



Levy County Board of County Commissioners
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Levy County Emergency Management

New Evacuation Order Strategy Proposal

Executive Summary

Levy County has been impacted by several hurricanes in recent years, prompting the declaration of a Local State of Emergency (LSE) and the issuance of evacuation orders for portions of the county. The process of creating and managing these have not been as seamless as we believe they could be. This proposal examines issues identified with each and discusses what we believe to be some areas for improvement moving forward.

Current Procedure: Overview

The Planning Group (formerly known as the Policy Group) determines when evacuation orders will take effect and how extensive they will be, basing this decision on the latest forecasts and the overall likelihood of impacts. The following is the evacuation order messaging that went out for Hurricane Milton:

“A mandatory evacuation is in effect for Levy County for the following. All mobile homes, manufactured homes, recreational vehicle parks, coastal communities, low lying areas to include everything west of US 19 for all of Levy county. Hurricane RISK Shelters have been opened at the following locations. Bronson Elementary for Special Needs. Bronson Middle High School, General Population / Pet Friendly. For more information go to www.levydisaster.com or call the Citizen Information Line at 352-486-5576 or 352-486-5155”

Evacuation Order Issues and Proposed Changes

We have identified several areas for improvement. Using the Hurricane Milton evacuation order as a reference, we will break down each sentence to discuss these issues.

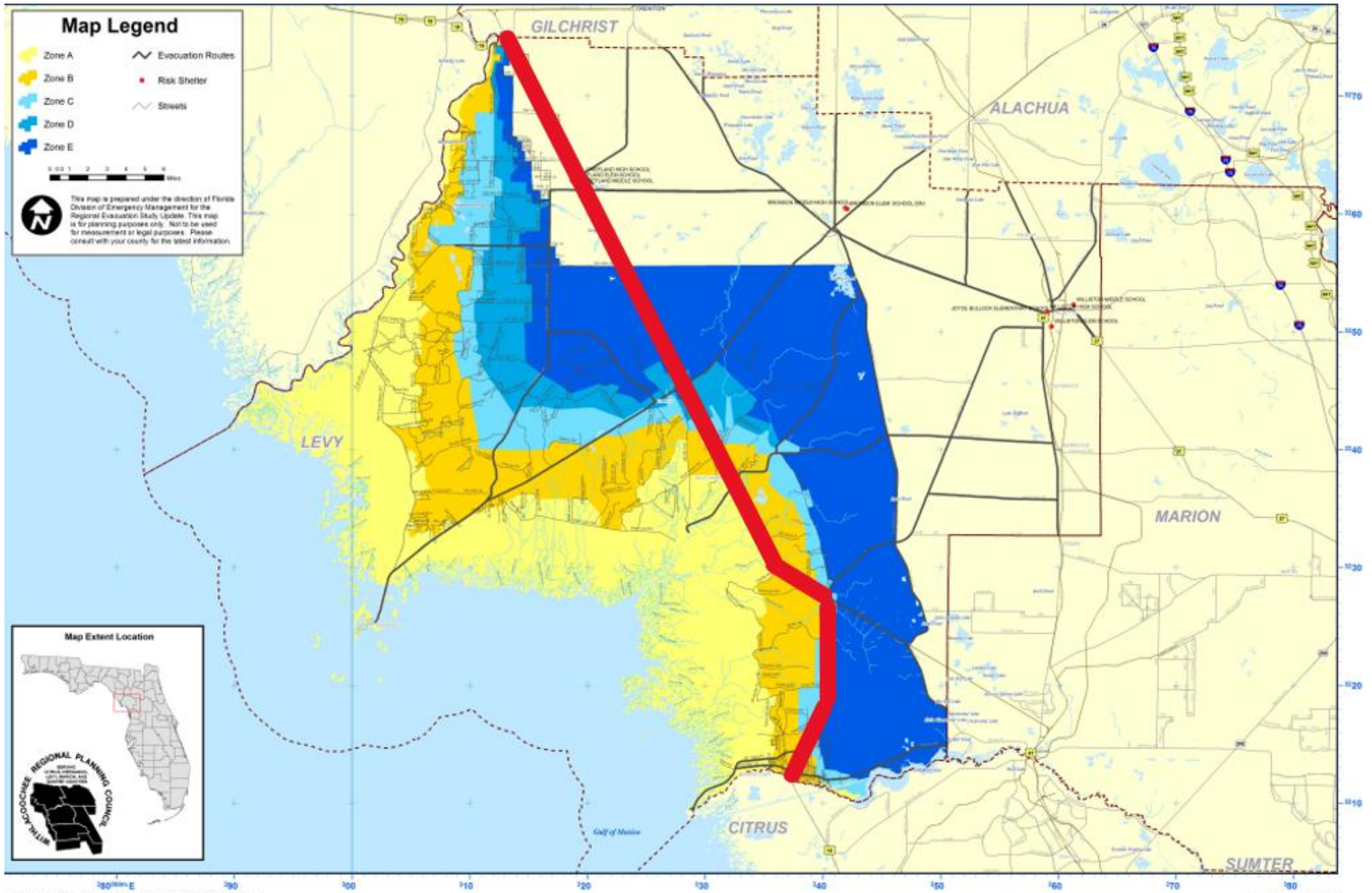
- **Unneeded Designation of Mandatory or Voluntary Evacuation**

