

Lake Okeechobee News
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Dike in good shape for storm season

By Katrina Elsen
Lake Okeechobee News

LAKE OKEECHOBEE – With rehabilitation of the Herbert Hoover Dike set to be completed next year, the dike is in good shape for the 2021 hurricane season, according to Col. Andrew Kelly, commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The contractors are “hitting it out of the park” on the dike repairs, said Kelly, during a media tour of the dike on April 14.

“Construction technology and dam safety is at a different level” than it was when the dike was constructed, he said. Dike repairs, which began in 2007, are on track to be complete in 2022.

Kelly said the dike is stronger than it was in 1917, when residents south of the lake were ordered to evacuate as Hurricane Irma approached the state. “It’s a much more dependable structure now,” he said.

The colonel said those who live around the dike can look forward to better ratings for flood risk. “At the end of the rehabilitation, we will complete the safety and risk analysis and will assign a new Dam Safety Action Classification,” he explained. FEMA uses this classification to determine flood zones.

Dike was built in two phases

The work to protect those who live and work around the Big Lake began in the 1930s when a smaller dike built in response to the devastation of the 1926 and 1928



Special to the Lake Okeechobee News/USACE/Torres
LAKE OKEECHOBEE – Work on a cutoff wall in the Herbert Hoover Dike continues round-the-clock.

hurricanes. This embankment, constructed along 67.8 miles of the lake’s south shore and 15.7 miles along the north shore, was completed in 1938.

A major hurricane combined with

storms that created the “Great Flood of 1947” prompted the need for additional flood and storm damage reduction work. As a result, Congress passed the Flood Control Act of 1948 authorizing the first

phase of the Central and South Florida (C&SF) Project, a comprehensive plan to provide flood and storm damage reduction and other water control benefits in central & south Florida. The taller, 143-mile dike was completed in the late 1960’s and it was renamed the Herbert Hoover Dike.

The USACE website explains, the dike was built with gravel, rock, limestone, sand and shell. These natural materials allow water to seep through the embankment. As the water level in the lake increases, the seepage can lead to internal erosion. Without intervention, the movement of material within the dike could cause the dike to fail, putting thousands of people in harm’s way.

In the 1990s and early 2000s, the corps observed performance issues during high water events in Lake Okeechobee. These performance issues included movement of dike material, such as sloughing, the development of sinkholes, and other erosion. The corps dealt with issues immediately to keep the dike from failing. A series of studies was undertaken on various sections of the dike. As the results of those studies became available, the corps began rehabilitation of the dike.

Repairs include the replacement of water control structures and construction of seepage barriers within the earthen berm and extending into the earth from Port Mayaca to Lakeport.

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Don't lose your boat when a hurricane hits

By Richard Marion

Lake Okeechobee News

On May 20 forecasters from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) released their predictions for the upcoming 2021 hurricane season, saying they expect a 60% chance of an above-normal season, a 30% chance of a near-normal season, and a 10% chance of a below-normal season.

For 2021 forecasters estimate there will be a likely range of 13 to 20 named storms (winds of 39 mph or higher), of which 6 to 10 could become hurricanes (winds of 74 mph or higher), including 3 to 5 major hurricanes (category 3, 4 or 5; with winds of 111 mph or higher) is expected.

The NOAA doesn't expect a repeat of 2020, which saw a baffling 30 named storms form. Still, it only takes one bad hurricane to turn your life upside down.

That's why it's important to secure your property and belongings and be prepared for what steps to take beforehand.

For boats, the NOAA says the most effective way to secure them is by trailering it and pulling it to high, dry land. (There's not much "high land" in Florida, but you'll have to do your best.) Before moving your boat, you should be sure that your vehicle is capable of properly moving the boat. Check the condition of your trailer's tires, bearings, and axle.

Once you have placed your boat in a safe location, lash your boat to the trailer and place blocks between the frame members and the axle inside each wheel.

If you own a lightweight boat, consider letting out approximately half of the air in the tires, then filling the boat one-third full of water to help hold it down. Be sure to consult your boat's manufacturer for the best procedure to do this. Secure your boat in place by tying it down with heavy lines to fixed objects. Your boat can be tied down



This image shows Hurricane Katrina.

Special to the Lake Okeechobee News/NOAA

to screw anchors secured in the ground.

If possible, try to pick a location that allows you to secure your boat from four directions. This is because hurricane winds rotate and change directions.

