An Estimate of Hurricane Damage Sustained by Commercial and Sport Fishermen in the Long Island Area

by

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As a result of a general survey of the damage to fishing villages and fishing gear resulting from the severe storm of September 21, 1938, the following information has been obtained. The brunt of the storm and the greatest damage occurred on the south and eastern shores of Long Island, particularly in the vicinity of Fire Island Inlet, Great South Bay, Moriches Bay, and Montauk.

Fire Island Region

All ocean traps off Fire Island Inlet were completely demolished, together with considerable damage to fishermen's camps located just inside the Inlet on Great South Bay. Loss of gear and shore property estimated at $125,000.

An attempt will be made by one or two companies to fish one trap each throughout the remainder of the season which ends about November 15. Most of the concerns, which numbered about six, do not expect to resume fishing because of the lack of financial reserve and the uncertainties of successful fishing during the short period that remains of the usual season. It is possible that at least one of the largest and oldest of these outfits may have to declare bankruptcy.
Great South Bay

This region suffered relatively less damage than the outside ocean trap area since there are fewer and smaller traps set inside the Bay than on the ocean side of Fire Island Inlet. All of the Bay traps, numbering approximately eight, were a complete loss, much of the damage resulting from houses being carried directly through the trap area on the crest of the high tidal wave which swept over the strip of sandy beach near Fire Island Inlet, engulfing the Bay and flooding the towns and villages on the northern side of Great South Bay. Trap fishing in the Bay will not be resumed until May of 1939. Damage to gear estimated at $10,000. There are indications that the valuable shellfish beds, most of which are privately owned by the Blue Point Oyster Company, West Sayville, have been severely damaged by the overflow of sludge and mud. A survey of these beds is being made by the Blue Point Oyster Company in an effort to determine the extent of the damage.

Nerichan Bay Region

Practically no commercial or sports fishing is conducted in this Bay and hence the loss here was insignificant compared to the other regions. Considerable damage was done, however, to private property and to small shacks used by a few shellfish operators that engaged in tonging principally for clams and oysters. Damage to fishing industry estimated at $2,000.

Montauk

Montauk village consisting of approximately 400 fishing shanties was completely demolished. All pound nets located in Fort Pond and Gardiners Bays were completely wiped out and most of the fishing boats were beached.
on the sandy shore and thereby escaped complete ruin, most of the
damage being confined to sprung seams resulting from excessive strain
and from damage to hulls and riggings resulting from collision with
other drifting vessels and from the pounding of the surf while on the
sandy beach.

A few of the commercial boats and a number of charter boats used
for sports fishing were sunk in the vicinity of the dock at the Mountauk
Yacht Club. An effort is being made to repair those vessels that were
driven ashore and to raise the sunken boats.

It is expected that only a few pound nets will be reset for fall
fishing out of approximately 80 nets in operation prior to the storm.
Loss from damage to sport and commercial fishing, including sheds,
boats, and gear, estimated at $400,000.

Long Island Sound Region

Sport and commercial fishing from East River to Greenport at the
eastern end of Long Island is relatively less important than at other
parts of Long Island. Little damage was sustained by the commercial
fishery which is concentrated on the Sound side in the vicinity of
Greenport and Orient Point. A few otter trawls operating out of Green-
port were damaged but have been quickly repaired and will resume fishing
within the next week or so. Loss from damage in the Greenport area to
commercial fishery is estimated at $10,000. Sports fishing, particularly
by row boats, is of some importance at the western end of the north shore
in the vicinity of Hampton Harbor, extending eastward to Smithtown Bay.
This region experienced an exceptionally high tide causing considerable
damage to row boats and row boat stands. It is not known definitely how
many of the 1,000 row boats operated in this area were damaged but it is expected that it was not relatively as much as in Moriches Bay area. Without reliable data it is estimated that the damage to the sports fishery in this western region on the north shore is possibly $10,000.

In this region considerable destructions of private pleasure boats resulted from being washed ashore by the 15 foot tidal wave which overflowed most of this region.

Summary

Estimated damages in the various regions are as follows:

**New York (Long Island area)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Damage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Great South Bay (damage to gear)</td>
<td>$10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moriches Bay</td>
<td>$10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shinnecock Bay</td>
<td>$2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montauk</td>
<td>$400,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Long Island Sound region:**

- Commercial fishery in Greenport area: $10,000
- Sports fishery (estimated): $10,000

**Total for Long Island Area:** $447,000

**General Comments**

It is our opinion that immediate financial assistance is needed by the County of New Suffolk for rehabilitation of the numerous towns in that county which suffered most severely through loss of life and property damage. Some of these towns, particularly West Hampton, are already receiving governmental relief assistance through WPA and National Youth Administration projects but additional help is sorely needed.
Revisions in the program of the Biological Survey of the marine fisheries of Long Island being conducted by the New York State Conservation Department with the cooperation of the Bureau of Fisheries have been made in order to determine what physical and biological changes in the bay and ocean regions have resulted from the recent storm. For instance, eleven new inlets from the ocean to the bays on the south shore have been made as a result of the storm and it is naturally expected that this will result in considerable changes in the physical, chemical, and biological conditions of these bay regions which are noted for their commercial and recreational fisheries.