

Cost of damage from Hurricane Idalia could reach \$20 billion

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After causing catastrophic damage and flooding in Florida, Georgia and the Carolinas on Wednesday and Thursday, the remnants of Hurricane Idalia regained strength on Friday as a tropical cyclone that was approximately 80 miles west-southwest of Bermuda, the British island territory in the Atlantic Ocean.

According to the National Hurricane Center, the storm has maximum sustained winds of 50 miles per hour and will move near the south of Bermuda on Saturday. A tropical storm warning is in effect with winds extending outward up to 240 miles from the center of the cyclone. The storm is expected to bring between three and five inches of rain to Bermuda and produce hazardous surf on the island, which has a population of 65,000 people.

Severe damage has occurred in towns along Florida's Big Bend coastal region from the initial impact of Idalia. CNN reported on Thursday evening, "In its wake, the storm left thousands of homes damaged in Florida—some with shredded walls and roofs, others with murky, waist-high floodwater that officials warn could be dangerous for days to come."

Photos and videos posted on social media show severe flooding and reports of people being rescued from waters that were driven by the rain and storm surge. In the working class communities of Pasco County, just north of the city of Tampa, between 4,000 and 6,000 homes were damaged, according to county officials.

PowerOutage.us reports that approximately 65,000 Florida electric customers were without power as of Friday evening in the zone where the hurricane passed through the state and moved into Georgia. The state health department has issued a boil water advisory for DeSoto, Dixie, Leon, Levy, Marion and Taylor counties.

Michael Bobbitt, a Cedar Key resident who rode out the storm to help his neighbors, said the scene after the hurricane came through was "almost apocalyptic." Bobbitt said some homes "were just picked up and carried into the Gulf, so that was heartbreaking to see. My neighbor's house across from me was submerged to the roof line, but we had no injuries."

While it appears that the death toll from the storm has been limited, the corporate media and political establishment in Florida and Washington D.C. are downplaying the extent of the damage from the storm and covering up its impact on the working class throughout the region.

As recovery efforts are underway, early estimates of the total cost of the hurricane range from \$12 billion to \$20 billion. Moody's Analytics published this preliminary estimate in its weekly economic summary dated August 31. The report said the numbers account for a combination of property damage and lost economic output throughout the region.

The Moody's report said the estimate comes "not from a handful of counties that were decimated but instead a large, multi-state area experiencing significant but not catastrophic damage."

Significantly, from the standpoint of the corporate and financial interests for whom Moody's Analytics is published, the claim that the damage from the hurricane was "not catastrophic" is based on its assessment that "the storm made landfall in Florida's Big Bend, which is fortuitous. Its three coastal counties—Dixie, Levy and Taylor—are three of just five among roughly three dozen on Florida's coast that are not large enough to be part of a metropolitan area."

The report then goes on, "This means that the hurricane's worst impacts were felt in an area with fewer people and structures than most similar events.

Given the relative lack of economic activity and relative absence of land constraints, property values in the Big Bend are lower than they are for much of the rest of the state, further suppressing costs.”

In other words, as far as the capitalist elite is concerned, the devastated rural areas where Idalia struck Florida and the 84,000 people who live there are of little concern or economic value.

A report by Fox35 said residents in Horseshoe Beach, a small town in Dixie County, were hit with water and wind and “homes blew over like stacks of cards, strewn debris all over the city.”

Fox35 interviewed Herman Neely, who has lived in Horseshoe Beach for 78 years. The furniture inside his house was flipped over by four and a half feet deep water, and a freezer was toppled. Neely said, “It’s hell on wheels. It’s the worst. Sure is.”

The population of Dixie County is 17,100. The median household income of the county is \$44,287, well below the national medium of \$82,000. Approximately 15 percent of families and 19 percent of the population live below the poverty line, including 24 percent of children under age 18 and 16 percent of those age 65 or over.

Meanwhile, Bob Henson, a meteorologist and journalist with Yale Climate Connections, told the Associated Press, “The most unusual aspect was the especially high water recorded at Charleston, South Carolina, and other places along the Southeast coast.” Henson added, “These high waters were a combination of a ‘supermoon’ high tide, the storm-surge effects of Idalia, and a long-term component from sea level rise associated with human-produced climate change.”



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