

Coastal residents begin clean up efforts after storm

By Marilyn Wheeler
Associated Press

NEHALEM (AP) — Residents of the northern Oregon Coast put on their hip boots Wednesday as they began cleaning up homes and businesses damaged by floods and falling trees.

A series of storms packing heavy rain and high wind swept through the state beginning Saturday, causing millions of dollars in damage throughout northern Oregon.

A total of 37 people were evacuated from their homes in coastal Clatsop and Tillamook counties, where Gov. Neil Goldschmidt declared a state of emergency on Tuesday.

At the height of the flooding Tuesday, water was 6 feet deep on some Clatsop County roads, and chest high in a rural area near Nehalem where dikes were inundated.

In Nehalem, a town of 240 people 25 miles north of Tillamook, the water level dropped from 2½ feet to less than 1 foot as the tide began receding Wednesday afternoon.

Rugs dried on stoops in the sun and the sound of vacuums competed with that of the ocean as businesses up and down U.S. Highway 101 began salvaging their water-logged property.

About 25 residents evacuated overnight in northern

Tillamook County probably would not be allowed to go home until late Wednesday or early Thursday, said Lon Lasher, a spokesman for the county emergency services office.

A Coast Guard helicopter provided light to help with some of the evacuations, and Coast Guard water craft were used to help some people flee their homes.

Shelters were set up at several locations, but few people used them. Most of those who left their homes spent the night with relatives or friends, said Paul Levesque, assistant director of emergency services for Tillamook County.

"Flooding is a perennial occurrence and people have become complacent," Levesque said. "People say, 'We've ridden out the floods for 30 years and we'll do it again.' But because this was such an unusual event, they waited too long to leave."

"When they saw the need to leave, they no longer had the capability. Their vehicles were under water and they couldn't leave on foot."

A herd of about 500 cattle was driven to higher ground by members of the Tillamook Volunteer Fire Department, Levesque said.

Much of the county's prime dairy land was under water, and a few cattle were wander-

ing around in water up to their tails.

Lasher said county officials were flying over the area in a helicopter Wednesday to assess the damage.

A high tide at midday didn't cause any further problems, Lasher said. "Even with the high tide today, water levels aren't as high as yesterday afternoon and last night," he said.

Twelve residents evacuated in Clatsop County were returning home Wednesday, said chief sheriff's deputy Dan Laughman.

"The water's going down and now it's just a matter of assessing damages and cleaning up," said Laughman. "There's a lot of debris on the roadways and in people's yards. Businesses are sponging out and getting back to business as usual."

U.S. 101, which had been closed by high water at Nehalem and just north of Tillamook, was open again. Oregon 6, which connects Tillamook with Portland, was dotted with mudslides, but was passable.

Levesque said a mudslide had blocked the entrance of Cape Lookout State Park southwest of Tillamook and probably wouldn't be removed for at least a week. Water also had undermined the Sand Lake

Road, part of the Three Capes Scenic Drive, closing it to one lane.

Russell Chevrolet, at the northern end of Tillamook, was one of several businesses inundated Tuesday night.

Service worker Mike Jepson said the showroom was under six inches of water when he arrived for work on Wednesday. By mid-afternoon, there was little trace of the mess and the lot was filled again with new pickups.

Steve Johnson, owner of the Memories gift shop in Nehalem since April, said the water rose eight inches in his store Tuesday.

"From what I've heard, it's never been this high before," said Johnson.

Pete and Betty Thompson said about a dozen volunteers helped them move the antiques in their store, then lift them onto pilings as the floodwaters rose.

The antiques survived, said Mrs. Thompson, adding, "The only thing I lost was my good humor."

The governor's declaration allowed the National Guard to be called out to help deal with the flooding.

Laughman said the guard members mainly were used in his county to ferry staff and patients to and from Seaside General Hospital because the access

road was flooded.

In Tillamook County, guard members were used to remove a mudslide on a county road southeast of Tillamook, Levesque said.

Coastal rivers were receding rapidly Wednesday. The lower Nehalem River crested nearly 12 feet above flood stage, the river's highest level since records first were kept in 1971.

On Tuesday, a steelhead was spotted swimming up a Seaside street that was awash with water from the Necanicum River, said Linda Raniero, a public safety clerk at the Astoria police department.

The three storms dumped a total of 8.2 inches of rain on Astoria, at the mouth of the Columbia River. More than half that amount fell during the 24 hours ending at 4 p.m. Tuesday, according to the National Weather Service. During the same 24 hours, Seaside reported more than 6.5 inches of rain.

Colder air followed the storm inland, bringing heavy snow into the Cascades. Motorists were required to use traction devices on many northern mountain passes. Ten inches of new snow was reported overnight at Government Camp on Mount Hood.

The three days of wind and rain left thousands without electricity, but utility companies made good progress once the wind subsided Tuesday afternoon, spokesmen said.

About 800 customers still were without electricity in the Astoria area Wednesday, and some may not have power restored until Thursday, said Gary Donnelly, a spokesman for Pacific Power & Light Co.

Carol Dillin of Portland General Electric Co. said about 3,100 customers still were without electricity in the utility's service area, with the hardest hit area east of Gresham.

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