

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: June 29, 2018 – 6:00 p.m.

Houghton County Disaster Recovery Update

(Houghton, MI) – Following are the latest updates regarding the flood recovery efforts in Houghton County.

Roads held up well during Friday's midday storm. There were spotty areas of minor damage and lost power, but nothing major was reported. The storm did slow some work activity, but nearly all crews were able to get back on the job after it passed through.

The FEMA and State damage assessment teams have wrapped up their work in the Houghton County area. They will now put reports together and present them through channels to the President for consideration of a federal disaster declaration. There is no timetable available for this process.

The Houghton County Sheriff's Office reported that water levels are low and dangerous to boaters in many areas. There are a number of large trees in the waterways along with smaller branches. A couple specific areas include along the shore in Ripley, and at the mouth of the Swedetown Creek and Coles Creek where all the dirt from the washouts piled up in the canal.

As of 3 p.m. on Friday, June 29, there are currently 13 area roads that are still impassable and 54 roads only partially repaired. A list of the damaged and closed roads is included as a separate attachment.

The Western U.P. Health Department says there are 19 beaches open, with an additional seven areas under a health advisory, but this report comes with a warning. Current results for all beaches are from samples collected before the torrential rains that fell around midday on Friday, June 29. Results for beach locations that experienced heavy rain on Friday may no longer be valid. Heavy rain events may result in increased bacteria levels due to runoff. The public is advised to swim at their own risk at all beach locations that are open or under advisory. To prevent illness, people should avoid ingesting water whenever swimming in lakes. A PDF with the beach status is attached.

The Department of Natural Resources has opened limited ORV trails in Houghton County. Below are notes on those trails. A map is attached.

- The Bill Nichols ORV route is open from Mass City to South Range, about four miles south of Houghton. It is not possible to get into the City of Houghton or across the Lift Bridge on an ORV.
- Anyone travelling to Keweenaw County to ride ORV's will have to trailer north of Hancock. The Hancock-to-Calumet ORV route is open at Tomasi Road – approximately four miles north of Hancock.
- The Lake Linden ORV Route is closed. It is not possible to reach Dollar Bay, Hubbell, or Lake Linden on the ORV trail. There are severe/deep washouts in this area. Do not attempt passage.
- The Freda Grade ORV route is closed.
- All ORV routes north of Calumet are open. The damage in Keweenaw County was more limited.

HOUGHTON COUNTY MICHIGAN OFFICE OF EMERGENCY MEASURES

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- The Houghton-to-Chassell non-motorized rail-trail is closed. There are many washouts and the Pilgrim River Bridge has been damaged. Do not attempt passage.

The DNR is working on a construction plan to reopen the Bill Nichols trail into Houghton. The City of Hancock is working on an ORV route through Hancock. The DNR is focused on getting these routes open to reinstate connectivity between Ontonagon, Houghton, and Keweenaw Counties. The DNR is also working on engineering and repairs on the Lake Linden Route, Freda Route, and the Houghton-to-Chassell trail. These projects will take significant engineering, funding, and time.

As a reminder, the trails that are closed are not safe. There have been some gates and signage moved or damaged. Removing gates and/or signage is putting others at risk, especially with many visitors in the area. DNR staff is doing their best to not only fix the trails, but maintain the gates and signage.

The Volunteer Reception Center (VRC) and the Dee Stadium Donation Center are now at the former JCPenney location in the Copper Country Mall (rear entrance). The VRC will be open in its new location from 9 a.m.- 5 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday. There is no plan for the donation center to be open this weekend. If a need arises over the weekend, call (906) 233-6621.

Any residents who could use help are reminded to call (906) 233-6621. Volunteers are eager to assist you.

There is still a need for volunteers. The work is transitioning from debris removal to refurbishing houses impacted by the flood.

With rain expected over the weekend, the public is reminded to follow local media or coppercountrystrong.com for any updates.

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MEDIA: For additional information, contact Public Information Officers Eric Forsberg at (708) 465-4838 / Eric@HoughtonCounty.net or Michael H. Babcock at (612) 747-9686 / michael.babcock@finlandia.edu.