hour period. And we don't know what is happening in Algonquin Park and the melting snow." The impact of the Ottawa River is

having a devastating affect in both Horton and McNab Braeside townships, and in both cases, it is bringing back memories of 2017 and the path of destruction caused by the mighty river.

Horton Mayor Dave Bennett declared an emergency around 7:30

a.m. Friday after it became evident the 2019 Spring Flooding Freshet was severe and rising water levels threatened both property and the health of residents.

Similar to LaPasse, Horton Township, which also borders the Ottawa

River, has many homes damaged by the rising water and some are accessible only by boat. About 90 soldiers have been assisting township staff and residents.

In next door McNab Braeside, Mayor Tom Peckett also issued the

declaration on Friday when the area of Rhoddy's Bay was under extreme pressure due to the rising water. To date, township staff and volunteers have distributed 5,000 sandbags.

Renfrew County Warden (and Bonnechere Valley Mayor) Jennifer

Murphy said the rising water levels, combined with the melting snow in Algonquin Park, is a threat that is being assessed and all anyone can really do is wait to see what happens.

"This is something unprecedented during my time as an elected representative and it is not something we wanted, but it is here and we are dealing with it, day by day and hour by hour," she said. "Our control group has representatives not just from the county, but we have agencies that we keep up to speed with in terms of accurate information."

She said the group, led by Renfrew County Director of Emergency Services, Mike Nolan, meets in the early morning and mid-afternoon and since she announced the emergency declaration this past Sunday, support has come from many areas.

"Just the last few days, Garrison Petawawa has sent down more than 300 soldiers to assist Horton, McNab Braeside, and Laurentian Valley with about 50 soldiers at each location since they all declared their own emergencies.

"Some of the soldiers are pitching in to help make sandbags and others are working on infrastructural support and we are just so thankful for them coming to assist us," she said. "All these townships, along with Pembroke, are now in an emergency situation and that means a lot of documentation to back up any claims."

Other municipalities that have officially declared an emergency are Greater Madawaska and Killaloe, Hagarty and Richards.

Perhaps one site that has truly captured the severity of the rising water levels is the iconic lighthouse located on the boardwalk in Pembroke along the Ottawa River.

Sometime Friday evening, the force of the Ottawa River removed the lighthouse from its moorings and it could be seen floating in the river.

Laurentian Valley Township and Petawawa declared states of emergencies Saturday and Sunday, respectively. In the case of Petawawa, rising levels of both the Ottawa and Petawawa rivers resulted in the closure of Centennial and Petawawa Point Parks.

One thing Warden Murphy said has impressed her is the selfless acts of all those who have volunteered over the last few weeks.

"For the second time in two years, the residents of Renfrew County are being challenged by the unknown of what is going to happen and people are coming out in droves to volunteer," she said. "Many are complete strangers working beside each other, filling sandbags that get delivered to people they likely don't even know and we are all in this together no matter what happens over the next little while."



Thumbs up for our soldiers!

Loretta Robillard was absolutely thrilled when members of 2 RCHA from Garrison Petawawa suddenly showed up at her Beachwood Lane residence Tuesday morning and started to reinforce a sandbag wall. She and family members and friends started sandbagging over the weekend and it is the only thing holding back the full impact of flooding along the Ottawa River for her and several of her neighbours.

Extensive flooding coverage inside this section

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The parking area at the Pembroke waterfront used by many employees in the downtown core and by Algonquin College students and faculty remained flooded on Sunday evening. Loads of sand were dumped under the old railway trestle to prevent water from flooding onto Lake Street.

Pembroke's waterfront battered by rising Ottawa

By Terry Fleurie
Staff Writer

Pembroke -- Although the Pembroke waterfront has fallen victim to the rising waters of the mighty Ottawa River, forcing the closure of that area to the public, the mayor of the city feels somewhat fortunate they have escaped the more extreme

problems other areas downstream are facing.

