



EXTENT OF DORIAN'S WRATH COMES INTO FOCUS

09/10/2019 by [Catherine Kozak](#)



Hyde County Manager Kris Noble, left, and Ivey Belch, pastor of the Ocracoke Lifesaving Church, coordinate relief efforts with an emergency responder. Photo: C. Leinbach/Ocracoke Observe

OCRACOKE ISLAND – Islanders here are just starting to see the extent of flood damage wrought by Hurricane Dorian’s shocking 7-foot surge on Friday morning that appears to have spared no building or vehicle – nor their contents – in the village.

“It came from all directions,” Bill Rich, special projects coordinator for Hyde County and former county manager, said Monday. “It was a horrible experience for a lot of people. Everybody’s lost something.”

From what most residents have observed, he said, it appears that the floodwaters reached 24 inches higher than they ever had in any storm in memory.

But Rich, a Hyde County native who has lived on the island full time since 2007, said that Ocracokers are stubbornly resilient, and fortunately the storm did not take any lives.

“We’re in our fourth day,” he said, talking on his cell phone from the island. “We’ve come a long way. We’ve got our water back. The generator went out ... We were out of water for a day and a half.”



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Once power is restored – some estimates put that within days, he said – recovery will continue in earnest. Each of the 1,200 electric meters on island buildings must first be checked by Tideland Electric Membership Corp. and state inspectors, he said. The state has provided additional inspectors to speed up the process. So far, Rich said, about a third of the meters need to be replaced.

Rich said he estimates that at least 80 percent of the island's vehicles were flooded. The county estimated that 800 people were on the island, based on that there are about 500 homeowners, and that less people left than during Florence, Rich said. No one expected the surge would be so bad, he said.

The Variety Store had water to top of its first shelves. The library was inundated up to the first stack of books. The post office flooded, the hardware store flooded. The Fish house flooded, but all the fish was removed so it could be cooked. The Berkeley Manor – never known to flood – was flooded. The county's new trams are likely destroyed.

"The good news is we just repaired all the docks at the Ocracoke Community Foundation," Rich said. "They're all intact."

And the septic tanks still seem to be working, he added.

George Banks, who lives on Slash Creek in Hatteras, said that the village didn't get hit as hard as Ocracoke, although numerous buildings had about 6 inches of water.

"All I know is in my garage, I had 5 inches less than (Hurricane) Matthew, and Matthew was my worst-case scenario," said Banks, adding he got 15 inches of water in that storm. "It could've been a hell of a lot worse."

Banks, who has lived in the village full time since 1988, said that he has prepared his home so he and his wife Judy can stay during storms: His propane tank is secured in the ground, he has storm shutters, his electric is partially wired to a generator and he uses an electric stove.

And he has a "secret" location where there's high ground to park his vehicles.

"I do what I've got to do," he said. "This is not my first rodeo."

But Banks said the combined wind and water took a big toll in the village. He lost a 200-year-old oak and a 100-year-old cypress tree, and many neighbors also lost theirs.

"It was mostly a tree event," he said. "If we have 10 more storms like this on Hatteras Island, we'll look like Jockey's Ridge."

Long-term recovery

"This is going to be a long-term situation," Peter Vankevich of Ocracoke, co-publisher of the *Ocracoke Observer*, told *Coastal Review Online*. "You can't believe it, all the people who have lost all their stuff."

Vankevich said very few residents had left the island, mainly those with young children and older residents. But the situation is not going to be good when they return, with homes severely damaged, health risks from mold and tetanus, a lack of goods and services and dim prospects for the local economy.

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“The bank will not open because there’s no power — (Tideland Electric Membership Coop.) pulled the meter — the health service is closed and the school will be closed for the foreseeable future,” he said.

Tideland EMC pulled the meter as part of an ongoing assessment of each building on the island. It was unclear when power will be restored.

Trillium Health Resources personnel are on the island and will go door to door to see if people want counseling, said Laurie Potter, Hyde County Department of Social Services director. They will be on the island all week and will be at the Ocracoke Volunteer Fire Department at the medical treatment area.

