

Storm fells hundreds of trees in NYC's Central Park

By Suzanne Ma, Associated Press Writer

NEW YORK — Hundreds of century-old trees lay snapped in half and uprooted throughout Central Park on Wednesday after a severe thunderstorm with winds as high as 80 mph barreled through the city overnight.

"I've never seen a wind of that velocity in New York City," Parks Commissioner Adrian Benepe said. "It looks like pictures that I've seen of war zones where artillery shells have shredded trees."

The storm swept through the area Tuesday night, snapping some of the park's famous American elm trees in half while uprooting others. One tree lay across the tennis courts at West 96th Street, and a few lampposts stood at a slant after trees crashed into them.

Several parked cars were also destroyed when branches hurtled through the air and landed on them.

Steve Sherman, a 50-year-old photographer, cycled through Central Park on Wednesday morning and counted dozens of fallen trees around him. He compared the devastation to the aftermath of a tornado.



"Central Park is our oasis. It's our only saving grace living in an urban center like New York," Sherman said.

"To see Mother Nature up front and realize her power, it's phenomenal. You just don't expect it in an urban setting."

Dorothy London has spent years sketching the area's towering American elm trees. On Tuesday night, the artist stood by her apartment window worrying about how the trees were faring in the fierce storm.

"I heard the screaming of the wind. I heard crashing," London said. "I was worried if all those beautiful trees were all dying."

On Wednesday morning, she toured the park, looking for her favorite American elm near the tennis courts. She found the elm split in two. "It's dead," she said, bursting into tears.

Parks employees were cleaning up streets and travel lanes Wednesday and identifying any hazardous areas of trees with hanging limbs that could still come down. The [Central Park Conservancy](#) also brought in emergency contractors.

Benepe urged the public to stay away from any trees in the park marked hazardous. He said some of the heavier-hit sections, like the North Meadow and the area around the tennis courts, might have to be cordoned off. "The landscape has changed forever," he said.

The American elm can grow up to 125 feet tall, with a spread spanning 65 feet at the top. Benepe said he wasn't sure if new saplings would ever be able to reach the size and maturity of the trees that were lost.

"My grandchildren might be able to enjoy those trees in time," Sherman said. "But they won't be able to see the tree I just looked at yesterday. We've lost friends here."

The storm swept in after two sweltering days of temperatures above 90 degrees. According to the National Weather Service, there is a chance of showers and thunderstorms Wednesday evening.