

Lake Okeechobee at risk in hurricanes

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Scientists say New Orleans is most vulnerable to hurricane storm surge-caused loss of life and property damage of all U.S. East Coast and Gulf Coast areas.

Using a formula based on storm intensity, flooding potential, population, evacuation routes and other factors, the coastal scientists at Florida International University in Miami told The New York Times the second most vulnerable area is Lake Okeechobee, Fla., where, in 1928, approximately 2,500 people died when a hurricane whipped the lake's water into a powerful surge.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers rebuilt the lake's dike after that storm. The dike is 140 miles long, 45 feet high in places and up to 150 feet wide at its base, but some scientists told The Times it does not meet modern dam criteria and might not survive another hurricane. If it's breached, the lives of 40,000 people would be threatened, they said.

The storm surge analysis is to be reported in The Journal of Coastal Research.

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