

Minnesota Now (MPR) | Minnesota Now Chief Meteorologist Paul Huttner talks with Craig Edwards about Hurricane Ian and local weather news 01GE2MTT4AJZ8K6XW2YA6603ZD

TIM NELSON: As you heard in John's newscast, the western coast of Florida has seen the eye of hurricane Ian make landfall in the last couple of hours. This time on Wednesdays, we usually get the Minnesota weather news from our Chief Meteorologist Paul Huttner. But today, Paul is a special guest. Paul, thanks for being here.

PAUL Hey, Tim. My pleasure, as always. Thank you. And, boy, Ian really intensified overnight, as we've been saying. It's
HUTTNER: now a Category 4. It's a strong Category 4, 155 mile an hour winds. 157 is Category 5, so it's right on the borderline. And the key elements, that storm surge 12 to 18 feet along the west coast of Florida.

I'm looking at the eye wall right now. It is near Sanibel and Captiva Islands, near Fort Myers, Port Charlotte. And that's where former MPR and National Weather Service Meteorologist Craig Edwards is. Craig, hello. How are you? I knew we'd talk again soon, but I didn't think it would be during the edge when you're near the eye wall of a Category 4 hurricane.

CRAIG Yeah, I'd rather swap out a frost advisory than a Category 4 hurricane. But a lot of the TV weathercasters are
EDWARDS: rooting for that extra two miles per hour to get it up to a Category 5. But as you pointed out, Captiva and Sanibel and up through Cape Coral, and then going in a line up to North Port and Port Charlotte and Punta Gorda. So I never thought, Paul, that I would still have power being 30 miles east of an eye wall of a Category 4 hurricane, but we still have power here in Fort Myers.

PAUL So let's orient people to where you are. You're in Fort Myers. How far are you from the coast? How far are you
HUTTNER: above sea level? We're talking about that potential for 12 to 18 feet of storm surge. And our first concern, of course, is your safety. So tell us what the conditions are like there now.

CRAIG Well, we've had reports of winds as high as 112 miles an hour down toward Naples. And I'm sure their winds at
EDWARDS: 107 miles an hour, 110 miles an hour along the coast. I am about 20 miles inland. I'm actually east of Interstate 75 on the north-- sort of the north side of Fort Myers. So if the storm surge makes it east of 75, we got quite the news story.

But you're talking historical surges and-- up to 12, 18 feet. 18 feet seems a little bit high. But we've-- we're in a position now, Paul, with that eye wall so close that once the eye wall starts moving north, the wraparound on the south side of that eye is going to push 115 mile-an-hour winds onto the coast of-- the Western Coast of Florida. And I think that that's going to be the worst storm surge in the next two hours or so. I'm thinking, at my house, we're going to look at about 90 to 95 mile an hour winds about 4:00 this afternoon.

PAUL Yeah, and I've already seen a gust over 100 on Captiva Island, Craig, which is about, what, 15 miles west of you
HUTTNER: or so? And I've seen video from Fort Myers closer to the coast of storm surge already into the town up to about the car doors of some cars. So it is happening, you're right, near the coast.

Let's talk a little bit of hurricane geography because the bays, the inlets of the West Coast of Florida, they funnel that surge, that water in. You talk about places like Cape Coral, which is not far from you, where there's almost 300,000 people, and they live on canals. And Cape Coral is only about 3 to 6 feet above sea level. I mean, what are you thinking we may see there in the next 24 hours?

CRAIG Well, they're going to be in bad shape. I hate to think of what it's going to look like tomorrow morning. That storm
EDWARDS: surge is going to be something. And, Paul, hurricane forecasting is a difficult thing. And just last Thursday, they were predicting that hurricane would stay out over the open waters head toward Pensacola.

Then they took it toward Tampa. And then about three days ago, everybody was evacuating Tampa because it was the worst-case scenario for the hurricane to enter the state just north of Tampa and drive all that water into the bay. And then all of a sudden, they said not so fast. It's headed more toward Sarasota.

And then, finally, they said more toward Punta Gorda and Port Charlotte, then more toward Fort Myers. So it was a moving target. We were hoping for a wobble there. We heard the forecasters often mention a hurricane eye is wobbling, and I was looking for a wobble the last two hours and hadn't seen it.

