

Delaware weather: Rain, wind rip region

Waterways overflow and thousands lose power in NCCo

BY JONATHAN STARKEY • THE NEWS JOURNAL • MARCH 14, 2010

It may not be over yet.

After heavy rain all day and night Saturday, Delaware could see more showers this morning and more flooding in certain areas as some waterways were flowing at spillover levels.

A statewide **National Weather Service** flood watch remained in effect through this morning with flooding possible over the next couple of days. Two to 4 inches in total were expected to saturate the area.

"On a relative scale, tomorrow's better than today, but not as nice as it was in the middle of the week," Anthony Gigi, a **National Weather Service** meteorologist in Mount Holly, N.J., said Saturday night. "There will still be showers around."

The Weather Service was calling for between a tenth and a quarter of an inch today for northern Delaware, and less than a tenth tonight. Less than a tenth of an inch today and tonight are expected in the state's lower two counties. A slow-moving low-pressure system was expected to move north from Virginia on Saturday night and move off the coast sometime today, forecasts say, though some rain is possible Monday.

Throughout Saturday's dousing, some waterways overflowed their banks and spilled onto roads throughout the state. The Christina River at Cooch's Bridge overflowed while the Red and White Clay creeks in New Castle County were flowing at near flood levels, experts said.

State Police Sgt. Walter Newton had only one report of a motorist getting stuck in high waters -- on Governor Printz Boulevard north of Wilmington. About 3,000 Delmarva Power customers lost power because of downed lines, but most had their lights back on by early Saturday evening.

Just after 6 p.m. Saturday, 442 Delmarva Power customers in New Castle County were still without power. No customers were without power in Kent County, and two were without in Sussex. In Cecil County, Md., 89 customers were in the dark. Delmarva expected everyone's power to be restored by 9 p.m. Saturday, spokesman Matt Likovich said.

News Journal weather watcher Harry Winn of Talleyville recorded 0.84 inches at his home at 8 a.m. Saturday and another three-quarters of an inch before dinner. Winn saw no signs of flooding or downed trees, he said.

"I think the ground is at least absorbing it all," Winn said. "At least the snow is gone."

Bob Holloway, who lives on Vernon Road west of Harrington, spoke of Saturday's rainfall in monumental terms, but said nobody he knew experienced water in their homes or other damage.

"We got water everywhere," Holloway said. "I've got water in my backyard that's as high as it's been in the 57 years that I've been here."

In Ocean View, just west of Bethany Beach, heavy rain and high winds conspired to keep John Cardwell awake much of the night. His sump pump kicked in to expel water that had drained into a holding area before it could reach his home's crawl space. By 2 p.m., the sun was out, he said, but by late afternoon, cheery conditions gave way to overcast skies.

"There was no damage to my property, but driving out to [town] I could see downed trees and standing water," said Cardwell, 65, who lives on Wedgefield Boulevard. "The ground is so saturated that there's nowhere for the water to go, so it just gathers on the side of the road."

Tony Pratt, the state's shoreline and waterways chief, did not respond to a message about the state of the beaches.

Heavy rains throughout the day Saturday caused coastal and inland flooding up and down the state.

In Delaware City, officials stacked sand bags over a damaged portion of the sea wall near where the branch canal meets the Delaware River. At high tide early Saturday, water from the river was lapping against the wall and spilling over. Contractors working for the city raced to pump water back into the river before high tide Saturday night, when more flooding was expected. John Martin, Delaware City's mayor, said he and other officials would be "on the lookout" for more flooding.

Elsewhere, water was standing in many yards in Christiana. The Christina River spilled over its banks at Cooch's Bridge early Saturday night. National Weather Service forecasters said the river reached a stage of 11.6 feet, but was expected to recede Saturday night. Its flood stage, when it starts to spill over, is 10.5 feet. The upper Christina is prone to rapid flooding

for a couple of reasons. One, water runs quickly off roofs and streets in nearby urban neighborhoods. Two, the upper Christina has a small watershed, meaning runoff water does not have a long way to travel before reaching and swelling the river. The smaller the watershed, the quicker a waterway will flood.

"We call it flashy," said Gerald Kauffman, director of the **University of Delaware's Water Resources Agency**. "Every watershed reacts to rainfall in a different way."

White Clay and Red Clay creeks, for which the **National Weather Service** also issued flood warnings Saturday night, fill up more slowly because they have larger watersheds. The water must travel farther before falling into the creeks. More water also gets sopped up along the way, Kauffman said.

"The rivers may still be flooding" today, said Gigi of the **National Weather Service**. But, he added, "The rivers in Delaware respond more quickly than some of the rivers in Pennsylvania."

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