Beaches slow to get back electricity, phones, water

By CHRIS DAVIS

As utility services return to the majority of storm victims, many beach dwellers are still suffering without electricity. Some don’t have power, and some are even running without a water supply to drink.

A week after the storm, utility companies were reporting service to most of their customers.

Even so, people in hard-hit areas still have to wait before they can turn on a light or watch cable television.

Off the islands, some folks in Delco, Ogden, Porters Neck, Scotts Hill and Bayside will have to wait for their electricity. Many tree damage has tangled power lines that could still take days to repair.

Kyle Harshman, a spokesman for Carolina Power & Light, said the remaining areas will be the hardest to repair.

CP&L had restored power to 90 percent of its customers Thursday afternoon in the Wilmington, Whiteville and Wallace service areas.

Water and electricity were not available Thursday in hard-hit Topsail Beach and Surf City, according to emergency management officials in Pender County.

Kure and Carolina beach residents had water service, but at nearby Haney and Wilmington beaches water was not safe to drink. Much of the north end of Pleasure Island was without power because home damage prevented the power company from turning it on.

At Wrightsville Beach, water was turned on for many residents Thursday, but problems with individual lines kept some homes from receiving it.

Flooding in Pender and Duplin counties has slowed work and created even more power failures.

Even so, more than 97 percent of Four County Electric customers had power Thursday evening, officials said. Power had left all 26,000 of them in the dark.

About 700 customers still don’t have power. About one-third of those lines are in flooded areas of Duplin and Pender where crews are taking too long to work on damaged lines. Four County officials don’t expect all their customers to have power until the weekend.

Countries that got hit with the north side of Hurricane Fran have done better.

Brunswick Electric Membership Corp. reported that all of its 50,000 customers in Brunswick and Columbus counties had power Thursday, and crews were returning to areas to repair temporary repairs.

Meanwhile, BullShorth, which had relatively few problems, is struggling to repair its lines.

Henry calling volumes have tied up lines, and the loggers are expected to continue for several days.

Spokesman Kay Warner said the lines will be restored at the same rate. The remainder of the lines are expected to be replaced in the next few days.

In New Hanover County, many customers are without phone service in Wrightsville Beach, downtown Wilmington and the Winter Park area. Mr. Warner described Pender County as “a mess,” with rising floodwaters only making things worse. About 2,000 area customers are without service.

Exclusive isle surveys damage

By PHILIP HERVEY

FIGURE EIGHT ISLAND — Beach Road is spacy named.

Thursday, Figure Eight Island was not the comfortable, secluded getaway for the owners of 300 homes that range from typical beach cottages to million-dollar estates.

The main route through the private island north of Wrightsville Beach was under nearly three feet of sand from Hurricane Fran. Trees have been plowed by the street to make it possible for vehicles, or at least a few that look like snowblowers, following a winter storm.

Throughout Figure Eight, sand-clogged petals are interspersed with puddles of water with the harmful, red tides of toxic algae.

One house lost its roof and was gutted by the overwash.

Figure Eight is still full of electricity and water. Property owners were being allowed on Thursday. Construction workers doing repairs outnumbered the handful of people checking how their houses fared.

About 75 percent of the beachfront houses lost enough sand depth to make the septic tanks non-functional, said Bruce Cameron.

About 75 percent of the beachfront houses lost enough sand depth to make the septic tanks non-functional, said Bruce Cameron, who owns the island and was one of the early developers. He said he is not involved in the island’s business affairs today.

He estimates 1 million cubic yards of sand will be needed to replenish the beach. “It’s going to take quite a job to repair it,” he said.

He doubts many property owners will want to do costly repairs to houses until the beach is replenished. This homeowner would have to pay for rebuilding the beach since the island is private, he said. He hasn’t determined what to do with his house on South Beach Road, which had significant first-floor damage.

The Figure Eight Island development dates to the late 1960s. It became the in place for doctors, developers, even Hollywood actors.

Andy Griffith owns a house on Backus Point. The Fiftey- house appeared to have only minor roof damage. Nick Nolte and Kim Bassinger are rumored to have houses here, although their names don’t appear on county property tax records. Melanie Griffith stayed on Figure Eight when she was in Wilmington last year shooting Lords.

A few people, like Paul Foster, have called Figure Eight home for years.

Mr. Foster’s lot and other properties on South Beach Road lost 3 to 4 feet of sand depth. His 28-year-old cottage, which is laid over the sand with a hole in his roof caused by a tree or house damage and flooded. The top floor survived intact.

Those rules don’t apply today, Mr. Foster said. “We don’t have any regulations that I know.”

Storm may be among the costliest

Associated Press

RALEIGH — Hurricane Fran wasn’t the strongest storm to hit the United States, but it left one of the biggest swathes of destruction, federal and state officials say.

“This disaster is enormous,” said Lacy Slater of the Federal Emergency Management Agency. “It is probably in the top two or three in the country.”

Dollar amounts for damages from the storm are starting to come in.

Insurance companies have received claims for $72.1 million in property damage so far, and the amount is expected to top $1 billion by the weekend, said Insurance Commissioner Jim Long. Preliminary figures from the state Department of Agriculture showed more than $165 million in agricultural damage in 26 counties. Crop losses of $37.5 million in damage, while livestock and poultry losses totaled $57.7 million. There also was $275 million in forestry, equipment, buildings and land damage. The projected loss of corn was set at $54.8 million, with 260,000 of 400,000 acres affected. Cotton losses were expected to be about $60.12 million, with 135,000 of 755,000 acres damaged, and tobacco losses were expected to be about $165 million, with 62,000 of 273,000 acres damaged.

FORECAST: This two views of the south end of Figuer Eight Island show residents have a lot of cleaning up to do. Sand and water cover the roadway up to nearly 3 feet deep.