

# 'Catching some hell': Hurricane Michael slams into Florida

October 10 2018, by Jay Reeves And Brendan Farrington

---



An unidentified person takes pictures of the surf and fishing pier on Okaloosa Island in Fort Walton Beach, Fla., on Wednesday, Oct. 10, 2018, as Hurricane Michael approaches the Florida Gulf Coast. [Devon Ravine/Northwest Florida Daily News via AP)

Supercharged by abnormally warm waters in the Gulf of Mexico, Hurricane Michael slammed into the Florida Panhandle with terrifying winds of 155 mph Wednesday, splintering homes and submerging

neighborhoods. It was the most powerful hurricane to hit the continental U.S. in nearly 50 years.

Its winds shrieking, Michael crashed ashore in the early afternoon near Mexico Beach, a tourist town about midway along the Panhandle, a lightly populated, 200-mile stretch of white-sand beach resorts, fishing towns and military bases.

It battered the coastline with sideways rain, powerful gusts and crashing waves. It swamped streets and docks, flattened trees, stripped away limbs and leaves, knocked out power to more than 190,000 homes and businesses, shredded awnings and sent shingles flying. Explosions apparently caused by blown transformers could be heard.

"We are catching some hell," said Timothy Thomas, who rode out the storm with his wife in their second-floor apartment in Panama City Beach. He said he could see broken street signs and a 90-foot pine bent at a 45-degree angle.

With the hurricane still pounding the state hours after it came ashore, and conditions too dangerous in places for search-and-rescue teams to go out, there were no immediate reports of any deaths or serious injuries.

Michael was a meteorological brute that sprang quickly from a weekend tropical depression, becoming a fearsome Category 4 by early Wednesday, up from a Category 2 less than a day earlier. It was the most powerful hurricane on record to hit the Panhandle.



Heavy surf from the approaching Hurricane Michael pounds the fishing pier on Okaloosa Island in Fort Walton Beach, Fla., on Wednesday, Oct. 10, 2018. (Devon Ravine/Northwest Florida Daily News via AP)

"I've had to take antacids I'm so sick to my stomach today because of this impending catastrophe," National Hurricane Center scientist Eric Blake tweeted as the storm—drawing energy from the unusually warm, 84-degree Gulf waters—became more menacing.

More than 375,000 people up and down the Gulf Coast were urged to evacuate as Michael closed in. But the fast-moving, fast-strengthening storm didn't give people much time to prepare, and emergency authorities lamented that many ignored the warnings and seemed to think they could ride it out.

"While it might be their constitutional right to be an idiot, it's not their

right to endanger everyone else!" Walton County Sheriff Michael Adkinson tweeted.

Diane Farris, 57, and her son walked to a high school-turned-shelter near their home in Panama City to find about 1,100 people crammed into a space meant for about half as many. Neither she nor her son had any way to communicate because their lone cellphone got wet and quit working.

"I'm worried about my daughter and grandbaby. I don't know where they are. You know, that's hard," she said, choking back tears.



A beachgoer take photos of the waves on Wednesday Oct. 10, 2018, on Okaloosa Island in Fort Walton Beach, Fla., behind the boardwalk as Hurricane Michael impacts the coast. (Nick Tomecek/Northwest Florida Daily News via AP)

Hurricane-force winds extended up to 45 miles (75 kilometers) from Michael's center. Forecasters said rainfall could reach up to a foot (30 centimeters), and the life-threatening storm surge could swell to 14 feet (4 meters).

A water-level station in Apalachicola, close to where Michael came ashore, reported a surge of nearly 8 feet (2.5 meters).

Based on its internal barometric pressure, Michael was the third most powerful hurricane to hit the U.S. mainland, behind the unnamed Labor Day storm of 1935 and Camille in 1969. Based on wind speed, it was the fourth-strongest, behind the Labor Day storm (184 mph, or 296 kph), Camille and Andrew in 1992.

It appeared to be so powerful that it was expected to remain a hurricane as it moved into Alabama and Georgia early Thursday. Forecasters said it will unleash damaging wind and rain all the way into the Carolinas, which are still recovering from Hurricane Florence's epic flooding.

At the White House, President Donald Trump said the government is "absolutely ready for the storm." "God bless everyone because it's going to be a rough one," he said. "A very dangerous one."



Tom Moenich rides along the waterfront at Keaton Beach, Fla., checking on friends' homes Wednesday, Oct. 10, 2018, in Keaton Beach, Fla. Hurricane Michael continues to churn in the Gulf of Mexico heading for the Florida panhandle. (AP Photo/Chris O'Meara)

In Mexico Beach, population 1,000, the storm shattered homes, leaving floating piles of lumber. The lead-gray water was so high that roofs were about all that could be seen of many homes.

In Panama City, plywood and metal flew off the front of a Holiday Inn Express. Part of the awning fell and shattered the glass front door of the hotel, and the rest of the awning wound up on vehicles parked below it.

