

NOAA predicts 'extremely active' hurricane season

STEVE BULLOCK

ST. CROIX — This hurricane season could be active or extremely active, according to predictions by scientists at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

In its 2013 Atlantic Hurricane Season outlook issued last week, scientists at NOAA's Climate Prediction Center said there is a 70 percent that 13 to 20 named storms will develop in the Atlantic basin between June 1 and Nov. 30.

Of the 13 to 20 storms, NOAA said 7 to 11 could become hurricanes with winds in excess of 74 miles per hour. The forecast calls for three to six major hurricanes (Category 3, 4 or 5) with winds higher than 111 mph.

This year's hurricane forecast is well above the seasonal average of 12 named storms, six hurricanes and three major hurricanes.

Forecasters cite a number of factors responsible for this year's increased tropical cyclone activity.

These include a continuation of the atmospheric climate pattern, which includes a strong west African monsoon and warmer-than-average water temperatures in the tropical Atlantic Ocean and Caribbean Sea. In addition, El Niño is not expected to develop and suppress hurricane formation, according to NOAA scientists.

"This year, oceanic and atmos-

pheric conditions in the Atlantic basin are expected to produce more and stronger hurricanes," said Gerry Bell, lead seasonal hurricane forecaster with NOAA's Climate Prediction Center.

"These conditions include weaker wind shear, warmer Atlantic waters and conducive wind patterns coming from Africa," Bell stated.

NOAA's forecast does not predict how many storms will make landfall, or where a storm will strike.

In April, Colorado State University hurricane forecasters William Gray and Phillip Klotzbach issued a similar forecast for 2013.

They are predicting that this year's hurricane season will generate 18 named storms, nine hurricanes and four major hurricanes.

According to Gray and Klotzbach, there is a 72 percent chance that a major hurricane will make landfall somewhere in the United States this year. The historical average of a hurricane hitting the U.S. is 52 percent.

For the Caribbean, the forecast team is predicting a 61 percent chance that a major hurricane will impact the islands. The long-term average of a Caribbean land-falling hurricane is 42 percent.

The forecast team warned that their annual predictions are only a best estimate and not an exact measure of what is to come.



Andrew Wilkins

The Economic Development Authority board approved a loan for renewable energy infrastructure for a St. Croix hotel that will save them \$3,000 a month.

VI gov't bank could spur lending, EDA head says

ANDREW WILKINS

ST. CROIX — The government of the Virgin Islands should start its own bank because the territory's private banks aren't lending to small businesses, Percival Clouden, chief executive officer of the Economic Development Authority, told the EDA board Friday.

Also discussed at the meeting was legislation to improve the EDA, attracting businesses associated with the Virgin Islands Next Generation Network, and the consideration of Economic Development Commission benefits for three companies.

Clouden said the government shouldn't keep their money in banks that don't serve the community. A VI government bank could do more for local businesses, he said.

"The government has \$600 to \$700 million in deposits in local banks, and we need to pull those deposits and operate as our own bank," Clouden said.

The model is already in place in the British Virgin Islands, and he said he will soon be meeting with the president of the BVI government bank to learn more.

The idea was noted by the board, but little support was expressed. Albert Bryan Jr., board president and Labor commissioner, said the terri-

tory is trying to attract more banks and such a move wouldn't send a very good message.

The lack of lending to local business was a frequent complaint during the meeting and many recent EDA discussions. Clouden, Bryan and several senators have all said that local banks aren't meeting the requirements of federal law when it comes to local lending — and senators said banks would soon be held accountable.

The Virgin Islands Legislature is considering changes to the law governing the EDA to make the program more attractive to businesses.

Gov. John de Jongh Jr. is requesting several amendments to the law governing the EDA rather than a comprehensive bill, Clouden said. The St. Thomas Chamber of Commerce wrote a letter detailing the changes the organization wanted. Bryan said he liked some of the suggestions and didn't like others.

Other organizations, specifically the St. Croix Chamber of Commerce, were encouraged to submit their suggestion to the EDA program.

The EDA Small Business Development Authority unanimously approved a loan to a hotel for infrastructure upgrades, including solar energy equipment. Board members said the upgrades

would save the business \$3,000 a month.

"This is helping infrastructure for tourism, and creating capital to small business," Bryan said. "This is a key thing, especially for St. Croix. This is what you call economic development at its best."

EDA officials asked that the name of the hotel not be published because it could impact the hotel's competitiveness. Discussions of individual businesses usually take place in executive session, Bryan said.

A diner on St. Thomas also sought a loan, but Clouden said the request was tabled because the owner owed gross receipts and occupancy taxes. More research will be done and then the project will be revisited, he said.

Clouden said EDA loan recipients in default are already being taken to court. They are being submitted in groups of 30, he said, to avoid over-burdening the court. Attorney Henry Smock said efforts to increase collections were being stepped up and the staff should be commended for their efforts.

There was discussion centering around attracting Internet employers to the territory to benefit from the Virgin Islands Next Generation Network's high-speed Inter-

Police blotter

ST. THOMAS-ST. JOHN

Assaults:

12:25 a.m. Sat., Kirwan Terrace
9:48 a.m. Sat., East End
7 a.m. Sat., Main Street
11:36 p.m. Fri., Red Hook

Burglaries:

7:50 p.m. Fri., Bernier's Guest House
6:39 p.m. Fri., Pearl
6:25 p.m. Fri., Contant
4:49 p.m. Fri., Charlotte Amalie

Larcenies:

11:38 a.m. Sat., Main Street
7:02 a.m. Sat., Contant Knolls
1:54 a.m. Sat., St. John

Weapons/shots fired:

12:36 a.m. Sat., Hospital Ground
8:41 p.m. Fri., Oswald Harris Court

Drugs:

12:09 a.m. Sat., St. John

11:10 p.m. Fri., West End

Stalking:

5:28 p.m. Fri., West End

ST. CROIX

Assault:

5:51 p.m. Fri., Enfield Green

Burglaries:

1:04 p.m. Sat., Mount Washington

10:03 a.m. Sat., Sunny Isle

9:21 a.m. Sat., Whim

Larcenies:

11:28 a.m. Sat., La Reine
9:41 a.m. Sat., William's Delight
8:33 a.m. Sat., Morning Star
7:29 a.m. Sat., Coble Village
4:44 p.m. Fri., Christiansted

Drugs:

9:32 p.m. Fri., Concordia Manor

Stalking:

11:26 a.m. Sat., Mars Hill

Senate Calendar

Tuesday, May 28:

The Committee on Culture, Historic Preservation, Youth and Recreation has scheduled a meeting at the Frits E. Lawaetz Conference Room on St. Croix to receive a status report on revitalization efforts, ongoing and proposed projects, the boundaries of Christiansted and

Frederiksted. This will include the scope of work for the Paul E. Joseph Stadium, St. Croix's designation as a National Heritage Area, the Americans with Disabilities Act compliance, Salt River National Historical Park and Ecological Preserve, National Park Service and underground utilities.