- **Sentence:** “A mandatory evacuation is in effect for Levy County for the following.”
- ***Note:** According to FDEM, there are no known instances where the wording of an evacuation order has impacted homeowners' insurance claims.
- **Issue:** Per FDEM, “Other counties stated they moved away from using the distinction of voluntary or mandatory because they didn’t see those terms mentioned anywhere in statute, only the term “evacuation order,” and they didn’t want to say “mandatory” since they can’t force anyone to leave their homes anyways.” Furthermore, FDEM’s viewpoint is that a mandatory evacuation suggests a legal obligation to enforce it. While this has never been the case in Levy County, the public perception of this wording is evident, as the EOC will often receive a surge of calls from concerned residents who fear they may face legal consequences if they choose not to evacuate.
- **Proposal:** Consider eliminating the terms 'mandatory' and 'voluntary' from evacuation orders and instead use clearer, more action-oriented language such as 'we strongly advise you to evacuate.'

- **Imprecise Location Descriptions**

- **Sentence:** “All mobile homes, manufactured homes, recreational vehicle parks, coastal communities, low lying areas to include everything west of US 19 for all of Levy County.”
- ***Notes:**
 - Our evacuation zones are mapped out below. They roughly follow our storm surge inundation projections located [here](#) and are partially shaped by dozens of roadways across the county. Each county has evacuation zones that can be viewed [here](#), as part of FDEM’s [Know Your Zone, Know Your Home](#) campaign. Residents who are unsure of their zone can find out by typing in their address. This website is linked on [levydisaster.com](#).
 - During Helene and Milton, several surrounding counties included language specific to mobile homes, manufactured homes (mobile homes are defined as being built pre- June 1976, while manufactured homes are defined as being built since June 1976), RV parks, and low-lying areas in their evacuation orders. This is because all residents and visitors in these areas and housing types will be urged to evacuate for most hurricane events because of their specific vulnerability to wind and flooding, regardless of whether they are located inside or outside of an evacuation zone.
- **Issue:** **The red line on the map below is U.S. 19.** As you can see, issuing an evacuation order for areas west of Highway 19 would exclude parts of Zone B near Inglis and Gulf Hammock. Meanwhile, certain areas around Chiefland would fall under the evacuation order despite not being part of any evacuation zone. Additionally, all statewide evacuation studies are sponsored through FDEM and based on each county’s evacuation zones. The data from the most recent study is available [here](#). All of our evacuation timeframes are therefore based on this study.

- **Proposal:** Florida’s approach to issuing evacuation orders is by evacuation zones. Therefore, we recommend adopting this practice moving forward. Tying our evacuation orders to a singular roadway does not allow for the same level of precision as the tools already in place.
 - We would be prepared to embark on a public education campaign to ensure that our residents know their zone.
 - We understand that this may lead to increased call volume at the EOC during an evacuation. Citizen Information staff will need to be familiarized with the Know Your Zone website and how to assist residents in locating their zone



ources: Levy County Emergency Management, USGS, FDOT

- **Unneeded Public Dissemination of Risk vs. Host Shelter Distinction**
 - **Sentence:** “Hurricane RISK Shelters have been opened at the following locations.”
 - **Issue:** Our citizens are likely unaware of the difference between a risk shelter and a host shelter.
 - **Proposal:** Remove this language from public messaging. We do not believe a public education campaign is necessary, as the distinction between the two shelter designations has little practical impact for our residents—no one will be turned away from either type of shelter.
 - **Additional Guidance Needed on Rescinding Evacuation Orders**
 - **Issue:** Once an evacuation order is no longer needed, we need to understand what our expectation is for rescinding the order.
 - **Proposal:** Per FDEM, there is no expectation to issue a rescension. They recommend including an “effective until” date on the evacuation order and letting it expire on that date unless an extension is needed. It is at our discretion if we want to publicly announce when the order has lifted.
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Other Considerations

- **Establishing Greater Extension Period for Local State of Emergency**

Section 252.38(3)(a)5., Florida Statutes states the following: [To request state assistance or invoke emergency-related mutual-aid assistance by declaring a state of local emergency in the event of an emergency affecting only one political subdivision. The duration of each state of emergency declared locally is limited to 7 days; it may be extended, as necessary, in 7-day increments.](#)

Our LSE was extended eight times for Hurricane Helene. FDEM advises us to confer with legal to see if we have any flexibility within this statute for setting a longer LSE extension period for high-impact events.

- **Build Out GIS Capabilities**

We are working with FDEM’s GIS team to create something for us that will allow us to overlay our various maps, such as our storm surge inundation map and evacuation zones.

Conclusion

We are proposing simpler, clearer evacuation order messaging. An example would be the following:

“Levy County has issued an evacuation order for Zone A and B, as well as all mobile homes, manufactured homes, RV parks, and low lying areas. Shelters will open at 8 AM tomorrow, Tuesday August 17th, at the following locations. Bronson Elementary School for Special Needs and Bronson Middle High School for General Population and Pet-Friendly. To learn your evacuation zone, go to floridadisaster.org/knowyourzone. Or, for more information, visit LevyDisaster.com or call the Citizen Information Line at 352-486-5576 or 352-486-5155.”