

Storm expected to be another blow to Gulf Coast businesses

June 19 2021, by Kevin McGill and Jeff Martin



This GOES-16 GeoColor satellite image taken Friday, June 18, 2021, at 11 a.m. EDT, and provided by NOAA, shows a tropical weather system in the Gulf of Mexico. Officials ordered a floodgate and locks system closed in southeast Louisiana and readied sandbags in Mississippi and Alabama as a broad, disorganized tropical weather system began spinning bands of rain and brisk wind across the northern Gulf of Mexico coast Friday. Credit: NOAA via AP

A weekend that was supposed to be filled with celebrations of Juneteenth and Father's Day has turned dreary in coastal Louisiana and Mississippi, where an unpredictable tropical weather system has brought wind, heavy rain and fears of flooding to a region where some have sandbags still left over from last year's record-breaking hurricane season.

With virus restrictions loosened and summer near, [business owners](#) across the Gulf Coast—everyone from restaurateurs to swamp boat operators—had been anticipating an influx of tourist cash after a year of lost revenue due to the coronavirus pandemic and relentless storms. But those hopes have been dimmed by the storm.

"My biggest concern is that it drives away a busy weekend, and may just end up being a lot of rain," said Austin Sumrall, the owner and chef at the White Pillars Restaurant and Lounge in Biloxi, Mississippi. He had 170 reservations on his books for Sunday, but was concerned some patrons would cancel. "We saw, especially last year, the rug can get jerked out from under you pretty quickly," he said.

The storm churning northward in the Gulf of Mexico was expected to move inland early Saturday. It's likely to dump anywhere from 5 inches (13 centimeters) to 10 inches (25 centimeters) of rain along parts of the Gulf Coast—even 15 inches (38 centimeters) in isolated areas, according to forecasters at the National Hurricane Center.



A worker moves water tricycles off the beach in Biloxi, Miss., as a tropical system approaches on Friday, June 18, 2021. Forecasters predict a tropical system will bring heavy rain, storm surge and coastal flooding to the U.S. Gulf Coast. The poorly organized disturbance was located Friday morning about 255 miles south of Morgan City, Louisiana. Credit: Margaret Baker/The Sun Herald via AP

A tropical storm warning extended from Morgan City, Louisiana, to the Okaloosa-Walton County line in the Florida Panhandle. Coastal surge flooding was possible and flash flood watches extended along the coast from southeast Louisiana into the Florida Panhandle and well inland into Mississippi, Alabama and into parts of central and northern Georgia.

Louisiana swamp tour boat captain Darrin Coulon spent Friday securing boats to docks, having already canceled popular weekend tours.

"I'm sure the area's going to have some flooding," Coulon lamented.

Dealing with [tropical storms](#) is nothing new for Coulon, who said he jokingly tells people he's from the "cone of uncertainty," referring to a term that forecasters use.

In Louisiana, the threat came a month after spring storms and flooding that were blamed for five deaths, and as parts of the state continued a slow recovery from a brutal 2020 [hurricane season](#). That included Tropical Storm Cristobal that opened the season last June, hurricanes Laura and Delta that devastated southwest Louisiana, and Hurricane Zeta that downed trees and knocked out power for days in New Orleans in October.



Residents in low-lying areas of Hancock County move their vehicles, lawn mowers, ATVs and boats to higher ground in Waveland, Miss., as a tropical system approaches Friday, June 18, 2021. Forecasters predict a tropical system will bring heavy rain, storm surge and coastal flooding to the U.S. Gulf Coast. The poorly organized disturbance was located Friday morning about 255 miles south of Morgan City, Louisiana. Credit: Justin Mitchell/The Sun Herald via AP

The latest storm, moving north toward Louisiana, carried tropical storm-force sustained winds of 45 mph (72 kph) but forecasters said it couldn't be classified as a tropical storm because it lacked a single, well-defined center.

"I hope it just gets in and gets out," said Greg Paddie, manager of Tacky Jack's, a restaurant at Alabama's Orange Beach.

Paddie said the restaurant still has sandbags left over from its preparations for last year's Hurricane Sally. That September storm, blamed for two deaths, threw ships onto dry land and knocked out power to hundreds of thousands of people in Alabama and in the Florida Panhandle.

Disappointment was evident in the voice of Seneca Hampton, an organizer of the Juneteenth Freedom Festival in Gautier, on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. He spent weeks arranging food trucks, vendors, a bounce house, face painting and free hamburgers and hot dogs for the event. It was highly anticipated because last year's was canceled due to the pandemic and because of Juneteenth's new designation as a federal holiday.



Clouds from Tropical Storm Claudette form on Highway 90 Beaches in Pass Christian, Miss., Friday, June 18, 2021. City of Pass Christian has declared state of emergency for potential severe weather. Credit: Hunter Dawkins/The Gazebo Gazette via AP



A man takes a photo of waves crashing into what once was a dock for a ferry that transported people from Bay St. Louis to Pass Christian, Miss., as a tropical system moves toward the Mississippi Coast on Friday, June 18, 2021.

Forecasters predict a tropical system will bring heavy rain, storm surge and coastal flooding to the U.S. Gulf Coast. The poorly organized disturbance was located Friday morning about 255 miles south of Morgan City, Louisiana.

Credit: Justin Mitchell/The Sun Herald via AP



National Hurricane Center director Ken Graham, left, speaks during a news conference along with Sen. Rick Scott, R-Fla., Tuesday, June 1, 2021, at the center in Miami. Tuesday marks the start of the 2021 Atlantic hurricane season which runs to Nov. 30. Credit: AP Photo/Wilfredo Lee



Senator Rick Scott, R-Fla., right, speaks during a news conference after having toured the National Hurricane Center with director Ken Graham, left, Tuesday, June 1, 2021, at the center in Miami. Tuesday marks the start of the 2021 Atlantic hurricane season which runs to Nov. 30. Credit: AP Photo/Wilfredo Lee



Senator Rick Scott, R-Fla., speaks during a news conference after having toured the National Hurricane Center, Tuesday, June 1, 2021, in Miami. Tuesday marks the start of the 2021 Atlantic hurricane season which runs to Nov. 30. Credit: AP Photo/Wilfredo Lee

"It's something that means a lot to people, and there were people that were bummed out, like 'I already had in my mind I was coming out there to celebrate,'" said Hampton.

The Gautier event was postponed until next month. A Juneteenth event in Selma, Alabama, was postponed until August.

By Friday evening, storm clusters were dumping rain up to 4 inches (10 centimeters) an hour along parts of the Louisiana and Mississippi coasts, said Benjamin Schott, meteorologist in charge at the National Weather Service office in Slidell, Louisiana. Radar showed more heavy rain moving ashore over Alabama and the Florida Panhandle. The National Hurricane Center said the system was about 40 miles (65 kilometers) south-southeast of Morgan City, Louisiana, on Friday night, moving north at 10 mph (17 kph).

Mexico, while getting rain from the storm in the Gulf, also was threatened by a [storm](#) in the Pacific. Tropical Storm Dolores formed Friday with landfall expected on its west-central coast Saturday evening, possibly near hurricane strength, according to the National Hurricane Center.

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