NOAA Technical Memorandum NOS OES

# **EFFECTS OF HURRICANE BOB ON WATER LEVELS**

# **DATA REPORT**



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OCEAN AND LAKE LEVELS DIVISION OFFICE OF OCEAN AND EARTH SCIENCES NATIONAL OCEAN SERVICE ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND 20852

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#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was prepared by Stephen K. Gill and Dale H. Deitemyer, Tidal Analysis Branch, Ocean and Lake levels Division, and represents the cumulative effort of Atlantic Operations Section personnel stationed in Norfolk, VA and headquarters personnel of the Ocean and Lake Levels Division located in Rockville, MD responsible for operating and maintaining the tide stations, and for the priority collection, processing and analysis of data and information.

### **EFFECTS OF HURRICANE BOB ON WATER LEVELS**

#### **DATA REPORT**

#### I. INTRODUCTION

This report documents the water levels observed during the passage of Hurricane Bob along the east coast on August 19 and 20, 1991.

As part of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), National Ocean Service (NOS), the Ocean and Lake Levels Division (OLLD), Office of Ocean and Earth Sciences operates and maintains water level measurement stations; collects, processes, and analyses data; and produces standard time series and water level datum products. OLLD operates a network of approximately 200 long-term continuously operating stations in the U.S. coastal ocean, territories, and possessions, including the Great Lakes, that comprise the National Water Level Observation Network (NWLON). The OLLD water level program also installs, operates and maintains short term water level stations for various special projects for other federal and state agencies.

This report contains information from selected NWLON stations and special project stations in operation during Hurricane Bob. The maximum water elevations recorded during the hurricane are reported and compared to the maximum historical elevations observed over the period of record at each location. Storm surge as defined in this report is the difference between observed and predicted water elevations. Predicted tides are computed using standard NOS harmonic analysis and prediction algorithms. Characteristics of the storm surge at each location are included in this report. Finally, the predicted and observed time series are presented in a set of time series plots.

Structural damage from the hurricane to the tide stations was relatively minor, except for the station at Fort Pond Bay, Montauk, NY. This station was completely destroyed, along with the outer section of the pier. Data were transmitted by satellite up to about three hours before the hurricane passage. The station was destroyed sometime after this. Maximum water levels were

not recorded because the marigram data from the mechanical gauges were destroyed. Levels were run to a nearby high water mark to estimate the storm surge magnitude.

Detailed analyses are not presented in this data report, however some interpretive information is provided to highlight effects of the storm surge on water levels observed at the tide stations.

### II. MAXIMUM ELEVATIONS AND DATUM RELATIONSHIPS

Information on the observed maximum water elevations during Hurricane Bob are found in Table I. Appendix 1 is a copy of the best track positions for Hurricane Bob as obtained from a National Weather Service (NWS) preliminary report and Appendix 2 is a set of station location chartlets for each station listed. Table I includes the following information: date, time and height above Mean Lower Low Water (MLLW) and Mean Higher High Water (MHHW) of the maximum elevations; the maximum elevation relationships above National Geodetic Vertical Datum (NGVD); the date and height above MLLW of the maximum historical observed water elevations; and the Mean Great Diurnal Range (GT).

The elevations are referenced to the computed or derived MLLW and MHHW datums at each location. These datums are relative to the 1960-78 National Tidal Datum Epoch. MLLW is the reference datum for NOAA nautical charts and the NOS published tide prediction tables. The MHHW datum is the mean elevation of the higher high tide observed each tidal day. The maximum historical values are based on the entire period of record for each location, which is quite different at each station.

The maximum historical observed water elevations were not exceeded at any location during Hurricane Bob. The maximum elevations referenced to NGVD were observed at Woods Hole, MA; Providence, RI; Newport, RI; and Willets Point, NY. These locations coincide with the locations where maximum storm surges were observed (see section III). Elevation comparisons to MHHW are provided to put the hurricane effects in context with the normal elevation of a tidal high water at each location.

