



FEDERAL 2024 HURRICANE RECOVERY RESOURCES: FEDERAL INTERAGENCY RECOVERY COORDINATION (IRC) RESPONSES TO COASTAL & HEARTLAND NATIONAL ESTUARY PARTNERSHIP MEMBER COMMENTS

The Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership (CHNEP) held several public meetings with its members and other prominent regional stakeholders to discuss 2024 Hurricane Season recovery needs and requests for federal governmental assistance. Below represents the collective comments submitted to the Interagency Recovery Coordination (IRC) team from the following organizations: Polk, Highlands, Hardee, DeSoto, Manatee, Sarasota, Charlotte, Lee, Glades and Hendry counties, City of Punta Gorda, City of Sanibel, Town of Fort Myers Beach, City of North Port, City of Cape Coral, City of Bartow, City of Winter Haven, City of Arcadia, City of Venice, Village of Estero, Sanibel Captiva Conservation Foundation (SCCF), Peace River Manasota Regional Water Supply Authority (PRMRWSA), Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council (SWFRPC), Central Florida Regional Planning Council (CFRPC), Sarasota/Manatee Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD), South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD), Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), and Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP). The IRC's responses and contact persons/information for follow-up are included below as well.

NEED FOR FEDERAL ASSISTANCE WITH DEBRIS REMOVAL

- 1) *Need manpower and funding for removal of debris in upland waterways, including the creeks, streams, canals, and ditches that are maintained. Removing debris that impedes drainage is imperative to complete prior to next rainy season to prevent further flood damage to public and private assets, as well as to restore more natural flows to wetlands and downstream tributaries. Coordination amongst federal agencies to get funding assistance in a timely manner is needed.*

Commenting Entities: Hardee County, DeSoto County, Polk County, City of North Port, City of Winter Haven, Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD)

IRC Responses:



IRC Contacts for follow-up:



- 2) *Need manpower and funding for the removal of debris from waterways, including the estuaries and tidal creeks that are maintained. Removing debris that disturbs the natural ecosystems and*

degrades water quality as well as debris that impedes recreational activities such as boating and fishing is imperative to the health of the local economy.

Commenting Entities: Lee County, DeSoto County, City of Sanibel, City of North Port, Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP)

IRC Responses:



IRC Contacts for follow-up:



- 3) *Need assistance finding the necessary mechanism to remove derelict vessels that have sunk on municipal submerged land property.*

Commenting Entities: Lee County, City of Fort Myers, Town of Fort Myers Beach, Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP)

IRC Responses:



IRC Contacts for follow-up:



- 4) *Need manpower and funding for removal of debris from both public and private conservation lands. The removal of debris from conservation lands will lessen the fire risk and restore public access to recreation opportunities.*

Commenting Entities: Hardee County, Polk County, City of Winter Haven, City of Sanibel, Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD), Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), Peace River Manasota Regional Water Supply Authority (PRMRWSA)

IRC Responses:



IRC Contacts for follow-up:



- 5) *Need manpower and funding for debris and derelict vessel removal from mangrove forests. Additionally, more capacity is needed to monitor the long-term effects of back-to-back hurricanes on mangrove forests and wildlife.*

Commenting Entities: Lee County, Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP)

IRC Response:



IRC Contacts for follow-up:



- 6) *Need technical assistance and resources to minimize natural resource impacts associated with debris removal – especially as it pertains to mangroves. This could include what type of*

equipment, or methods should be used, how to consider accessing debris in least impactful way, etc.

