

Flood Safety Awareness Week Day 3: Ice Jams and Seasonal Flooding

The National Weather Service has declared March 15 through 19 Flood Safety Awareness Week. The National Weather Service in Caribou will feature a different educational topic each day during the week. Today's topic: Ice Jams and Seasonal Flooding.

Each year as winter transitions into spring, rivers, streams, and brooks around northern and eastern Maine begin to shed their ice. Snowmelt runoff pours into the water system and does its best to work downstream. When this runoff impacts ice it begins pushing the ice downstream.

As the ice migrates downstream it may come in contact with structures including bridges and river bends which could cause the ice to become stuck in place. When ice becomes stuck along the water channel it is called an ice jam. If the jam persists, water flowing upstream of the jam may begin to back up, with the ice jam acting as a natural dam. Flooding will become a possibility upstream of the jam as the water continues to be blocked.

An even more dangerous situation occurs when the ice jam finally releases. This release could be sudden with all of the flood waters upstream suddenly releasing. In this situation the ice will be lifted by the rushing water and migrated downstream very quickly. A localized flash flood becomes a possibility ahead of the ice along with dangerous fast moving ice chunks.

Throughout the late winter and early spring, local authorities and your National Weather Service monitor the progress of any ice jams. Stay tuned to your favorite weather and news source for updates, and if you live or work along the body of water affected by the jam be prepared to take action quickly if a flood is expected. Never walk out onto an ice jam. The ice is unstable, and can release quickly catching you off guard.

More information about current river conditions can be found at <http://water.weather.gov/>.