

AFTER HURRICANE FRAN



Ken Tatum of Pender County's River Bend subdivision backs out of his garage Wednesday afternoon as the Northeast Cape Fear River flows through his property. The home, which survived Hurricane Hazel, was moved from Carolina Beach. After Pender flooding in 1992, he put the residence on pilings.

Crusoe Islanders stay put as water rises around them

By BETTIE FENNEL

Staff Writer

CRUSOE ISLAND — Floodwater from the Waccamaw River surrounded this small community in southern Columbus County on Wednesday, cutting residents off from emergency services.

But the islanders, a fiercely independent lot known for their wariness of outsiders, refused to leave.

Water rose to the grill of a large pickup truck on the only road in and out of the community, which is rimmed by the Waccamaw River and the Green Swamp. Part of a log about 2 feet in diameter floated by the highway.

Some residents sat on porches and watched the water as it rose in their yards.

On one spot in the road, water whirled in a circle like water draining from a bathtub. On the other side of the road, the water boiled up around a cypress tree.

It gushed across the highway in several places, making it impossible by anything but four-wheel-drive trucks.

Earlier Wednesday, a rescue squad picked up an elderly woman who was bed-ridden and took her to higher ground, but the water had risen too high by mid-afternoon for the rescue squad

to make other trips to the community, said Lt. Sanford Hardee of the Columbus County Sheriff's Department.

Whiteville resident Gregory Smith, who had a four-wheel-drive truck, said someone from Columbus County Hospital asked him to stand by near the community in case people need to be rescued.

Though some residents were on dry ground, others had water lapping at their front doors. Dog pens, water pumps and an old truck were nearly covered with water.

A foul odor filled the air, Mr. Smith said it was the smell of sewage from flooded septic tanks and drain lines. One person walked barefooted through the tea-colored liquid.

Lt. Hardee said the water was 26 inches over a dam at Lake Waccamaw and pouring into the river. And more rain is expected in the next several days. Lt. Hardee didn't know when the river would crest.

By mid-afternoon Wednesday, only six Crusoe Island residents had gone to a shelter set up by the Red Cross at Palmyra Baptist Church, a few miles away on N.C. 130.

Most Crusoe Island families have lived for generations on the same mud-caked land, and it would take a lot to make them leave — a lot more than a flood.

Please see CRUSOE on page 6A



Tommy Spivey describes the water depth at his home off Crusoe Island Road. Floodwater was encroaching on his property, but Mr. Spivey didn't plan to evacuate as waters continued to rise around Crusoe Island.

MORE FORCED TO EVACUATE

As if we haven't had enough woe

Flooding has water lapping at our doors

By ANNE MINARD, MARTY MINCHIN and HOLLY ROBERSON

Flooding worsened across the region Wednesday, forcing schools to send children home early and sending more people scurrying for higher ground.

Brunswick County schools, finally open Wednesday after Hurricane Fran, closed at 11:30 a.m. as heavy rains quickly made some roads impassible. The county government complex shut down at 1 p.m. because of the flooding.

Beville Elementary School students carried their shoes and socks as they waded through knee-deep water to get to their homes on Carolina Avenue in Leland.

"We've got water everywhere," said Cecil Logan, Brunswick County emergency management coordinator. Yards and parking lots were full of water in northern Brunswick County, and several roads in Leland were blocked by high water running across them.

In Columbus County, the Sheriff's Department tried to evacuate Crusoe Island, threatened by the rise of the Waccamaw River. But many residents refused to leave.

New Hanover County saw flooding in a few neighborhoods, including North Chase, off N.C. 152 across from Laney High School, and Michele Drive, off Wrightsville Avenue.

And in Pender County, where many homes had already flooded after the Northeast Cape Fear River jumped its banks, the water kept rising.

The good news for Pender resi-



It's really this deep.

Homeless

Hurricane Fran left about 7,800 families homeless in North Carolina, according to a preliminary Red Cross damage assessment.

