Those of us who remember the spring of 1990 probably recall something in particular that stands out as a testament to how wet those few months were.

For a farmhand from the Delta, the striking memory is of spending spring break week waxing and polishing a tractor, instead of driving it across fields ready for planting.

The spring of 2015 has shaped up eerily similar to that of 25 years ago, to the extent that the areas of extreme rainfall then and now almost completely overlay on a map of the state.

How wet has the spring, and especially May, been?

Fort Smith saw more than 18 inches of rain in May alone — more than a foot of rain above normal for the month. That excess rainfall in a small window has led to both flash flooding and prolonged flooding.

Three-month rain totals from other locales show why flooding has persisted and will continue to do so for some time. Hot Springs, 38 percent above normal. Little Rock, 54 percent above normal. Texarkana, 86 percent above normal.

Predominantly, the heaviest rainfall has fallen in the western third of the state. All that rain had to go somewhere, and since the ground in many areas passed the saturation point weeks ago, much of the water has flowed into the Arkansas River. Water levels along the river from Van Buren to Pine Bluff have hovered at or above flood stage, with the worst impacts being in the Van Buren area.
Rain
Continued from page 1

and Pine Bluff areas. Some river flooding in rural areas has occurred in Conway and Faulkner counties as well.

Although flooding has primarily been a concern along the Arkansas and Red rivers, other waterways around the state are higher than normal. The Ouachita River has raged throughout much of South-Central Arkansas down to Camden and beyond.

To date, the White and Black rivers have not been too much problem. However, their time may be coming, as lakes upstream may soon have no choice but to let water go.

Of course, Arkansas is not alone in its flooding woes. Portions of Texas and Oklahoma have suffered staggeringly.

And the rainfall has not been the only inclement weather threat.

Storms in early May and on Memorial Day weekend brought violent thunderstorms and several tornadoes to various areas of the state.

An EF2 tornado hit Nashville, AR last month. A tree was pushed down so hard that a chain link fence post was fully impaled instead of being crushed.

From a landslide that blocked a portion of Interstate 40 to multi-vortex tornadoes/waterspouts that damaged chicken houses, impacts of Spring 2015 weather have been far-reaching and will not soon be forgotten.

As of May 27, 21 of the state’s 75 counties have declared an emergency as a result of weather events. Those counties stretch from the southwest corner of the state, Sevier County, to nearly the northeast, Independence County.

To put into perspective how active May was from a weather standpoint, the first day of the month through the 26th, the National Weather Service office in Little Rock issued a total of 125 severe thunderstorm, flash flood and tornado warnings. That number compares to 16 such warnings in 2014, 29 in 2013 and 21 in 2012.

For the Tulsa NWS office, those numbers are: 2015, 32; 2014, 1; 2013, 23; 2012, 1.

For the Shreveport office: 2015, 43; 2014, 6; 2013, 17; 2012, 7.

More than a few flash flood and flood warnings have been issued since May 26.

The first hint of good news on the weather horizon came Tuesday when National Weather Service Senior Services Hydrologist Tabitha Clarke told ADEM staff that a more summer-like pattern should be taking control of the state’s weather by now.

Though rainfall chances have continued, that rainfall is more likely to be in much smaller amounts, she said, as opposed to the half-foot-at-a-time variety of the past few weeks.

“We should start seeing a change.”

A welcome one.
Tabitha Clark, senior services hydrologist with National Weather Service/Little Rock, answers a question during a conference call with county emergency managers and elected officials. ADEM Director David Maxwell hosted the call on May 22 in advance of another round of severe weather across the state. Maxwell (at right) viewed flood damage in Central Arkansas with Gov. Asa Hutchinson on May 29.
Jennifer Oakley, PDM Grant Coordinator, takes a call for public assistance from a resident of Pike County. ADEM staffers are taking calls through June 9 from residents of three Southwest Arkansas counties affected by storms and flooding of May 8 and beyond.

Call center taking assistance requests

Residents of Hempstead, Howard and Pike counties affected by the storms and flooding of May 8 may be eligible for Arkansas Disaster Assistance.

Assistance is available for eligible homeowners and renters whose primary residence was destroyed or severely damaged and who had eligible uninsured losses. Businesses are not eligible for this program.

Categories of assistance include home repair, personal property and primary transportation repair/replacement. Information needed when applying includes damage address, phone number, email address, Social Security number and a detailed description of the damage.

The application period will be May 27 through June 9. A call center will be open 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday-Friday during that time. The number is 1-888-683-2336.

