

## Quick Response by New York Sea Grant Provides Information to Better Manage Hurricane Sandy Impacts

**B**y acting as a bridge between decision-makers and researchers, New York Sea Grant was able to quickly provide sound information to coastal managers when they needed it most.

Hurricane Sandy inflicted tremendous damage along the New York and New Jersey coastlines. The force of the storm's waves and surge opened several breaches through the barrier islands protecting Long Island's south shore.

Of particular concern to coastal land managers was a breach in the Fire Island National Seashore in a federal wilderness area. The breach was in a barrier fronting a portion of the mainland containing 13,000 homes collectively valued at \$10 billion dollars. Under state and federal policies, the breach was to be monitored for 45 to 60 days to determine whether it posed a threat to the mainland and should be artificially closed or allowed to close naturally.

The National Park Service (NPS), which was responsible for making the decision regarding closure, asked New York Sea Grant's Coastal Processes Specialist to assist their interagency Breach Assessment Team composed of 35 federal, state and local officials.

New York Sea Grant (NYSG) provided the group with research-based information on impacts of new breaches from earlier NYSG efforts and helped them identify data needed to properly evaluate the situation. NYSG worked with researchers at Stony Brook University to identify ongoing field projects that provided some of the needed data, synthesizing and disseminating it to the Assessment Team within two weeks of the storm.



*Hurricane Sandy created this breach in the Fire Island National Seashore near a residential area valued at \$10 billion. Photo: C. Flagg*

NYSG coordinated with researchers and managers to develop and fund a quick response project to collect critical real-time data on physical changes associated with the breach when it became apparent other agencies were not able to respond in a timely manner.

NPS used NYSG information to evaluate the condition of the breach and its impacts, and decided not to close it immediately, which would have cost approximately \$6 million. The initial data showed the feature was fairly stable and having minimal impacts on main land tide levels.

Recognizing the value of the information, NPS is funding continuation of the data collection program to monitor the breach and its physical impacts to ensure it did not cause increased flooding on the mainland.

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*This project meets the performance goals of Sea Grant's Hazard Resilience in Coastal Communities Focus Area.*

New York Sea Grant is a joint program of Cornell University, the State University of New York, and NOAA. New York Sea Grant Extension administration is located at 112 Rice Hall, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853.

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