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NEWS TAKE TO WATER

Florida teams join Mississippi to assist in rescue efforts

By **JOY E. STODGHILL**

The Mississippi Press

If tragic hurricanes sweeping across the Gulf states in the aftermath of Katrina's wake.

Emergency personnel have taken over the school with a parking lot packed with vehicles, ATVs, boats, command centers and police cars.

Florida crews are splitting time and day between Harrison and Jacksonville, with local authorities with search efforts.

We kind of come up the ball," said Matthew Ervin, an officer with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission.

Ervin and other guys have been out of town," said Ervin, with the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (DMR).

Ervin explained to Ervin how he had to ready himself in Vancleave, as well as the homes of members for the storm.

Ervin, who is nine months pregnant with a baby named Caroline, took their toddler, to Tupelo before the storm.

Ervin continued to share family stories of the river intently searching for survivors in need of rescuing.

Ervin said Florida is 10 weeks pregnant. Ervin said the emergency room the day her son was born, with complications and is now at the hospital to bed rest.

Ervin said many emergency personnel, suffering from damage to his home.

Ervin said he had a chance to get in touch with my family because we've been out here...at the moment," he said matter-of-factly.

Ervin said scorching September sun, Webb and Ervin searched the marsh on either side. A breeze blew occasionally. Herons and other birds flew

overhead while otters played in the river below them. Other animals such as fish and raccoons were visible as well, but were not so lucky. Trees — some standing, some fallen — are brightly decorated in colors reminiscent of circuses and happier times. Clothes, pieces of curtains, plastic bags and tarps and bright orange life jackets dot the landscape among the marsh grasses and trees.

Large rusted dredge pipes and rubber pipes lay half-exposed on land and half-submerged dangerously somewhere beneath the murky water, making progress difficult at times. Other areas were impassable due to debris or lines mooring boats to trees.

At one point in the East Pascagoula River, south of I-10 in Moss Point, the smell of gas was obvious, and a few gas barrels floated in the oily waters.

Webb and Ervin mentioned a few problems they have faced since they got started. Webb mentioned stopping several people on a boat "joyriding" along Casino Row in Biloxi, or what is left of it.

"We can't be everywhere at once," he said. "A lot of people are still out after curfew, walking around because they're bored."

Ervin worked security for the Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) as they searched through the rubble of homes on land Wednesday. As they were out looking for survivors, they found neighbors more than willing to help in any way they could.

"For the most part, the community pretty much took care of each other," Ervin said. His big concern is that returning residents may try to enter their dilapidated homes without caution.

"We may end up rescuing some people (then)," he said.

As stories continued to be swapped about people who thought they could ride out the storm in rough areas, Webb said, "Some people think they're indestructible."



Carisa Anderson/The Mississippi Press

Officers prepare to patrol the Pascagoula River as the search continues for survivors of Hurricane Katrina.

Once the initial phase of search and rescue and anti-looting security is complete, Ervin said they will begin to "patrol in shifts" to prevent robbery and rioting.

Ervin and the other 400 game wardens initially deployed are being joined by more from Florida each day. Ervin is one of a smaller faction of the group, the 150-member Special Operations Group (SOG), which is trained in homeland security.

Webb said the DMR prepared as best they

could for the storm, moving most of their boats north of Interstate 10, but still suffered damage. "You can never prepare for something like this," he said.

At the end of their first run Thursday, Ervin said, "The East river is pretty much clear."

While the search-and-rescue crews are on the water, they will not hesitate to stop suspicious people on the water, because of the looting threat. Reporter Joy E. Stodghill can be reached at (251) 219-5551.



Carisa Anderson/The Mississippi Press

Department of Marina Resources Marine Patrol Officer Patrick Webb checks on a houseboat with two dogs as he and a Florida officer patrol the East a River in a search and rescue mission Thursday morning after Hurricane Katrina.