

US warnings of heavy rain, tornadoes from weakening storm Barry

July 14 2019, by Michael Mathes



A port floods as Tropical Storm Barry makes landfall in Intracoastal City, Louisiana on July 13, 2019

Tropical Storm Barry buffeted the US state of Louisiana on Sunday, bringing warnings of heavy rain and possible tornadoes even as it weakened.

After briefly becoming the first hurricane of the Atlantic season, Barry was downgraded to a [tropical storm](#) after making landfall Saturday. It nevertheless packed a serious punch as it moved inland, though there were few indications of widespread flooding.

Flights in and out of the airport in the state's biggest city New Orleans resumed Sunday after all were canceled a day earlier. Thousands of people had abandoned their homes, tens of thousands lost power and first responders were poised for action.

Fears that the levee system in New Orleans could be compromised eased after the Army Corps of Engineers voiced confidence that it would hold, but Mayor LaToya Cantrell urged residents not to be complacent.

"We are not in any way out of the woods," she said, adding that flash flooding could still occur into Sunday.

President Donald Trump warned of "major flooding in large parts of Louisiana and all across the Gulf Coast.

"Please be very careful!" he said on Twitter.

Louisiana Governor John Bel Edwards said Saturday that the storm would intensify into Sunday, with many areas seeing more rain overnight than they had during the day.



In Jeanerette, Louisiana, Tropical Storm Barry's strong winds tore apart a billboard on July 13, 2019

"Don't let your guard down thinking the worst is behind us," he told a press conference.

At 8:00 am (1200 GMT), the storm packed maximum sustained winds of 45 miles (72 kilometers) per hour and was located southeast of Shreveport in western Louisiana, moving north at six miles per hour, the National Hurricane Center said.

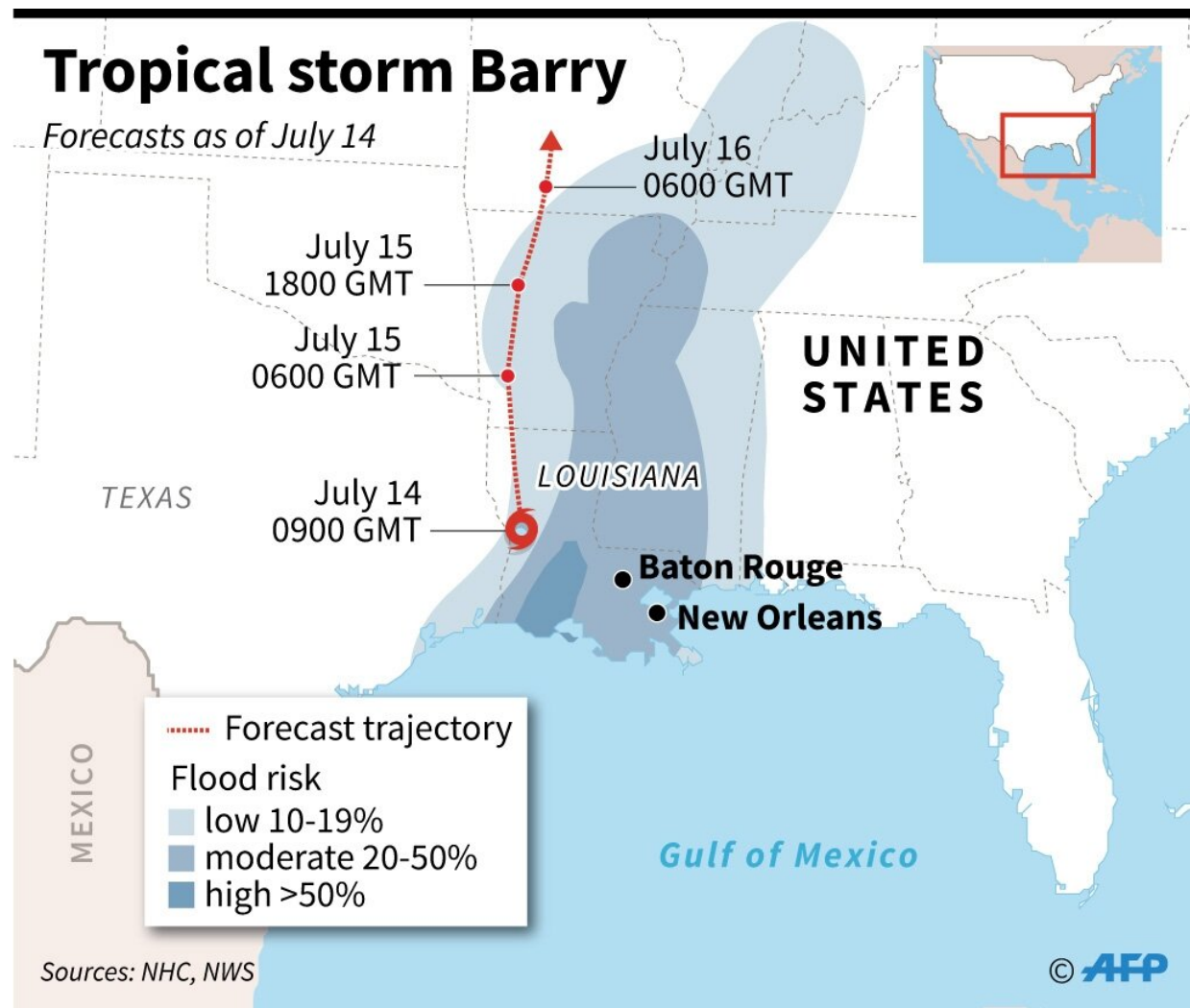
"Barry is forecast to weaken to a tropical depression later today," the NHC said.

