

Ohio and Missouri Basin River Forecast Centers Three Quarters of a Century Providing Water Services

This autumn, the National Weather Service's (NWS) Ohio and Missouri Basin River Forecast Centers (RFCs) will celebrate 75 years of operations.

In the early 1940s, the NWS had a vision to modernize river and flood forecasting services by establishing centers focused on hydrology. Cincinnati and Kansas City were chosen to be the homes of the first two RFCs. The Ohio RFC opened on September 23, 1946, and one week later on October 1, 1946 the Lower Missouri RFC opened.

Over the past 75 years the Ohio and Missouri Basin RFCs have gone through several transitions relating to technology, science, and data. The RFCs transitioned from hand calculations to using complex computer models, and from using remote, centralized mainframes to local computer systems. There was also an explosive growth in the availability of data. Originally, cooperative observers provided weather and stream data by telegrams, postcards, teletypewriters, and telephone. Today, RFCs utilize vast data networks that provide weather and stream data via observers, telemetry, satellite and radar in near real-time – comprised of more than 5,000 sites. The two RFCs issue forecasts for about 840 river and reservoir locations.

Since the NWS established the Ohio and Missouri Basin RFCs, they have added an additional 11 RFCs. These centers of hydrologic excellence provide water services to all 50 states and most U.S. territories. While many things have changed since 1946, today, the NWS RFCs continue to evolve and change by integrating new science and technology, and expanding services to meet the needs of the people and communities they serve. That mission continues to motivate the dedicated and hardworking people at the NWS's RFCs.