



State of
North Dakota
Office of the Governor

Doug Burgum
Governor

PROCLAMATION
1997 RED RIVER FLOOD COMMEMORATION MONTH
APRIL 2017

WHEREAS, the record-setting North Dakota winter of 1996-97 featured eight named blizzards resulting in record snowfall accumulations for Grand Forks, Fargo, and Bismarck; and

WHEREAS, on February 14, 1997, the National Weather Service predicted severe flooding along the Red River of the North, including all tributaries, between Wahpeton and Pembina, North Dakota, and subsequently projected flood crests of 17.9 feet in Wahpeton, 38 feet in Fargo, and 49 feet in Grand Forks; and

WHEREAS, Blizzard "Hannah" on April 5-6, 1997, caused an estimated loss of 90,000 head of cattle, downed the 2,060-foot KXJB-TV broadcast tower, toppled nearly 6,000 power poles, and forced approximately 90,000 homes to be without electricity; and

WHEREAS, flood waters along the Red River crested at 19.42 feet on April 6, 1997, and 19.25 feet on April 15, 1997, in Wahpeton and 39.72 feet on April 18, 1997, in Fargo; and

WHEREAS, on April 7, 1997, President Bill Clinton issued a major disaster declaration, as requested by Governor Ed Schafer, for severe flooding in all counties in North Dakota; and

WHEREAS, on April 16, 1997, Grand Forks Mayor Pat Owens recommended residents voluntarily evacuate the city; and

WHEREAS, on April 18, 1997, dikes in Grand Forks, North Dakota, and East Grand Forks, Minnesota, began to be overtopped, including Lincoln Park, Central Park, and Riverside Park neighborhoods, leading Mayor Owens to order the evacuation of over 50,000 people, which, up to that time, was the largest civilian evacuation in the United States since Atlanta, Georgia, in 1864 during the American Civil War; and

WHEREAS, the flood waters pushed miles beyond the banks of the Red River, swamping fields, roads, and towns, submerging an area roughly the size of Delaware; and

WHEREAS, the flood waters in Grand Forks were 4 feet deep throughout downtown, covered rooftops in some neighborhoods, reached inland approximately 3 miles, and ultimately damaged 9,001 homes and 751 businesses; and

WHEREAS, the Grand Forks water treatment plant failed on the morning of April 19, 1997, leaving residents without water for 13 days and without potable water for 23 days; and

WHEREAS, on April 19, 1997, a fire started at the Security Building in a flooded downtown Grand Forks, spread over 3 city blocks, and destroyed 11 historic buildings over the course of two days; and

WHEREAS, the Red River crested in Grand Forks on April 22, 1997, at the historic high water mark of 54.35 feet after which the river level did not fall below 49 feet until April 26, with the river finally receding below flood stage of 28 feet on May 23, 1997; and

WHEREAS, on April 22, 1997, President Bill Clinton, Senators Kent Conrad and Byron Dorgan, and Congressman Earl Pomeroy, visited Grand Forks Air Force Base and committed \$488 million in federal assistance; and

WHEREAS, Red River flood waters ultimately inundated approximately 2,200 square miles of land, resulted in the evacuation of 70,000 residents, and caused approximately \$4 billion worth of damage; and

WHEREAS, the Grand Forks Air Force Base provided instrumental support throughout the disaster, including serving as a shelter for 3,500 evacuees and a medical shelter for more than 400 civilian patients, assembling approximately 800,000 of the 3.5 million sandbags used by the city of Grand Forks, and providing military equipment for fire suppression, evacuation, and civilian transport; and

WHEREAS, 694 homes and 493 other structures in Grand Forks were demolished following the flood, an additional 850 properties were purchased and demolished through a voluntary buyout program, and 161 homes and 414 structures were relocated to other properties to make space for permanent flood protection; and

WHEREAS, in addition to the more than \$48 million in damage to University of North Dakota buildings, 16 of the 22 schools owned by Grand Forks Public School District suffered a total \$72 million in damages, including 3 schools which suffered catastrophic damage; and

WHEREAS, disaster recovery funding from all sources exceeded \$567 million, including more than \$34 million in state and local funding; and

WHEREAS, following the disaster, the administrations of Governor Ed Schafer and Governor John Hoeven and the Legislative Assemblies throughout the decade following the flood continued to provide support for the cleanup, restoration, and flood prevention efforts in the Red River Valley; and

WHEREAS, in January 2007, the \$409 million Grand Forks Flood Prevention Project was completed, featuring approximately 8 miles of levees and walls expandable to protect against a 63-foot flood, 20 miles of recreational trails, two pedestrian bridges, and 2,200 acres of green space; and

WHEREAS, as a result of the Red River flood of 1997, the National Weather Service has changed its flood forecasting methodology, increased the number of monitoring gauges, updated satellite imagery, and revised surveys of the Red River channel; and

WHEREAS, major capital projects in the Red River Valley, including the \$19 million Grand Forks County office building, the \$104 million Ralph Engelstad Arena, and the \$16 million downtown Corporate Center, were built using flood mitigation designs such as raised foundations, elevated utility rooms, and integrated dewatering systems; and


WHEREAS, the City of Grand Forks has adopted other flood-stricken communities across the country to assist in flood prevention and management practices, including St. Bernard Parish, Louisiana; Cedar Rapids, Iowa; Minot, North Dakota; Findley, Ohio; and Biloxi, Mississippi; and

WHEREAS, flood mitigation lessons learned from the Red River flood of 1997 have been applied to city plans and flood prevention projects in communities throughout the Upper Midwest, including the cities of Valley City, Bismarck, Minot, Wahpeton, and Fargo; and

WHEREAS, the Governor recognizes the hard work exhibited by all communities impacted by winter storms and flooding during the winter of 1996 and the spring of 1997 in preventing and responding to historic natural events; and

WHEREAS, the Governor expresses his gratitude and appreciation on behalf of the people of North Dakota to the United States federal government, United States Air Force, North Dakota National Guard, and countless businesses, organizations, and volunteers who assisted in the protection, recovery, and rebuilding of all 1997 flood-impacted communities.

NOW, THEREFORE, as Governor of the State of North Dakota, I do hereby proclaim April 2017, **1997 RED RIVER FLOOD COMMEMMORATION MONTH** in the State of North Dakota.



Doug Burgum
Governor

ATTEST:



Alvin A. Jaeger
Secretary of State