Fire Island Association

WORKING FOR FIRE ISLANDERS SINCE 1955

*FIA **UPDATE***



Photo by Beth Batkiewicz

October 2026

Dear Fire Islanders,

It was a remarkably quiet hurricane season in the North Atlantic this summer, thanks in part to El Niño, and the weather forecasters had very little to talk about. So, when a nor'easter began to crawl up the East Coast, they had plenty to say about it.

A nor'easter is a strong coastal storm whose winds blow in from the northeast along the East Coast of the United States and Canada. Unlike hurricanes, which form in the tropics and feed on warm ocean water, nor'easters are extratropical storms that draw their energy from the meeting of cold and warm air masses.

They can bring heavy rain or snow, strong winds, coastal flooding, and large waves.

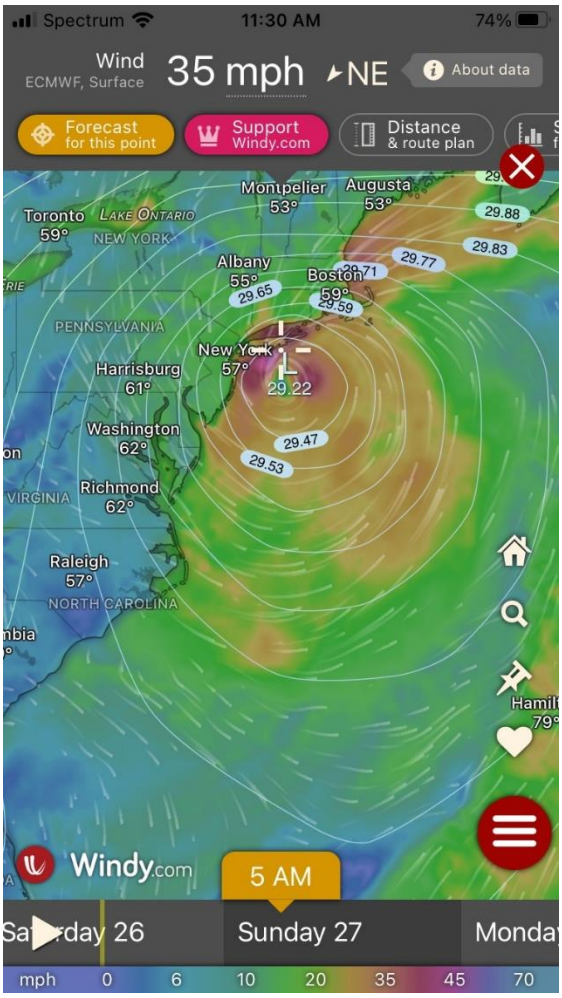
In the North Atlantic, the nor'easter season usually runs from October through April. The peak storm action comes from January through March, when most of the major snow-producing nor'easters hit the East Coast.

This storm stayed for three days from Friday (9/25) through Monday (9/28). This FIA UPDATE will take you through the storm from start to finish: how it approached, what it did to Fire Island and the Long Island region, and what may lie ahead.

Where Will It Go?

The storm meandered its way up the coast and kept everyone guessing. As late as Wednesday (9/23) the forecast models disagreed. The European model showed a stronger storm close to the coast, while the American model kept it weaker and well offshore.

By Friday, September 25, with the storm already on its way, the National Weather Service was still cautioning that a shift closer to or farther from the coast "would change the locations of the strongest winds, heaviest rain and highest coastal water levels."



The Calm Before the Storm

As the storm approached on Friday evening, those who stayed on the island were treated to a spectacular sunset. This time, however, the old saying "Red sky at night, sailor's delight" definitely did not hold true...

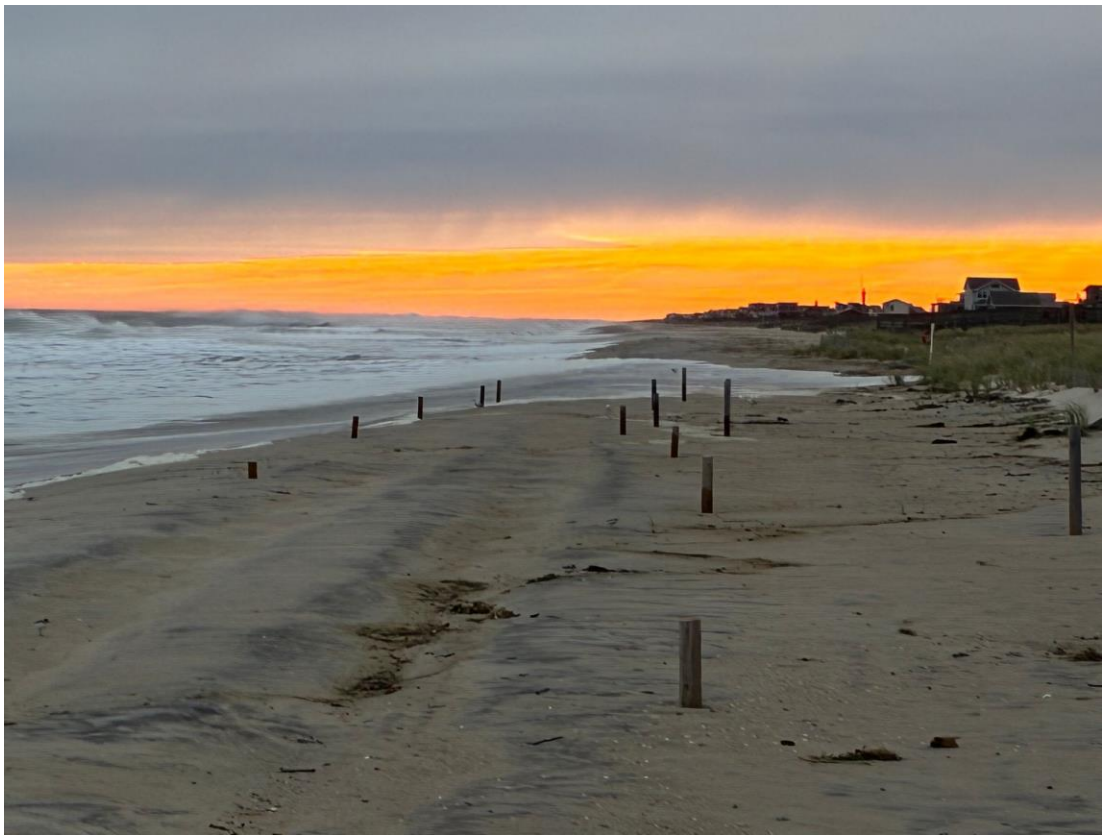


Photo by Don Sussman

The Storm Finally Arrives

By Saturday, the storm was in full force. The Northeast winds and high tides were made more severe by three factors working together:

- **A full moon.** The Harvest Moon was full on Saturday, coinciding with the storm's peak and pushing the high tides on Saturday and Sunday above normal levels.
- **King tides.** The storm hit during September's king tide period. King tides are typically some of the highest astronomical tides of the year.
- **Very low barometric pressure.** The storm's lowest central pressure, 29.12 inches of mercury, was reached on Saturday night, when its center was roughly 100 miles south of Long Island. Low air pressure allows the sea surface to rise, adding to the storm surge.

Across Long Island, the storm left a trail of serious damage. Wind gusts reached 81 mph out in Montauk, and anywhere from 3 to 5 inches of rain fell across the island. Up to 3 feet of water flooded the south and east bays, and South Shore streets near the bay flooded all the way up to Montauk Highway. About 2,000 trees came down, and PSEG reported more than 128,000 power outages. Waves

of 7 to 10 feet caused erosion from Fire Island to Montauk, scouring beaches and dunes and causing millions of dollars of damage along the coast.

On Fire Island, our three ferry companies stopped service early Friday evening as the storm approached. Regularly scheduled service did not resume until Monday due to strong north winds and lingering high tides that made it difficult to land at the island's docks.

The biggest challenge of the storm was its prolonged nature. Instead of passing quickly on by, it sat offshore and delivered several high tide cycles on both the ocean and bay sides. As previously mentioned, the full moon made those high tides even higher and intensified the height and force of the ocean waves, causing significant beach erosion.

There was at least one positive aspect to the storm track. Because the center of the storm sat south of our region for much of the time, we got North/North East winds instead of East/North East winds. This significantly reduced potential damage on ocean side, but unfortunately it did increase the severity of impact on the bay side due to the destructive angle of the wave action.

Taking Stock: On the Ocean Side

When the storm finally moved on, every community had lost significant height and width on their beaches, but the severity of the erosion varied from place to place. On the west end, Kismet was hit very hard, losing a lot of berm and sections of dune.





In other west end communities, however, dunes were intact and the damage was actually less than many had expected.



Fair Harbor



The East End is Battered

Unfortunately, the east end of the island was more seriously impacted, with significant loss of berm and dune in central to western Ocean Bay Park, western Point O' Woods, the Pines, on a stretch between the Pines and Water Island, and Davis Park.