### TABLE I. HURRICANE BOB - MAXIMUM OBSERVED WATER LEVEL ELEVATIONS AND HISTORICAL DATA COMPARISON

| STATION             | DATE/TIME | HUR<br>ELEV<br>MLLW | RICANE<br>ATION<br>MHHW | BOB<br>ABOVE<br>NGVD | HISTO<br>ELEVATION<br>DATE | ORICAL<br>ABOVE MLLW<br>ELEV. | DIURNAL<br>RANGE |
|---------------------|-----------|---------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------|
| Portland, ME        | 8/19 1800 | 10.55               | 0.64                    | 5.98                 | 2/78                       | 14.17                         | 9.91             |
| Camp Ellis, ME*     | 8/19 1754 | 10.57               | 0.82                    | -                    |                            |                               | 9.75             |
| Biddeford, ME*      | 8/19 1818 | 11.28               | 1.26                    | -                    | -                          | -                             | 10.02            |
| Kennebunkport, ME*  | 8/19 1748 | 9.90                | 0.28                    |                      | -                          |                               | 9.62             |
| Boston, MA          | 8/19 1812 | 10.55               | -0.22                   | 5.20                 | 2/78                       | 15.25                         | 10.33            |
| Woods Hole, MA      | 8/19 1348 | 7.33                | 5.08                    | 6.86                 | 8/54                       | 10.39                         | 2.25             |
| Nantucket, MA       | 8/19 1530 | 3.66                | 0.06                    | -                    | 1/87                       | 6.58                          | 3.60             |
| Newport, RI         | 8/19 1330 | 8.31                | 4.39                    | 6.91                 | 9/38                       | 13.53                         | 3.92             |
| Providence, RI      | 8/19 1400 | 10.32               | 5.32                    | 8.43                 | 9/38                       | 17.71                         | 4.96             |
| New London, CT      | 8/19 1248 | 6.19                | 3.11                    | 5.12                 | 9/38                       | 10.76                         | 3.08             |
| Bridgeport, CT      | 8/19 1448 | 7.59                | 0.26                    | 4.67                 | 9/38                       | 12.44                         | 7.33             |
| Willets Point, NY   | 8/19 1548 | 10.52               | 2.74                    | 7.36                 | 9/38                       | 16.90                         | 7.78             |
| The Battery, NY     | 8/19 1724 | 6.07                | 0.95                    | 4.19                 | 9/60                       | 10.23                         | 5.12             |
| Sandy Hook, NJ      | 8/19 1706 | 6.36                | 1.16                    | 4.59                 | 3/62                       | 10.33                         | 5.20             |
| Atlantic City, NJ   | 8/19 1630 | . 5.34              | 0.66                    | 3.70                 | 9/44                       | 9.20                          | 4.68             |
| Lewes, DE           | 8/19 1706 | 5.45                | 0.72                    | 3.73                 | 3/62                       | 9.49                          | 4.73             |
| Ocean City, MD      | 8/19 1454 | 4.75                | 0.79                    | 2.98                 | 9/85                       | 7.54                          | 3.96             |
| Ches. Bay Brdg., VA | 8/19 1424 | 3.52                | 0.57                    | -                    | 4/78                       | 6.36                          | 2.95             |
| Duck Pier, NC       | 8/19 1436 | 4.27                | 0.51                    | 2.69                 | 11/81                      | 6.48                          | 3.76             |
| Charleston, SC      | 8/18 1500 | 6.16                | 0.36                    | 3.73                 | 9/89                       | 12.80                         | 5.80             |

Notes:

Elevations are in feet (ft.); MLLW is Mean Lower Low Water; NGVD is National Geodetic Vertical Datum; GT is Great Diurnal Range of Tide (MHHW minus MLLW); Times are in EST.

\* - Preliminary tidal datum elevations based on one month series.

