

Two men, 11-year-old die after canoe capsizes near Belle Fourche

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BELLE FOURCHE -- Two Rapid City men and an 11-year-old girl died Sunday after a canoe capsized about midday near a diversion dam for the Belle Fourche Irrigation District.

Officials have identified the victims as Jeramy Rogers, 38, Andrew Korth, 26, and Sierra Rogers, 11.

A fourth occupant in the canoe, Isabella Rogers, 8, was swept to shore by the current and walked about two hours to find help.

Butte County Deputy Sheriff Doug Parrow mobilized a search, and Belle Fourche Irrigation District operators manually opened gates to divert water from the river into the canal to lower the water level, Butte County Sheriff Fred Lamphere said.

The bodies of the victims were recovered from the Belle Fourche River. Parrow said the other girl in the canoe had also been wearing a floatation device.

It is the second boating accident this summer at the diversion dam. A Spearfish couple kayaking there narrowly escaped drowning in the turbulent area of the river in April. The diversion dam is part of the Belle Fourche irrigation project that feeds the Belle Fourche Reservoir at Orman Dam.

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Parrow had high praise for Isabella. “She is a very brave and courageous young lady.”

He said Isabella told him she remembered passing under a bridge before the canoe capsized in the turbulence at the dam structure. She headed back upstream to find the bridge. When she stopped a motorist on U.S. Highway 212, she still wore her floatation jacket. Parrow said she perfectly described the accident and its location.

Terrain along the river in that area is very difficult, Parrow said. Weeds and willows are tightly packed and can be 5 to 6 feet high. Collapsed beaver dams create holes 2 to 3 feet deep that aren’t easily seen.

“I don’t know how she made it,” Parrow said. “I couldn’t do it. Not in that mess.”

He told how the girl reported the canoe hit part of the diversion dam wall and capsized. She was thrown out, and the current pushed her to shore.

“She never cried,” Parrow said. “She gave me her address, the names, what happened.”

“It’s been a very tragic day,” he said. “My heart goes out to the families.”

“The miracle was the 8-year-old who was able to get to help,” he said. “She’s got a very strong survival instinct.”

Lamphere said between 50 and 75 people were involved in the recovery effort, including the sheriff's office, Belle Fourche Police, Belle Fourche Fire Department and Search and Rescue, Butte County Ambulance, South Dakota Game, Fish & Parks, Bureau of Land Management, South Dakota Highway Patrol, Newell Volunteer Fire Department, City of Belle Fourche elected officials and maintenance workers, Nisland Volunteer Fire Department, pilot Mark Jarnecke, who conducted an aerial search, and many volunteers.