

HURRICANE IDALIA: HOW DATA AND INFORMATION SHARING ADVANCES EFFICIENT AND EQUITABLE RECOVERY EFFORTS

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With maximum winds of 125 mph, Hurricane Idalia slammed ashore as a powerful Category 3 hurricane at Keaton Beach on Wednesday, August 28, 2023. Idalia was the strongest hurricane to make landfall in Florida's Big Bend region in more than 125 years.

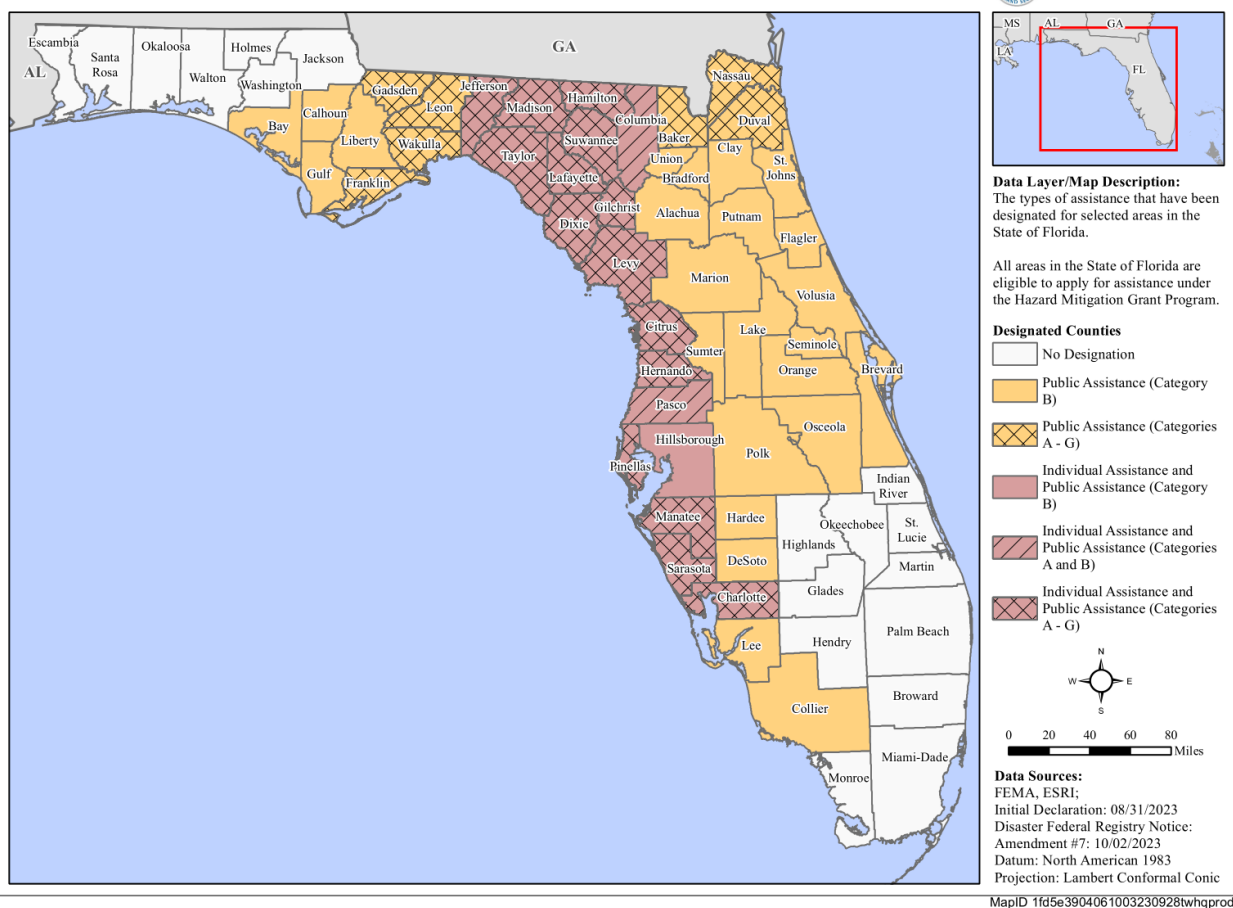
As Idalia moved up the Gulf of Mexico on Tuesday, it strengthened from a Category 1 hurricane to a Category 4 by early Wednesday before weakening slightly to a Category 3 when it made landfall. Climate and weather experts reported that the exceptionally warm waters in the Gulf helped fuel the rapid intensification. Conditions in the Gulf resulted in major flooding from storm surge and wind in multiple coastal counties that Hurricane Ian previously impacted.

After damage assessments were completed, FEMA designated 18 counties for Individual

Assistance (IA), including Citrus, Charlotte, Columbia, Dixie, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Hernando, Hillsborough, Jefferson, Lafayette, Levy, Madison, Manatee, Pasco, Pinellas, Sarasota, Suwannee, and Taylor. Nine counties, all in the Big Bend area, were declared eligible for Direct Housing Assistance: Dixie, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lafayette, Levy, Madison, Suwannee, and Taylor.

The Florida Division of Emergency Management launched FloridaRecovers.org in partnership with the American Red Cross to provide temporary sheltering assistance to Floridians impacted by Hurricane Idalia. The state-led sheltering program provided temporary sheltering options – such as travel trailers and hotel rooms – for households whose needs were unmet through insurance or FEMA's Individual Assistance program.