APPLY FOR DISASTER ASSISTANCE
HEMPSTEAD, HOWARD, AND PIKE COUNTIES
Residents affected by the May 8, 2015, Tornadoes, Severe Storms and Flooding may be eligible for Arkansas Disaster Assistance.

SOLICITUD DE AYUDA POR DESASTRE
CONDADOS DE HEMPSHEAD, HOWARD Y PIKE
Los residentes afectados por los Tornados, Tormentas Severas e Inundaciones ocurridas el 8 de mayo de 2015, pueden ser elegibles para la Asistencia por Desastres de Arkansas.
Federal Surplus Property

FSP sponsors appreciation day

Federal Surplus Property held its annual Donee Appreciation Day on May 7th and had over 300 people, representing 80 different accounts, visit. This event is a time FSP dedicates to showing appreciation for those people who make FSP successful and always includes lunch, raffles and a good time.

In the past year FSP has collected over 27,000 donated items and sold over $100,000 worth through GSA Sales. That is not their biggest achievement though. In the past year FSP has helped eligible organizations gain over $27 million in property at a cost well below what it would be to gain that same property from a retailer.

Kathryn Mahan-Hooten executed booths and vendor exhibits at sixteen different events, published 11 newsletters and secured ads in two different magazines. Her efforts undoubtedly contributed to FSPs gain of 73 new accounts in the previous year, bringing them up to 883 eligible agencies.

FSP also took the opportunity this day provided to hold a meeting of their advisory board. Reports were given by members of FSP detailing their accomplishments for the previous year. Many of the amazing figures provided earlier come directly from sitting in that meeting.

The most amazing piece, for me, was hearing that the Federal Surplus Property program is at risk due to a growing trend to send the best equipment to GSA Auctions instead of to FSP. Division Director Arthur Woods explained why this needs to be addressed, exhorting donees and board members to speak to their representatives.

“FSP not only saves the American taxpayer costly tax dollars when it comes to reuse and recycling of federal property but most importantly here in Arkansas it serves the people.”

- Div. Director Arthur Woods

Debbie Grooms, Development Coordinator for Arkansas Enterprises for the Developmentally Disabled and Arthur Woods, FSP Division Director, received awards from the National Association of Federal Surplus Property Agencies, presented by Kristy Fierro.

Follow ADEM on social media for real-time news and information!
Tour for Arkansas’s Secretary of Agriculture

Secretary Wes Ward and ADEM Director David Maxwell in the State Emergency Operations Center. During the Tour Director Maxwell spoke about the role that all state agencies play when the EOC is activated.

Tour for 1st District Rep. Crawford

SGT Mike Dawson (below from left), COL Bill Bryant, Congressman Rick Crawford and Director David Maxwell examining a display of Arkansas State Police Bomb Squad equipment (at left). SGT Dawson, ASP Bomb Squad Commander, answered questions about the new ways technology helps keep bomb technicians both effective and safe.
A Smart911 profile perhaps helped save the life of a Lonoke County woman.

On April 14, a call came into the Lonoke County dispatch center. Christy Kenzel took the call.

It was from a home health aide reporting that her patient needed immediate attention. However, Kenzel was unable to determine the patient’s address because she could not get the spelling of the street name.

But because the patient had previously filled out a Smart911 profile, Kenzel was able to access the address, including the proper spelling of the street name. From there, the dispatcher was able to direct medical personnel to the scene.

“The way she kept saying the street name, I couldn’t determine the spelling, and I could not find the road to dispatch the ambulance to,” Kenzel said. “Not only did the Smart911 profile provide the exact address, I was able to relay all of her medication information to the EMTs while they were en route. It saved both me and the EMTs several minutes in response time.”

The patient’s Smart911 profile also included her doctor’s name and the hospital personnel should transport her to.

Lt. Matt Edwards of the county’s Sheriff’s Department, said time is of the essence in many medical emergencies.

“We are constantly encouraging our residents to create a profile with Smart911 for exactly this reason. Christy was able to use the information provided by the citizen to save time and answer questions for the responders before they even arrived at her location. The time saved may just have saved this woman’s life,” he noted.

State Sen. Jonathan Dismang, who represents Lonoke County, agreed.

“This is just another great example of how Arkansas’s Smart911 system is making a positive difference in our communities,” he said. “We’re proud to have Arkansas leading the nation in protecting our citizens across the state with Smart911.”
Have a witty animal-themed preparedness meme? Then American Public Health Association has the contest for you. The organization’s Ready, Pet, Go! Contest is featuring animals sharing a readiness message. Entries will be accepted through today, so hurry to enter here.
Thank you to all our Emergency Medical Service professionals.

