

The Journal

Neighborhood flood area won't go away

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MARTINSBURG — In 48 years living in Berkeley County's Horner subdivision, Cissy Brown, 81, thought she had seen it all.

However, Brown said she would have to place the development's current 6-to-8 inches of flood water covering her street and yard at the top of her list.

"This has been the worst it has ever been," said Brown who, with her husband, lives on the main road — County Line Drive — in the subdivision. "Everybody's property is flooded past us. The neighbors across the street can't even get in their front door; it's clean on up to their front porch."

The development most recently flooded over Nov. 26 after heavy rain storms hit the area.

For the Eastern Panhandle and surrounding areas, 2018 will likely be remembered as the year of the flood with several rain storm cycles saturating area water tables beyond their containment limits.

In fact, the latest two-day spate of rain starting Thursday may break Martinsburg's record of 60.20 inches of annual rain water set in 1996.

The Horner subdivision's latest flood is altering residents' daily routines.

Mail delivery and garbage pickup in the 31-home subdivision were halted this week when County Line Drive, the main access road, again flooded over.

"I just went to post office to pick up mail for the week," Brown said.

While trucks and four-wheel vehicles are high enough to drive through flood water, some residents are reluctant to drive through with a car.

"We have a (GMC) 'Jimmy' that sets up higher than a car," Brown said. "I wouldn't take my car through it."

Homeowners with-school age children must now drive to the end of County Line Drive to drop off and pick up children where the bus now stops along W.Va. 45.

Set directly off W.Va. 45, the Horner subdivision is adjacent to Rocky Marsh Creek, which flows northeast through the development.

While the low lying development is prone to flood after severe storms pass the area, nothing has prepared residents for the development's front entrance filled with close to a foot of water.

"This is the longest that it has been this way; ever since Thanksgiving, it's been the way it is right now," said subdivision homeowner Rocky Carver, who has become the de-facto spokesperson for development residents and is working on forming a homeowner's association to be able to take action on remedying the neighborhood's flood dilemma.

While the Horner subdivision has flooded innumerable times in the 24 years Carver has lived here, those waters recede quickly, he said.

Residents have contacted Berkeley County and the state Division of Highways and officials there informed residents they are not responsible for keeping County Line Drive clear.

"We've got no help from anybody down in here," Brown said. "We have to pay our taxes, but we don't get no help from nobody."

Residents are concerned the latest rains will raise flood water levels even higher.

"Usually, it takes a day or two for the water to go up," Carver said. "I've seen it go up in just one day, and I've seen it go up a week."

In addition to record breaking rainfall, long-time residents say subdivision segments built up over the years with cement and asphalt have become water storing repositories.

"It just lays over there in that field," said Brown, referring to the front segment of the subdivision adjacent to W.Va. 45. "It's got no place to run to."

West Virginia state geologist Mitchel Blake said this year's record rain, coupled with a low-lying plain that may partially be made of rock would be the perfect recipe for a long sustaining flood zone.

"It's so wet this year; all the rules are broken," said Blake, who is also director of the West Virginia Geological and Economic Survey. "Everything is saturated, you're getting dumped on with a lot more rain, and you probably have impermeable rock layers. So what's there won't drain away fast."

However, when the subdivision again flooded in late November some homeowners pointed a finger at another culprit: A family of beavers living adjacent to Rocky Marsh Creek.

In response, Carver demolished a four-foot high mound of tree branches at the south end of creek, and then dug out a section of creek to improve water flow.

According to Beavers Wetlands & Wildlife — a nonprofit that's studied beavers for 50 years — beavers causing floods is not uncommon. Beavers oftentimes will see a hole that was originally left open to help drain water and fill it, viewing it as a "hole in an otherwise fine dam," the organization said.

But beavers have been known to reduce or prevent flooding too.

According to an article published in The Guardian, scientists in the United Kingdom are currently studying whether beavers could be a solution to flooding.

With below freezing winter temperatures around the corner, residents are concerned that those water fields will turn to ice fields.

"Eventually, it is going to freeze up, then it's going to get real bad on us," Carver said.