

## HURRICANE FLOYD: THE AFTERMATH

# Tough choices made as folks flee drowning Pender homes

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BURGAW — Facing a swiftly rising Northeast Cape Fear River, Jim Connor chose to shoot 35 goats on his farm rather than give them up to the water.

"Even if they could swim, there isn't anywhere for them to get to land," Mr. Connor said.

Mr. Connor, families and neighbors gathered on a bridge over the river on Sunday. It was one of the only dry spots on N.C. 53 between Burgaw and Maple Hill, in a county where floodwaters continued to creep up roads, houses, cars and street signs.

Those who stayed in their homes during Hurricane Floyd began leaving Sunday, piling suitcases and duffel bags filled with clothes onto neighbors' boats. Two boats carried 16 people away from houses where water began to seep into first-floor windows.

Joyce Reed and her mother were ferried to a dry spot in the road, where they could be picked up and driven to Atkinson.

"We're just grateful to get out," said Ms. Reed, a nurse at New Hanover Regional Medical Center, who lives off N.C. 53.

Some people weren't able to escape the flood, at least the worst in 90 years, in time.

The number of North Carolina deaths attributed to Hurricane Floyd climbed to at least 26



Staff photo: MICHAEL CAFFRELL

**Joyce Reed packs some belongings into a boat that will carry her and her mother away from their flooded home off N.C. 53 near Burgaw.**

on Sunday. Three were reported in Pender County and three more in Duplin County.

In Edgecombe County, six people drowned after a boat carrying 12 people from their flood-threatened homes capsized.

Thousands of animals, including pets and livestock, have also become storm casualties.

Mr. Connor said he expects 1,800 hogs on his Burgaw farm off N.C. 53 to drown. He saved two baby goats.

"They're all I've got left," he said.

The farmer, who has lived at his home in Burgaw for 27 years, waited Sunday on a bridge

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over the river for dog food, ice and milk for the baby goats. He's been staying on the second floor of his flooded home, guarding his property.

"I get off on the roof and go through my office window," he said.

After losing three cows, Debbie Shackelford and her husband put three cows, three calves and a horse on the porch at their house. Ms. Shackelford waited with Mr. Connor.

"It's like having to start all over again," she said. "I don't know about Jim, but I'm too old to start all over again."

Her husband lost all of his concrete-making machinery. She said it will be hard for many people in the area to rebuild their lives.

"He can't go back to work for we

don't know how long," Ms. Shackelford said. "We've got homeowner's insurance but no flood insurance."

For the first time after Hurricane Floyd, Millie Dodgens caught a ride on a motorboat Sunday to check on her house, surrounded by lakes off N.C. 53.

"I could have stayed here, but if the waters continue to rise, somebody would have to risk their life to save me," said Ms. Dodgens, an art teacher at Rocky Point Elementary School.

When the flooding ceases, Ms. Dodgens expects to conduct lessons in healing in her art classroom. She said she will ask her students to talk about and draw pictures of what they saw at their houses in the soggy aftermath of Hurricane Floyd.

"It's tough on the children. Adults can see and understand more," she said. "All the children know is that their lives have been turned upside

down."

George Steinmark, Ms. Dodgens' neighbor, helped her cross ditches with a wooden board and by lifting barbed wire.

Mr. Steinmark spent Saturday carrying people away from their flooded

homes in his boat.

He planned to stay at a mobile home on land behind his house until the waters got too high.

"We'll just pick up our stuff then and float it up to Burgaw," he said.

Brian Cody, a carpenter who helps

restore historic homes in Wilmington, lost his trailer off U.S. 17 on Road to the flooding. He left in a canoe Thursday morning.

"I don't have a home any more," Mr. Cody said. "But I'm alive."