

Flooding

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Railroad tracks also were damaged in many spots, covered in branches and debris. A long section of track was hanging midair off of state Route 34 in Newfield. The dirt beneath it washed away completely in the flood, and the track was warped under the weight of whole trees that had fallen.

Jim Lawrence, who owns the property around the damaged track, said it may take one to two weeks to rebuild the support.

The region is under another flash flood warning, until noon on Tuesday.

Joanne LaBounty, a meteorologist for the National Weather Service, said there are a few more chances for showers and thunderstorms this week, though it won't be as severe as Sunday.

"There will be localized areas of heavy rain and just like what we saw already — some areas got hit hard, while others not too far away didn't get much. It's important that people stay tuned to the forecasts, especially in those areas that got hit hard," LaBounty said.

On Monday, the weather service said Tuesday and Thursday could bring a "very moist atmosphere" and heavy rainfall. It won't take much more rainfall to cause water problems, since the ground in some areas is already soaked from the recent downpour, officials said.

Falls at state parks outside of Ithaca saw huge swells of water. At twisting line of twigs and logs on the lawn of Buttermilk State Park marked how high the water rose Sunday, more than 4 feet above the concrete steps.

Driving into Newfield, the damage of the flash flooding was visible as crews worked to clear stones and debris. Home driveways were washed away, mailboxes upended, and many basements were flooded.

Travis Henry, a resident of Mill Street in Newfield, was raking debris in his front yard Monday afternoon as water rushed down a cracked and broken ditch running beside his home. Though not home at the time of the storm, Henry came back to workers fixing the roads outside his house and a lot of rebuilding ahead of him. His mailbox was ripped from the curb, and around his yard, water levels reached as high as a foot, dumping the gravel from his driveway to the very edge of his property.

"They can't really do anything repair-wise until the water stops flowing," Henry said. "It's coming down from the hills, so there's not too much they can do."

Nearly all roads in southern Tompkins County have reopened, according to the county. Motorists, however, are still advised to drive carefully because of road damage — parts of pavement and shoulders are gone in some areas.

The following roads in the Town of Newfield remain closed:

» Bower Road, between Shaffer Road and VanBuskirk Road (closure expected to last weeks, if not months).

» Burge Hill Road, from state Route 13 to the end.

» Brown Road, between state routes 34/96 to Bald Hill Road.

» A small section of VanBuskirk Road, where it intersects with Bower Road.

» State routes 34/96 at Brown Road also remain closed because of severe road damage.

The area of Curtis Road in Danby was also damaged.

The top priority for highway workers is to clear the roads, Berggren said. After that, they will work on repairing driveways and shoulders.

Berggren said drivers should be careful of the shoulders of the road and watch out for crews working.

In his 11 years working in the department, Berggren said he has never seen damage this bad from flooding.

"Every one of our roads pretty much is missing a section of shoulder here or there," he said.

Other towns have pitched in to help with the roads, Berggren said, including Ithaca, Enfield, Ulysses and Cayuta.

Emergency response

The storm came through at about 6:30 p.m. Sunday, and calls soon came in for flooded basements and washed-out roads, said Lt. Tom Basher, of the Ithaca Fire Department.

Firefighters in Newfield were checking residents in the Shelter Valley community off of Route 34 when they found the last road in or out was flooded.

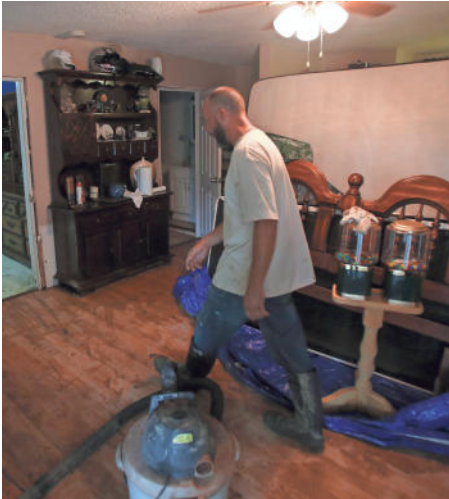
Ithaca firefighters assisted Newfield with boats and water rescue equipment. Firefighters went house to house to evacuate families that needed to get out. Rescuers put people in life jackets and carried them to safety to the other side of the washed-out road, Basher said. Bangs Ambulance personnel and a Newfield School District bus were waiting to take them to a shelter set up at the high school.

Twenty-three people in total were rescued, Basher said. "Our guys did a great job," he said. "They went out there, and they brought all those kids across the water. The water was moving pretty fast. It could have been ugly if someone had slipped and fallen. But everyone got over safely, and it was a good job."

The American Red Cross has been assisting people affected by the flooding across the region, in Tompkins, Wyoming, Tioga and Schuyler counties. A



PROVIDED PHOTO
The backyard of the Stage residence, on Smith Road in Newfield, during the highest point of the flooding Sunday.



KELSEY O'CONNOR / STAFF PHOTO
Corey Cahill, a resident in the Shelter Valley Trailer Park, shows damage to his home. The residence was full of muck and water. He was evacuated Sunday when the flooding was deepest. He said at the highest, water was up to his thighs.

'It just kept coming'

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NEWFIELD — Sunday evening began as a normal, albeit rainy night for Matt and Karen Wilson, tenants of 1421 Elmira Road in Newfield. The couple had been watching a movie, enjoying another relaxing start to the week.

