

Weekly News Summary for Sunday, August 23, 2026.

Dare County and NCDOT officials talk about NC 12 closures

Hatteras Island folks interested in the July 24, closure of NC 12 in Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge came to the Fessenden Center on August 18.

Robert L. Woodard, Chairman of the Dare County Board of Commissioners, introduced the topic: “We’re here tonight to talk about NC Highway 12, specifically, the recent closure and how the county and NCDOT coordinate and communicate with the public when closures occur.”

Dare County Manager Robert L. Outten shared the county’s perspective. Ronnie K. Sawyer, NCDOT Division I Engineer, shared the NCDOT process. Marshall B. Gill, Deputy Division Engineer, gave a detailed explanation of the many new features of DriveNC.gov.

Dare County perspective

Outten said, “Random events like rain “don’t rise to the state of emergencies.”

However, Dare County has two systems to warn those who register about impending weather and road closures.

The first is IPAWS, Integrated Public Alert and Warning System, a public safety alert system, including geo-fencing to trigger warnings.

Next is the OBX Alerts system, that requires registration to receive messages. On the recent Pea Island flooding, the Alert went only to Hatteras Island registrants as well as Twitter and Facebook accounts.

Outten emphasized that the warning systems are “a two-way street,” and encouraged attendees to monitor accounts.

NCDOT Perspective

Ronnie Sawyer said he didn’t know when or how much rain would fall. That morning, he started getting calls from Cape Hatteras National Seashore Rangers. He contacted NCDOT’s County Maintenance Engineer for an assessment. The engineer said we need to close the road. That was done. “We do not wait to close the roads.”

The standard way of public notification is for the local engineer to send out the notice, which was accomplished around 10 a.m., July 24.

The road was reopened around 3:15 p.m. “It was still not that good of a situation,” said Sawyer.

The water stayed for weeks. Said Sawyer, we “didn’t know it was going to stay that long.”

Sawyer said U.S. Fish and Wildlife staff has been very gracious. The refuge allowed the NCDOT maintenance crew to begin to reopen unmaintained drainage facilities to drain the troubled area.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife provided rainfall figures. On the July 24, six inches of rain fell. Then for two days another six inches fell. The impoundment areas were a foot below the target. By the end of the event, 87.6 million gallons of water had filled the impoundment. Refuge staff raised the boards and let out 30 million gallons.

Ronnie Sawyer posted the following on Facebook, the day after the meeting:

“The NCDOT team will be reviewing all your concerns and questions that came up. Among some of the items we are working on:

- * Working closely with USFW to reestablish drainage from the highway to ponds on the west side of Pea Island
- * Consideration of mobile message boards to stage closer to impacted areas.
- * Coordination with Dare County on potential pumping operations in extreme cases.

Update on redundancy in fiber cable

On July 28, 2026, the Brightspeed-owned fiber optic cable serving Hatteras Island was damaged once again, temporarily disrupting internet service and leaving many communications systems, including the ability to place wireless 911 calls, inoperable or degraded for several hours.

The outage underscored an issue Dare County officials have been working for years to address: Hatteras Island's dependence on a single fiber connection and the need for reliable backup communications when that connection is damaged.

While a permanent redundant fiber connection remains a long-term goal, a significant improvement to emergency communications is now in place.

FirstNet Adds Satellite Backup Capability

Dare County Emergency Management Director Drew Pearson has continued to pursue satellite-based backup alternatives with wireless providers. Last year, those efforts gained traction with FirstNet, Built with AT&T, the nation's public safety broadband network.

After Pearson brought the recurring public safety impacts experienced by the Hatteras and Ocracoke island communities to the attention of FirstNet President Scott Agnew, Agnew and his team visited Dare County to discuss potential solutions.

Those discussions led the FirstNet team to design, install and test low-Earth-orbit satellite backhaul capabilities at FirstNet sites serving Hatteras and Ocracoke islands.

When the July 28, 2026 outage occurred, the FirstNet site in Avon was in the final stages of testing. The site automatically transitioned to satellite backhaul and remained operational. On July 31, 2026, FirstNet confirmed that the new capability was operational at all its sites serving Hatteras and Ocracoke islands.

