

Wednesday, September 12, 2018 – 8:30 am

As of the 5am National Hurricane Center (NHC) forecast update, a hurricane warning and a storm surge warning remains in place from Duck NC and the Albemarle and Pamlico Sounds to South Santee River SC. Hurricane warning means hurricane force (74+mph) winds are possible in the next 36 hours. A tropical storm warning is in effect from north of Duck NC to the VA/NC boarder. A tropical storm warning means tropical force (39+mph) winds are possible in the next 36 hours. At tropical storm watch is in effect for the VA/NC board to Cape Charles Light VA. A tropical storm watch means tropical force (39+mph) winds are possible in the next 48 hours.

Florence remains a CAT4 (130mph) hurricane moving at about 17mph. The forecast track currently has the center of Florence making landfall near Wilmington then turning towards Florence SC and then further west in SC. Confidence in Florence's track is fairly high until it makes landfall.

The Florence forecast has continued to trend more in our favor. Our chance of seeing tropical storm force winds has decreased significantly since yesterday. While we will likely see tropical storm force (39+mph) gusts, our chances of sustained tropical winds is very low.

Florence remains an extremely dangerous storm and it is still very possible that our area will see at least tropical storm impacts. The National Weather Service has begun to provide more local specific forecast impacts this morning. Uncertainties in the forecast still exist, changes in the forecast track will greatly change the impacts felt across the local area. Based on information from the NHC and National Weather Service (NWS):

Strength/size – Florence is currently a CAT4 (130mph). Florence is forecast to strengthen back to around 145mph by Thurs. morning. Florence is still expected to slow down considerably by late Thursday into Friday. Florence is forecast currently to be a CAT2 storm when her center makes landfall. Florence's wind fields have continued to grow –tropical force winds extend up to 175 miles and hurricane force winds now extend 70 miles from her center.

Forecast track – Overall confidence in the forecast has continued to grow up to the point that Florence makes landfall. The NCH is currently forecasting landfall near Wilmington NC. After/near landfall, forecast confidence is not as high. While the NHC forecast track currently shows her moving west towards Florence SC, there is a growing possibility that it could move further south towards Charleston before making the turn to more to the west. Florence is still expected to slow down/stall soon near landfall – possibly for as much as 24 hours. If she stalls, impacts will be significantly increased for those areas.

We will likely continue to see fluctuations in Florence's forecast track. Don't focus too much on where the center line of the Florence – the actual storm track could occur anywhere within the NCH forecast error cone. The NHC forecast is still expecting Florence to stall at or near the coast – it is currently forecast to remain almost stationary for more than 24 hours before continuing a more west track through SC. The last couple of forecast updates have kept the forecast track south of VA. All but very western VA is currently outside of the forecast error cone. However, due to her large size, at least tropical storm force winds may be seen in our area.

Rainfall – NWS is currently forecasting 2”-6” for IOW. Dangerous flash flooding and flooding may occur Friday through the weekend.

Winds – NHC forecast has not changed the wind chances for Hampton Roads significantly from the last update. Currently forecasting:

- 37% chance of tropical force winds (39+mph) (down from 63%)
- 4% chance of strong tropical force winds (58+mph) (down from 19%)
- 0% chance of hurricane force winds (74+mph) (down from 10%)

Based on NWS forecast information, we are not forecast to see sustained tropical force winds across IOW. We are forecast to see a tropical force gust from early Friday morning through Saturday afternoon. Sustained winds are forecast to be in the mid-20s to low-30s from around midnight Thursday through 6pm Saturday. Forecast gust are from the low-30s to mid-40s. Actual wind timing and extent will be highly dependent on the actual track of Florence. Winds in the NWS is currently forecasting winds to begin to taper off Saturday morning.

Inland Flooding – NWS still has IOW in the moderate risk level for inland flooding. Flooding in low lying areas and ditch overflow will also likely be an issue – especially on the back roads.

Blackwater River – the Blackwater River forecast is factoring in the significant reduction in potential rainfall. Thanks to Jeff Turner, want to make sure to note that I should have been referencing a maximum forecast level versus a crest in the previous updates. The forecast maximum level is currently in the 16-’17’ foot range. This would be the worst-case scenario forecast. The more likely levels based on the current rain fall forecast is probably closer to 9’-10’. Sorry for any confusion this may have caused folks with interests along the Blackwater.

Storm Surge/Evacuation - The NWS is currently forecasting for less than 1’ of storm surge along the IOW coast line. As of 7:30 this morning, no storm surge watches or warnings have been issued for Virginia. Storm surge related flooding depends on the relative timing of the surge and the tidal cycle and can vary greatly over short distances.

As always, stay alert and don’t let you guard down, while it’s looking like we may have dodged the Florence bullet – that’s what Charleston and GA thought about 18 hours ago. Florence’s forecast is very complicated and circumstances could change very dramatically very quickly.