FEMA-4734-DR, Florida Disaster Declaration as of 10/02/2023



Immediately after the hurricane, the Florida Housing Coalition reached out to impacted SHIP offices to provide information, discuss program needs, and offer guidance on a variety of housing recovery activities. Additional guidance will be available once the Florida Housing Finance Corporation announces the disbursement of SHIP Disaster Recovery funds. To support local planning to optimize funding, the Coalition's staff will help housing departments update and implement their SHIP disaster strategy and other relevant strategies. The Coalition can assist local staff in considering priorities for applicant selection, identifying documentation to collect, addressing staffing needs, avoiding duplication of benefits, and more.

DATA AND INFORMATION SHARING FOR EFFECTIVE DECISION-MAKING

FEMA collects vast amounts of data on disasters – including Individual Assistance and Public Assistance– all of which can be used to inform housing leaders and decision makers better. OPEN FEMA¹ provides access to key data sets but requires expertise in software and analytics. Local governments can request data to provide additional support; however, the request process for obtaining Personally Identifiable Information can be challenging because it must protect the privacy of individuals.

Post-Ian, the State Disaster Housing Task Force members had defined the goal to improve coordination of FEMA PII data sharing and discussed common gaps and needs. In early 2023, the Coalition's Resilience and Disaster Recovery team and FDEM began working with FEMA to discuss the development of data tables and model forms that would support housing offices in requesting FEMA data. The teams also discussed the importance of sharing

aggregated data to support early analysis and provide context of impacted households and damage levels across the state.

In May 2023, Ian Ohlin, Individual Assistance Officer, Florida Department of Emergency Management, was appointed FDEM Task Force co-chair. Supported by Shannon Hagan and Rachel Woofert, the FDEM team worked with FEMA Recovery Reporting & Analytics Division (RAD) to provide current data to the Task Force.

At the September 21 Task Force meeting after Hurricane Idalia, FDEM provided the new aggregated FEMA Individual Assistance charts showing key registration data. The charts defined registration levels by population demographic, county, trends over time, registration method, and assisted and functional needs by age and income.

More than 126 FEMA Disaster Survivor Assistance (DSA) specialists worked in the initially designated counties to help people apply for federal assistance. According to FEMA, DSA specialists visited over 120,000 homes, more than 7,000 businesses, and community facilities and met with 3,000 people at FEMA's mobile centers in various locations. The deadline to register for FEMA assistance closed on Nov. 29.

Th FEMA data as of Oct. 30 indicated 71,503 valid registrations with 39,322 owners and 31,940 renters. Of the five counties with the most FEMA IA registrations, three were in the Big Bend region, and two were in the Tampa Bay region: Pinellas, 15,471; Suwannee, 9,746; Hillsborough, 6,374; Taylor, 5,971; and Columbia, 5,212. It's also crucial to understand the scale of housing impacts. For example, there were nearly 6,000 applications from a total of 7,200 households in Taylor County.

With the support of Bank of America, the Coalition will collaborate with FEMA and FDEM to develop new recovery planning resources

¹ Available at: <https://www.fema.gov/about/reports-and-data/openfema>.

and provide technical assistance to local government and nonprofits to facilitate data sharing. Also, through connections made at the National Low Income Housing Coalition's Disaster Recovery working group, the Coalition is collaborating with Texas Appleseed to provide access to a new interactive Disaster Housing Dashboard that will visualize aggregate data of Hurricane Idalia impacts using assistance applicant information.

Users will be able to look at residence type, estimated damage level, income level of applicants, and whether the applicant owned or rented (percent of owner/renters). These data-sharing and analysis efforts will provide an early understanding of the impacts by housing type for renters and owners. Data can greatly enhance local government housing staff's ability to optimize and coordinate housing assistance and repair programs to support low-income households.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE: SPECIAL SESSION ADDRESSES HURRICANE IDALIA RELIEF

In early November 2023, the Florida Legislature met in a Special Session to address several policy items including a legislative package to address Hurricane Idalia disaster recovery and resiliency. The Legislature passed House Bill 1C/Senate Bill 2C which provided tax relief and financial assistance for damages resulting from Hurricane Idalia, among other policies.

On the hurricane housing recovery front, the Legislature appropriated \$25 million from the Local Government Housing Trust Fund towards the Hurricane Housing Recovery Program (HHRP) for SHIP jurisdictions impacted by Hurricane Idalia. The Florida Housing Finance Corporation (FHFC) will manage the program and distribute these funds based on damage assessment data and population. These HHRP dollars may be used by eligible SHIP jurisdictions

for: site preparation, demolition, repair, and replacement of housing; repair, replacement, and relocation assistance for manufactured homes; acquisition of building materials for home repair and construction; assistance to homeowners to pay insurance deductibles; down payment assistance; housing reentry assistance; and other strategies that are eligible through HHRP.

HB 1C/SB 2C also appropriated \$176,170,000 in nonrecurring General Revenue Funds for the My Safe Florida Home Program - a robust statewide program that provides matching grants and inspections to strengthen Florida homes against hurricane damage and to lower insurance costs.

HB 1C/SB 2C covered a range of other recovery and resiliency topics including amended language from 2023's Senate Bill 250 that has been a hot topic in the resiliency and planning world. Senate Bill 250 prohibited local governments within 100 miles of where Hurricanes Ian or Nicole made landfall from proposing or adopting "more restrictive or burdensome amendments to its comprehensive plan or land development regulations" before October 1, 2024. HB 1C/SB 2C removed the 100-mile radius requirement, narrowed this prohibition to ten Hurricane Ian-affected counties, and extended the prohibition to October 1, 2026.



CJ REYNOLDS is the Director of Resilience and Disaster Recovery for the Florida Housing Coalition. She served as the Director of Resiliency and Engagement at the Tampa Bay Regional Planning for nearly four years and led the Regional Resilience Coalition which includes 32 local governments.