

Impact of Hurricane Florence continues to be felt throughout the Carolinas

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Two weeks after Hurricane Florence first made landfall on the North Carolina coast, its impact is still being felt throughout the region. The death toll now stands at 48 across the three states—North and South Carolina and Virginia—most directly affected by Florence, with 37 of those in North Carolina. The latest reported fatality was an 85-year-old North Carolina man who, while cleaning up storm debris, suffered an injury that later became infected, causing his death.

Throughout North Carolina, an estimated 1,500 people remain in shelters.

On Friday, the North Carolina Coastal Federation issued a warning to residents advising them to avoid coastal waters for the time being due to pollution caused by flooding runoff. Over 30 inches of rain fell on the region due to Florence, inundating the ground and causing a large amount of agricultural and industrial waste to flow into the area's waterways. This has caused elevated levels of bacteria in coastal waters.

The *Fayetteville Observer* has reported an outbreak of large mosquitoes due to the vast amounts of standing water left over from the storm. Mosquitoes breed in puddles and wherever stagnant pools of water can be found, and the storm has caused a much larger than usual number of mosquito eggs to hatch. Local residents say it is the worst mosquito outbreak in their lifetimes, with some of the breeds being up to 3/8 of an inch long. The state has allocated \$4 million for mosquito eradication efforts.

Residents in Lumberton, North Carolina have sought approval from a federal judge to file a class action lawsuit against the railroad giant CSX for blocking efforts to improve the community's flood prevention system in advance of the hurricane, causing the city to flood and destroying a large number of homes.

Matt Lee, an attorney for the residents, explained to

the *Raleigh News Observer* that the city had a levee system that was designed to prevent this kind of flooding, but the one open spot was where CSX had train tracks running underneath an elevated portion of Interstate Highway 95. Construction of a floodgate in that area would have cost an estimated \$3.5 million, he said, and it would have been paid for jointly by the state and a nonprofit organization, the Golden Leaf Foundation.

The lawsuit alleges that CSX knew about the risk of flooding in the area for years but did nothing to address it. The company also threatened to bring trespass charges against residents who attempted to pile sandbags at the site to prevent flooding. The governor later overrode CSX and residents attempted to secure the area, but it was too late to prevent flooding. The lawsuit seeks \$250 million in damages.

The storm has caused an ongoing agricultural disaster. Approximately a dozen reservoirs holding animal waste were flooded in the storm, spilling waste into the surrounding areas. Four million chickens and turkeys died in the storm, and 5,500 hogs. Many farms throughout the state have been isolated by the floodwaters, preventing delivery of supplies and imperiling livestock.

South Carolina has also continued to suffer in the aftermath of Florence. The wastewater treatment plant in Conway, South Carolina was forced to close earlier this week due to flooding. As a result of the closure, millions of gallons of untreated wastewater flooded into a tributary of the nearby Waccamaw River. Though operations at the plant resumed after approximately 24 hours, state officials have warned residents to avoid any areas inundated by the untreated sewage.

Some 21,000 residents of Conway are uncertain when it will be safe to return to flooded areas, with some

reports claiming the area will not be habitable until late October. Two coal ash ponds near Conway are also being monitored. One of the ponds was already flooded last week, and the floodwaters are expected to reach the second pond sometime this week, according to state officials.

The Waccamaw River, which has caused the flooding, crested at a record 21.16 feet last Wednesday, topping the previous record of 17.9 feet set by Hurricane Matthew in 2016. Some 2,000 homes have thus far been damaged in South Carolina by the storm, and state officials estimate the number could rise to hundreds of thousands in the coming weeks.

Also in South Carolina, an investigation continued into the deaths of two female mental health patients who died when the police van in which they were being transported was overtaken by floodwaters. The two deputies transferring the patients took shelter on the roof of the van but failed to rescue the women. A spokesman from the sheriff's department told the Associated Press that the National Guard had waved the police van past the barriers erected to keep residents from entering the flooded area because it was a law enforcement vehicle. The two deputies have been suspended pending the outcome of the investigation.

The current estimate of damages from the storm ranges from \$38 to \$50 billion, and could rise much higher.

The national news media has largely abandoned coverage of the storm, instead focusing almost exclusively on the more sensational Kavanaugh hearings in Washington. As with past natural disasters, the saturation coverage by the media only extends as far as it boosts ratings. Unlike the Kavanaugh affair, it is unlikely that the US Senate will hold hearings into the criminal neglect on the part of the ruling class that has led to the catastrophe brought on by Hurricane Florence.



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