

Sheffield declares Barrow disaster

After state officials toured areas of Barrow damaged by the recent disastrous storm which struck Alaska's Arctic coast late last month, Gov. Bill Sheffield declared the site a disaster area.

The action sets aside \$2.2 million in immediate state aid.

The storm did more than \$7.5 million worth of damage in the communities of Barrow and Wainwright, according to officials of the North Slope Borough. It also flooded a portion of the Kaktovik runway and forced the evacuation of whaling crews camped on Cross Island in the Beaufort Sea.

Borough Mayor George Ahmaogak recently declared a disaster, immediately freeing \$500,000 of borough money to take care of emergency work.

"Our community needs immediate help," Ahmaogak said. "People forced to evacuate their homes need shelter. We're making every effort to

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Seaside homes hardest hit by Arctic storm

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save the most threatened homes.

"We're working on our roads so they can be usable not only for the public, but for fire trucks, ambulances and school buses. We have a lot of work to do in this community, and it's going to take a lot of money."

Hardest hit were the seaside homes and roads which took the full brunt of the giant waves generated by winds gusting to more than 70 mph.

Working around the clock in driving wind, rain and snow, North Slope Borough Department of Public Works crews have thrown up a half-mile long dike to keep the surging seas out of beach-front homes and businesses.

The waves undercut 35-foot bluffs on the southwest side of Barrow, causing huge chunks to break off and fall

into the sea. One house was left suspended precariously above the surf, another house and a building are in immediate danger of going over and about 10 to 15 more threatened by further erosion.

Two homes in Wainwright also have been severely undercut and hang over the sea.

Several roads in Barrow and the suburb of Browerville have been washed out or damaged, as have roads leading to the sewage lagoon, the sanitary landfill and the old Naval Arctic Research Laboratory which now houses enterprises of Ukpeagvik Inupiat Corp.

Whaling crews have been stranded at Point Barrow after roads leading there washed out.

Harder to measure than monetary damages are the impacts upon the subsistence lifestyle of the Inupiat people

who make up the majority of the North Slope population.

"It's a big concern to us," said Arnold Brower Jr., chairman of the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission.

A little more than a week before the storm, an Inupiat man believed to be hundreds of years old was found frozen, along with many artifacts in the side of a Barrow bluff. The community was alive with excitement and wonder as plans were made to involve the elders and students in a major excavation project next spring.

The man and many of the artifacts with him were washed out to sea.

"That whole area is a traditional use site," said Edward Itta, the borough planning director overseeing repair operations.

"There are other old houses buried in the permafrost there, and much of our history and culture is there with

them. Some of these sites are threatened now as well. Much of our history is being eroded away. There is a big concern to the elders and to all of us," he said.

Itta also noted other problems facing the community. The pack ice, which at this time of year is usually near shore, is unusually far out to sea — more than 150 miles. It was this expanse of open water that allowed the high winds, not uncommon in Barrow, to build high waves.

Until the ice is securely in, long-term repair work cannot be done as a new storm could destroy it all.

Itta also pointed out that costs, always high in Barrow, are only going to be magnified by the timing of the storm. It is too late to bring in new materials by barge. All supplies and materials will have to come in by expensive air freight.