

INDIAN RIVER COUNTY

Red Cross assists eight in still-flooded Fellsmere following rain deluge

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Published 1:46 p.m. ET Nov. 18, 2023 | Updated 6:20 p.m. ET Nov. 18, 2023

FELLSMERE — At least eight residents of this Indian River County city are receiving help from the American Red Cross following a deluge of 14 inches of rain earlier in the week that led to widespread flooding and damaged homes, county officials said Saturday night.

Fellsmere's North Broadway Street, North Cypress Street and New York Avenue (from North Willow Street to Broadway Street) remained closed Saturday night as residents and businesses waited for the water to recede.

The American Red Cross "is assisting at least eight Fellsmere residents. This includes four adults and two children who were displaced because of flood damage to a home," Ryan Lloyd, emergency management coordinator for Indian River County, told TCPalm.

"This is the worst that we've ever seen for sure," said County Commissioner Susan Adams, who owns Marsh Landing Restaurant.

Marsh Landing sits on Broadway in downtown Fellsmere, one of the streets closed due to the flooding. On Thursday night, the wake from cars passing by pushed water through the doors of the restaurant.

The drainage system for the city of Fellsmere and the county surrounding the area is maintained by the Fellsmere Water Control District, Adams said, which is a separate independent district from the county and the city. From the county's perspective, she said, a conversation will be had with the city and water control district to address the infrastructure shortages in the area.

Businesses along Broadway Street remain closed for a second day Saturday, due to flooding and road closures.

"I had to cancel a huge party that we had for breakfast (today)," Adams said. "I had to cancel parties that we had last night. And it's not just the inconvenience to the customers, as it is the inconvenience to my staff that's really counting on this holiday money to help pay for their holidays."

Adams hopes to reopen Sunday if the water recedes, allowing customers to safely park their cars on the street.

“I know it’s an inconvenience to the customer, and we are losing money not being open, but I’m really worried about my employees and their livelihood,” Adams said. “We have a lot of them coming in and doing prep work and other things like that, but this is generally a really big weekend. It’s very impactful to our business and I’m sure other businesses, too.”

Many streets in Fellsmere remained flooded and inaccessible by foot even on Saturday. Houses seemed largely undamaged by the water even though many yards had about ankle-deep water. Regina Collins, who works as a nurse and lives in the city, said that her car got flooded Thursday night and had to be towed onto the driveway, but that her house remained untouched. "It has never flooded so badly," she said.

Three Fellsmere homes have sustained internal damage from flooding, and this number could change as more information becomes known, Lloyd said.

"One Fellsmere business sustained floor damage and several businesses in the city remain closed. The economic impact data is pending," he said.

Indian River County wants residents to document impact

The city of Fellsmere and Vero Lake Estates, located about 4 miles apart on the east and west of Interstate 95, experienced a rainfall of 13–14 inches starting Thursday morning into Friday, the National Weather Service said. Many areas, including side streets off Pennsylvania Avenue, North Broadway Street, the Fellsmere Little League field, and 101st Avenue between 87th Street and County Road 512, were severely flooded.

All roads in Vero Lake Estates reopened Saturday, Lloyd said.

Flooding will continue through the weekend as the canals levels slowly recede, and the county's staff will be surveying the area and working on repairs over the weekend.

Although flowwaters in Vero Lake Estates had subsided as of Saturday afternoon, but Fellsmere "is draining much slower," county spokeswoman Kathy Copeland said Saturday in an email. "Knee-deep water is still keeping certain roads closed."

Copeland added that a crew is on scene to "patch washouts as they become visible," and that the roads will be graded once they dry out.

“We are asking residents and businesses to assist us in documenting the impacts of this event,” Lloyd said in a prepared statement. The statement also urges residents or businesses

that were damaged by the floods to visit www.IndianRiver.gov/em or email documentation of damages to emergencymanagement@indianriver.gov. So far they have received 13 complaints, Lloyd said.

“Staff has been alerted to be available for work over the weekend and a staging area has been established with equipment already in the area,” Kirstin Leiendecker, assistant public works director, said in the statement. The situation will be monitored for blockages to help ensure the water is able to move out of the area as soon as the canal levels drop and allow for additional capacity, officials said.

The Fellsmere Water Control District said that the city’s drainage system “is designed to move 2 inches” of rain in a 24-hour period,” and that the water would take several days to recede. “The system is a “gravity system,” not pumped, and not gated, officials said.

"The District is monitoring the canals and ditches for any damage as the floodwaters recede in the next two days," Greg Nelson, president of the Fellsmere Water Control District, told TCPalm.

Despite the explanations from the Fellsmere Water Control District online, residents said on Facebook that the drainage system had been neglected for years.

“If the ditches were routinely cleaned like they should be the water could drain faster. Also, it would help if people stopped using ditches like garbage dumps,” Kathleene Johns commented, which got 39 likes as of noon Saturday.