

East Coast storm cost tops \$100 million

by AP-News

OCEAN CITY, N.J. - It was a desperate, ultimately futile battle " machine against nature " and Ocean City kept it up long after the outcome had been decided.

As wave after wave pummeled the beachfront during last week's powerful nor'easter, more and more of the sand disappeared until the ocean came roaring through. A bulldozer manned by a city employee rushed to push sand back into the breach, which would hold for a few moments before yet another wave would knock it down and send the sea rushing through again.

"They were literally fighting each wave," said Bob Ashenbrenner, who watched from his home across the street. "They did that for days."

It was one of the more extreme examples of beach erosion that occurred along the east Coast from North Carolina to New Jersey last week from the remnants of Tropical Storm Ida, which killed at least six people and caused tens of millions of dollars worth of damage.

Officials in more than half a dozen states began totaling the cost of the destruction this week, hoping to build a strong case for President Obama to declare their areas federal disaster areas, and qualify them for rebuilding funds.

N.J.: \$100 million and rising In just a few New Jersey beach towns, for example, damage estimates approached \$100 million with many more estimates still to come and areas yet to be inspected.

"We had predicted that this storm would be one of the five worst all-time in Cape May County, and the numbers will probably reflect that," said Frank McCall, the county's emergency management director.

A quick tour of hard-hit areas turned up severe erosion in some places, with dunes suddenly dropping off 18 to 25 feet to the sand below. McCall said the area's beaches had lost 150 to 400 feet of sand.

Up and down the coast, the roar of bulldozers could be heard as crews worked to push sand back into makeshift dunes, and front-end loaders scraped sand off streets and carried it back to the beach.

Officials said they did not expect the storm damage to hurt next year's crucial shore tourism season, predicting beach towns would do everything necessary to get the beaches back in shape by Memorial Day.

The storm whopped Harvey Cedars, N.J., where a beach replenishment project was to begin last week " just as the storm hit, causing \$5.6 million in damages.

In Ocean City, N.J., the storm inundated much of the city, including the beach that used to be across the street from Ashenbrenner's house.

It washed away a 10-foot-high dune and the beach in front of it, leaving huge sand-filled fabric "geo-tubes" lying on the sand like beached whales. The synthetic tubes were used as the base for the man-made dunes years ago as part of a beach replenishment project. Wooden pilings that once supported a staircase over the dunes now stand bare, jutting into the air, supporting nothing.

2,000 tires pelt island In Maryland, the storm pelted Assateague Island with nearly 2,000 tires from a man-made underwater tire reef. Volunteers on Wednesday will start clearing the tires that most likely came from a man-made reef off Ocean City, Md.

The island is one of two places that are home to a famous colony of wild ponies that swim between it and the mainland of Chincoteague, Va. The 150 ponies on Assateague Island survived the storm by seeking higher ground.

Virginia Beach claimed \$10 million in damages to its 17-mile coast. But the beach did not sustain as much erosion as it might have a decade ago because the city added 4 million cubic yards of sand in 2001 " the equivalent of a line of dump trucks stretching from Virginia Beach to Denver.

There also was serious erosion in Ocean City, Md., where beaches dropped off to sheer cliffs in many places. City Engineer Terry McGean said crews would bulldoze sand back to where it should be, and expect to be aided by a large, newly formed sandbar sitting just offshore that is expected to gradually return to the beach with the tides.

Delaware's beaches lost 4 million to 5 million cubic yards of sand worth about \$15 million.

In North Carolina, rough surf chewed up about a quarter-mile of State Highway 12, the main road running north and south on Hatteras Island.

Even though Ida only brushed Louisiana, its waves and storm surge washed out patches of beach and barrier

islands along the state's fragile coastline. Grand Isle, a resort town on a barrier island 60 miles south of New Orleans, reported the worst erosion, most notably the breaching of 1,000 feet of dune piled up to protect homes on the western end of the island.

About 100 feet of a nearby beach called Elmer's Island were washed out, said David Camardelle, Grand Isle's mayor.

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