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North Tillamook County 'worse than Columbus in '62'

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MANZANITA - Residents of North Tillamook County continued to dig out and clean up Thursday after what many locals describe as the worst storm in memory.

Residents told Jon Welsh, co-owner of Manzanita Fresh Foods, which along with other area grocers and lumber stores stayed open to service local citizens, that the storm was worse than last year's December storm.

The big news in the three Nehalem Bay area communities of Manzanita, Nehalem and Wheeler was the damage by hurricane-strength winds that clobbered the area early Monday morning. Scores of trees blocked roads and snapped power poles. Peak gusts reached 129 mph at the Cape Meares recording station, before the wind recording equipment was knocked out by the wind early Monday, according to Tillamook County Sheriff Todd Anderson.

At the mouth of the Nehalem River, the Jetty Fishery Marina recorded a gust of 120 mph at the peak of the second storm early Monday morning, which arrived on the heels of the first storm that raked the coastline Sunday. Power was knocked out to all of North Tillamook County by about 8 p.m. Sunday. "That's the most downed trees and the most damage I've seen the Nehalem," said Jean Laviolette of the Jetty Fishery, who has lived in the area 29 years.

In a reverse 9-1-1 call to area residents early Thursday afternoon, officials of Tillamook County Emergency Management reported that Tillamook People's Utility District had indicated that it could be Friday evening, at the earliest, before power is restored to North Tillamook County, "especially for residents north of Wheeler," which includes Nehalem, Manzanita and unincorporated Neahkahnie.

Number is announced

Area residents were being advised to call the North County Emergency Operations Center at (503) 368-7229 if they need power for a medical device or need shelter.

While flooding was again an issue in downtown Nehalem and the Mohler area, Nehalem City Manager Michael Nitzsche said it could have been worse.

"We got lucky," said Nitzsche, who noted that the lack of a "significant" high tide minimized flooding of the downtown area along U.S. Highway 101. Last December, a higher tide, coupled with a swollen Nehalem River, caused great flooding in the city of Nehalem. Still, in the outlying areas, damage caused by the storm was widespread. "The old timers are saying it was worse than the Columbus Day Storm (of 1962)," Nitzsche said.

In the meantime, life was slowly getting back to normal for area residents. Chung and Judy Lee, owners of Manzanita Grocery, were making the best of a bad situation by barbecuing meat and feeding hungry patrons for donations received.

"It was either this or sit down and cry," said Judy Lee. Restaurants with gas grills stayed open as well, offering li menus. Business was brisk at the Bayside Gardens Shell Station, the only gas station in the Nehalem Bay area.

Following last year's storm in December, Sheldon Oil of Tillamook, owners of the station, installed a generator t power to the pumps to keep the station open in the event of emergencies.

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