The total includes 1,774 homes destroyed and 6,022 that had enough damage to make them uninhabitable without major repairs.

The damage report released late Wednesday, says 29,463 North Carolina homes were affected by the storm. Most of them — 21,565 — are in New Hanover, Brunswick and Pender counties.

The Red Cross makes the assessments to determine how many families will need assistance after a disaster.

dents is that the river's rise has slowed.

Lloyd A. Tyndall, a civil engineer taking measurements at the N.C. 351 bridge east of Burgaw, measured a 15-inch rise in the river from Sunday to Monday, an 8-inch rise from Monday to Tuesday and a 3-inch

Please see FLOOD on page 6A

6A WILMINGTON MORNING STAR / THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 1996

Flood

Continued from page 1A

rise from Tuesday to Wednesday.

The Northeast Cape Fear has risen about 14 feet, about a foot higher than it did during flooding in August 1992. Mr. Tyndall said. That flood caused about \$1 million in damage.

On the Cape Fear River, floodwaters have created and are on the decline. At Lock and Dam No. 3 in northeast Bladen County, where the river floods at 42 feet, waters had fallen from 59 feet on Sunday to 52.4 feet Wednesday.

Lock and Dam No. 2 in Elizabethtown was inaccessible to boats Wednesday because of high water, but Shari Ireland, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service, said a slow fall in the water level is also expected there.

At Lock and Dam No. 1 near East Arcadia, waters were expected to crest at 24.5 feet Wednesday and begin a slow descent.

But the Northeast Cape Fear won't begin to fall until the Cape Fear River is below flood stage, which is expected to happen Monday.

Pender County residents continued to evacuate Wednesday as water rose still higher around and into their homes and streets. Some people in flooded areas still had electricity to their homes. Phone service was interrupted as water

covered the phone service boxes.

Jennifer Coombs and her husband, Glen, loaded up a johnboat with their family and necessities Wednesday after they realized the water was not going to subside at their new double-wide trailer on Lizard Lick Trail.

Mrs. Coombs said she would take their son Sean, 3, and 4-month-old daughter, Katy, to relatives' homes. Mrs. Coombs said they would go wherever power had been restored.

"Our baby hasn't done too good without air conditioning," she said. Sean was a different story.

"He's doing great. He loves boat rides," Mrs. Coombs said.

Her home and car were still high and dry early Wednesday afternoon, but her neighbors weren't as lucky. One trailer looked like many cast of Burgaw. The windows steamed as water rose past the bottoms of the frames. One Ford Escort, parked outside, was filled with water to the seat tops.

All along Lizard Lick Trail and adjoining Whitestocking Road, dogs left by evacuating families barked as water smelling of sewage encroached on their yards.

For those who got stuck in the rising waters along N.C. 53, Green's Wrecker Service in Maple Hill was a lifesaver. The business has been busy for the last few days rescuing people and dragging their cars out of troubled waters.

Sitting in his father's big fluorescent-green 18-wheeler, Travis Green said he just didn't under-

stand why people would drive into the cola-colored water that stretches as far as the eye can see. N.C. 53 had two waist-deep areas between Maple Hill and Interstate 40.

"I ain't never seen it like this," Mr. Green said as he watched a car about a half mile down the road start into water that was 4 feet deep in some places. "I just don't understand why people can't see there's water on the road. I guess they don't realize the road sinks down in places and it gets deep."

Angela Chisholm thought her silver Ford Probe would make it. She was wrong.

Mr. Green's wrecker pulled up as Mrs. Chisholm sat on top of her car with her cellular phone. "I was calling my husband," said the Cherry Point Marine. "I was driving along and it just died. Then all this water started coming up, and I got scared. Climbing on top of my car seemed like a good plan."

The wrecker service pulled out 28 vehicles Tuesday and Wednesday, Mr. Green said. At \$150 a pop, the situation was lucrative.

