

There will always be storm water management issues in a large metropolitan area. In addition, with a multi-county metropolitan area, there are many flood sources which impact Omaha. Here is a brief description, by source, for the flood sources.

Missouri River

The first flood record that could be found was dated April 6, 1881, which was a major flood because a large ice jam was breached in Cedar County. This flood swept away entire towns and the Missouri was five miles wide at Omaha. People were forced to evacuate to the roofs of their homes on 9th Street. Along the Missouri, there was a total of three people killed, thousands of livestock perished, and damaged was placed in the “many millions”. Another major flood occurred in 1943. At Omaha, the river crested at 22.45 feet and had a discharge of 200,000 cubic feet/second (89,760,000 gallons/minute). Three thousand men helped fight the flood, but after a week, the Missouri found a weak spot in the temporary dike and the battle was lost. One hundred homes were flooded when the floodwater also breached a new dike at Locust Street. The industrial section on Grace Street was flooded, and businesses were closed several days. One thousand people were evacuated from Carter Lake and East Omaha as the old Lake Florence bed filled and inundated the airport with seven feet of water in 18 hours. One person was killed in Omaha, and the damage estimate there was \$1.4 million. A \$6 million floodwall was constructed as a result of the 1943 flood, which served Omaha well during major floods in 1947 and 1950. The flood of record on the Missouri River took place on April 16, 1952 with a recorded discharge of 396,000 cfs (177,724,800 gallons per minute) with a record stage of 40.2 feet (flood stage at Omaha is 29 feet). Emergency freeboard was added to the top of the floodwall in order to keep Omaha from being flooded. The severe flooding on the Missouri River in the 1940s and 50s led to the authorization for the construction of six large dams by the United States Army Corps of Engineers. These dams were completed in the early 1960s, and flooding on the Missouri has not been a significant problem since. The Corps also constructed a levee/floodwall system in Omaha which provides protection to the 500-year (0.2% change per-year) flood. The only significant flooding at Omaha after the completion of the dams took place in 1993, the year with record flooding over the entire Midwest. However, Missouri River flooding was much more pronounced south of Omaha, below the juncture with the Platte River and other large rivers from Iowa.

Big Papillion Creek

The two largest floods of record on the Big Papillion Creek took place in 1964 (45,900 cfs) and 1965 (31,200 cfs). The flood of June 16th and 17th, 1964, killed seven people and caused \$5 million in damage, not including losses to personal property. 95 trailer homes were destroyed, with several being swept more than a half-mile downstream by the torrent. Flood damages were recorded in the Big Papio Creek watershed from the consistent heavy downpours in the summer of 1993. Many homeowners had problems with bowing or collapsed foundation and retaining walls.

Little Papillion Creek

The flood of record for Little Papillion Creek took place on June 21, 1960. Intense localized thunderstorms in the watershed led to a discharge of 15,300 cfs at Irvington

Street and 10,000 cfs at Cass Street. The severe thunderstorm of September 6, 1965 caused a discharge of 12,800 cfs at the mouth with the Big Papillion Creek.

West Papillion Creek

The largest flood on West Papillion Creek occurred in June 1964 having an approximate discharge of 40,800 cfs in the Elkhorn area and 31,500 cfs at the mouth with Big Papillion Creek. Mobile homes were swept away by this flood in the Millard area.

Hell Creek

Hell Creek flows from Boys Town to its confluence with West Papillion Creek. The flood of June 16-17, 1964, was caused by eight inches of rain falling in three hours. The 500-year flood discharge was exceeded, and reports noted that Hell Creek was fifty feet wide and had five-foot waves. Houses were moved from their foundations and garages were destroyed by these floodwaters. After some channel improvements earlier in 1965, the September 7, 1965, flood event on Hell Creek nearly equaled the severity of the 1964 event.

Cole Creek

Up to ten inches of rain fell overnight on August 6-7, 1999, forcing Cole Creek out of its banks. Cole Creek flows through the fully-urbanized watershed in northern Omaha of Debolt and Benson neighborhoods before joining the Little Papillion Creek near 77th & Dodge. One man was killed from the 1999 flood as a result of a basement wall caving in on top of him.

Thomas Creek

Thomas Creek flows primarily north-to-south past Irvington before joining Little Papillion Creek at Blair High Road. The Thomas Creek watershed has been rapidly developing in the last ten years, and downstream flood problems have been the result. During the August 1999 storm, one property owner was trapped by the rising water and nearly lost her life while trying to open the fences for her horses.

Boxelder Creek

Much of rapidly developing west Omaha is drained by Boxelder Creek. As a result, it should be expected that runoff rates will cause more water to flow in the creek more quickly. However, Zorinsky Lake is a flood control structure on Boxelder Creek which will minimize flooding.

In the Elkhorn area, the only significant riverine flood on the West Papillion Creek occurred in June of 1964. In this flood event, water was reported to have been two feet over the railroad tracks and three feet deep at the intersections of Blondo Street and Main Street.