

**NINA MOINI:** The National Weather Service is surveying storm damage in Becker County today. A preliminary assessment found that at least an EF1 tornado, with wind speeds of around 110, touched down North of Detroit Lakes. During the storm, two people were injured and homes, trees, and power lines were damaged in the area. Carrie Smith is the Becker County administrator. She's on the line to give an update on the storm and the recovery process in the area. Thanks for being with us, Commissioner Smith.

**CARRIE SMITH:** Hi.

**NINA MOINI:** You all are very busy today. We really appreciate you coming on. I'm so sorry that a couple of people were hurt. We understand those were non-life threatening injuries, and hopefully, no one else was hurt. What is the National Weather Service doing today? Could you describe for us just to learn more about the tornado that touched down and why is it important for them to determine if a tornado touched down or not?

**CARRIE SMITH:** They have been on site and we are doing some drone coverage over the area, and it's imperative that they assess and determine the rating of the tornado as well as assessing damage for future assistance to potential residents if they need the assistance in repairs. And many homes have been damaged and power lines and many different types of property.

**NINA MOINI:** OK. Do you know about how much has been surveyed so far? I know there are other storms that are expected as well. I don't know what exactly the weather situation for the area is going to be, but is there a lot more to survey at this point?

**CARRIE SMITH:** There is. Like I said, our local law enforcement and partnering agencies have assisted in controlling access into some of these areas for protection of not only homeowners, but also the safety of first responders, because again, the power-- there's been many power lines that are down and we obviously don't want any additional injuries.

So again, they did drone flyovers because when this initially happened, nobody really knew the extent of the damage. And there were many buildings. So, initially, the response was they weren't clear whether or not there were individuals trapped within homes or much casualties, which thank goodness, we have not had any of those.

**NINA MOINI:** What kind of aid do people impacted by this storm need at this time? I know there's early on needs and then long-term needs that people have if they're displaced or if they're going to be displaced for a long time. How's the county addressing that? How does that process work?

**CARRIE SMITH:** What we have done thus far, I can't give enough kudos to our staff here. And the response was absolutely immediate. We did have law enforcement in the immediate area. So they were able to respond within minutes into the vicinity and started to assess. So with that said, last night, we did almost immediately, within an hour, opened an emergency operations center, and we borrowed space from our community college, which was able to house all of that as well as an emergency shelter.

So initially, we were able to provide a staging area. I believe we had 30 plus people that initially checked into that emergency operations center. And I believe all of the individuals that initially checked in there were able to find additional resources from friends and family. So we did not have anybody that ended up actually sleeping there. I do know that it was either one or two families that we did that were able to stay at a local motel.

So at this point, I think the immediate needs of the people are being addressed. That there'll be continued assessment of what the longer term needs are.

**NINA MOINI:** All right. Thank you so much for the update. We really appreciate your time.

**CARRIE SMITH:** You're very welcome.

**NINA MOINI:** That was Becker County administrator Carrie Smith. Abby Fostveit was one of the first photographers on the scene. She's with the Detroit Lakes Tribune. And she spent last night and this morning documenting the damage and talking with people in the area. She joins me now. Thanks for being with us, Abby.

**ABBY** Yes, thank you for having me.

**FOSTVEIT:**

**NINA MOINI:** Take us back, if you would just to last night. What did you see when you first arrived to the areas that were impacted?

**ABBY** Yes, so I responded pretty soon after the storm had moved through Monday evening, one of our editors pointed me toward the area where damage was first being reported, so that was mostly heading North on US Highway 59. The first thing that really stood out to me was how many trees were down. They were lining the highways, blocking driveways. On top of power lines and sometimes on vehicles.

As I had got into one of the neighborhoods off 59, it became obvious that they had taken a pretty hard hit. When I was out there, the sky was still orange and you could still see the lightning off in the South. And I spoke with a woman who was walking down the road, and she pointed out her home to me, and I asked her if she was OK and whether she was comfortable with me photographing that damage. And she said yes because she wanted people to see what they had gone through.

And it was moments like that that really reminded me of the importance of documenting what's happening as accurately as you can to help people understand the impact of these images. And there was a large emergency response in the area. But one thing I kept noticing was neighbors checking in on each other. People were standing in the road asking if everyone was safe. Seeing what they needed and figuring out how they could help.

When I went back Tuesday morning to some of the areas, there was a lot of cleanup already underway. And I stopped at a local business, which had been hit pretty hard, and there were friends and family everywhere running chainsaws, clearing trees, repairing a roof before some more rain anticipated tonight moves in. And they were obviously dealing with a lot of damage, but they told me they were incredibly thankful that everyone in their area was safe on their property.

**NINA MOINI:** Yeah, thanks for that, Abby. This area, are they recovering from anything weather-wise in recent years, or is this something that they have seen in the past, or what's your sense for just how difficult of a situation this was for everybody and how different?

**ABBY FOSTVEIT:** This is certainly at least in my time with the Detroit Lakes and in Detroit Lakes in general, I haven't seen a storm this intense, and I've been here for almost coming up on two years. When I was out responding, people were visibly distressed. Some grieving some of their property. And I was in a moment where that was just my job was to photograph and let them have a moment to grieve.

But there was a lot of distress when I was out there. People seemed really thrown by the severity of the storm.

**NINA MOINI:** That's too bad. I'm sorry to hear that. For yourself, Abby, how do you take care just to make sure that you're being safe when you're out, kind of documenting these kinds of scenes or the aftermath?

**ABBY FOSTVEIT:** Absolutely. And it was-- as I mentioned, it was definitely a team effort. I was talking with one of our editors essentially the whole time just updating where I was. And it's just a good-- having a good head on your shoulders. And if you feel unsafe, obviously, your safety is not worth putting at risk. So I had some really good guidance last night, and I just went with what I felt was best for my safety and other people's safety as well.

**NINA MOINI:** And are you headed back out to keep photographing or what are you going to be covering next as it relates to this whole weather situation?

**ABBY FOSTVEIT:** Yes, this morning, I was up North in the Floyd Lake area, and a lot of those roads are still closed down for just some first responders efforts. I got a few more photos, and mostly it was photos of people starting to clean up and recover and check in on one another. Our coverage now, there was just a press conference held at the Becker County Courthouse at 11:30 this morning, and we're going to have a lot more info there coming out soon.

So me and another one of my reporters are working on getting the info from that press conference out. And hopefully, anyone who wants their story to be told once they're in a place of where they're feeling, maybe safe or more secure. We would love to tell their story when they're ready.

**NINA MOINI:** All right, Abby, thanks so much for your work that you do every day and for sharing it with us. Really appreciate your time.

**ABBY FOSTVEIT:** Yes, thank you so much. I appreciate it.

**NINA MOINI:** That was Abby Fostveit, reporter and photographer with the Detroit Lakes Tribune.