

# My Most Vivid Memory Concerning Water



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Since my mom works for the Pembina County Water Resource district office, my water memories revolve around the Red River basin in Northeastern North Dakota. Living near the Tongue River, I cross it each day as I come and go to school and work. Although most times, I zip across the bridge on the highway in my car, other times I choose to walk across the walking bridge where I can peer over the edge and watch the water flow. With my mom's guidance, I have had the opportunity to learn about the ebb and flow of the Tongue River system through droughts and floods and have been taught how to gauge the river height by visually measuring the river against a static point.

During the Fall of 2021, I watched water levels drop lower and lower on my leisurely strolls across the river. By late fall, the Tongue River was a mere trickle through my community and discussions about water priority rights were being held. Luckily, our drinking water comes from underground aquifers; however, livestock producers and irrigators were at odds on who should get first rights to the dropping water levels. The levels were also affecting Icelandic State Park as the boat dock was soon no longer touching the lake. During much of the winter, there was not much relief in sight as snow levels were below average --that was until late spring 2022.

In March and April 2022, it seems that all of the precipitation that did not fall during the summer of 2021 decided to fall. Within a few short weeks, several feet of heavy wet snow were blanketing the area. Discussions turned quickly from water priority rights to flood preparations, especially after a heavy rain melted the snow quickly in late April. Although I was very young, I still remember the flood of 2013 and having to evacuate my home due to the instability of Renwick Dam. Thankfully, Renwick has had a major reconstruction and breaching is no longer a concern, but that did not mean that the area would not still have major flooding issues.

During the early morning of May 1, 2022, I woke up to my mom leaving the house. She would return briefly to shower and grab necessities mid-morning before heading back to her office. Water had risen through the night and was expected to flow across the new spillway at Renwick within the next few hours. Honestly, my mom and I were both a little excited as it was never really expected to flow on the auxiliary spillway. Although Renwick was performing as designed, the city of Cavalier was ill-prepared for the amount of flow. The tiny trickle of last fall was now a roaring river that was threatening homes and businesses in low-lying areas.

Flooding near the city of Cavalier was soon overshadowed by a failing spillway at Bourbanis Dam. I did not see my mom much that week as she managed engineers, National Guard, and emergency responders working both in the city of Cavalier and at Bourbanis Dam. When she was able to come home for short periods, her phone constantly was pinging with new river level updates, questions from engineers, and requests for public information updates. National Guard helicopters were soon flying overhead as they worked to place sandbags and locate large pumps to help draw down Bourbanis' reservoir. Adding to the stress of the week, my brother was graduating college on Saturday, and I knew my mom would not leave if the situation with the dams was not stabilized. Thankfully by early Saturday morning, it appeared that the efforts to stabilize the breach at Bourbanis dam was working and water levels were stabilizing which allowed my mom to attend graduation and enjoy the day with family. Bourbanis Dam was not done being a "problem child" for my mom though as it was determined that it no longer was safe to leave in place which meant a summer of planning for the dam's decommission in Fall 2022.

Even though my future career plans as a nurse will not place me in a position similar to my mom, I do hope to be an active leader in my community which means that I will need to be prepared to address situations of both drought and flood as it seems that there is always not enough or too much water. Issues with flooding and drought will continue to occur; however, communities can prepare and win the battle with dedicated efforts of government, citizens, and volunteers.