

Clinton tours ravaged Down East

Expected rain in region could add more water to already swollen rivers

Associated Press

TARBORO — After seeing entire communities submerged in water, President Clinton promised Monday that “the American family” would do all it can to help the victims of floods caused by Hurricane Floyd. “We’re going to be with you every step of the way,” he said.

Clinton toured this devastated community in eastern North Carolina by helicopter, his eyes taking in miles of brown water that seemed to swallow everything in its path: factories, small airplanes, cars and trees, six houses on a cul-de-sac showing only inches of roof.

“The damage was unbelievable. I was surprised by it,” Clinton told reporters just before leaving town. “We just have to stay with it and do our best to help them.”

Clinton said on Air Force One he was amazed at the depth of the water so many days after the hurricane because that is a sign that it is not receding quickly. These waters, he said, “did not come from a normal ebb and flow. ... This was water that was literally blown in here by the hurricane.”

“It’s going to cost them some real money to fix it, and we’ve got to help them,” he said.

Clinton announced separate federal disaster aid for North Carolina last week. Monday, he said the Labor Department will use \$12 million to hire temporary workers to help with hurricane cleanup, and emergency food stamps will be available to help families in need. He urged flood victims not to be shy about seeking help.

“The people who need it ought to take it,” Clinton said. “There is nothing to be ashamed of.”

Mainly, the president tried to comfort the people who fled their homes as Hurricane Floyd raked North Carolina and eight other states: South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Maryland, Virginia, New Jersey, New York and Connecticut.

“Every once in a while something happens that proves to you, no matter how hard you work, you are never completely in control,” Clinton said. “When things like this happen to some of us, we know they could happen to all of us. We know we have a responsibility as members of the American family to help you get back on your feet again, and we intend to do it.”

He stopped by a shelter run by the Red Cross and Salvation Army, lingering to listen to people pour out stories of lost possessions and worries about their future. Clinton said he was impressed by the upbeat spirits many people displayed; he noted one minister was wearing a T-shirt reading, “Too Blessed to be Stressed.”

Wearing khakis and cowboy boots, Clinton walked onto Main Street in downtown Tarboro with two small business owners whose shops were flooded. They pointed down two submerged streets, describing damage that Clinton couldn’t wade in to see for himself.



President Clinton and Gov. Hunt (top photo) in Tarboro during tour of eastern North Carolina on Monday. The Mays' residence at Tranter's Creek Estates is surrounded by floodwaters (center photo), with Aaron Mays (inset) pointing to the high-water mark. Traffic clogs the bridge across the Pamlico River — with whitecaps — at Washington (bottom photo).

By Claud Hodges
Staff Writer

Mandatory evacuation of the Whichard's Beach area and a countywide curfew took effect Monday evening as Beaufort County prepared for the Pamlico River to crest sometime late Monday or Tuesday.

The evacuation and curfew were among precautions emergency management officials took as floodwaters from the upper Pamlico-Tar River basin made their way to the lower part of that basin, which was hit hard by recent storms.

Most residents in Whichard's Beach Road area were forced out by floodwaters from Tropical Storm Dennis and Hurricane Floyd a few days ago. Floodwaters coming down from the upper reaches of the Pamlico-Tar River basin forced them out Monday evening, when a mandatory evacuation of the Whichard's Beach area was ordered by the Beaufort County Emergency Management office. Volunteers and the N.C. Army National Guard helped evacuate the area.

“People’s access will eventually be cut off with regular vehicles,” said Daden Wolfe, county emergency management coordinator, said Monday. “People need to evacuate now. If we can’t get in for them later, we can’t get in. I urge people to get out as a safety factor.”

Wolfe asked those who chose to stay at home to think about the consequences if medical emergencies arise. He estimated there were 200 people to evacuate from the area.

Evacuees were transferred to buses and taken to the shelter at Washington High School.

County Manager Don Davenport said the curfew is needed.

“It is best for folks affected by this flood to stay home for this emergency,” he said.

Just when the Pamlico River will crest at Washington is uncertain, said National Weather Service forecaster Mike Colby.

“We still should see some minor rises by midday Tuesday,” he said.