The technology automatically transitions FirstNet sites to a low-Earth-orbit satellite connection when the fiber connection is lost. This allows sites in Rodanthe, Avon, Buxton, Frisco, Hatteras Village and Ocracoke to remain connected during fiber outages, supporting public safety communications and wireless access to 911.

Because wireless 911 calls can be routed through any available carrier network, the added connectivity helps preserve access to 911 even for callers who are not AT&T or FirstNet customers.

“This is a significant improvement for public safety on Hatteras and Ocracoke islands,” said Pearson. “For years, Dare County has been working with our telecommunications partners to find ways to protect 911 access when the fiber connection is cut or otherwise becomes unavailable. We are extremely grateful to Scott Agnew and the FirstNet team for listening to our concerns and taking action to provide this important backup capability.”

Business News

The business news this week focuses on the performance of the island's real estate market during July.

The cumulative results through July clearly show that the residential market in 2026 is not performing as well as it did in 2025. With the exception of homes for sale, every major indicator was negative.

Indicators for the unimproved lot market were mixed for the first seven months of the year.

To give the individual categories more perspective, consider the following benchmarks.

Since March, the number of residential properties for sale each month has been about 200.

The number of residential properties sold each month has averaged about 19 homes. Looked at another way, the monthly number of homes sold has averaged about 10 percent of the homes listed for sale.

The median residential sale price has remained in the \$500,000 to \$600,000 range.

Except for February, the monthly interest rate for 30-year fixed rate mortgages remained above 6.0 percent. The fed watchers vary by the week in their interest rate predictions from no increases this year to a 75 percent chance of a rate increase in September! The bottom line seems to be that there will be little, if any, chance for an interest rate decrease this year, writes Business Correspondent Tom Hranicka.

All things considered, it appears that the real estate market will be moving sideways for the near future.

In other news associated with the Hatteras Island economy, according to an article in the Island Free Press, in July, the island recorded Dare County's highest short term occupancy rate of 89.1 percent. In addition, the average daily short-term rental rate was \$688 dollars.

Telehealth pilot program available

Dare County Schools, in partnership with Dare County Department of Health & Human Services and Surf Pediatrics and Medicine, is launching a School-Based Urgent Care Telehealth Program for students in grades 6 through 12.

This pilot program provides eligible students with convenient access to urgent medical care for common illnesses and minor health concerns while remaining at school whenever possible. With assistance from the school nurse, students can connect with a licensed healthcare provider through a secure virtual visit conducted in a private location at school.

To learn more, visit [darenc dot gov slash dot dot dot slash school hyphen based hyphen urgent hyphen care](https://darenc.gov/school-based-urgent-care).

Interested. Enroll your students who are in grades six through 12th

Pick up registration packet at school office.

Deadline: September 3, 2026.

How it works. Student visits school nurse. Before telehealth starts, a parent gives verbal consent.

The medical visit proceeds using a secure health platform. The student returns to class or goes home with excused absence, or a prescription is sent to a pharmacy.

Students experiencing a medical emergency or severe illness will receive standard school emergency care.

Injuries and medical concerns outside the scope of the program will be referred for in-person care through an urgent care provider or the student's primary care provider.

Parents and guardians should continue to follow school illness guidelines and should not send students to school with a fever, active cough, vomiting, diarrhea, or other contagious illness that could place other students or staff at risk.

It's National Park Week

Outer Banks Forever, the official nonprofit partner for the Outer Banks three national parks and Duck Donuts have teamed up to celebrate National Park Week.

The special week started Saturday, August 22 and ends Sunday, August 30.

A special day will be celebrated on Tuesday, August 25 which is the 110th birthday of the National Park Service.

Entrance fees to Wright Brothers National Memorial are waived.

During the week, all six Outer Banks locations of Duck Donuts will offer a limited edition "sea turtle" donut inspired by the sea turtles that nest on the Cape Hatteras National Seashore beaches. Round up your purchase or add a donation at checkout and support Outer Banks Forever.

Duck Donuts was founded on the Outer Banks and now has over 100 locations globally.

Now, really listen.

Monday is the First Day of Public School in Dare County or the Outer Banks for the 2026 to 2027 school term.

Students will be standing on the side of NC 12 and some other roads waiting for the big school bus to arrive. SLOW DOWN. Be careful.

This is Radio Hatteras.