

Tropical Storm Isaias leaves its mark on the lower Northern Neck

by Lisa Hinton-Valdrighi

About 5 a.m. Tuesday, August 4, Henry Dixon of Ocran heard the telltale sound of a freight train moving towards his home on Dymmer Creek.

Tropical Storm Isaias arrived in the Northern Neck around daybreak and left a path of destruction in its wake, downing trees and power lines, destroying property and leaving dozens homeless from White Stone in Lancaster County to the Browns Store area in Northumberland County.

"It was loud, just like a train, just the way they describe it on the news," said Dixon. "And then in 30 seconds, it was over. And it left all this."

Dixon stood in his neighbor's yard, while an excavator cut through dozens of trees blocking his driveway. Dixon and his wife, Lena, moved into their new waterfront home in April. Tuesday, the roof facing the waterfront was peeled back and water seeped into the walls. His garage was destroyed. He estimated about 40 trees were split along his drive.

"I've been in the air flying for over 45 years," said the former spotter pilot. "And I've seen a lot of storm damage from the air. I haven't seen this from the air but I can bet I've never seen anything as bad as this."

Around noon Tuesday, three National Guard trucks rolled down Ocran Road, the final mile of which was partially blocked by downed trees and dangling power lines.

About a half a mile from the Dixons, Sam Johnson was asleep when all of a sudden trees began to split and topple in his yard. Several fell on his one-story home, one on his car. His shed was destroyed. In his yard alone about 25 trees were split. In fact, his home was barely visible from the road.

Iris Treackle's home, which she spent years painstakingly restoring, had windows shattered, roofing ripped off and outbuildings crushed.

The storm, which had not been classified as a tornado by the National Weather Service at press time, cut a path from White Stone's Little Bay and Ocran areas over to Fleets Bay and Boys Camp Road areas near Kilmarnock, then up to Good Luck Road and through Regina to Browns Store.

Good Luck Cellars winery in Kilmarnock sustained structural damage to its tasting and events facility. Owners Paul and Katie Krop, along with tasting room manager James Garnett, were surveying the damage early Tuesday.

Katie Krop said she received an early morning call from Sandy Zeiler, who lives across the street from the winery on Good Luck Road.

"But I didn't expect this," continued Krop, picking up pieces of the roof that were scattered across the lawn and driveway. "Thank heaven it was 5:45 in the morning and no one was here. You never expect something like this."

The National Weather Service in Wakefield had issued an alert at 5:53 a.m. urging folks to take cover as radar confirmed a tornado had formed near Kilmarnock and was on a path toward Lancaster, Wicomico Church, Robley, Heathsville and Farnham. Parts of Northumberland County remained under a threat of tornado until 6:46 a.m. as the storm moved out and up the coast. According to weather forecasters, the greatest threat to the eastern part of the state was from storm-sparked tornadoes.

At 10:40 a.m. Tuesday, Lancaster County chief of emergency services Matt Smith said first responders were still assessing the situation, but he knew of one storm-related injury.

At noon, Northern Neck Electric Cooperative reported 447 Lancaster residents were without power. Meanwhile, Dominion Energy Virginia communications specialist Audrey Cannon reported 4,093 Lancaster residents were affected by the storm and 3,662 were without power.

In Northumberland County, it was much the same. Northumberland County Chief of Emergency Services Wes Packett reported Tuesday afternoon that crews were still out surveying damage, but knew of no injuries. Northern Neck

Electric Cooperative reported 1,200 outages across the county. Cannon said 3,875 Northumberland residents were affected by the storm and 3,265 Dominion customers were without power.

As of 3:15 p.m. Tuesday, Dominion reported 15,320 residents in the Middle Peninsula and Northern Neck were without power.

Jackie Nunnery also contributed to this story.