

Proactive Flood Plan Saves Toad Suck One-Stop Owner Money, Protects Environment

By Nate Olson, DEQ

Jon McGinty was on pins and needles every time he viewed aerial footage of the epic Arkansas River floodwaters that had inundated the Toad Suck One-Stop just west of Conway. Just a few days before, McGinty and Arkansas Petroleum Solutions owner Nathan Huggins had led a crew of employees to secure the site. When McGinty, a petroleum technician, watched that footage on newscasts and social media, his eyes were on the tanks and a sheen on the water indicating leaking fuel.

“No one in our industry had experienced the hydrostatic pressure that was going to be coming through,” Huggins said. “Water was pouring four foot above ground; you have no idea what the energy of that water is and what it will do. We had no idea if the precautionary stuff we had done was going to be enough to keep everything in place.”



Photo Courtesy of Jason Trantina

Arkansas River floodwaters inundated the Toad Suck One-Stop in June, but thanks to a proactive plan by owner Jason Trantina and Arkansas Petroleum Solutions the fuel tanks stayed in place and no fuel was leaked.

When the water receded, owner Jason Trantina’s building was ravaged inside, but his tanks were intact with no leaks. Huggins credits Trantina for his forward thinking. Trantina farms on property near the river levee and is a member of the levee board, so he was privy to potential river levels. Two weeks before flooding was a threat, Trantina contacted the company about a plan to protect his equipment and the environment. That gave Huggins and McGinty time to plan the best procedures.

“We discussed every option we had, and the best option was to remove all of the fuel equipment and cap all of the lines off, cap all off the electric and get all of the tanks filled with fuel and make sure all of the cabling was tight so the hydrostatic pressure wouldn’t push the fuel out or cause the tanks to float,” Huggins said.

With the river about to crest, Trantina was determined to stay open Memorial Day weekend – one of the busiest days of the year. All parties decided that Monday afternoon was when the floodwater may compromise the property, so Arkansas Petroleum crews arrived Sunday and worked to remove all equipment among other preventative measures. Huggins said convincing his employees to give up their Sunday off on Memorial Day weekend was easy because they “love [Trantina’s] family.”

“It looked like a bunch of ants around here Sunday morning,” Trantina said. “[Huggins] told me not to worry about it, and they would take care of it, and they did. They took care of me like family. There are a lot of oil companies that aren’t going to come out here on a Sunday morning of Memorial Day weekend and do what these guys did.”

Harrison’s Petromark sent a truck Monday morning to top the tanks off with fuel to make them as heavy as possible. Later, things got tense once the raging floodwaters ripped over the large concrete barriers covered with visqueen that Trantina and volunteers had built.

"I had to tell people to quit sending me pictures and videos," Trantina said. "I told them, I don't want to see anything until it's time to work."

When the water finally receded, Trantina's property was devastated as expected, but an environmental disaster was avoided.

"What he did and the attention he paid to it as an owner, you just don't find many owners that will do that," Huggins said. "They will just say, 'I will file the insurance claim.' He saved about \$80,000 in fuel equipment that wouldn't have been covered by insurance. At the end of the day, not only did he protect the environment, but he protected his investment and let his customers know a week in advance that he may have to shut down for an extended period of time based on the weather. He did everything you would expect from someone who has integrity. He gets an 'atta boy' for being proactive and protecting everything."

The Arkansas Department of Energy and Environment, Division of Environmental Quality (DEQ), also noticed Trantina's preparedness. The agency had been monitoring stations statewide as flooding became widespread.

"I was really happy," DEQ Inspector Supervisor Sam McDuffie said. "It was nice to see they had taken the proactive approach in this preparing before it actually happened."

With floodwater still lurking twenty feet behind the building, Trantina began to repair his building with the help of his brother and nephew, home builders in Florida, along with other relatives and volunteers. It wasn't long and Huggins and McGinty showed up to assess the damage. They found that electrical panels were full of sand and silt. They cleaned them with a water hose and shop vac in preparation of hooking up the fuel equipment.

Trantina and crew made such significant headway in June that Huggins and McGinty decided the entire operation could be ready for the July Fourth holiday, another historically busy day.

"[Huggins] and I were talking, and we felt like it would be a really good booster for [Trantina], to go into the holiday and be able to sell fuel and goods from inside the store," McGinty said. "In a way, it was a celebration for the community because this is kind of a hub. You say Toad Suck One-Stop anywhere around here, and people know what you are talking about. Jason said if we thought we could put it all back, he'd give us the green light."

The Arkansas Petroleum crew arrived and began furiously re-installing the equipment that had been in storage. They beat the deadline by a day and were selling gas by midday July 3. Not only did Huggins and McGinty help install equipment, they installed a door and did other handyman chores as well

as ringing up customers while Trantina finished unloading food.

"We didn't announce [the opening] on Facebook on the third because we knew there may be some bugs to work out," Trantina said. "There weren't even any bugs to work out. They had that sucker up and running. I was grinning ear to ear because I know if you can sell a Coke and a tank of gas people are going to be happy."

On an unusually sweltering morning in mid-September, it's business as usual at the convenience store. Patrons are in and out getting gas and grabbing coffee. The building sparkles like new (partly because it is), and the only sign of the flood is a literal sign that sits on partway up on the outside of the building that features a caricature of a toad indicating how high the floodwater was.

With everything in order, Trantina has spent most of this morning working on the farm. He and McGinty and Huggins share a few laughs recounting the last few months, and how it came together. They all agree that they "hope a next time" never comes, but if it does, they will be ready.

"[Flooding] isn't going to run me off, it's too good of a business, and it's too good for the community," Trantina said. "Can I handle [flooding] every three or four years? No. Every ten years, a new remodel will be OK. We know we can do this. We may tweak a few things, but we know we can do it."



Photo by Nate Olson

Thanks to a collaborative effort, it didn't take long for Toad Suck One-Stop to reopen after the Arkansas River flood this summer. Pictured (from left) are: Arkansas Petroleum Solutions owner Nathan Huggins, Toad Suck One-Stop owner Jason Trantina and Arkansas Petroleum Solutions petroleum technician Jon McGinty.