

Hurricane Florence: 10 days after storm, fresh chaos in Carolinas



David Covington jumps from a porch railing to his canoe along with Maura Walbourne and her sister Katie Walborne in Conway, S.C. on Sept. 23, 2018. The three paddled a canoe to Covington's home on Long Avenue on Sunday to find it flooded and the floor boards floating. | Jason Lee/The Sun News via AP

BLADENBORO, N.C. — Ten days after Hurricane Florence came ashore, the storm caused fresh chaos Monday across the Carolinas, where rivers kept rising and thousands more people were told to be ready to evacuate.

Authorities urged up to 8,000 people in Georgetown County, on the South Carolina coast, to be prepared to flee from potential flood zones. A “record event” of up to 10 feet of flooding was expected to begin Tuesday near parts of the Pee Dee and Waccamaw rivers, county spokeswoman Jackie Broach-Akers said.

Residents along the Waccamaw braced for water predicted to peak Wednesday at 22 feet near Conway. That's twice the normal flood stage and far higher than the previous record of 17.9 feet, according to charts published Monday by the National Weather Service.

Pastor Willie Lowrimore and several members of his church spent Saturday sandbagging and spreading plastic sheets around the sanctuary of The Fellowship With Jesus Ministries church on the banks of the Waccamaw in Yauhannah, South Carolina, about 20 miles south of Myrtle Beach.

The nearly black, reeking water seeped around and over the sandbags around 2 a.m. Monday. By noon, it was several inches deep.

With the church pews moved to a flatbed trailer on higher ground, Lowrimore sat in a rocking chair listening to the normally calm river rush by, ruining the church he built almost 20 years ago.

“I'm going to go one day at a time. Put it in the Lord's hands. My hands aren't big enough,” he said.

In North Carolina, the Cape Fear and Neuse rivers remained swollen and were not expected to return to normal levels until October, the charts show.

“Florence continues to bring misery to North Carolina,” North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper said Sunday evening in a statement.

Most of the Carolinas have seen the worst of the flooding, but people need to remain cautious, said Todd Hamill, a hydrologist at the National Weather Service’s Southeast River Forecast Center. With most rivers having crested, that water is moving toward the coast, he said.

Parts of Interstate 40 are expected to remain underwater for another week or more, and hundreds of smaller roads remain impassable. But there was some good news: Interstate 95 was reopened to all traffic Sunday night for the first time since the floods.

Floodwaters already receding on one stretch of Interstate 40 left thousands of rotting fish on the pavement for firefighters to clean up.

Crews conducted about 350 rescues over the weekend, and travel remains treacherous in the southeastern area of the state, the governor added. National Guard members would be shifting to more door-to-door and air-search checks on people in still-flooded areas.

The storm has claimed at least 43 lives since slamming into the coast Sept. 14.

On Monday, Republican education leaders in North Carolina announced planned legislation to assure teachers at still-shuttered schools that they will get paid without using vacation time. The proposal was part of broader disaster funding that the General Assembly will consider in an anticipated special session.

In Washington, lawmakers considered almost \$1.7 billion in new money for disaster relief and recovery, even as they face a deadline this week to fund the government before the Oct. 1 start of the new budget year.

The chairman of the House Appropriations Committee said the money would be available as grants to states to help rebuild housing and public works, as well as assist businesses. GOP Rep. Rodney Frelinghuysen of New Jersey called it “a first round” and said lawmakers are ready to act quickly if the federal disaster relief agency also needs more money.

The economic research firm Moody's Analytics estimated that Florence has caused around \$44 billion in damage and lost output, which would make it one of the 10 costliest U.S. hurricanes. The worst disaster, Hurricane Katrina in 2005, cost \$192.2 billion in today's dollars. Last year's Hurricane Harvey cost \$133.5 billion.

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