PAUL HUTTNER: Yeah, and it's interesting to note that that's why the National Hurricane Center puts out a forecast cone of uncertainty because we get those wobbles, those errors. Overall, the forecast has been good. They forecast the West Coast of Florida days in advance. But that's why if you're in or near the cone, you need to-- you need to pay attention because these things can move easily 50 to 100 miles.

Craig, another aspect of this storm, the rainfall. We're looking at potentially 10 to 20 inches north of the center. That could be from Tampa all the way up through Orlando, even to Jacksonville. Talk to us a little bit about the geography, the low-lying geography of Florida and what 10 to 20 inches of rain can do in a period of a day or two.

CRAIG EDWARDS: Well, Paul, sort of like dumping a glass of water on the top of a table. But there's hardly any slope here in the state, or at least the part I am. If you're 20 feet above sea level, you drive 50 miles and you're still 20 feet above sea level. So I got about three different waves of rain that produced about 6 and 1/2 inches of rain from the storm over my place.

And like you mentioned that the heavy rain's going to go from Port Charlotte up toward Tampa, and then even into Orlando and Gainesville. But it looks like Orlando is still-- Orlando is even in part of the hurricane warning. Who would have thought Orlando would be in a hurricane warning with heavy rain of up to 10 to 15 inches?

PAUL HUTTNER: Yeah. And, finally, Craig, human life, of course, is the first consideration here. But I've also been looking at some insurance estimates, companies like CoreLogic who do this kind of calculation as hurricanes come ashore. There is a lot of expensive real estate on the West Coast of Florida and across the state. They're talking about the potential for \$45 billion worth of damage, maybe \$250 billion total real estate in that area. Talk to us about the area and how populated it's become over the last 10 or 20 years where you're at.

CRAIG EDWARDS: Well, I think just in the last five years, it's exploded down here. The baby boomers all said I'm tired of the cold and tired of doing the Minnesota hunch, and let's get down to Florida. And they said the farther south we get, the better off we are. But not so in this case.

And the real estate values have gone up. The insurance coverage has gone up. Everything has gone up in regards to cost of living. So it's the result of the people wanting to be south, and be south during the cold season. So the insurance values-- or insurance rates are going to sky rocket tremendously, I think, with this hurricane. It's going to be quite devastating to some expensive real estate in the southwest portion of Florida.

PAUL HUTTNER: Well, Craig Edwards, it is such a pleasure to talk with you again. We wish you the most safety riding this out, the eye wall just a few miles west of you now and will continue to move to the north. Stay safe, my friend, and let's talk again soon after you ride the storm out.

CRAIG EDWARDS: Yeah, let's talk when we have a frost advisory out for Fort Meyers in February. Have a good day, Paul. See you.

PAUL HUTTNER: You, too. Thank you, Craig. Tim Nelson, there you go. We've got MPR former meteorologist right near the eye wall of the storm, incredible to see in this 155 mile-an-hour hurricane.

TIM NELSON: Right. And getting back here to Minnesota, a little nippy here today. How cold did it get?

PAUL HUTTNER: Yeah, 37 this morning at Twin Cities Airport. That's the coldest morning in five months, since late April. So those frost advisories verified. Here's the good news. We're going to warm up gradually as we go through the rest of the week. 60s today, will be near the 70s, it looks like, by Friday, and into the low 70s this weekend, lots of sunshine. We need some rain, Tim. We don't see any of that in the forecast, but the weather will be pleasant.

TIM NELSON: Yeah, I understand it's been the driest September on record so far.

PAUL HUTTNER: Yeah, we've had less than a quarter of an inch of rain, .23 at Twin Cities Airport. So we're still in severe drought from the Twin Cities westward toward the Minnesota River. Northern Minnesota has done well on rainfall this summer, but we're not as widespread or as deep in the drought as we were last year. But we're certainly-- what we need is several good fall rainstorms before we head into the freeze here in November and December.

TIM NELSON: All right. Well, thanks much, Paul. That was--

PAUL HUTTNER: My pleasure. Thanks, Tim.

TIM NELSON: That was MPR Chief Meteorologist Paul Huttner.