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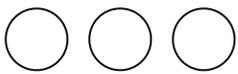
NEWS

Major damage from heavy rains in Rensselaer County

Officials say it will take time to rebuild roads

Kenneth C. Crowe II, Pete DeMola

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Heavy downpours Wednesday damaged roads in central and southern Rensselaer County, including this portion of Taborton Road in the town of Sand Lake.

Rensselaer County

SAND LAKE — It could take weeks to repair the roads that were washed out when powerful thunderstorms dropped as much as 5 inches of rain on parts of Rensselaer County Wednesday.

Standing at the washed out section of Taborton Road in Averill Park Thursday afternoon, county and federal officials said local and national infrastructure has to be built to survive the heavy rains that sent streams over their banks and flooded areas that usually don't go under water.

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“When we are going to have these types of weather events we have to make sure our infrastructure is resilient and it can sustain itself through any type of conditions,” said U.S. Rep. Antonio Delgado, the Democrat who represents most of the county.

Rensselaer County is asking residents, business owners and local officials to catalog damage in an effort to get federal aid, County Executive Steve McLaughlin said. The county deployed engineers, drones and highway crews to begin repairs and assess the extent of the damage.

“We will have our people at the USDA put together a task force. They will be meeting with the county folks fairly soon,” U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said about helping farmers and using available programs to assist the county. “The federal government is here to help.”

Vilsack was in the Capital Region to meet with Delgado and to discuss workforce modernization and rural infrastructure. Vilsack toured Taborton Road, which is considered to be at the center of the storm’s devastation, with McLaughlin and Delgado. The three talked with Joan Bishop of 15 Taborton Road, whose residence was flooded by the heavy rain that poured down the hill, wiping out the bridge and damaging other homes.

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Bishop said she didn't know how the storm will impact the sale of her home, which is under contract. Bishop's granddaughter, Guiliana Valente, was in the house when the flooding swept through the property. She said she told her grandmother not to try to come home.

"Crazy," was how Valente described the situation Wednesday. Water quickly poured into the basement as it rose outside, Valente said.

Thunderstorms that rumbled across the county dropped between 2 and 5 inches of rain in over three hours Wednesday. The downpour is blamed for flooding that damaged dozens of roads in the county and prompted officials to declare a state of emergency for fear drivers would crash into debris.

The thunderstorms repeatedly hit the central and southern parts of the county, washing out pavement and raising the levels of creeks and streams. Ground already saturated from weeks of rain couldn't absorb the downpours, contributing to flash flooding. The storms also caused power outages and customers remained without service in pockets around the area.

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“There were probably five to six waves of heavy rain. The thunderstorms kept developing over Albany County and moved into Rensselaer County,” Kevin Lipton, a meteorologist at the National Weather Service at Albany, said Thursday.

The rush of water tore apart the parking lot at the Old Daley on Crooked Lake at 2339 State Route 43.

“We need a a federal emergency,” said Stephanie Pettit of the inn as family and friends worked to clean up the damage to the banquet facility and restaurant in preparation for two weddings’ scheduled for Saturday. Both weddings had been postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Pettit said neighboring businesses have offered support. The parking lot was being repaired Thursday afternoon. Pettit said it was always assumed any flooding would come from the lake, not down from the hill on the other side of Route 43. The lake Thursday was 10 feet higher than normal.

County officials fear storm runoff may have fouled drinking water wells. The county is distributing water through town halls and fire departments to assist residents whose wells were flooded leaving them without save drinking water supplies, McLaughlin said. The county also has called in the American Red Cross to assist people impacted by the severe storms.

Rensselaer County and local town highway crews started road repairs Thursday as residents and businesses dealt with the aftermath the storm.

"We're going to go as fast as we can but there's massive damage out there so it's going to take us in some cases a couple of weeks," McLaughlin said.

The county has made repairs along roads to allow residents to be able to exit their driveways where they were otherwise washed away. McLaughlin said the county is moving quickly to make the small fixes and that it will be determined what bigger projects are ahead.

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"The damage that is here is pretty massive. It was an unbelievable amount of water," the county executive said.

Map of rainfall amounts from last 24 hours.

Note the "bullseye" of heavy rain which fell across portions of Rensselaer County - between 3 and 5", which occurred in only 2-3 hours! This resulted in significant flash flooding Wednesday afternoon and evening.

pic.twitter.com/MjPpVdVTii

— NWS Albany (@NWSAlbany) July 15, 2021

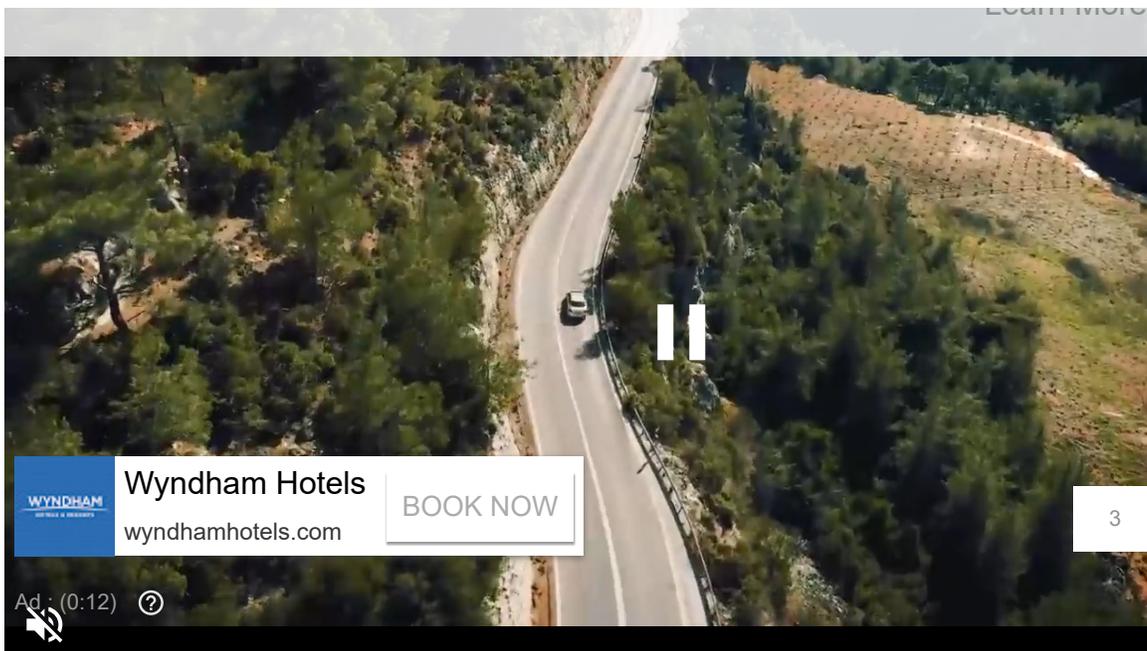
The flooding damaged roads around the northern part of the town of Nassau, closing Routes 66 and 43, as well as local roads.

Nassau Town Supervisor Dave Fleming said the devastation might seem startling to some. The southern part of the town got little more than sprinkles while parts to the north were drenched.

“There has been a significant amount of damage to the northern end of town,” Nassau Town Supervisor David Fleming said in a video posted on Facebook. “... We’ve actually lost roads that have been recently constructed. County and state roads have been dramatically impacted.”

Most roads reopened Thursday morning. But a major concern remains: Culverts that are washed out beneath many roads. Fleming said that while the road surface may be intact, flood waters may have washed out what’s underneath, leaving the pavement compromised. The town expects to carry out a broad assessment of the highway network to determine the extent of the damage and where unseen risks might lurk.

“This is worse than Tropical Storm Irene,” said Fleming, referring to the August 2011 tropical storm that caused extensive flooding around the Capital Region.



McLaughlin warned residents to be careful of road damage and south shoulders that may collapse.

Fleming said the town will inspect the Dewey Loeffel Landfill Superfund site to

see how the heavy rains are affecting runoff from the closed dump into the Little Thunder Creek, a tributary of the Valatie Kill, a trout stream. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the state Department of Environmental Conservation have contacted Fleming and will be assessing the Dewey Loeffel site.

Route 66, a main route through the town, had a landslide at Pike's Pond. "It took out an entire lane of the road," Fleming said. Highway crews used snowplows to push mud and other debris out of the roadway. Fleming said it allowed the reopening of one lane of Route 66.

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