Medical assistance is available at the Ocracoke Volunteer Fire Department, which is the command center for all activities. The Ocracoke post office also is closed indefinitely, said Celeste Brooks, postmaster. However, UPS arrived Monday morning and FedEx will arrive Tuesday.

The Hyde County Health Department will administer free tetanus shots at 10:30 a.m. Tuesday in the Ocracoke Volunteer Fire Department.

Also, the 3rd District congressional election is Tuesday and with the village fire department as the regular polling place, its role as the hub of emergency operations could take precedence. Vankevich said plans call for setting up a tent for voting in the parking lot next door.

Damage to the Ocracoke post office is preventing regular mail delivery. Officials said it will reopen as soon as possible. UPS was delivering on the island Monday and its drivers agreed to take any stamped items off the island.





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Highway 12 north of the pony pens is buckled. Photo: Keith Gaskins/Ocracoke Observer

Two, 500-foot sections of N.C. 12 on Ocracoke Island's north end were damaged, and the dunes are gone, said National Park Service Outer Banks Group Superintendent Dave Hallac, who visited the island on Sunday. The area is the same as what was restored after Hurricane Florence, except this time the brunt of the water looks like it came from the sound side.

Hallac said that in preliminary assessments, it appears that Wright Brothers National Memorial in Kill Devil Hills and Fort Raleigh National Historic Site on Roanoke Island experienced little impact, with minor flooding at Wright Brothers and numerous downed trees at Fort Raleigh. But the impacts in Cape Hatteras National Seashore got more and more severe traveling south.

At Buxton's Canadian Hole day-use area for kiteboarders and windsurfers, he said, there was "substantial" damage to the parking lot and around the septic tanks. Cape Hatteras Light Station, however, appears to have escaped all but minor impact, he said. Hallac added that he was still trying to get an assessment on the Hatteras Weather Bureau.

But the park service, along with everyone else, took a big hit on Ocracoke. Although its vehicles were parked on high ground that had never flooded before, Hallac said that they all were swamped by the surging water – although he is not sure they're all destroyed. All told, the superintendent said he counted 135 vehicles in the park service parking lot on the village outskirts, including some that had floated into the fence in front of the Berkeley Manor.

Also, the base of the Ocracoke Lighthouse, as well as the Keepers' Quarters and several outbuildings had flooded with up to 2 feet of water, he said.

But, in an illustration of the randomness of storms, the park service's island office, a double-wide trailer, appeared to be unscathed.

Farther south along the coast

On Monday, 68 National Park Service employees from across the nation, part of the National Park Service Incident Management Team, began assessing Cape Lookout National Seashore.

There were about 54 new inlets cutting through from the Atlantic Ocean to Core Sound at various points of North Core Banks and 38 historic structures at Portsmouth Village were significantly damaged by flooding and winds, according to park service officials. Infrastructure at the Long Point cabin camp was also severely damaged.

"The Seashore sustained significant damage to Portsmouth Village, and North Core Banks, including the Long Point Cabins," Superintendent Jeff West told *Coastal Review Online*. "This is an unprecedented event. We will assess conditions using the best science and information available to us, but it will take some time before we can move forward."

While debris cleanup around the visitor facilities and beaches has begun, visitors are discouraged from traveling to or entering the national seashore because of safety concerns.

The park service's Beaufort visitor center was to resume operations Tuesday. The Harkers Island visitor center is to reopen Wednesday. Passenger ferry service to Shackleford Banks from Beaufort and Harkers Island is to resume operations Wednesday. All other visitor facilities and services remained closed.

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On Monday, Cedar Point Campground on the Croatan National Forest reopened and the ranger district office in New Bern returned to regular business hours. U.S. Forest Service staff said they have begun assessing damage and hazards and will reopen closed areas and roads on a case-by-case basis as conditions allow. Crews began clearing roads and trails Sunday, including the following roads known to have downed trees: Mill Branch, Cahooque Creek, Millis, Billfinger, Holston Hunter, Great Lake and Pine Cliff.

Coastal Review Online staff and the [Ocracoke Observer](#) contributed to this report.