Ocean Bay Park looking west into Seaview



Point O'Woods



Fire Island Pines



Fire Island Pines



Davis Park



Davis Park

Taking Stock: On the Bay Side

The bayside of the island had its most substantial flooding since the January 2024 storm. All communities reported serious flooding from the Bay, 2 to 3 feet above normal, and some locations also had significant damage to docks and structures.



Kismet flooding on the Bayside



Bikes were not for riding in Ocean Beach



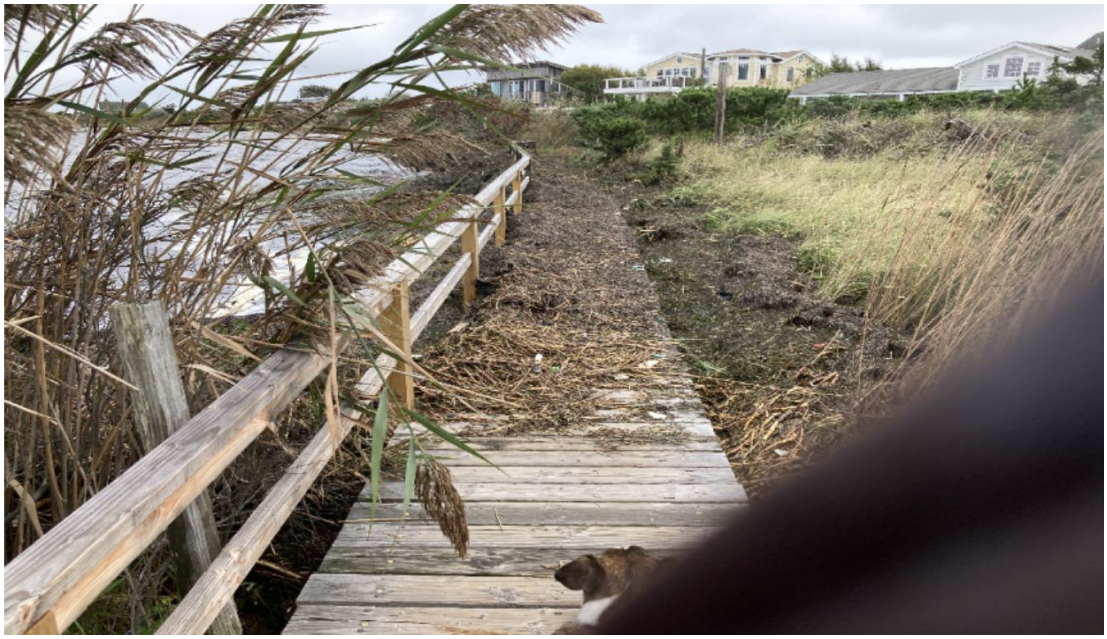
The Ocean Bay Park firehouse took on 10 inches of water.



The Point O Woods Yacht Club dock disappeared underwater.



Boots were made for walking in Cherry Grove



This Atlantique boardwalk took on a lot of debris

Repairing Our Beaches and Dunes

It is still too early to address the prospects for repairing Fire Island's beaches and dunes. In many communities Mother Nature has started the work, and beaches are beginning to build back up as sand comes back in from the offshore bars.

Meanwhile, the Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC), Suffolk County, and the Towns of Islip and Brookhaven are gathering data on the nature and severity of the damage all along the island with post-storm site visits, photographic assessments, and drone flyovers. This data will be compiled and evaluated to make decisions about possible PL 84-99 emergency repair, or alternatively, about expediting the schedule for renourishment of our beaches under the FIMP project.

More Trouble Ahead?

The Northeast Regional Climate Center at Cornell University says this year's unusually strong El Niño could bring more nor'easters this season, along with more high-tide flooding days and increased onshore winds.

Unlike hurricanes, which pass quickly by, coastal storms can be slow movers, lasting for days, and causing long duration damaging winds and numerous high tide cycles.

The FIA will continue to monitor conditions on our beaches and stay in close touch with all our federal, state, and local officials as the damage assessments move forward.

When there are new and important developments, we will be back with another FIA UPDATE.

Warm regards,



Suzy Goldhirsch
President, Fire Island Association

The FIA has been actively, relentlessly, and passionately advocating with government agencies and elected officials for Fire Island shoreline management, sand renourishment, and storm repair for over 70 years. Please support these efforts by joining us as a member.

https://fireislandassociation.org