#### III. STORM SURGE CHARACTERISTICS

Information on the maximum storm surge measured at each station is found in Table II. Storm surge is defined as the difference between the observed and predicted water level elevations. Predicted water level elevations are computed using standard NOS harmonic analysis and prediction algorithms. The timing of the maximum storm surge is largely dependent upon the timing of interaction of the tide and the storm passage, and the maximum storm surge may not coincide with the occurrence of a predicted tidal high water. Table II provides information for each station on the date and time of the maximum storm surge; the observed elevation of the water above MLLW at that time; the predicted elevation of the water above MLLW at that time; and the storm surge value (observed minus predicted elevations).

Time series of the storm surge are constructed by subtracting the predicted hourly height time series from the observed hourly height time series. Figures 1 through 4 are simultaneous plots of the storm surge for various geographical regions for a five-day time period centered around the time period of the storm track. All of the figures use the same vertical scale (in feet) so that the magnitude of the surge can be put into perspective between stations and regions. Table II and the figures show that storm surge values over 5.00 feet were found at Newport, RI; Providence, RI; and Woods Hole, MA near the landfall of the hurricane. The maximum storm surge value of 6.71 feet was measured at Willets Point, NY, in western Long Island Sound.

Figure 1 shows the southern extent of significant storm surge with Charleston exhibiting a slight difference before and after the storm passage offshore. The storm surge signatures show the effects of the hurricane spread out much more over time than the northern stations due to the distance of the storm track offshore and because the track was parallel to the shoreline. The maximum surges for these stations are generally less than 1.4 feet. The storm surge was slightly higher near the Outer Banks of North Carolina, where the hurricane track was closest to the mainland.

Much more severe storm surge effects are increasingly seen in the New York Bight, New York Harbor, and Western Long Island Sound, as shown in Figure 2. The storm surge signatures in western Long Island Sound are particularly dramatic, given the distance of these stations from the storm track. Based on these signatures and the others from Long Island Sound, it appears that the geometry of the Sound relative to the storm track and associated changes in wind direction allowed for a severe oscillation with significant positive and negative surge as the storm passed up through Rhode Island.

The storm surge signatures near the hurricane landfall at Newport, Providence and Woods Hole are very similar, as shown in Figure 3, with very sharp initial peaks and a short-lived low frequency oscillation afterwards. The signature at Nantucket shows a much lower magnitude storm surge oscillation, probably due to the sheltering effect of Nantucket Island and Nantucket Sound. At landfall the hurricane track was nearly perpendicular to the coastline and the storm was moving at a speed of 28 knots.

The storm surge signatures shown in Figure 4 show the effects of the hurricane after it had weakened and the eye passed over Massachusetts Bay and up the coast. The most intense surge was found at Boston with minimal effects at Portland. Camp Ellis is at the entrance to the Saco River and Biddeford is up near the head of tide where the navigation channel ends. The apparent effects of river runoff and storm surge affected the water levels at Biddeford over a longer duration than nearby stations. Kennebunkport has a similar signature to Biddeford, and it too is located up a river and sheltered from the ocean.

| TABLE II. HURRICANE BOB | - MAXIMUM STORM SURGE |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| INFORMATION             |                       |

