

Sandy erodes Corolla dunes, beach accesses

By Cindy Beamon
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COROLLA — The shoreline on the Currituck Outer Banks bears the marks of Hurricane Sandy, even though overall damage appears to be less than points south and north.

Up and down Corolla's shoreline, the storm ripped away steps leading from beachfront homes to the shore. On Tuesday, many dunes that supported the walkways had been eaten away by rough surf and wind.

Four emergency beach accesses were also wiped out, leaving steep drop-offs in their place.

"Vehicles can't get to the beach right now," said Corolla Fire Chief Rick Galganski. The three emergency accesses at Pine Island, Albacore, and the Currituck Lighthouse are eroded down six to eight feet, he estimated.

On the four-wheel drive beaches, rough surf bit into the dune line, leaving water-filled gullies at the bottom of some on-ramps. At the bottom of the Milepost 20 ramp, a two-foot drop-off poses a hazard to unaware motorists.

Despite the eroded shoreline, the Currituck beaches appear to have missed the serious wind and flood damage Sandy caused elsewhere.

Wind gusts that reached 70 mph appeared to cause only minor damage to beach homes in Corolla.

"It's like a bad northeaster would have done," Galganski said.

Some houses were missing a few shingles or pieces of siding, but there were no reports of major damage in Corolla, he said. No downed trees were reported and only a few residents briefly lost power, he said.

For the most part, roads were passable throughout the storm, although some pooling of water on N.C. Highway 12 and some flood-prone streets was reported.

Whalehead subdivision typically floods, but a new stormwater drainage system appears to have lessened the problem.

Ron Harmon, former president of the Whalehead Property Owners Association, said water appeared to be draining away faster than before the \$3 million system was installed. County officials could not be reached Tuesday to say if the drainage system paid for by Whalehead residents through a special stormwater tax had performed as expected.

Unlike Hurricane Irene, sound-side flooding did not appear to be a problem.

Gary McGee of Corolla said water extended into his yard eight feet during Irene, but a different wind direction during Sandy prevented the problem this time.

“The water is rising, but I have not seen it coming over the banks yet,” McGee said Tuesday.

Greg Wilson of North Swan Beach said sand roads on the off-road had puddled, but not any more than during typical rainstorms. The National Weather Service reported six inches of rain fell at Cape Hatteras during the storm.

Wilson said his house, in an area behind the dunes was not damaged. Wilson, a volunteer firefighter, said the department had not received any emergency calls during the storm.

Not all property owners escaped damage, however.

Two older waterfront houses in Swan Beach, near milepost 15, did appear to take a battering from Sandy. The houses, the closest to the off-road shoreline, had been damaged during earlier storms and were being protected from encroaching surf by sandbags. During last weekend’s storm, the sandbags were washed away and waves were washing beneath the structures.

Residents also reported seeing an abandoned truck being buffeted by waves near the on-ramp for the off-road beaches. The Currituck Sheriff’s Department reported that shortly before midnight on Sunday, a beach deputy was notified of an abandoned red 1998 Dodge Dakota pickup in the 1300 block of North Beach, a half mile north of the beach ramp in Corolla.

The deputy contacted the owner of the abandoned truck, who said the truck was having electrical problems, and he planned to have it towed during the next low tide. North Beach Recovery was contacted, and at low tide, located the vehicle and towed it away.