Mayor Mike LeMay told the *Leader* Monday afternoon while there was heavy flooding at the waterfront that forced city officials to close both entrances to traffic, things are worse elsewhere in Renfrew County.

"We've got flooding at the waterfront and we lost the little lighthouse, but we can replace it," he said. "But so far, we're a little more fortunate than other areas of the county."

Mayor LeMay said unlike other municipalities, he has not declared a State of Emergency yet, but he

and staff are constantly monitoring the situation.

"I did a tour of the two areas, that, if the river went up much more, could have some flooding. We're waiting on the report at five o'clock. We'll look at it, and check again tomorrow."

"But so far, as far as the residential aspect along the Ottawa River, we're okay," he added. "But that could change."

In terms of the waterfront flooding, he said it got progressively worse over the weekend, forcing the closure of the two access roads to traffic.

"On Friday, our staff started working to make sure our infrastructure within the waterfront area was protected," he said. "But then with the waves and so on, there was flooding, but it is in the park area."

Temporary Berm For Protection

Truck loads of sand were trucked in to create a temporary berm under the old railway trestle near the Cogeco cablevision headquarters to prevent the rising waters from flowing out onto Lake Street. Mayor LeMay said the existing berm of the former Canadian Pacific railway bed has definitely kept the water contained.

While he believes the flooding at the waterfront may be slightly more extreme than in 2017, he feels the affect of the previous flood was felt in far more areas of the city.

"In 2017, we had a lot more flooding down around Elgin (Street) and, of course, I always worry about the Muskrat (river), with the landslides we tended to have and the erosion

we had because of that."

While there was some residential flooding in those areas over the Easter weekend, the Muskrat and Indian rivers appear to be receding.

"When you look at where the city is in regards to the Ottawa River, we're probably fortunate because Laurentian Valley gets nailed because it narrows like a funnel. It's nice and wide in Pembroke, but when you start going down, it really gets narrow."

Mayor LeMay said city staff are meeting daily to assess the situation to see what they have to do moving forward.

"They've been able to stay on top of the situation," he said. "They've been able to get our infrastructure at the waterfront sandbagged before the water rose."

He expressed his concern about possible flooding damage at the waterfront campus of Algonquin College but believes the situation there is now okay.

The outdoor chapel built at the college is underwater and sections of the walkway that lead to the waterfront are also flooded.

There is also lots of water in Riverside Park but it too is contained to that area.

Mayor LeMay said it's difficult to know if the water has crested yet as there are differing reports, adding it is predicted the Ottawa will reach its peak in the National Capital area either Thursday or Friday.

"So has it crested in Pembroke? Some people say yes. I don't know. I'd rather wait another day."

"But basically we're on top of it

and saying what do we have to do next going forward," he added.

He said the city is trying to keep homeowners in low lying areas along the Ottawa constantly advised of what is happening. He agreed the water levels at the waterfront have started to recede.

"That is why we're trying to keep everybody out of there. We don't want anybody getting hurt."

Mayor LeMay said large cement blocks were placed on the walkway to hold it down. He expects the lighthouse, which is owned by the Department of Oceans and Fisheries, will be replaced. It toppled Friday night during high winds. There was still lots of ice in the marina area that may have pushed it over.

Shortly after the interview with Mayor LeMay, the city issued a release stating the Kiwanis Walkway was now closed for the safety of the public.

"The marina and waterfront remain closed and we urge the public not to visit these areas," the release stated.

Mayor LeMay said aside from the current flooding, he is concerned about deadheads the high water may have loosened to cause hazards during the boating season. When the water recedes city staff will also be examining all infrastructure to ensure it was not damaged by water levels.

He said many employees of the downtown core use the parking lots at the waterfront and they are now using the parking area at the Pembroke Memorial Centre and another area.



Heavy cement pylon-like blocks were placed along this boardwalk to keep it in place at the Pembroke waterfront last week. The area remained flooded as of press time Tuesday.