Colby said the wideness of the river from Washington to the Pamlico Sound and to the Atlantic Ocean will allow floodwaters to spread out over a large area.

On Monday, Red Cross crews assessed damages from Dennis and Floyd at Belhaven, the Pamlico Beach area, Washington, Washington Park and River Road. They will move to the south side of the river Tuesday.

Law-enforcement authorities have been dealing with another problem since evacuations began — looting.

“If we can catch those responsible for looting and vandalism, we’re not going to tolerate it at all,” said Alan Jordan, Beaufort County sheriff. “We’re going to arrest them and prosecute them to the fullest extent of the law.”

Looting has been reported in the northwest portion of the county, mainly in the areas around Tranter's Creek, the Voice of America Road and Cherry Run Road, he said.

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"There are no polite words for a looter," Jordan said.

If people observe looting, they should call the Beaufort County Sheriff's Department immediately at 946-7111, Jordan said.

U.S. Highway 17 between Washington and Chocowinity was closed at nightfall Monday because water across the four-lane road was deepening, said Allen Lewis, a maintenance supervisor with the N.C. Department of Transportation.

The road was reduced to one lane, and vehicles waited their turn to head either north or south. Traffic was backed up for several blocks in either direction.

The bottleneck on U.S. 17 caused some drivers to use ferry that runs between Aurora and Gaylord's Bay near Bayview.

"There's been a tremendous increase in traffic here with the situation with Highway 17," said Kay Sadler, processing assistant with the ferry service. "People seem to be using the ferry as a detour to Highway 17."

To handle the extra ferry traffic, another ferry was brought in Monday. The ferries will leave each terminal every 45 minutes through Tuesday. A third ferry was expected to arrive to help out.

National Guard divisions are supporting law enforcement in the flood crisis, said Capt. Cliff Wilkins with the N.C. National Guard. They have transported cots, generators and other emergency supplies. Guards-

men are assisting with traffic control and search-and-rescue efforts, he said.

"We have men on duty now who have lost their homes to this flood," Wilkins said. "We're working to help the situation."

Meanwhile, recovery efforts continue.

The delivery of mail and food are slowly being restored on the mainland of Hyde County.

Anita Fletcher, post mistress at the Engelhard Post Office, reported receiving mail on Sunday, the first mail delivery since Sept. 15. That mail was delivered Monday.

Other post offices in Hyde County tried to resume normal operations on Monday. The Scranton post office remains closed. Mail for Scranton area residents is being handled by the Swan Quarter post office.

Melba Farrow with Farrow's Red & White in Engelhard, reported that food from the Red & White warehouse in Rocky Mount should be shipped out to her store on Tuesday. But flooded roads may prevent delivery trucks from reaching the store.

Hyde County officials said more than 100 homes were damaged by flooding caused by Floyd.

National Guard vehicles have been distributing food, water and other items in the county. The Red Cross has been preparing hot meals for residents.

Correspondent Douglas A. Gibbs contributed to this article.

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North Carolina Gov. Jim Hunt said he implored Clinton to "tell the nation about this" — about the tens of thousands of people who have lost homes, the factories and jobs that have been flooded away. "I'm asking that everybody in America help eastern North Carolina. We need a lot more money than everything that is headed our way," he said.

Clinton said there was a "huge, huge problem" in housing because many people who lost their homes did not have flood insurance because they were not in a flood plain. He said the government would try to set up trailers on their property for temporary housing while they rebuild.

Clinton was accompanied by the Federal Emergency Management Agency head, James Lee Witt, who said floods from Floyd are the

worst he has seen in more than six years on the job.

Witt said FEMA is setting up temporary water stations in North Carolina, to provide showers, bathrooms and clean water, as well as offices where hurricane victims can apply for a variety of federal aid.

In Tarboro, the Tar River is falling slowly after cresting at 24 feet above flood stage.

A separate Agriculture Department program will provide farm loans at less than 4 percent interest to help rebuild flooded farms and replace lost livestock. Those programs will cover hurricane victims in any state, the White House said.

The federal government will help fund unemployment payments for up to 26 weeks for workers whose jobs are on hold because of storm damage, Witt said.