Commenting Entities: Lee County, Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP)

IRC Responses:



IRC Contacts for follow-up:



- 7) *Need technical assistance and funding to implement proactive approach to debris removal ahead of extreme storm events. There is a very short window post-storm to submit a letter of intent for funding and it would be beneficial to get assistance to take preventative measures to clean-up the waterways ahead of a storm event.*

Commenting Entities: DeSoto County, Highlands County

IRC Responses:



IRC Contacts for follow-up:



NEED FOR FEDERAL ASSISTANCE WITH BEACH RENOURISHMENT

- 1) *Need funding for beach renourishment due to enormous scale of sand loss from storm surge on non-engineered natural beaches. Some federal funding pots for renourishment through USACE or FEMA do not apply given many of the impacted beaches are non-engineered.*

Commenting Entities: Lee County, City of Sanibel

IRC Responses:



IRC Contacts for follow-up:



- 2) *Need manpower and funding for beach renourishment on an ongoing basis, as multiple hurricanes can have compounding impacts and potential for extreme erosion.*

Commenting Entities: Lee County, Charlotte County, City of Sanibel, Town of Fort Myers Beach

IRC Responses:



IRC Contacts for follow-up:



NEED FOR FEDERAL ASSISTANCE WITH PERMITTING

- 1) *Need streamlined review processes for waterway debris removal, with consideration that aquatic habitats have been impacted and degraded now by waterway debris and pollution so removal of that debris is restoring habitats (even if there are temporary impacts associated with the removal process).*

Commenting Entities: Lee County, Hardee County, City of Fort Myers, City of North Port, Florida Department of Environmental Protection Aquatic Preserves

IRC Responses:



IRC Contacts for follow-up:



- 2) *Need streamlined expedited permitting for beach renourishment, dune restoration and scour path rehabilitation – preferably on regional scale, not site by site, given the large-scale need.*

Commenting Entities: Lee County, Charlotte County, City of Sanibel, City of Fort Myers, Town of Fort Myers Beach

IRC Response:



IRC Contacts for follow-up:



- 3) *Need streamlined review processes for aquatic and terrestrial restoration projects. Many acres of mangroves, oyster reefs, seagrass, and beaches were significantly damaged. Hydrology in many cases has been significantly altered. Temporary impacts need to be weighed against permanent restoration goals to ensure timely permitting to restore habitat and hydrology and increase resiliency. Living shorelines and artificial reefs not only serve as habitat but also serve as barriers to wind and wave action, making systems more resilient to future storms.*

Commenting Entities: Charlotte County, Lee County, City of Sanibel, City of Fort Myers, City of Venice, Town of Fort Myers Beach, Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation (SCCF), Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP)

IRC Response:



IRC Contacts for follow-up:



NEED FOR FEDERAL ASSISTANCE WITH FUNDING RESTORATION PROJECTS

- 1) *Need funding for aquatic habitat restoration projects including riverbank stabilization. Many acres of mangroves, oyster reefs, seagrass, and beaches were significantly damaged. Hydrology in many cases has been significantly altered. Living shorelines and artificial reefs not only serve as habitat but also serve as barriers to wind and wave action, making systems more resilient to future storms.*

Commenting Entities: Charlotte County, Lee County, DeSoto County, City of Fort Myers, City of Venice, Town of Fort Myers Beach, Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation (SCCF), Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP)

IRC Response:



IRC Contacts for follow-up:

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- 2) *Need funding for restoration of conservation lands and cultural sites. Conservation lands were heavily impacted, and restoration will involve debris removal, replanting vegetation, and restoring hydrology. Many cultural sites have been exposed and vandalized and funding is needed to restore them.*

Commenting Entities: Hardee County, City of Sanibel, Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP)

IRC Response:

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IRC Contacts for follow-up:

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- 3) *Need funding for restoration of stormwater lakes and ponds and interior wetlands. Storm surge from Hurricane Ian in 2022 converted several stormwater ponds and freshwater wetlands to saltwater systems. These waterbodies were starting to return to normal freshwater conditions 2 years after Ian but were set back to ground zero by Hurricanes Helene and Milton. Saline conditions have greatly impacted the ecology of these stormwater ponds as well as their ability clean water and to improve water quality.*

Commenting Entities: Lee County, City of Sanibel, Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation (SCCF), Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP)

IRC Response:

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IRC Contacts for follow-up:

