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Fertile man drowns in accident near dam

By KRISTIN BUEHNER,

Jul 26, 2010



Emergency personnel carry the body of a man who drowned in the Winnebago River after falling from the dam in cleaning debris from the dam when he fell in. (BRYON HOULGRAVE/The Globe Gazette)

By KRISTIN BUEHNER,

FERTILE — A 43-year-old man who drowned Monday at Fertile was attempting to help out his community by removing debris from around the Fertile dam.

The man identified as James Thompson was attempting to move a log stuck at the top of the dam when he went over the dam, the Worth County Sheriff's Department reported. The Sheriff's Department had not confirmed the victim's identity late

Monday but it was confirmed by funeral home officials handling arrangements and by witnesses at the scene.

His body was located about a half mile down the river shortly after 1 p.m.

Emergency personnel performed CPR for more than half an hour but could not revive Thompson, Worth County Sheriff Jay Langenbau said.

Thompson helped out the city every once in a while, Langenbau said.

Joseph Elings, 13, of Fertile, who was with Thompson when the accident occurred, said they were trying to remove debris from the river. Thompson was in the water while Elings was on the river bank.

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“He was pushing the log trying to get it to fall in the water at the edge of the dam,” Elings said. “When the log finally fell off, he tried to swim back to grab onto the ledge and couldn’t make it.”

Thompson was swept over the the dam, which Langenbau estimated is 15 to 20 feet high.

His head bobbed up a couple times at the bottom of the dam and then he disappeared, Elings said.

Langenbau said the river is higher than normal with recent heavy rains and is probably moving faster than normal, too.

“There’s a lot of suction at the bottom of the dam,” he said.

It is the second drowning at the Fertile dam in the past 10 to 12 years, Langenbau said.

An autopsy will be performed.

The Worth County Sheriff’s Department was assisted at the scene by the Iowa State Patrol, Department of Natural Resources, Winnebago County Sheriff’s Department, Fertile Fire Department, Hanlontown Fire Department, Clear Lake Fire Department and Manly Police Department.

Funeral arrangements are incomplete at the Petersen Lund Funeral Home, 505 N. Clark in Forest City. A funeral notice appears on Page A8.

— Heather Jordon of the Forest City Summit contributed to this report.

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