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Breakwall repairs won't come soon

NEWS

By Ryan Bentley News-Review Staff Writer
 Wednesday, March 15, 2006 1:39 PM EST

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Officials remained unsure Tuesday about how extensively Petoskey's breakwater had been damaged during a windstorm earlier in the day.

Petoskey city staff believe a 50-foot-long concrete section of the breakwater - which shields the city's marina - became separated from the rest of the structure and was pushed into the water.

City parks and recreation director Al Hansen said pressure from ice and water being moved about by strong winds likely caused the breakwater breach during the early-morning hours Tuesday. Wind gusts in excess of 40 mph were reported Tuesday around Little Traverse Bay.

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The breakwater is a federal property overseen by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Wayne Schloop, chief of operations for the Corps of Engineers' Detroit district, said the breakwater's understructure - consisting of timber boxes filled with stone - was installed in 1908. The concrete lining the top of the barrier dates back to the 1970s, he added.

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Tuesday's breach was the first of its kind for the Petoskey breakwater, Schloop said.

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City staff provided the Corps of Engineers with photos showing the gap in the breakwater visible above the waterline. But Schloop said an in-person assessment will be needed to determine the precise scope of the damage.

Because weather conditions remained harsh Tuesday and the ice buildup on the breakwater would make it difficult for people to move safely along it, Schloop said he was unsure when the Corps might be able to send someone to conduct such a survey.

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"As soon as weather permits, we're going to have somebody take a close look and do a formal assessment of the condition of it," Schloop said. "Our biggest concern at this point is basically the integrity of the entire structure. We don't want it to deteriorate any further if we can avoid that."

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“Certainly, the breakwater is not going to function like it was designed with a big piece of the superstructure gone.”

The Corps of Engineers likely will not be able to arrange any breakwater repairs at least until late April, he added.

Petoskey Department of Public Safety director Mike Vargo said in the interest of safety, he is asking that people stay off the breakwater until repairs can be made. He said city crews have put up a barricade at the entrance to the breakwall in hopes of dissuading people from venturing out onto it.

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Hansen said some structural settling had occurred last November along the segment of breakwater which washed away Tuesday.

Because the section which washed away was relatively short and a significant distance - about two-thirds of the way out - from the shore, Hansen believes it's unlikely the breach would allow waves to cause substantial damage to the marina.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Hansen estimated that the concrete segment knocked loose from the breakwater - which was about 20 feet wide and 6 to 8 feet thick - weighed multiple tons.

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