

Heavy rains, killer freeze, ice storms mark 2007

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CARTHAGE, Mo. -

Water, ice and cold were the big weather-makers in a year that was book-ended by severe ice storms in January and December, and marked by a historic freeze on Easter weekend and flooding in Jasper County on two separate occasions.

Officially, 2007 will go down in the National Weather Service record books as the seventh wettest year since record keeping started in the 1900s.

Officially there was 55.52 inches of rainfall at the Joplin airport in 2007, a huge improvement over the 2005 and 2006, which were the ninth and 10th driest years on record.

The amount of rain that fell at the Joplin airport pales in comparison to what fell at the Carthage Water and Electric Plant on River Street this year.

Plant workers recorded 68.72 inches of rainfall this year, an amount that, had it fallen at the Joplin airport would beat the wettest year on record there.

"It just shows how localized the rains were around the area," said Brian Barjenbruch, a meteorologist at the National Weather Service in Springfield. "This year Joplin was more than nine inches ahead of normal, while Springfield was right around normal. Some of those rains in June and the rains from the remnants Tropical Storm Erin in August caused big rains in some places and smaller rains in other areas."

June 2007 was the wettest June on record, with 17.12 inches of rainfall at the Joplin airport and 17.58 inches in Carthage.

The rains were so heavy that the Dry Branch creek between Carthage and Jasper overflowed its banks and closed U.S. Highway 71 for about a day.

Areas where the pavement and shoulders washed out on U.S. 71 around the Dry Branch bridge had to be repaired before the highway could be reopened.

The ice storm in January could be seen as a warning to the Carthage area for what was going to happen in December.

While most of the damage from the Jan. 11 and 12 storm was concentrated along and south of Interstate 44, the damage from the Dec. 8 and 9 storm was focused in Jasper, Barton and Cherokee counties with about 1.75 inches of ice sticking to trees and power lines across the area. In Carthage, more than a quarter of CW&EP customers lost electricity for a time and more than 60,000 customers of Empire District Electric Co., were knocked out as well.

Power was restored to most homes in Carthage by Dec. 13 and 14.

The Easter Freeze was caused by a blast of bitterly cold air coming through the area in the wake of unseasonably warm weather for the previous three weeks.

"The April freeze was actually more devastating as far as farmers and ranchers than anything else that happened this year," Barjenbruch said. "We had a record shot of cold air with deep reinforcement that moved through that weekend. We had had record warm weather the weeks before and everything had started to grow and bud out. Once it started growing, it couldn't stop until it had to."

The Missouri Department of Agriculture estimated the damage from the Easter freeze at more than \$400 million, and every county in Missouri was affected."