Pete Gaynor, acting administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, told Fox News "there are still life-threatening conditions that exist" as Barry moves north.

"The rain is the threat," he added, not only while it falls but in a couple of days when floodwaters move back down the Mississippi River to the Gulf of Mexico.

Governor Edwards said he had spoken to Trump about the storm's impact.

"I thanked President Trump for his support and for approving our request for assistance," the governor said.



Map showing the path of storm Barry in the United States.

Tornadoes were possible in parts of Louisiana, Mississippi, western Alabama and eastern Arkansas, the NHC said.

Rainfall estimates had been lowered to between six and 12 inches (15 to 30 centimeters) over south-central Louisiana but rivers and canals across the state's south were full.

The heavy winds scattered tree branches across roads and knocked over road signs, and in St. John's Parish next to New Orleans, local television footage showed some areas under two or more feet (60 centimeters) of water.

Cajun Navy

The eye of the storm made landfall at Intracoastal City, a speck of a town with a few houses and businesses. Part of the main road was flooded Saturday afternoon, as were some waterfront businesses, with water rising by the minute.

News footage showed localized flooding, swollen waterways, and downed power lines and trees across south Louisiana. Rivers overtopped their levees in several locations, including part of coastal Terrebonne Parish, where authorities had issued a mandatory evacuation notice.

The Atchafalaya River swallowed the waterfront pedestrian promenade in Morgan City, which was entirely without power, as about 10 members of America's Cajun Navy citizen rescue group assembled under a highway overpass.



Residents remove a downed tree from a road in Morgan City, Louisiana

"We're just neighbors helping neighbors," John Billiot, 39, the group's president, told AFP.

The group, which has conducted volunteer rescues since Hurricane Katrina in 2005, had assembled five flat-bottom rescue boats, a high-clearance, military-style truck and 86 other boats across the region in preparation for the latest storm.

"We're still waiting. Barry is playing peek-a-boo with us," Billiot said.

For many, the storm and potential for large-scale flooding revived unpleasant memories of deadly Hurricane Katrina.

Thousands packed up and left their homes as floodwaters hit low-lying areas like Plaquemines Parish, where road closures left some communities isolated.

Others hunkered down to ride out the squall, despite mandatory evacuation orders and the risk of dangerous storm surges.

William Manuel, a maintenance worker living in Bayou Vista, not far from Morgan City, compared Barry to "a thunderstorm" and said: "I'll be back to work Monday."



Tropical Storm Barry left a parking lot flooded in Berwick, Louisiana on July 13, 2019

Dangerous conditions

But experts say Louisiana is facing an extraordinarily dangerous confluence of conditions.

The level of the Mississippi River, already swollen from historic rains and flooding upstream, was at nearly 17 feet (5.2 meters) in New Orleans—just below flood stage.

However, Edwards said new forecasts show many rivers wouldn't reach the maximum heights predicted before the storm hit, though flash floods remained a threat.

US Senator Bill Cassidy said officials with the Army Corps of Engineers told him they were "confident" the 20-foot-high levee system protecting New Orleans, a city of 400,000 known for its Mardi Gras and jazz, would hold.

In 2005, Katrina—the costliest and deadliest hurricane in recent US history—submerged about 80 percent of New Orleans after the city's levee system failed, causing about 1,800 deaths and more than \$150 billion in damage.

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