| STATION            | DATE/TIME | ELEVATION A<br>OBSERVED | ABOVE MLLW<br>PREDICTED | DIFFERENCE |
|--------------------|-----------|-------------------------|-------------------------|------------|
| Portland, ME       | 8/19 1654 | 10.25                   | 7.68                    | 2.48       |
| Camp Ellis, ME     | 8/19 1624 | 9.53                    | 6.67                    | 2.86       |
| Biddeford, ME      | 8/20 0030 | 5.43                    | 1.66                    | 3.77       |
| Kennebunkport, ME  | 8/19 1618 | 8.79                    | 6.43                    | 2.36       |
| Boston, MA         | 8/19 1454 | 8.01                    | 4.38                    | 3.63       |
| Woods Hole, MA     | 8/19 1348 | 7.33                    | 1.55                    | 5.78       |
| Nantucket, MA      | 8/19 1518 | 3.63                    | 1.62                    | 2.01       |
| Newport, RI        | 8/19 1306 | 8.09                    | 2.58                    | 5.51       |
| Providence, RI     | 8/19 1400 | 10.28                   | 3.71                    | 6.57       |
| New London, CT     | 8/19 1230 | 6.08                    | 1.16                    | 4.92       |
| Bridgeport, CT     | 8/19 1442 | 7.54                    | 2.73                    | 4.81       |
| Willets Point, NY  | 8/19 1536 | 10.36                   | 3.65                    | 6.71       |
| The Battery, NY    | 8/19 1742 | 5.99                    | 4.22                    | 1.77       |
| Sandy Hook, NJ     | 8/19 1712 | 6.33                    | 3.99                    | 2.34       |
| Atlantic City, NJ  | 8/19 1700 | 5.32                    | 3.63                    | 1.69       |
| Lewes, DE          | 8/19 1306 | 4.07                    | 2.78                    | 1.29       |
| Ocean City, MD     | 8/19 1306 | 4.34                    | 3.12                    | 1.22       |
| Ches.Bay Brdg., VA | 8/19 0106 | 3.17                    | 2.03                    | 1.14       |
| Duck Pier, NC      | 8/19 0206 | 4.17                    | 2.82                    | 1.35       |
| Charleston, SC     | 8/18 1630 | 5.68                    | 4.67                    | 1.01       |

#### NOTES:

Storm surge is the difference between observed and predicted elevations; Elevations are in feet; MLLW is Mean Lower Low Water datum; Times are in EST.



FIGURE 1. HURRICANE BOB STORM SURGE EASTERN SEABOARD: SOUTH CAROLINA TO DELAWARE



FIGURE 2. HURRICANE BOB STORM SURGE NEW YORK BIGHT TO WESTERN LONG ISLAND SOUND



FIGURE 3. HURRICANE BOB STORM SURGE

NARRAGANSETT BAY, BUZZARDS BAY, EASTERN LONG ISLAND SOUND



FIGURE 4. HURRICANE BOB STORM SURGE MASSACHUSETTS BAY AND GULF OF MAINE

#### IV. COMPARISON PLOTS: OBSERVED VS. PREDICTED

This section is a set of plots showing the observed and predicted simultaneous six-minute interval time series for each station from which the storm surge signatures in Section III were derived. The effects of the storm surge on the expected tide are clearly seen. The effects of the timing of the storm surge effects with the phase of tide can also be seen. For instance the maximum storm surge effects occurred near the time of high tide in New York Harbor, on a rising tide in Long Island Sound, Block Island Sound, and Narragansett Bay, and near the time of high tide from Boston to Portland. The effects of the heavy sea swell and local wave action are also apparent in the 6-minute interval plots at the open exposed locations, such as Duck Pier and Atlantic City. All elevations on the plots are in feet relative to arbitrary datum.











































#### V. SUMMARY

The continuous operation of the National Water Level Observation Network (NWLON) and the timing with a special project with the Corps of Engineers, New England Division, have resulted in an important data set documenting the effects of Hurricane Bob on water levels in the U.S. coastal ocean. Only a few stations incurred minor structural damage, with one station at Montauk, NY destroyed when the outer portion of the pier was destroyed by high wave action.

Maximum recorded historical highest water levels were not exceeded at any of the NWLON stations. Maximum storm surge values were measured at Providence, RI (6.57 feet) near hurricane landfall, and at Willets Point, NY (6.71 feet) in western Long Island Sound. Plots of the storm surge signatures for selected stations have illustrated the varying effects of the hurricane depending on coastline orientation and closeness to the hurricane track.

Preliminary data recorded during the hurricane were provided to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the National Weather Service, and to FEMA. Information on tidal datums, storm surge, and time series from the stations listed in this report and from other NOS stations can be obtained from:

NOAA/National Ocean Service Office of Ocean and Earth Sciences Ocean and Lake Levels Division Products and User Services Section, N/OES23 6001 Executive Blvd. Rockville, MD 20852

Telephone: (301) 443-8467 FAX: (301) 443-1920

### VI. APPENDICES

- 1. Storm Track Plot from National Weather Service Preliminary Report.
- 2. Set of tide station location chartlets.













































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