Every boat owner needs to have a plan that is designed to fit their boat type, the local boating environment, the severe weather conditions and the characteristics of safe havens and/or plans for protection. After you have made anchoring or marooning preparations, it is important to remove all of the valuable equipment from your boat. You should also remove all movable equipment, such as:

- Canvas;
- Sails;
- Dinghies;
- Radios;
- Cushions;
- Bimini tops;
- Roller furling sails.

Secure anything that cannot be removed such as: tillers, wheels, or booms. Make a list to keep track of the items that you have

removed from the boat and those that you have left. Ensure that you have sealed all openings (using duct tape) to make your boat as watertight as possible. The electrical system should be off unless you plan to leave the boat in the water.

Another option is to secure your boat on the water. If leave your boat docked, consider the dock lines that you use to secure it. It is estimated that approximately 50% of boats that have been damaged at fixed docks during hurricanes could have been saved by using better dock lines. Use dock lines that are long, large, arranged well, and protect against chaffing. For most boats, you should use:

- 1/2" line for boats up to 25 feet in length;
- 5/8" line for boats 25 feet to 34 feet;
- 3/4" to 1" lines for larger boats.

You should have chafe protectors on any portion of the line that could be chafed by chocks, pulpits, pilings, etc. Secure your lines to strong, wooden pilings. These pilings can stand up to lateral stress and

twisting, as opposed to concrete pilings that cannot.

You'll also want to organize your boat records and documents to keep with you during the hurricane. This could include:

- Insurance policies;
- A recent photograph or videotape of your vessel (and a photo which includes the hull number);
- Boat registration;
- Equipment inventory;
- Lease agreement with the marina or storage area;
- Telephone numbers of appropriate authorities, such as;
- Marina, harbor master, or similar entity;
- Coast guard or local law enforcement;
- Insurance agent;
- Local emergency management or emergency services.

It's recommended in the event of a hurricane warning that you plan to have your boat secure at least 48 hours before the storm is expected to make landfall.



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The supplemental names replacing the Greek alphabet in 2021 are Adria, Braylen, Caridad, Deshawn, Emery, Foster, Gemma, Heath, Isla, Jacobus, Kenzie, Lucio, Makayla, Nolan, Orlanda, Pax, Ronin, Sophie, Tavshaun, Viviana, and Will.

1928 Okeechobee Hurricane killed more than 2,500

By Richard Marion

Lake Okeechobee News

Ninety-two years ago a hurricane struck Florida that would change the Lake Okeechobee area forever. It lashed Puerto Rico on its way to South Florida and tore its way directly through Lake Okeechobee.

As reports were coming in over the radio of the storm hitting Puerto Rico, many around Lake Okeechobee weren't panicked. Those around the lake had survived a previous hurricane a few years before and reports from weathermen at the time suggested that the storm wouldn't even hit the Florida mainland.

But on Sept. 16, 1928, the hurricane made landfall, bringing with it a wave of death and destruction.

The storm moved across the lake northwest diagonally, from Pahokee to near the area where Buckhead Ridge is today. High winds ripped roofs from buildings, while floodwaters either lifted entire houses up and carried them away or caused them to disintegrate completely. Water from the lake came rushing through the communities of Belle Glade and Pahokee, killing thousands.

Carmen Salvatore was an Italian immigrant and World War I veteran who helped found Pahokee. He was one of the lucky few to survive the hurricane and, in 1992, the Florida Folklife Program interviewed him to document life around the lake during the early 1900s.

Unsurprisingly, the role the hurricane of 1928 played came up when Salvatore was telling his life story.

"The wind started about a half an hour before sundown," Salvatore said. "Then the water started coming up. This was at night. You couldn't see your hand in front of your face. The rain was coming down in sheets, not drops now, I mean sheets. We got behind a ridge to avoid the water. Then the water started coming over the ridge. That scared me."



Special to the Lake Okeechobee News/Florida Memory Project

BELLE GLADE – This photo from 1928 shows bodies of those who perished being loaded into a truck.

During a lull in the storm, Salvatore and a friend went to check on an elderly couple in the neighborhood.

"Mr. and Mrs. Hunter were in their eighties and lived about 300 feet from me," recounted Salvatore. "We got to their house and the water from the lake had went right through the house. Went inside and nobody was there. We found Mrs. Hunter within 10 feet from where we were. She heard us calling her but she was so weak she couldn't answer back. We found Mr. Hunter riding a dead cow 600 feet from there out in the muck and water."

"Everybody had a story to tell," continued Salvatore. "And you think that story would be about as bad as it could be, but the next guy would give you one worse than that one."

