



Hurricane Sandy: Cumberland County bayshore communities take stock of damage

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COMMERCIAL TWP. — By Wednesday morning those communities along the Delaware Bay that were hit hardest by Hurricane Sandy were finally able to begin taking stock of the storm's damage.

Record high tides had receded enough to allow officials and even some property owners access to coastal areas of Downe, Commercial, and Maurice River Townships; even on the low tide some roads were nearly impassable, and flotsam and jetsam were piled high along the shoulders.

In the village of Bivalve, hard against the mouth of the Maurice River, a scant few hundred yards from the bay in Commercial Township, committeeman Bill Riggan was out along the docks, taking stock of the ravages of the storm surge.

And it is immense.

"The bank at Shellpile is gone, and Peak of the Moon was breached, as well as Ogden Avenue out near the State Police barracks," Riggan said in summation. "The PSE & G boardwalk was also washed away.

"There was water on Main Street, which there hasn't been since Hurricane Donna back in 1962."

For most residents of South Jersey's bayside communities, Sandy was a once in a lifetime event, and may be one that has economic ramifications outside of the costs of reconstruction.

For the foreseeable future, oystering season in the bay is closed, due to bacterial contamination in the water. With several weeks left in the season, many of Commercial Township's commercial oyster vessels are unsure if and when they will be able to fill their yearly quotas.

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With the governor and the president today touring those areas of New Jersey's Atlantic Coast that suffered the worst of Sandy, many along the bayshore fear that they may end up being an afterthought.

"They forget about us on the bayshore sometimes," Riggins said with a touch of gallows humor. Oyster vessels and commercial fishing boats may not be as glamorous as bikini clad women enjoying a white-sand beach, or a glittering casino nightclub, but the multi-million dollar industry is a large part of the region's economic foundation.

Just down Route 553 in neighboring Downe, homeowners in the township's island communities of Gandy's Beach, Money Island, and Fortescue still haven't been able to get into their houses.

George and Sandra Boland, year-round residents on Gandy's Beach, were displaced by Sandy on Sunday, and have been staying with their son in Newfield for the past few days.

George managed to get onto the island for brief time this morning to survey the damage, but couldn't get inside of his house. Around 2 p.m. they were awaiting Mayor Bob Campbell to escort them past the sheriff's deputies that were guarding the only road into Gandy's.

"We haven't been inside," said George. "But I did see that water washed through our first floor, which is 8 feet off the normal high-tide line."

Damage on Gandy's was severe. According to Mayor Campbell, North Cove Road is pretty much gone, and South Cove Road is covered with two feet of sand. The storm surge breached a 750 foot concrete retaining wall that the township erected last weekend, and scattered the heavy blocks across the road "like peanuts".

Every property on the island suffered some degree of damage, and according to some reports, a few were washed right into the bay, and all of the bulkheads are essentially gone.

"My fridge is in the driveway," said Boland. "I just want to make sure my beer is still in it."

Despite the devastation, most residents are keeping a positive attitude towards what will likely be a long and extensive rebuilding process.

"That's the price you pay to live in paradise," said Boland.

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