



Hurricane Season ...

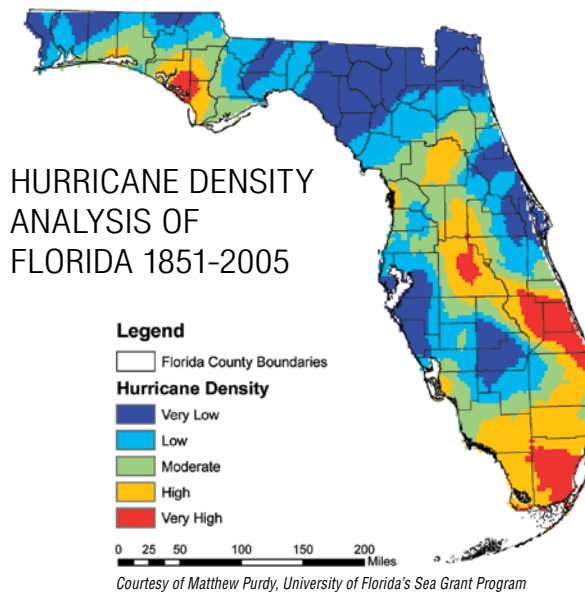
Again

The good news is that the spring 2006 drought — one of the driest periods since the spring of 2001 — will come to an end. The bad news is that the hurricane season has started. The Climate Prediction Center indicated Florida will have an increased probability of higher-than-normal temperatures and rainfall from July through October. This year, much of that rainfall could come from hurricanes.

The National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and others have predicted that 2006 may not match the record season of 2005, but it will be a busy one. Dr. William Gray and his associates at Colorado State University have predicted there will be 17 named storms, nine hurricanes, and five intense hurricanes (Category 3 or above). He indicated that there is an 82% probability of at least one major hurricane (category 3, 4, or 5 with winds of 111 mph or higher) making landfall somewhere on the U.S. coastline. The chance of a major hurricane hitting the East Coast and the Peninsula is 69%, and the chance of one hitting the Gulf Coast from the Florida panhandle west to Brownsville, TX, is 38%. These probabilities are all higher than those of the previous century (in the case of an East Coast landfall, the probability is twice as high).

“Above Normal” Has Been Normal

NOAA indicated that, with the exception of two El Niño years, “all of



the Atlantic hurricane seasons since 1995 have been above normal.” This differs from the 1971–1994 period when hurricane activity was generally below average. NOAA stated that “the main uncertainty in this outlook is not whether the season will be above normal, but how much above normal it will be. The 2006 season could become the fourth hyperactive season in a row.”

Matthew Purdy of the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) Sea Grant Program prepared a map showing a Hurricane Density Analysis of Florida from 1851–2005 (see map inset).

During that period, numerous hurricanes have hit Florida, and his map shows where the greatest activity has been. The map shows that coastal counties such as Dade, Martin, St. Lucie, and Bay have had very high densities of hurricane strikes. Other coastal counties such as Monroe, Broward, Palm Beach, Indian River, and Gulf also have had a high density of strikes.

What is surprising is that several inland counties have experienced high hurricane activity. Both Okeechobee and Polk counties have had very high hurricane densities, and parts of Lake, Orange, Osceola, Marion, and Calhoun counties have had high activity.

Historical Perspective

This map shows where most Florida hurricanes have occurred historically. It shows all hurricanes and does not distinguish among the different strengths of hurricanes.

While relatively few Category 5 hurricanes have hit Florida (the most recent and memorable Category 5 was Hurricane Andrew), a larger number of category 1–3 hurricanes have hit the state.

Interestingly, several counties on the central west coast of Florida (e.g. Sarasota, Manatee, Hillsborough, and Pinellas) have had low or very low hurricane activity.

Will these counties get hit by the next big hurricane? No one really knows. All we do know is where hurricanes have gone in the past and that we now face another active hurricane season. All we can do is prepare. **FLG**