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# The Great Ohio Valley Flood of 1913- 100 Years Later

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## Remember Our Past

- The Silver Jackets teams of Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky, and Pennsylvania, in collaboration with the Midwest Regional Climate Center are commemorating 100 years of flood mitigation since the great Ohio Valley flood of 1913.
- Heavy rainfall, equivalent to two to three months worth, fell across the Ohio Valley between March 23 and March 27<sup>th</sup> of 1913. The resulting runoff produced cataclysmic floods and damages never before seen over such a large area extending from Indiana, Ohio, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, New York, and later communities along the Mississippi River.
- The Capitals of both Ohio and Indiana were inundated with water over 10 feet deep as levees failed, which slowed rescue efforts in those states.
- When the floodwaters receded, the damages exceeded \$200 million and over 450 people had drowned.
- Prior to the Great Flood of 1913, the only natural disasters the nation had witnessed that were greater were the dam break flood at Johnstown, PA in 1889 and the Galveston Hurricane in 1900. Though the death tolls were significantly higher in each of those events, the extent of the disaster was fairly localized, while the Great Flood of 1913 was spread over several states and lasted for several days.



This is a view of Massillon, Ohio, looking east from Ceres Supply Co., Tremont Street during the flood in March 1913. Photo courtesy of the Massillon Museum and the



This is a view people standing on roofs of collapsed houses brought down by the fast moving currents of the Miami River after the flood in March 1913. Photo courtesy of the Ohio Historical Society.

- The death toll and damages were staggering at the time. But also unseen before in a natural disaster was this significant of an impact on the national economy. The ripple effect this flood had by halting business and commerce over a booming industrial part of the country for an extended period of time increased the outcry for flood control.

- In the Miami Basin in Ohio, where over 360 people were killed, the local people took the initiative and raised over \$2 million for flood mitigation engineering and legal studies.

- Their efforts soon pushed through the Ohio Conservancy Act, which enabled for the establishment of conservancy districts, the first such legislation in the country. Shortly after they formed the Miami Conservancy District (MCD) in 1915. Designed and directed by engineer Arthur E. Morgan, the MCD installed 5 large reservoirs around Dayton. This passed the test when the rains of 1959 nearly matched the 1913 yet the reservoirs held the floodwater back.
- At the national level the flood acted as an accelerator on the political, social, and cultural view on flood mitigation. There was a growing recognition that emergency assistance was not enough. Legislation was slowed, but future floods on the Mississippi in 1917, 1927, and 1936, and 1937 revived support for national flood control legislation.
- In the one hundred years since the Great Flood of 1913 there have been great strides in reducing the threat to life and property from floods. It has been learned time and time again that through a combination of education, preparedness, mitigation, and emergency services these that the loss of life and property can be greatly reduced in future floods.

## Reducing Our Flood Risk Today

- The Silver Jackets are state teams consisting of federal, state, and local partners to provide focused flood mitigation assistance, identify gaps and barriers to flood risk reduction implementation, and improve on risk communication and leveraging of information and resources.
- Several strategies are in place to reduce flood risk:
  - Prevention measures (building, zoning, storm water management, floodplain regulations)
  - Property protection measures (acquisition, elevation, relocation, flood insurance)
  - Natural resource protection (wetland protection, erosion/sediment control)
  - Emergency services (warning programs, disaster response)
  - Structural projects (dams, levees, channel modifications)
  - Public information (outreach, technical assistance, education)
- Advanced Flood Warning Systems
  - Extensive river and rain gauge networks
  - Dual Pol Radar Technology
  - Meteorological and Hydrological modeling for more accurate forecasts

## Strategize Our Future

- Silver Jackets will continue to meet to reassess the needs of the state with goals of improving the competencies of the U.S. officials at all levels of government to:
  - prepare for
  - protect against
  - respond to
  - recover from
  - mitigate the potential effects of flooding
- Silver Jackets remains committed to:
  - Improving the efficiency and cooperation between State, Local and Federal officials
  - Enhancing the preparedness and building resiliency of individuals, families, and whole of communities