

In Florida, residents grapple with Hurricane Idalia's toll

August 31 2023, by Gerard MARTINEZ



Many residents in Florida agree that as bad as Idalia was, things could have been worse.

The hot Florida sunshine is broken by a gentle breeze, carrying with it salty sea air.

But the mood is anything but idyllic as the town of Keaton Beach assesses the damage from Hurricane Idalia, which left overturned trees and destroyed homes in its wake after making landfall nearby Wednesday morning.

"I think we fared very well compared to our neighbor friends who are missing part of their roof," says Laurie Brenner, returning home after evacuating ahead of the storm.

"We have siding damage, but so far I'm glad to see the house is still standing," the 57-year-old hairdresser adds.

Consisting of little more than two narrow streets and a canal, Keaton Beach, in the northwest of the state, is near ground zero of where Idalia landed after traversing the Gulf of Mexico.

As Idalia, which weakened to a [tropical storm](#) later Wednesday, continues to dump rain and cause flooding across the southeastern United States, residents who left are trickling back and the state of Florida is only just starting to put together the total cost of the wreckage.

In Keaton Beach, that destruction included an office with a single wall still standing, or a home missing its entire second story, the interior exposed like a dollhouse. Overturned mattresses suggest it once could have been a three-bedroom.



A destroyed house is seen in Keaton Beach, Florida, in the wake of Hurricane Idalia.

Elsewhere, at least three people were killed in Idalia-related incidents, according to news reports. Hundreds of thousands of customers lost power.

—'Like a beast'—

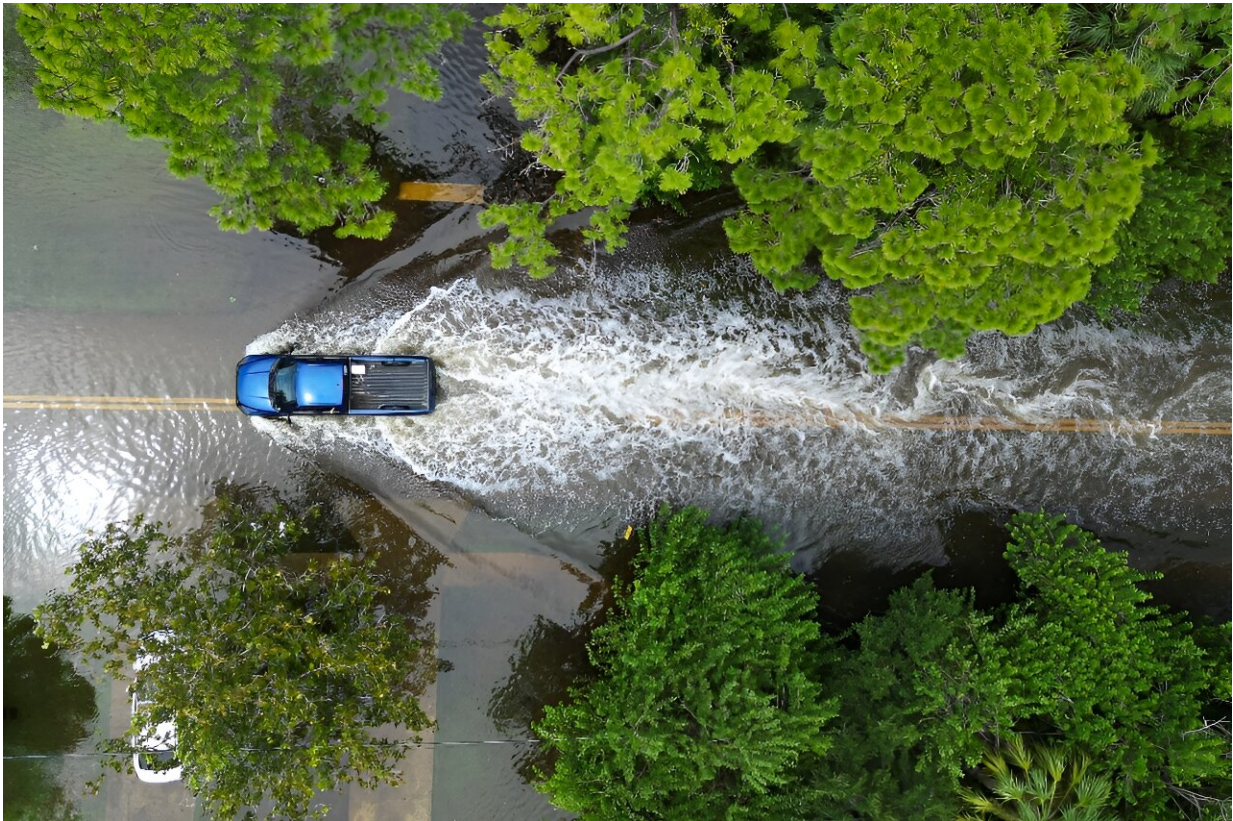
Some 20 miles (35 kilometers) north, in Perry, Idalia's winds took down trees and power lines, and damaged the facades of houses and stores.

Residents were out and about Wednesday removing fallen branches from their yards as emergency services prepared to clear the streets.

Still, many were relieved that the damage wasn't worse.

"I was sleeping beside a bedroom window and it was just so loud. It was like a beast," says James Strawter, who spent the night in his parents' Perry home.

"I feel relieved now that everything is over and that people can try to slowly get back to their normal life," he adds, his own home having been spared.



A truck drives along a flooded street in New Port Richey, Florida.

In Steinhatchee, about 40 miles (60 kilometers) to the southeast, Idalia left numerous streets flooded—hardly a surprise in the town of 1,000, which straddles the mouth of an eponymous river emptying into the Gulf.

But the town has sprung back to life: Neighbors rode through the streets in a golf cart, while others stopped to take a picture of a mobile home overturned by the howling winds.

Here, as is the case across Florida's Big Bend region, the long road to recovery has already started, as clean-ups and power line repairs take off.

Back at Keaton Beach, Brenner takes it all in, beaten down but not defeated.

"This is just depressing," she says. "But we are still here and we will get through it."

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Citation: In Florida, residents grapple with Hurricane Idalia's toll (2023, August 31) retrieved 12 September 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2023-08-florida-residents-grapple-hurricane-idalia.html>

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