"It's extra if there's a snake bite involved," said a laughing Leslie Green, owner of the business.

One man had to go to the hospital after being bitten by a water moccasin, Mr. Green said.

The big green truck made dirty waves in the water as it pulled closer to a stranded car. But before getting there, it had to dodge a Jeep that was covered with water above its hood and a blue truck with only

a portion of the door still visible as it slowly sank into the water.

Flooded roads included N.C. 53 east of Burgaw, Old Maple Hill Road, Lizard Lick Trail, Heading Bluff Road, Crossbridge, Whitestocking Road, Bond Road and Stag Park Road.

Emergency officials said the National Guard was called to N.C. 53 twice after people tried to drive beyond barricades. A state Highway Patrol officer rode on each rescue.

"We're plucking them up and writing them a ticket," said Carson Smith, emergency management coordinator for Pender County. He warned motorists that insurance probably won't cover damages incurred while driving on closed roads.

Most displaced flood victims went to homes of friends or family members, but Topsail Middle School is open for food and hurricane victims.

People with flood damage will be able to get money from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, just as those who received damage during the hurricane. It can include coverage for home and contents in permanent homes or rental housing.

Jack Hutson, a spokesman for FEMA in Raleigh, said people with flood damage should call (800) 462-9029. Flood victims should call even if they have left home and have not seen the extent of the damage, he said.

"All they need to know is that they've had a loss," Mr. Hutson

said. "People whose homes have been made unlivable should call as soon as possible."

In Brunswick County, the post-Fran rains are flooding more than just roads. The deluge is raining what's left of crops, contaminating wells and making septic tanks overflow, said Mr. Logan, the emergency management coordinator.

The rain only added more misery to the mobile home park on Old Fayetteville Road. Residents got their power back after five dark nights, only to see Wednesday's rain turn the park into a lake and overturn a propane tank.

The back of the park smelled like sewage; one resident said an underwater septic tank was leaking.

But hurricane veterans David Hutchins and Christina Capps, pupils at Beville Elementary, were unfazed by the huge puddle on the dirt road between their houses and on Old Fayetteville Road.

"It's not as bad as it was during Bertha," 10-year-old Christina said, pointing to a wooden fence several feet high. "It was up to the second pole."

Across the street at Jernigan's Mobile Home Park, Linda Ripperda gave her 7-year-old son Phillip Astwell a piggy-back ride through the water to their mobile home.

"I came out and all my stuff was floating down my yard," Ms. Ripperda said.

Today's weather forecast doesn't hold out much hope for the soggy region. It calls for a 40 percent chance of rain.

Marty Minchin and Holly Roberson are Morning Star staff writers. Anne Minard is a correspondent.

Crusoe

Continued from page 1A

"I've seen it higher than this before," said Dewey Long, 83, who was checking his collar patch to see how much water was in it. "I've seen when you had to boat in and out in 1924," Mr. Long said.

"I think it's about on a stand," he said, meaning the river had crested and the flood water would start receding.

Water was about 3 feet deep on the road 100 yards from his house. Evangeline Spivey, who lives at the end of the road just a few hundred yards from the river, said she had no plans to leave.

"I'm just as happy here as I can be," she said. "If water comes up and starts getting in the house, there's plenty of boats I can get in," she said, pointing to several her husband, Tommy, had tied up in front of his workshop.

Mr. Spivey, 51, said the flooding was the worst since Hurricane Hazel in 1954. But he didn't plan to leave.

Earlier Wednesday, Mr. Spivey, who catches snakes and turtles to sell, drove out of the community on his tractor.

One resident, however, didn't plan to take any chances. Betty Ethridge, 35, left the community two days ago to stay with her son at Nakina.

"The bridge is going to start washing out, and there ain't but one way in and one way out," she said. Mrs. Ethridge returned Wednesday long enough to get clothes off her clothesline and to retrieve her two Chihuahuas dogs. "The only thing I'm leaving behind is my birds . . . and chickens."