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## Significant damage in Emerald Necklace; officials warn of hanging branches

Posted by Matt Rocheleau August 29, 2011 02:42 PM

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By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

While there is no count of the number of trees and tree limbs downed along Boston's Emerald Necklace park system from this past weekend's storm, officials today called the damage significant and cautioned parkgoers to watch for loose hanging branches.

"They can come down very quickly and can be lethal," said Emerald Necklace Conservancy senior project manager Ray Oladapo-Johnson by phone after touring much of the park space to get an initial idea of Tropical Storm Irene's aftermath.

No injuries have been reported in the park system thus far, he said, and no sections of the six-park system, which comprises half of Boston's parkland, are closed, but residents are asked to keep an eye out when venturing through the 1000-plus acre Emerald Necklace.

The system stretches five miles from the Charles River through part of the Back Bay, extending over the city's border with Brookline where it runs along the Fenway and Jamaica Plain neighborhoods before reaching Roslindale and Roxbury and bordering parts of Mattapan and Dorchester.

"As you're going under any canopies, keep your head up," said Oladapo-Johnson, adding that any branches that are broken, but still hanging overhead can be reported to officials from the various agencies involved in cleanup efforts.

That crew includes the conservancy, state conservation and recreation officials, along with Boston and Brookline parks officials. Workers plan to tackle the most dangerous situations and damage done in the busiest areas first, the project manager said.

"They're being pretty efficient and reactive," Oladapo-Johnson said. "They were prepared and ready. I'm pretty impressed."

He said the edges of the park system were hit hardest by the former hurricane's weakened, but still-powerful wind and rain. He said any trees and debris that fell onto adjacent roadways had been cleared before Monday morning's traffic rush.

Deeper into the parks, the damage was more sporadic.

"Wind and rain can be pretty effective at bringing a tree down," he said. "It was a bad storm but not a terrible storm." Adding that the park system has seen

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a bad storm but not a terrible storm, adding that the park system has seen similar amounts of damage done by weather systems in recent memory.

He said the various agencies that oversee the system, which is made up of the Arnold Arboretum, Back Bay Fens, Franklin Park, Jamaica Pond, Olmsted Park, and the Riverway, will likely consider replanting some of the lost vegetation perhaps as soon as this fall or next spring.

But, the size and scope of a replanting efforts will depend on the final tally of how many trees were destroyed or damaged, he said.

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