"Oh my God, what are we seeing?" said evacuee Rachel Franklin, her mouth hanging open.

The hotel swimming pool had whitecaps, and people's ears popped

because of the drop in barometric pressure. The roar from the hurricane sounded like an airplane taking off.

Meteorologists watched satellite imagery in complete awe as the storm intensified.



Peter Malave records the surf from encroaching Hurricane Michael, which is expected to make landfall today, in Panama City Beach, Fla., Wednesday, Oct. 10, 2018. The hurricane center says Michael will be the first Category 4 hurricane to make landfall on the Florida Panhandle. (AP Photo/Gerald Herbert)

"We are in new territory," National Hurricane Center Meteorologist Dennis Feltgen wrote on Facebook. "The historical record, going back to 1851, finds no Category 4 hurricane ever hitting the Florida panhandle."

Colorado State University hurricane expert Phil Klotzbach said in an email: "I really fear for what things are going to look like there tomorrow at this time."

The storm is likely to fire up the debate over global warming.

Scientists say global warming is responsible for more intense and more frequent extreme weather, such as storms, droughts, floods and fires. But without extensive study, they cannot directly link a single weather event to the changing climate.

With Election Day less than a month away, the crisis was seen as a test of leadership for Scott, a Republican running for the Senate, and Tallahassee Mayor Andrew Gillum, the Democratic nominee for governor. Just as Northern politicians are judged on how they handle snowstorms, their Southern counterparts are watched closely for how they deal with hurricanes.





People photograph the surf from encroaching Hurricane Michael, which is expected to make landfall today, in Panama City Beach, Fla., Wednesday, Oct. 10, 2018. The hurricane center says Michael will be the first Category 4 hurricane to make landfall on the Florida Panhandle. (AP Photo/Gerald Herbert)

Thousands of evacuees sought shelter in Tallahassee, which is about 25 miles from the coast but is covered by live oak and pine trees that can fall and cause power outages even in smaller storms.

As winds started to topple trees in Tallahassee, one of them landed on Joe Marino's chimney.

"It was like an earthquake. The bookshelf shook and a frame fell down," he said. "It was weird. We went outside and you could smell the pine, and there it was, laying on the chimney."

Marino, who lives with his girlfriend and her grandmother, said water started dripping through the chimney, and they feared the wind would send the tree crashing through the roof. They planned to stay on the first floor.

"Upstairs is a no-go zone," he said.



Jayden Morgan carries his dog through a flooded street in St. Marks, Fla., on Wednesday, Oct. 10, 2018, as his family evacuates at the last minute before Hurricane Michael hits the state. (AP Photo/Brendan Farrington)

Only a skeleton staff remained at Tyndall Air Force Base, situated on a peninsula just south of Panama City. Hundreds of military families were moved out, and the base's aircraft, which include F-22 Raptors, were flown to safety hundreds of miles away.

In St. Marks, John Hargan and his family gathered up their pets and moved to a raised building constructed to withstand a Category 5 after water from the St. Marks River began surrounding their home.

Hargan's 11-year-old son, Jayden, carried one of the family's dogs in a laundry basket in one arm and held a skateboard in the other as he waded through calf-high water.

Hargan, a bartender at a riverfront restaurant, feared he would lose his home and his job to the storm.

"We basically just walked away from everything and said goodbye to it," he said, tears welling up. "I'm freakin' scared I'm going to lose everything I own, man."



Cornell Silveira, of Keaton Beach, Fla., leaves with some of his belongings as he evacuates his home as Hurricane Michael approaches the area Wednesday, Oct.

10, 2018. Hurricane Michael continues to churn in the Gulf of Mexico heading for the Florida panhandle. (AP Photo/Chris O'Meara)



The St. Marks River overflows into the city of St. Marks, Fla., ahead of Hurricane Michael, Wednesday, Oct. 10, 2018. The hurricane center says Michael will be the first Category 4 hurricane to make landfall on the Florida Panhandle. (AP Photo/Brendan Farrington)



This Tuesday, Oct. 9, 2018 satellite image provided by NOAA shows Hurricane Michael, center, in the Gulf of Mexico. (NOAA via AP)



The St. Marks River overflows into the city of St. Marks, Fla., ahead of Hurricane Michael, Wednesday, Oct. 10, 2018. The hurricane center says Michael will be the first Category 4 hurricane to make landfall on the Florida Panhandle. (AP Photo/Brendan Farrington)



Krystal Day, of Homosassa, Fla., leads a sandbag assembly line at the Old Port Cove restaurant Tuesday, Oct. 9, 2018, in Ozello, Fla. Employees were hoping to protect the restaurant as Hurricane Michael continues to churn in the Gulf of Mexico heading for the Florida panhandle. (AP Photo/Chris O'Meara)

© 2018 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: 'Catching some hell': Hurricane Michael slams into Florida (2018, October 10)

retrieved 18 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2018-10-hell-hurricane-michael-slams-florida.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.