



*At times, up to three cranes were working to clear the log jam between the railway bridge and the Gérard-D.-Levesque bridge. As the SPEC was reaching its deadline, the debris was a couple of days away from being fully removed.*

Photos: G. Gagné

## Major flood causes extensive damage in the Gaspé Peninsula, mostly in Bay of Chaleur area

Gilles Gagné

CASCAPEDIA-ST-JULES—A major flood struck the south side of the Gaspé Peninsula on December 2 and 3, mainly the Bay of Chaleur area. Dozens of roads were closed temporarily, while as many as 280 houses were isolated during the worst part of the flood. A total of 28 people were evacuated by different authorities, sometimes municipal employees and sometimes police officers of the Sûreté du Québec.

Heavy rainfalls brought as much as 160 millimetres to certain areas in less than 24 hours. The mountains of the back country were the most affected areas and the water level kept rising 12 hours after the rain had stopped.

Up to 13 roads were still closed on the morning of December 4 and six evacuated people still had not returned to their homes. It will take a couple of weeks, maybe more, before calculating the total sum of the damage but a lot of people had already started cleaning the mess on the afternoon of December 3, despite the fact that in some spots, the water level had not started to go down.

As the SPEC was reaching its December 4 deadline, the two main spots of concern remained the damaged structure of White Brook's bridge on Road 299 near the kilometre 12.5 point, and the state of the two old railway bridges also situated in Cascapedia-St-Jules.

Although it will likely take a few weeks before traffic can resume on Road 299's kilometre 12.5 point, Transports Québec is permitting pedestrians to walk on the damaged bridge, says Darlene Sexton, Director general of the Cascapedia River Society, which is extending a hand to the residents stuck between the White Brook bridge and the last house located near kilometre 16.

"One of the people who is stuck up there is Ken Labrecque, our assistant manager, and he spoke with the

road department and it is safe for them to walk across the bridge that has been damaged at White Brook. So yesterday, his brother-in-law went and picked him up and brought him down and he came in here (to the office). He had the idea to bring two of our trucks to place on this side of the bridge for emergency usage or if someone needs something. We have 11 people up there in five homes. Two are our employees, so it is a safety thing which I thought was a great idea. He took them (the trucks) down to New Richmond and they are full of gas and ready to go if and when needed. It is a small way to help our citizens through another crisis," explains Ms. Sexton.

The other area severely affected was the east part of the old railway bridge in Cascapedia-St-Jules, where work was still ongoing for a third straight day on December 4 to clear the log jam consisting of hundreds of trees.

"There is still wood between the (road and railway) bridges, and under the railway bridge. It will have to be inspected before the passage of the next train but it can't be done as long as we can't have a look under the bridge," says Mr. Dubé.

There is also clearing work to do on other parts of the railway between Matapédia and Gaspé, but the Gaspésie Railway Society employees are concentrating their effort between New Richmond and Matapédia, the part that is currently in use.

"The railroad is not damaged but we have to clear culverts full of wood and mud and make sure that it won't cause damage in the near future," adds Éric Dubé. Traffic resumption between New Richmond and Nouvelle was hard to predict as of December 4 because of the inspection required on the Cascapedia-St-Jules bridges, which seemed almost untouched from the nearby road, except for a slightly torn steel beam.

As prefect of the Bonaven-



*The debris caused by a log jam between the railway bridge and the Gérard-D.-Levesque bridge will likely take days to be completely removed.*

Photos: G. Gagné

ture MRC and mayor of New Richmond, Éric Dubé was in a good position to assess some other damage caused by the floods.

"There is a lot of people working at repairing and cleaning roads, clearing culverts and assessing some structures. I can say that nobody in the MRC is isolated. There is still work to do between the Third and Fourth Ranges (east) roads," he concluded on December 4.

On his part, Cascapedia-St-Jules mayor Gaétan Boudreau will keep a close eye on the Road 299 repairs, specifically in the White River bridge area. "I understand that no major work can be undertaken before the water level comes back to normal, which will allow the structure to be assessed, including the abutments, but if things are not moving after mid-December, I will start calling Transports Québec quite often," he says.

Meanwhile, the road between Bonaventure and Saint-Elzéar was closed for a full day

because the Bonaventure River was blocking the way. The only option for people from Saint-Elzéar was using Church Street to get to New Carlisle. The main road received the green light the following morning.

Other floods caused damage in Chandler, Grand River,

Percé (where a snowmobile bridge passing over Portage River was carried away by the current), Sainte-Anne-des-Monts, Maria and Nouvelle. In Ristigouche South East, Moffet Brook's overflow temporarily closed Highway 132 on the evening of December 2.



*Road 299 sustained heavy damage, mostly around the 12.5-kilometre point, where the White Brook bridge was destroyed. The road was, nevertheless, closed around the 7th kilometre, for safety reasons, as the water of other brooks was passing vigorously on the pavement.*