

North Topsail damage

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NORTH TOPSAIL BEACH - Before the National Guard Humvee reached Rogers Bay Family Campground, Bill Brown and Marie Tyner could see their brand new custom-made trailer toppled on its side, their belongings strewn about the damaged trailer park.

The site looked even worse up close as the couple stumbled over pieces of their sun porch to reach the lot off Island Drive where the ocean carved new inlets during Hurricane Floyd.

"It's really sickening to see this," Ms. Tyner, 71, said. "It was such a beautiful thing, it was really pretty."

After spending the first weekend in the trailer they got four weeks ago, the Gastonia couple sought shelter during the storm, which ravaged Topsail Island, downing power lines and chewing up sections of the main drag in North Topsail Beach.

Structural damage, water and sand in the streets was reported in Surf City and Topsail Beach. Surf City is now open to everyone. In Topsail Beach residents with passes were allowed access to the town Saturday to secure their properties.

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Residents and property owners in North Topsail were allowed on the island in military trucks or four-wheel drives for the first time Saturday. Although the damage was not the devastation seen after Hurricane Fran, the exposed water and sewer lines, damaged homes and roads are enough for Floyd to become a bad memory for many.

Jim Thomas stared at the 16 apartments at Ocean Bay Village that survived the storm but not without scars that could take weeks to fix.

"It breaks my heart to see all this mess," said Mr. Thomas, who is president of the village homeowners association.

About 20 palm trees he planted along the front of the village disappeared into the sound. Waves crashed through garage doors, leaving washers and dryers submerged in 4-foot high piles of sand.

"It's incredible," Mr. Thomas said. "Just amazing."

His own stucco home across the street was heavily damaged, forcing him and his tenants to bunk in a bistro he owns in Jacksonville.

Construction crews spent Saturday afternoon filling in sections of New River Inlet Road taken out by the ocean that met the sound at some point during the storm.

Foundations beneath a handful of homes crumbled in the surf that ripped out pilings and exposed large sandbags on structures in some areas along New River Inlet Road.

The ocean crashed through the town's protective dune and over the main road. The road is damaged in some of the same areas damaged during Hurricane Fran in 1996. It was weeks before people could return to their properties after that storm.

Construction crews spent Friday and Saturday repairing the roads.

Although crews are working rapidly to restore power and phone lines to the town, Town Manager Tony Hammond said repairing water lines is a concern. Town officials were working with crews from the Onslow County Water Department Saturday to assess the damage.

Minimal damage was reported on the north end of the island but farther south near Surf City, an inlet was carved near Myrtle Drive.

Mr. Brown and Ms. Tyner, the couple from Gastonia, didn't get to enjoy their retirement dream after visiting the beach for more than 20 years.

After riding out hurricanes Fran, Bonnie and Dennis on the island, the couple said they had not expected Floyd to be worse.

They realized they were mistaken Saturday after seeing where the ocean had flowed under their trailer. Scrambling to save what they could, Mr. Brown, 67, fought tears on his way off the island to get his pickup and make calls to find someone to help pull the trailer upright.

The couple said they aren't sure what they will do next. The trailer, which was custom made in Indiana, was not insured because the underpinning was not finished. The couple had started the process when Dennis approached.

"We'll start over," Mr. Brown said, cradling his girlfriend.