

VIMS, Hampton facilities take hit from Isabel's winds, floods, storm surge

Hurricane Isabel battered coastal facilities at three Virginia Sea Grant locations, and cleanup could continue for months. Mike Oesterling, aquaculture specialist at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, summed up the feelings of many who hosted Hurricane Isabel. "She was not a good guest," he said.

Although no injuries to people were reported, extensive damage occurred across the VIMS campus and at the Virginia Seafood Agricultural Research and Extension Center in Hampton. The Center for Coastal Physical Oceanography at Old Dominion University fared better, losing only some frozen material due to the power outage. The floating dock wound up on the lawn, but otherwise, the big damage was downed trees.

At Virginia Tech's Hampton lab, director Michael Jahncke said the lower level flooded with roughly five feet of standing water, which ruined a number of things including refrigerators, freezers, lab benches, cabinets, etc. Ironically, it was water that caused the demise of most of the flatfish and cobia in the tanks, as the loss of pumps meant the loss of oxygen. Lab staff, however, managed to save all the most important fish, including the broodstock. The standing water has been pumped out, and work is under way to clean up the micro lab and fix the damage everywhere.

The VIMS campus suffered the most extensive damage of all Virginia Sea Grant institutions. A storm surge of nine feet destroyed two piers and caused extensive damage to the seawater lab and oyster hatchery. Numerous people have contributed video and images illustrating Isabel's wrath, and can be seen at http://www.vims.edu/isabel_images.html.

Although the finfish culture facility remains closed until further notice, all fish were safely released prior to Isabel's arrival. Oesterling reported that the storm lifted and spun two large water-filled tanks, wreaking havoc with nearby equipment. One tank held 5,800 gallons, the other 7,500 gallons. One gallon of water weighs

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The remains of the finfish culture facility at VIMS are being restored following Isabel's visit. Shown here is debris from several tank systems after roughly four feet of water flooded the lab. The 5,800-gallon tank at right was lifted, rotated within the center of the greenhouse, and deposited on top of a heat pump, which punctured the tank.

Michael Oesterling photo

Oyster meeting results in research priorities

In an effort to examine our current understanding of oyster disease and the overall progress of the programs supported by the NOAA National Sea Grant Program, the Maryland and Virginia Sea Grant programs in coordination with the National Sea Grant Office held a September conference that brought together scientists, resource managers and industry representatives from around the country. Their goal was to assess research progress to date, its impact on the oyster industry, on restoration and public health and to then develop prioritized research objectives to define further investments.

Following a series of expert presentations on research findings, the state of oyster populations in major growing areas, and the status of the industry in these areas, participants broke into five workgroups to develop recommendations for research needs and priorities. Groups were charged with developing key goals, or objectives, and detailing priority research for achieving them.

In addition to detailing specific research needs, a number of common principles emerged from the groups.

* Partnerships with federal and state agencies, industry, non-profit organizations and others will be critical over the long-term in developing sustainable oyster species.

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Isabel damage (cont.)

roughly 8 pounds – thus the smaller tank weighed 46,400 pounds, the larger 60,000 pounds! The smaller tank was lifted and deposited on top of a heat pump, which punctured the tank and exacerbated the flooding. The building suffered extensive structural damage as well.

Oesterling said, "Some of the fish are irreplaceable - in particular, we released several 2-year old cobia weighing roughly 30 pounds each, which we had raised from eggs and had planned to use as brood stock next year."

Sharing the can-do attitude of other researchers contending with Isabel-related delays, however, he said, "we'll pick up the pieces and begin anew next year."

oyster meeting (cont.)

* A concerted effort and investment is needed to support infrastructure to develop and maintain oyster broodstocks required for long-term development, field-testing and implementation of disease resistant strains.

* Research and demonstration projects must build in standardized methods of monitoring and evaluation that should aim for an ability to compare and apply findings.

* Communications among researchers is critical as is outreach education to stakeholder interests.

Broad goals and specific research needs and priorities were outlined by each group:

- Oyster Fisheries Management and Restoration
- Genetics and oyster Populations
- Frontiers of Disease Research
- Aquaculture and Hatchery issues:
- Public Health and Processing

A complete summary may be found on the Maryland Sea Grant web site at: <http://www.mdsg.umd.edu/oysters/meeting/>



The ferry pier at VIMS - going ... going ... gone.



Call for papers announced

A call for technical papers has been announced for the 5th International Conference on Recirculating Aquaculture to be held July 22-25, 2004, at the Hotel Roanoke & Conference Center in Roanoke, Va.

The conference is sponsored by Virginia Tech and the Aquaculture Engineering Society.

Authors should submit a short abstract to editor Dr. George Flick for review and consideration. Abstracts must be received by Feb. 1, 2003.

The call for papers may be downloaded in Acrobat pdf format at <http://www.cfast.vt.edu/downloads/callRAC2004.pdf>. Additional information may be obtained by contacting aqua@vt.edu for complete instructions.

Seeking reader input

The Virginia Sea Grant College Program developed its initial long-range strategic plan three years ago in preparation for an overall program review by the National Office of Sea Grant. The program is scheduled for a similar program evaluation in 2004. To prepare for that evaluation, we will conduct a review of our strategic plan during 2003. The plan identifies program priorities related to the following topical areas: aquaculture, commercial fisheries, seafood technology, coastal economic development, coastal ecosystem health, and fostering an environmentally and scientifically informed citizenry.

At this time, we invite public comment on the strategic plan, its priorities and its directions. If you feel that a marine or coastal issue or problem or opportunity has been overlooked, please let us know what you believe should be modified in the strategic plan.

We welcome comments from any interested individual, and will consider all input provided us. Virginia Sea Grant is on the web at <www.virginia.edu/virginia-sea-grant>, and the strategic plan is under "About Us."

Please mail comments to Director, Virginia Sea Grant College Program, 170 Rugby Road, Charlottesville, VA 22903; fax to 434-982-3694, or e-mail to wlr4z@virginia.edu. Please include your name and address as well as a brief description of your connection to Virginia's coastal and marine resources and/or environments.

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