Then, a few minutes after 7 p.m., Matt Wilson noticed water trickling through the crack beneath the door.

"We got some towels, but then we saw more water coming in," Wilson said.

They went upstairs to see fellow tenant Chuck Newman. He thought the gutters may have gotten clogged and went to clean them. That's when they all noticed water coming over the road.

"It just kept coming," Wilson said. "We couldn't stop it. We dug some trenches, but we couldn't do anything until the water stopped."

They called 911 so someone could come and close off the road, now obstructed by rubble, but to no avail. "They told us, 'Oh, you're the 30th in line,'" Wilson said. "Once they did make it out, it was around 10 p.m., and they moved rubble to divert the water down the road. It seems like if they had done that earlier, it may not have come all the way down here."

By Monday morning, once the rain had stopped, the Wilsons were in the yard with Newman and landlord Carmen Guidi, proprietor of next-door Second Wind Cottages, helping to clean debris out of their home. The storm had destroyed the floor of their basement apartment and filled the garage — situated downhill from the road — with silt and debris.

The cottages, next door to the property, were unaffected.

"The only thing in all of God's creation who enjoyed this were the ducks," Newman said. "They were flapping around all over the place."

Dozens of Newfield residents were caught directly in the path of the storm, with some even finding nearby rivers and streams rerouted into their backyards. Dody Stage, of 234 Smith Road, evacuated her home around 8 p.m. Sunday, sloshing through 2 feet of water in her backyard as the nearby stream dumped silt and stone into her backyard.

"Just the amount of rain we got, (the creek) couldn't handle it," said Dody, a 24-year resident of Newfield, adding it



KELSEY O'CONNOR / STAFF PHOTO
The outside of Cahill's home in the Shelter Valley community in Newfield. Residents were evacuated after the bridge washed away Sunday.

was the worst flooding she had ever seen. "It took about 30 minutes for it to overflow and get into our driveway, and after that, there's not much you can really do."

At the base of the hill, the stream had swollen to the point where trees were uprooted and the railroad tracks along state Route 96 had been overtaken by water. Residents said state officials had been through earlier in the day Monday to assess the damage, but the Department of Environmental Conservation had not yet sent a representative.

Farther down the stream, where it runs through Jim Lawrence's property on Route 96, water had rushed so violently, the fill beneath a set of train tracks had been washed out, leaving rails and ties suspended in air over the rapids.

Shelter Valley Trailer Park, where residents in lower elevations were evacuated in the wake of the storm, saw its own share of damage, with one bridge obliterated by the rushing water.

"It was running like the Colorado River," said Bruce Lott, a resident of the park at 305 Midway. "Some people have lived here 20 years and said they had never seen something like this."

The worst of the damage could be seen on the property of Corey Cahill, a resident of Shelter Valley, who had his house flood and a bridge alongside his property destroyed.

"I was eating a piece of apple pie after a motorcycle ride when my girlfriend said, 'Hey, the water's coming up over the bridge.' I grabbed the shovel and got up there to find the whole rail-

road bridge was jammed. It just kept getting deeper and deeper, so I went to get my skid steer to move some of the dirt, and that's when the water broke, putting us under 2 or 3 feet of water."

Cahill said this was the second flood his house had seen since the railroad bridge bordering his property was redone around seven years ago. Debris from the rushing water kept striking the low bridge until it began to dam up the waterway, he explained.

He grabbed sheets of plywood to attempt to build dams to shift the flow of water away from his house, but with his bridge gone and the water rising, firefighters arrived around 8 p.m. to evacuate them from the house. The house took on approximately 7 inches of water, leaving 2 feet of silt on the floor. The Valley Shelter Community, friends and family were on hand Monday morning to pull more than 200 gallons of sludge out of the house.

"At the end of the day, it doesn't matter," said Cahill, who had just moved back to the area from Florida. "At any moment, you could have been swept away. When it's go time, it's go time, and you have to get it done before you lose everything. It could have been so much worse; we're fine. Hopefully we get some help. The Red Cross has been by, the railroad company (graded) our front yard for us, and so far, it's been a community project. It's been 15 years total I've been away, and all my friends I've had from before are here to help."

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"Every one of our roads pretty much is missing a section of shoulder here or there."

KEVIN BERGGREN
NEWFIELD HIGHWAY SUPERINTENDENT

dozen people spent Sunday night in a shelter in Newfield.

In a statement Monday, U.S. Sen. Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., said he plans to do everything possible to provide federal aid to pay for the flooding damages.

"We have been in touch with community leaders in the impacted counties and have assured them I will do everything possible to help deliver any and all available federal aid to pay for the damages from the flash flooding this weekend. I will do everything in my power to get the available assistance to those in affected areas as quickly as possible, should the federal thresholds be met," Schumer said in a statement. "While local officials and emergency responders are busy making sure residents are safe from flooding, I will be coordinating with federal agencies to make sure any red tape is cleared so our affected communities can get the resources they need."

Staff writers Anthony Borrelli and Nick Reynolds contributed to this report.

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NICK REYNOLDS / STAFF PHOTO
Debris from flooding is on the grass and sidewalks next to Buttermilk Falls in Ithaca Monday.