Photo: Mike Yeas



There was still plenty of ice along the shore of the Ottawa River that was pushed inland by the rising water and high winds over the weekend that caused the collapse of the iconic lighthouse, seen at the left floating.

Photo: Mike Yeas



The lighthouse at the Pembroke Marina fell prey to the high water and ice that was pushed inland by heavy winds on Friday night.

Photo: Mike Yeas

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Freelance photographer Mike Yeas of Pembroke toured the Town of Petawawa and area on the weekend after the swollen Petawawa River forced the closure of Centennial Park and Petawawa Point.

Rushing Ottawa and Petawawa Rivers cause unprecedented water levels along riverbanks

Raging waters force the closure of town's only bridge that handles 17,000 vehicles daily

By Debbi Christinck
Staff Writer

Petawawa -- The Petawawa River is overflowing its banks and churning toward the Ottawa River causing not only the town to declare a state of emergency, but the county to close the crucial Petawawa Boulevard Bridge. "This is what they call the 100-year-flood, or maybe 1,000-year-flood," Mayor Bob Sweet said as he dealt with emergency unlike any he has encountered in his time as mayor. "We have had other disasters like a microburst and high winds, but not like this." Petawawa declared a state of emergency on the weekend asking residents to avoid areas near cresting water and to take precautions to protect their property and their own safety. On Tuesday morning, the County of Renfrew closed the busy Petawawa Boulevard/County Road 51. "There is a huge water volume increase along the Petawawa River," the mayor explained. "There has been some erosion along the banks." The county was sending in engineers to see about enforcing the embankments and the bridge will remain closed until it is deemed safe, he said. This bridge is on what has been deemed the busiest

road in the county as traffic to Garrison Petawawa funnels in there. "We can't take any chances with 17,000 vehicles passing over this bridge," Mayor Sweet said. During the time the bridge is closed, traffic will be detoured through Murphy Road to Highway 17 and take the "back door" entrance to Garrison Petawawa, he said. "And I can't tell you if it will be closed for hours or days at this point," he said. One piece of good news was the Ottawa River and Petawawa River have peaked, he said. Gauges show the water is receding in the Petawawa area, but the uncertainty of more spring melt coming from the north have caused town officials and council to remain cautious. "There is still snow melt coming and we also have this forecast of rain and freezing rain, so we are not sure what will happen," he said. "We are in a holding pattern until we see." Centennial Park and Petawawa Point are both closed due to water encroachment. "We are asking people to keep away from areas that have water, particularly the bridges," he said. "We don't want any accidents to happen. We want everyone to be safe." As of Tuesday morning, there

had been no evacuations in Petawawa, but some people had left their home voluntarily. Mayor Sweet said some homeowners on River Drive were staying in hotels. "There is a lot of water in basements from the water level rising," he added, noting the Black Bay area and River Drive are ones he has heard of. In the years since he came to Petawawa in 1974 there has never been flooding like this and he has spoken to others who have been in the community longer and they also recall no such flooding. "If you see the water coming down the Petawawa it is astounding seeing the volume," he said. Mayor Sweet was full of praise for the volunteers, paramedics, firefighters and other individuals who have come forward to sand-bag or help where needed. "The volunteering is tremendous and the support from the community and business is just wonderful," he said. "It is refreshing to see." "It really is special seeing 40 to 50 volunteers helping people they don't know," he said. Soldiers from Garrison Petawawa have been deployed throughout the county and beyond helping with flood relief and are also helping in their home community. "The soldiers have been bagging


sand bags at the water plant to make it secure," he said. "That is precautionary again." Mayor Sweet said it has been a busy time monitoring the situation and staff are making sure to be updated on changes. "It is a day-to-day situation," he said. "The sense we receive is more water is to come and I'm not sure if it comes in a bit at a time or faster. I know we are expecting some rain and freezing rain between now and Thursday."

