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## Great Ape Trust's luck improves on Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>

Des Moines, Iowa – June 13, 2008 – The Des Moines River crested at Great Ape Trust early Friday morning, three days after floodwaters caused non-essential personnel to evacuate the 230-acre campus in southeast Des Moines. The situation is still serious, but senior leaders of the scientific research center studying ape behavior and intelligence believe the crisis has passed.

Water crept into the ape buildings Thursday, but a half dozen water discharge pumps kept water at levels recommended by builders of the vertical ape residences to give the buildings maximum stability during times of high water.

“Water is intentionally being managed at 6 inches, based on the recommendations of our builders,” said Dr. Rob Shumaker, director of orangutan research. “We need to keep at least 6 inches on the floor to balance the stresses on the buildings, and pumps are helping us manage that.”

Interior flooding was an unexpected development because the ape residences were built above historic Floods of 1993 levels, but directors of the orangutan and bonobo research programs say the situation is being well-managed and the apes are dry and comfortable. Ape caretakers remain with the bonobos and orangutans at all times.

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“The apes are doing really well,” said William M. Fields, director of bonobo research. “We’re trying to do some research, to reinforce that things are normal.

“The main inconvenience,” he said, “is to people.”

Orangutans are spending their time on the mezzanine and upper levels of their three-story home, Shumaker said.

Though officials believe the crisis has passed, contingency plans have been developed in the unlikely event that ape evacuation becomes necessary. Both the Blank Park Zoo in Des Moines and Henry Doorly Zoo in Omaha, Neb., have offered to provide emergency shelter for the apes, but officials don’t think that will be necessary.

“Our colleagues have just been spectacular,” Shumaker said.

At 6:15 a.m. Friday, the river level at Great Ape Trust was 35.06 feet, and predictions are for it to fall to 33.6 feet by 3 a.m. Saturday.

Trust officials speculate flooding at Great Ape Trust may have been exacerbated by post-1993 construction of a four-lane highway, which acted as a levee to impede the flow of floodwaters. Portions of the Highway 65/69 beltway remain closed today as floodwaters move over the roadway, further easing the situation at Great Ape Trust.

“Business is as normal as possible under the circumstances,” Operations Director Jim Aipperspach said. “We’re confident of our strategy to get through the next several days and the crest of this emergency. In due time, we will continue to return more and more to a normal operation here at Great Ape Trust, focusing on our mission.

“For now, we’re concentrating on day-to-day operations,” he said. “We’re cautiously optimistic we’ll get through the next several days and things will become more normal.”

To review a slide show and check updates on blogs, go to [www.GreatApeTrust.org](http://www.GreatApeTrust.org).

## ***GREAT APE TRUST BACKGROUND***

Great Ape Trust of Iowa is a scientific research facility in southeast Des Moines dedicated to understanding the origins and future of culture, language, tools and intelligence. When completed, Great Ape Trust will be the largest great ape facility in North America and one of the first worldwide to include all four types of great ape –

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bonobos, chimpanzees, gorillas and orangutans – for noninvasive interdisciplinary studies of their cognitive and communicative capabilities.

Great Ape Trust is dedicated to providing sanctuary and an honorable life for great apes, studying the intelligence of great apes, advancing conservation of great apes and providing unique educational experiences about great apes. Great Ape Trust of Iowa is a 501(c) 3 not-for-profit organization and is certified by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). To learn more about Great Ape Trust of Iowa, go to [www.GreatApeTrust.org](http://www.GreatApeTrust.org).

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## Insights Through Collaborations with Apes