

Crescent City harbor destroyed; 4 people swept into sea, 1 feared dead

Mike Anton and Shan Li, Los Angeles Times, 3-11-11

Eight-foot waves from the Japan tsunami destroyed much of Crescent City harbor, battered boats, closed the 101 Freeway and left one person missing.

KDRV-TV reported that four people were washed out to sea Friday. Three were hurt and one is feared dead.

Local residents reported that about three dozen boats were "crushed" in the harbor and that surging waters significantly damaged or destroyed most of the docks. Ocean water surging up Elk Creek north of the harbor reportedly lapped up to front doors of the community's cultural center.

Officials were warning residents to expect higher surges throughout the day, one resident said by telephone. Officials from the Sheriff's Department and the city could not be reached. Crescent City, near the Oregon border, was the scene of a devastating tsunami in 1964 which killed 11 people and destroyed 289 homes and businesses.

In 2006, tsunami-driven currents caused \$10 million in damage to the city's harbor. One resident said Friday's damage to the harbor was as bad -- or worse -- as then.

Officials reported waves of 6-1/2 feet in Crescent City and 6 feet in Morro Bay, said Caltech scientist Lucy Jones. Jones said officials won't know the extent of the damage until high tide occurs later Friday.

"Clearly, very large drawdown of water in Half Moon Bay," Jones said earlier in the day. "We are coming to high tide in a couple [of] hours. As long as we're still growing on tide, we need to keep a watch on the water.... Currents may be very significant.

In Santa Cruz, the waves jostled boats and damaged docks.

Authorities issued an evacuation advisory about 6:40 a.m. for coastal residents and those living along the San Lorenzo and Capitol rivers and other major waterways in Santa Cruz County, said county spokesman Enrique Sahagun.

The first waves reached land about 7:45 a.m. At Santa Cruz Yacht Harbor, the swells pushed and bumped boats together and broke some docks, but total damage is unknown thus far, Sahagun said.

"The water is pushing the boats together like a major car collision on Highway 405 or another big highway," he said.