Mayor Sweet said he has an area he monitors as his own water level and he noticed it was down about three inches on Tuesday, so this means levels are dropping. "A lot of water has gone through, but it could come back up again," he said. The mayor was also doing a bit of double duty as he prepared for the Ontario Small Urban Municipalities (OSUM) conference to be held in Pembroke beginning today (Wednesday). As the chair of the

County of Renfrew Development and Property Committee he had long campaigned to bring the conference to the county, but noted because of disasters in other areas, including Bracebridge, some participants might not be able to attend. "We do have Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing Steven Clark coming Friday and representatives from the Liberals and the NDP, so hopefully this does not hamper that," he said.



Residents along River Drive are experiencing flooding from the swollen Ottawa River. On Tuesday morning, the main bridge that carries 17,000 vehicles a day to Garrison Petawawa was closed due to high river levels.



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All hands on deck in Horton Township

By R. Bruce McIntyre
Staff Writer

Renfrew -- Loretta Robillard didn't know whether to laugh or cry when she stepped on to her back deck Tuesday morning as several soldiers suddenly arrived carrying sandbags and began passing them to form a last line of defence for her cottage on the Ottawa River.

"I have never been in a war zone before, but it sure feels like it and words just can't describe how it felt when these incredible soldiers showed up to help us save our cottage," she said. "We thought the floods in 2017 were bad, but this is way worse and all of us are just praying this is as high as the river gets."

Mrs. Robillard and her husband, Terry, who reside in Armprior, purchased the cottage in 1988 with the dream of retiring on the property which is nestled off of River Road in Horton Township. After the floods of 2017, they took precautions in case another event occurred, but they never imagined flooding would take place again in such a short time span.

Although they had sump pumps running non-stop in an effort to keep water out of their basement, water was leaking through the sandbags and a sense of dread set in.

"This morning (Tuesday) we were worried and all of a sudden the soldiers showed up and we just pray everything turns out okay," she said. "I have a sense of relief now and all I can say is thank you to all of them."

Her sense of relief was felt by many all along River Road where the uncommon site of large army personnel carriers parked alongside cars in driveways suddenly seemed common.

All day yesterday, the cottages and homes along River Road were filled with soldiers and families working alongside each other as a constant convoy of army vehicles and township trucks shuttled back and forth to the municipal building where loads of sandbags were transported to the affected properties.

Is River Controlled From Toronto?

Her neighbour, Ian Moodie, and a few friends set out early last Saturday to build a long line of sandbags and by all accounts the impressive wall was still holding. He is resigned to the fact that flooding is now a common occurrence.

"I can't explain it, but I am really not sure why this is happening, maybe it is the bureaucrats in Toronto at OPG who don't know what they are doing, but years ago there were local people who worked for OPG and



Members of the 2 Royal Canadian Horse Artillery (RCHA) use a small boat belonging to a Lola Lane resident to navigate their way to some homes damaged by flooding along the Ottawa River. Lola Lane was one of several roads covered in water in Horton Township over the last week. The township was one of several to declare a state of emergency.

they communicated with people up and down the river and now they are gone," he said. "I guess we can pretty much expect flooding every year from now on."

He has a flagpole on his property and said ordinarily, the water stopped more than 60 feet away from his home at the flagpole that he uses as a marker.

"This year is way worse and I think it is going to stay that way from now on."

The intensity of the flooding throughout the Ottawa Valley resulted in hundreds of troops being dispatched to various locations in the county and several members assigned to Operation LENTUS set up a base

of operations last Friday at the Ma-Te-Way Activity Centre in Renfrew.

With close to 300 personnel deployed, 115 have been assisting in McNab Braeside and another 113 were sent to Westmeath. The remaining troops from the 3RCR and the 2 RCHA units have become a familiar site in Horton Township.

With just over 90 troops assigned to help the township, they have worked side by side with civilians, township staff and Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry staff in a joint effort to maintain the safety for the residents affected by the rising water.

Armed with shovels instead of guns, and using wheelbarrows and loaders

instead of tanks, the soldiers have worked alongside residents of all ages to keep the area safe.