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NEED FOR FEDERAL ASSISTANCE WITH INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS

- 1) *Need funding and streamlined grant process to lessen the time it takes to implement infrastructure improvement projects. Storm surge impacted several municipal sewer system components, particularly with respect to electrical power for various lift stations. Funding is needed to restore those components as well as to make them more resilient using back up solar power generation or bypass pumps or a similar solution. Additionally, several lift stations that were impacted during Hurricane Ian in 2022 were further impacted during Hurricanes Helene and Milton in 2024 because the identified improvements needed were not funded or implemented prior to the 2024 hurricane season.*

Commenting Entities: DeSoto County, Highlands County, City of Fort Myers, City of Cape Coral, City of Sanibel, City of Winter Haven, Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation (SCCF), Sarasota/Manatee Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)

IRC Responses:

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IRC Contacts for follow-up:

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- 2) *Need technical assistance and funding for stormwater improvement projects that address flooding and water quality. Stormwater conveyance systems were designed to a certain standard that is no longer appropriate and it is extremely costly to update systems to a higher standard.*

Commenting Entities: Sarasota County, Polk County, Highlands County, City of North Port, City of Cape Coral, City of Arcadia, Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation (SCCF), Central Florida Regional Planning Council (CFRPC), Sarasota/Manatee Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP)

IRC Responses:



IRC Contacts for follow-up:



- 3) *Need funding for septic to sewer conversion and wastewater capacity upgrades. Many areas on private well and septic were flooding, contaminating wells, and causing septic failure with wastewater overflows – including areas identified for future septic to sewer. However, homeowners now are facing severe home repair expenses and therefore have little ability to absorb the assessment levied to convert their septic to municipal sewer. Likewise, state governmental funding for such programs may need to be redirected. Therefore, federal governmental funding to subsidize these programs is needed in this area, to keep that progressing while undertaking other recover efforts.*

Commenting Entities: DeSoto County, City of Bartow, Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation (SCCF)

IRC Response:



IRC Contacts for follow-up:



- 4) *Need technical assistance and funding to elevate homes, buildings, and roads. Entire neighborhoods were flooded, and thousands of people lost their homes. These communities will need to be elevated. However, technical assistance is needed to ensure new construction based on new code requirements does not exacerbate flooding on surrounding properties at lower elevations.*

Commenting Entities: Charlotte County, Lee County, City of Venice, Central Florida Regional Planning Council (CFRPC), Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council (SWFRPC), Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation (SCCF)

IRC Responses:



IRC Contacts for follow-up:



NEED FOR DIRECT DELIVERY OF FEDERAL EMERGENCY SUPPORT

- 1) *Need added capacity and manpower to study and address impacts from back-to-back hurricanes in addition to day-to-day work activities. More manpower is needed to help with the additional*

recovery work, managing grants, and restoration projects. Staff support is especially needed for federally funded projects that involve a lot of paperwork and overhead.

Commenting Entities: Polk County, Hardee County, Charlotte County, Lee County, City of Sanibel, City of North Port, Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council (SWFRPC), Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP)

IRC Responses:



IRC Contacts for follow-up:



NEED FOR FEDERAL ASSISTANCE WITH LAND ACQUISITION PROGRAMS

- 1) *Need funding and added capacity for land acquisition and conservation programs. Agricultural communities have suffered greatly from recent hurricanes and citrus greening. These agricultural lands were serving as floodplains and are feared of becoming developed with impervious surfaces that alter the hydrology and degrade water quality. These are land acquisition opportunities beyond the scope of both County and state land acquisition programs that would provide benefits to day-to-day stormwater management and help to mitigate against compounded impacts from major storm events.*

Commenting Entities: Polk County, Charlotte County, City of Bartow, Central Florida Regional Planning Council (CFRPC), Sarasota/Manatee Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)

IRC Response:



IRC Contacts for follow-up:



- 2) *Need funding for land acquisition of islands and nearshore sensitive habitats such as mangroves. Mangroves buffer against wind and wave action and protect the communities on land. Acquisition of these island and nearshore habitats not only makes the communities on land more resilient, but also helps to prepare for habitat migration in the future.*

Commenting Entities: Charlotte County, Lee County, Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP)

IRC Response:



IRC Contacts for follow-up:



NEED FOR FEDERAL ASSISTANCE WITH OTHER RECOVERY NEEDS

- 1) *Need funding to project manage and implement canal and/or creek maintenance (dredging) on an on-going basis (some counties), as multiple hurricanes have clogged canals and waterways and limited recreational boating opportunities.*

Commenting Entities: Sarasota County, DeSoto County, Highlands County, Town of Fort Myers Beach

IRC Response:



IRC Contacts for follow-up:



- 2) *Need funding to project manage and implement culvert and ditch maintenance (cleaning) on an on-going basis (some counties), as multiple hurricanes have clogged culverts and ditches and limited stormwater conveyance capabilities.*

Commenting Entities: City of Venice, City of North Port

IRC Response:



IRC Contacts for follow-up:



- 3) *Need for updated LiDAR and elevation data throughout the entire region. FEMA recently lowered the base flood elevations on barrier islands and other potentially flood prone areas, thus allowing people to build lower along the coast when the Gulf and Ocean water temperatures are rising, sea levels are rising, and storms are stronger. For example, the base flood elevation was recently lowered by 4 feet in Sarasota County's AE zone.*

Commenting Entities: Sarasota County, Charlotte County, Central Florida Regional Planning Council (CFRPC), Sarasota/Manatee Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)

IRC Response:



IRC Contacts for follow-up:



- 4) *Need for updated flood maps and storm surge models for the entire region.*

Commenting Entities: Sarasota County, Charlotte County, City of Arcadia, Central Florida Regional Planning Council (CFRPC), Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council (SWFRPC)

IRC Response:



IRC Contacts for follow-up:



- 5) *Need funding for research to understand how water quality is impacted from these events – especially with concerns of Vibrio bacteria in waterways and floodwaters. This will involve immediate post-event water quality sampling to look at environmental health.*

Commenting Entities: Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD), Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP)

IRC Response:



IRC Contacts for follow-up:

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- 6) *Need funding for water storage projects – both for projects that assess water storage capabilities throughout the region as well as projects that create reservoirs to store water during the wet season.*

Commenting Entities: Polk County, Charlotte County, Central Florida Regional Planning Council (CFRPC), Sarasota/Manatee Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)

IRC Response:

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IRC Contacts for follow-up:

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- 7) *Need funding for research to identify potential proactive measures that could be implemented to minimize impacts to threatened and endangered species on conservation lands. For example, the Groundhopper Sparrow nests on the ground, and in addition to the potential impacts to the nest from extreme winds and flooding, fire ants get dispersed by flood waters and manage to find and destroy the nests.*

Commenting Entities: Central Florida Regional Planning Council (CFRPC)

IRC Response:

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IRC Contacts for follow-up:

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- 8) *Need technical assistance and funding for research to understand the extent of tree canopy and vegetative impacts. Extreme winds and flooding from storms have devastated the canopy and there have been long term impacts to the trees' defense mechanisms.*

Commenting Entities: City of North Port, City of Sanibel

IRC Response:

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IRC Contacts for follow-up:

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- 9) *Need expedited federal fisheries disaster funding for short-term funding assistance programs for commercial fishermen and charter captains. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) meets with industry folks impacted by the storm and establishes what their needs are, and then it takes 1-3 years to get those federal funds to help them.*

Commenting Entities: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)

IRC Response:

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IRC Contacts for follow-up:

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PROCESS FOR FURTHER COORDINATION WITH IRC

- 1) *Need information about what the process is for further coordination with IRC, besides individually contacting the IRC Contacts listed above.*

Commenting Entities: All

IRC Responses:



IRC Contacts for follow-up:

