

Navajo DOT road crews addressing flooded roadways



While heavy rains battered the Navajo Nation and caused flooding in all five agencies, sunflowers bloomed in the storm's wake. Green fields of sunflowers and other vegetation covered the normal sparse landscape of the reservation. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

The Navajo Division of Transportation encourages motorists to use extreme caution when traveling Navajo Nation roadways this week.

According to the seven-day forecast from National Weather Service, the Navajo Nation and northern Arizona are expecting thunderstorms and heavy rains for the week.

This means flooded roadways and dangerous driving conditions.

Ray Russell, department manager for NDOT Roads Department, said his crews are focused on clearing debris and sediments from paved roadways this week.

"We understand that the Bureau of Indian Affairs Roads Department is on training this week, so NDOT is covering all roads," Russell said. "We will not be grading dirt roads due to the saturated soil from the major storms we received yesterday afternoon and last night."

Russell said the potential of getting NDOT equipment

stuck is high, which could further impact and restrict crews from conducting road assessments and operations.

"We will begin routine maintenance and repairs on those roads when things dry up and get back to normal," he said.

Including the BIA roads triples the NDOT workload.

Russell cautioned drivers to use their best judgment when traveling in rainy conditions. He said more rain is expected throughout the Navajo Nation today and tonight.

Drivers need to slow down to avoid hydroplaning. Never attempt to cross a flooded roadway. Instead, find an alternative route or do not attempt to travel, if at all possible.

Senior heavy equipment operator Roscoe Tsosie said his road maintenance crews are on the road this week, providing direct services to flooded areas.

Tsosie said, "We have crews out on N15, near Cornfields and Sunrise area. Other areas include Route 12 near In-

dian Wells and N64 and N59, headed out to Kayenta from Many Farms."

As of this morning, he said other areas of concern were in the communities of Chinle, Red Valley, Tonalea, Cow Springs, Sweetwater, Two Grey Hills, Toadlena, Sheep Springs, Newcomb, and Shiprock.

Flash floods occur unexpectedly and quickly, often covering roadways within minutes or hours of excessive rainfall.

If you see a flooded roadway, turn around. Otherwise, find higher ground and wait for water to subside.

Six-inches of water will reach the bottom of most passenger cars, causing loss of control or stalled engines. One-foot of water will float many vehicles. Two-feet of rushing water can sweep away most vehicles, including pickups and sport utility vehicles.

The following tips for driving in thunderstorms are courtesy of the Federal Emergency Management Agency:

- Tune in to your radio to stay informed of approaching storms
- If you see a tornado or hear a tornado warning, don't try to outrun it
- Turn on your headlights (low beams) and slow down
- Allow extra distance for braking
- Don't drive unless necessary
- Stay in the car and turn on emergency flashers until the heavy rains subside
- Automobiles provide better insulation against lightning than being in the open
- Avoid contact with any metal services inside your car or outside
- Avoid flooded roadways
- Avoid down power lines
- Approach intersections with caution



Flooding in the Huerfano area damaged dirt roads and eroded large portions of earth near the roadbed. This channel began eroding into the roadway as well. (Photos by Rick Abasta)