Lola Lane Area Bad

Perhaps nowhere has the level of damage been more severe than the Lola Lane area where the only way to access several homes is by boat. Located just off of River Road, the quiet wooded area is now a scene of floating debris and the roadways which would normally have trucks and cars going back and forth are eerily vacant. Even the common sight of boats attached to docks is nowhere to be seen as many of them have either been washed away or are completely submerged under the river.

The bottom section of Lola Lane

nearest the river is nowhere to be seen as it is now covered with water, in some areas almost five feet deep.

Leading the way yesterday morning (Tuesday) on this inaccessible road was Sergeant Kevin Jenkins of 2 RCHA (Royal Canadian Horse Artillery) and a contingent of about 30 soldiers who had to navigate through broken trees in order to access some of the homes by small boats.

"This is just devastating for the residents," Sgt. Jenkins said as he made his way out to several homes on a small boat loaned to them by some homeowners. "The only safe way in or out of the area is by boat and I have been impressed by the level of co-operation by everyone

that has helped out. The homeowners have done a great job at building barricades using sandbags and our primary role right now is to reinforce those walls and keep the water away best we can."

As he disembarked the boat, he could only shake his head at the impact of the Ottawa River on the homes. The riverside properties that would ordinarily have lawn chairs is now a long barricade of white and orange sandbags, in some cases they are five feet high, and even then, Sgt. Jenkins is not sure if they will hold back the water.

"We can predict a lot of things, but we can never predict the impact of natural forces so we just do what we can."

Unknown to Sgt. Jenkins over the last week was the fact he was working alongside Dave Bennett, who also happens to be the mayor of the township.

"No way...you're kidding, right?" Sgt. Jenkins said when informed by this reporter who he was. "Didn't have a clue. I have seen him around all week helping out and we talked about clothing and sandbags and he helped me move some equipment and I had no idea who he was."

Mayor Bennett had nothing but praise for the influx of army personnel.

"The sad thing is people around here are getting used to floods and that just doesn't seem right," he said. "These folks work hard to save money to own a home or cottage and to see it all destroyed is very sad. They get frustrated, but I can tell you when they see all the army trucks pull up and soldiers jumping out to give them a hand, then that really picks up their spirits."

Mayor Bennett said his emergency control group has been meeting regularly since the first sign of threat occurred and noted without the co-operation of several government agencies and the small army of volunteers who keep coming out to fill sandbags, the situation would have been much worse.

"The people around here help each other and having the army sure helps a lot," he said. "Everyone is worried about what might happen next. Right now, there is a threat of more bad weather and rain coming our way and all we can do is try and prepare."

Sub-Lieutenant Pamela Bussiere, a Public Affairs Officer assigned to Operation LENTUS, said there is no set date as to when the personnel will return to Garrison Petawawa.



Horton Township Mayor Dave Bennett confers with Sergeant Kevin Jenkins as members of 2 RCHA pack sandbags into a wheelbarrow to get them ready for transport to homes affected by flooding. About 90 members of 2 RCHA have been assisting the township over the last several days.



Sergeant-Major Bob Hewitt and Warrant Officer Phil Fortin of 2 RCHA confer on how best to reinforce a long line of sandbags along the Ottawa River in Horton Township. The wall, more than 200 feet long, stretches along the river in front of four residences. In the background, approximately 60 feet away, is a flagpole that marks where the river normally meets the shoreline.



Members of 2 RCHA, who have set up a base camp at Ma-Te-Way Activity Centre in Renfrew, were transported by personnel carriers to sections of Horton Township to assist residents affected by flooding along the Ottawa River. One of the main tasks was to help build sandbag barriers along the river.



Soldiers of 2 RCHA working beside family members making sandbags was a common sight along River Road in Horton Township this week. More than 300 soldiers were dispatched from Garrison Petawawa over the weekend to assist areas most affected by the recent flooding.