The day following the storm Salvatore described people as people shellshocked, walking around the community in a daze as they processed what had just happened. Property damage amounted to over \$25 million. Over 2,500 people died, many of whom were migrant farmworkers. Bodies were found in ditches, in trees, anywhere the swirling waters might have carried them. Farmers reported finding the skeletons of the hurricane's victims in their fields even years later.



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BELLE GLADE – Coffins stack along the bank of a canal after the 1928 hurricane.



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BELLE GLADE – An automotive garage in Belle Glade was demolished by the 1928 hurricane.

A mass funeral was held in West Palm Beach for many of those who died. Survivors spent days and weeks gathering bodies into makeshift coffins to be buried. Eventually, volunteers had to turn to cremation because of the massive number of dead the storm left in its wake.

Then President-elect Herbert Hoover visited the Okeechobee area to see the destruction firsthand. Eventually the Herbert

Hoover Dike was constructed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to help prevent another mass loss of life from happening in the area again.

"When the hurricane was over with we were dumbfounded," said Salvatore. "There was no wind, no life. You were in a world by yourself without any evidence of life. You were all by yourself. That's the best way I can describe it."

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Your hurricane plan should include your pets

Special to the Lake Okeechobee News

When a hurricane threatens, do you have a plan for your pets? Do you have a safe spot for them in your home? What will you do with them if you can't stay in your home?

The Humane Society of the United States encourages pet owners to have a disaster preparedness plan in place that includes the four-legged members of the family.

Preparedness tips include:

- ID your pet: Make sure that cats and dogs are wearing collars and identification tags that are up to date. You'll increase your chances of being reunited with pets who get lost by having them microchipped; make sure the microchip registration is in your name. But remember: The average person who finds your pet won't be able to scan for a chip, but they will probably be able to read a basic tag.

- Put your cell phone number on your pet's tag. It may also be a good idea to include the phone number of a friend or relative outside your immediate area – in case you have had to evacuate.

- If you evacuate, take your pet. If it isn't safe for you, it isn't safe for your pets. You have no way of knowing how long you'll be kept out of the area, and you may not be able – or allowed – to go back for your pets. Pets left behind in a disaster can easily be injured, lost or killed. Remember

to make plans for ALL your pets; during natural disasters, disaster plans for feral or outdoor cats, horses and animals on farms can be lifesavers.

- Evacuate early. Don't wait for a mandatory evacuation order. Some people who have waited to be evacuated by emergency officials have been told to leave their pets behind. The smell of smoke or the sound of high winds or thunder may make your pet more fearful and difficult to load into a crate or carrier. Evacuating before conditions become severe will keep everyone safer and make the process less stressful.

- Find a safe place to stay ahead of time. Before a disaster hits, check the website of your local office of emergency management to see if you will be allowed to evacuate with your pets and verify that there will be shelters in your area that take people and their pets. Also be sure to review how they are managing social distancing needs. If you plan to take your pet to a shelter, find out what kind of cage or pet carrier will be required. Be sure to pack your pets food, water dish, toys, blankets and any medications.

- Contact hotels and motels outside your immediate area to find out if they accept pets. Ask about any restrictions on number, size and species. Inquire if a "no pet" policy would be waived in an emergency. Keep a list of animal-friendly places handy, and call ahead for a reservation as soon as you think you might have to leave

your home. Several websites offer lists of pet friendly lodgings: Bringfido.com, Dogfriendly.com, Doginmysuitcase.com, Pet-friendly-hotels.com, Pets-allowed-hotels.com, Petswelcome.com; Tripswithpets.com.

- Make arrangements with friends or relatives. Ask people outside your immediate area if they would be able to shelter you and your pets – or just your pets – if necessary. If you have more than one pet, you may need to arrange to house them at separate locations.

- If you have a fish tank, invest in a battery-operated aerator (the kind used for live wells on boats), in case your home loses power during a storm.

Some stay-at-home tips:

- Close off or eliminate unsafe nooks and crannies where frightened cats may try to hide.

- Move dangerous items such as tools or toxic products that have been stored in the area.

- Bring your pets indoors as soon as local authorities say trouble is on the way. Keep dogs on leashes and cats in carriers, and make sure they are wearing identification.

- If you have a room you can designate as a "safe room," put your emergency supplies in that room in advance, including your pet's crate and supplies. Have any

medications and a supply of pet food and water inside watertight containers, along with your other emergency supplies.

- If there is an open fireplace, vent, pet door or similar opening in the house, close it off with plastic sheeting and strong tape.

- Follow local news outlets online or listen to the radio periodically, and don't come out until you know it's safe.