The MEMS station in Little Rock was kind enough to pose for photos during EMS Week. The personnel pictured includes Administrators, Medics, EMTs and Dispatchers. MEMS also broke ground on a new facility and participated in a parade during EMS Week.
ADEM staff mix work, lunch, fun

ADEM staff joined together (in spirit, if not in location) for a long-planned picnic lunch on May 28. Ongoing disaster assistance efforts and continued monitoring of flooding events made for a somewhat disjointed event, but spirits were enthusiastic nonetheless. Director David Maxwell (at left) welcomed those at the lunch site before Tabitha Clarke (below), senior services hydrologist with the National Weather Service/Little Rock, provided another flooding update and forecast briefing. Lunch consisted of burgers and hot dogs grilled by Glen Beedle (top, left), Finance and Accounting Branch Manager, and Kendell Snyder (right), Fire Services Coordinator. “Supervising” the grilling is Mark Hooker, Training and Exercise Branch Manager. Several staff members entered desserts in a contest, won by Layce Blake, Mitigation Branch Manager. Trey Gray, Homeland Security Program Coordinator, came in second.
Duty Officer Randall Berry (right) goes through the lunch line.

Five teams vied for the horseshoes-pitching crown, and the team of Beedle and Clay Bewley (second from right), Public Assistance Officer, came out on top. Oscar Myers (left), Warehouse Property Agent at Federal Surplus Property, and Kyle Key, HMGP Grant Coordinator, finished second.

Denise Loyd (right), Administrative Assistant for Preparedness/Training/Exercise, calls out BINGO numbers as Linda Crow, Senior Accountant, waits to hand out a prize.
ADEM staffers certify with state program

Personnel Manager Erin Townsend and Planning Branch Manager Danna McGinty have certified as volunteer managers.

They were among 35 Arkansans who recently earned certification in public and volunteer management from the Arkansas Public Administration Consortium (APAC) in a ceremony at the Arkansas Governor’s Mansion.

APAC is a consortium of three universities in the state, Arkansas State University in Jonesboro, University of Arkansas at Little Rock and the University of Arkansas. APAC has been successfully delivering training and education to managers and leaders from the public and nonprofit sectors since 1985.

John M. Selig, Director, Arkansas Department of Human Services, was the keynote speaker. Mr. Selig shared his thoughts on the importance of rigorous professional development, and encouraged the graduates to continue learning and applying their knowledge at their organizations.

The Arkansas Governmental Manager (AGM) program provides management training to middle and upper level manager in public and nonprofit agencies and in local and county government. The AGM designation is attained upon completion of 10 two-day courses and a service project.

Readiness kit winner

Directorate Administrative Assistant Amber Daugherty (right) draws the winner for an earthquake readiness kit as part of ongoing efforts to raise participation in this year’s Great Central U.S. Shakeout. Katie Belknap (left), Earthquake Program Coordinator, devised the online contest and is continuing to enlist participants in the event.
Let’s talk frustration.
No, I don’t mean when your favorite team loses. Or when you go all the way across the county to the one store that carries your brand of whatever only to find an empty shelf. Or even when the fish don’t bite.
No, I’m talking about a higher level of frustration — one that stems from our inability, sometimes, to prevent tragedies.

In April 2014, I spoke to a number of Vilonia residents who basically told me the same story: “Yeah, I heard the sirens go off, and I saw the guy on TV saying that the tornado was coming, but I figured we would be OK here at the house in a closet. … Then, the house exploded, and Grandpa was out in the pasture with a 2x4 through his kidneys.”

These were people within a five-minute walk of the community’s safe room.
Frustrating.

This spring has been a near-continuous frustration. We’ve seen raging floodwaters remain at ridiculous levels for weeks, we still get reports on a daily basis of people driving through water and getting trapped or people going swimming in a creek that’s closer to a torrent of whitewater than it is a cozy swimming hole.

We warn, and we caution, and we urge, but, still, some people ignore our words of wisdom and put themselves — and then first-responders — in harm’s way.

What can we do?
Not much, in one regard. There will always be people who missed the “be careful” gene handout.

Nothing we an do about them.
But, many more people will listen if we continue to put out our safety messages and remind our friends and neighbors of the dangers that can be all around us.

Don’t give up! Keep on keeping on! We can’t save everybody from themselves, but we can make a big difference in many people’s lives.

Keep spreading that safety message!
Thunderstorm, flash flood and tornado warnings in the state through the first 29 days of May have affected areas 3.3 times the size of the state.