After a storm, protect your pet from dangers

- Don't allow your pets to roam loose. Familiar landmarks and smells might be gone, and your pet will probably be disoriented. Pets can easily get lost in such situations. There could also be a lot of debris, such as roofing nails and broken glass, that could cause injuries.

- While you assess the damage, keep dogs on leashes and cats in carriers inside the house. If your house is damaged, your pets could escape.

- Be patient with your pets after a disaster. Try to get them back into their normal routines as soon as possible. Be ready for behavioral problems caused by the stress of the situation. If these problems persist, or if your pet seems to be having any health problems, talk to your veterinarian.

- If your community has been flooded, check your home and yard for wild animals who may have sought refuge there. Wildlife can pose a threat to you and your pet.



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Develop storm a hurricane disaster plan now

Hurricane season runs through Nov. 30

Special to the Lake Okeechobee

OKEECHOBEE — Hurricane season officially started June 1, and the Florida Dept of Health in Okeechobee County encourages everyone to prepare for severe weather emergencies now.

Get A Plan!

The best way to cope with a disaster is to have a plan. Following an emergency or disaster, you may lose access to basic services, such as power and water, and be subject to limited or no access to basic needs, like food and medications. The Florida Department of Emergency Management provides an interactive online tool, 'Get a Plan!', to help families and businesses stay prepared. This useful tool allows you to answer a series of questions and create a plan customized for you.

Make a Kit

As we watch for upcoming storms, think about what you might need to keep on hand in order to be prepared. The Florida Division of Emergency Management recommends that you have enough supplies to last you and your family for a minimum of seven days. Each individual or family disaster supply kit differs, based on personal needs. Review the list below for the basic items to include in your kit. For more

information, visit

<https://www.floridadisaster.org/planprepare/hurricane-supply-checklist/>.

- Food: Nonperishable packaged or canned food and juices, snacks and foods for those with dietary restrictions (i.e., infants, people with diabetes, etc.).
- Cooking supplies: Manual can opener, cooking tools and fuel, paper plates and plastic utensils.
- Flashlight and extra batteries
- Pillows, blankets and/or sleeping bags
- Clothing: Complete change of clothes suitable for the current climate. Stock up on diapers if you have an infant. Include sturdy shoes to protect feet from debris or other sharp objects post-storm.
- First aid kit, prescription medications and other medicines: People with health issues may need to carry written instructions for care and medication (including medication dosages), a list of medical devices and a list of current doctors.
- Radio: Battery-operated and NOAA weather radio.
- Toiletries
- Cleaning Supplies: Garbage bags, moisture wipes and other items.
- Cash: Banks and ATMs may not be working for long periods following a disaster.
- Important documents: Store all critical documents in a waterproof container

and save electronically. Documents like insurance, medical records, bank account numbers, Social Security card, etc.

- Special Items: Assess all family member needs. Plan for infants, elderly and individuals with access and functional needs (i.e. medical items, baby bottles, etc.).
- Pet care items: Proper identification, immunization records, ample supply of food and water, carrier or cage, medications, muzzle and leash, and a photo of you and your pet together to validate ownership.

Know Where to Find Shelter

The time may come when you need to evacuate your home and go to a safer place. In certain situations, it may be safest for you to evacuate to a shelter. A hurricane evacuation shelter is a refuge of last resort, a place to go if you can't stay at home or with a relative, friend or co-worker, or at a nearby hotel. Hurricane shelters are also available for people who have no other place to go. The Florida Division of Emergency Management maintains a list of open shelters on their website.

If you have a disability or a special need, such as a medical condition, it's vital that you register with your local emergency management office. All emergency management offices maintain a list of people within the community who have disabilities or special needs so they can be assisted

quickly during an emergency.

If you are eligible for a Special Needs Shelter, your kit should include the following: a list of medications and dosage, a 30-day supply of medications, vital medical equipment for those who may be electrically or oxygen dependent, backup energy sources for essential medical equipment, any special dietary needs or food, as well as personal information, including photo ID, insurance card, emergency contacts, and your primary care providers contact information.

And if you have pets, be sure that the shelter has a place for them and their supplies.

Stay Connected

During severe weather and other emergencies, stay connected to local radio, television and social media outlets.

The State Assistance Information Line (SAIL), a toll-free hotline, is activated to provide accurate and up-to-date information on emergency or disaster situations impacting the State of Florida. The SAIL hotline is: 1-800-342-3557.

You can also get helpful information from the Florida Department of Health's official social media accounts. One of the fastest ways to receive accurate health-related information is to monitor @HealthyFla on Twitter and on Facebook.

For more information on how to prepare for hurricane season, please contact your local Florida Department of Health.

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