

Hurricane Gordon weakens but spurs Florida flooding

by Mike Clary
September 17, 2000
Los Angeles Times

MIAMI - Hurricane Gordon downsized into a tropical storm as it made landfall Sunday evening in north Florida, but not before lashing much of the state with heavy rains and kicking up a storm surge that flooded parts of the state's west coast. Residents and tourists fled inland by the thousands as Gordon churned the Gulf of Mexico on a path that took the system ashore over Cedar Key, a tiny resort island about 80 miles north of Tampa.

Sustained winds had dropped below 74 mph, the minimum threshold of a hurricane, when the center of the ragged storm blew ashore about 9 p.m. EDT.

The system spun off at least one tornado as it passed by the length of the peninsula and generated a storm

surge predicted to reach 9 feet in some low-lying areas.

"You just know it's going to be a mess," said Richard Tindall, manager of the 10-room Gulfside Motel on Cedar Key. "We'll have about 5 feet of water in every room. I'll lose all my interiors, all the furniture."

Tindall said he considered hauling the furniture out of the rooms, but suddenly, "It was raining too heavy. I'm just going to lock it up and leave," he said.

Although weakened, Gordon is expected to live on Monday as a tropical storm as it spreads rainfall into Georgia and the Carolinas before pushing northeast into the Atlantic Ocean. A tropical storm watch is posted along the East Coast northward to Cape Hatteras, N.C.

Gordon is the first storm of the tropical season to strike the United States, and Florida Gov. Jeb Bush ordered emergency teams on alert.

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-Richard Tindall, manager of the 10-room Gulfside Motel on Cedar Key.

"This storm is going to impact the entire state," he told reporters in Tallahassee.

While forecasters emphasized the dangers of tornadoes and flooding, south Florida water managers welcomed the rain. Low reserves in Lake Okeechobee, the main fresh water reservoir for metropolitan areas from Miami to West Palm Beach, have spurred talk of rationing during the dry season, which begins in December.

Seaside residents of two west coast Florida counties were told to leave their homes. Voluntary evacuations were advised in several other areas around Tampa Bay, and several emergency shelters were opened.

On the other side of the state, at Cape Canaveral, officials at the Kennedy Space Center made plans to move the shuttle Discovery from the launch pad if the storm veers in that direction. The shuttle is poised for an Oct. 5 mission to the international space station.

Gordon, born out of a broad area

of low pressure south of Cuba, never blossomed into a powerhouse. Strong southwest winds above 10,000 feet sheared off the tops of thunderstorms and prevented Gordon from developing a well-defined center, said Christopher Burr, a forecaster at Miami's National Hurricane Center.

"And the latest forecast shows that it is not going to regenerate into a hurricane" when it moves off the coast of South Carolina Monday, Burr said.

But even without killer winds, Gordon caused anxiety and dislocation along more than 200 miles of Florida coastline. A 54 mph wind gust was reported in Tampa. Steady winds of 40 mph or more raged on Cedar Key for hours.

As storm bands well east of Gordon's center swept through south Florida early Sunday, a tornado was spotted west of Fort Lauderdale.

In Cross City, a town of 2,000 in the sparsely populated Big Bend area

of north Florida, south of Tallahassee, all 25 rooms at the Carriage Inn were filled early Sunday. Owner Mike Zombar said residents of mobile homes and those who live along the marshy coast were checking in for safety.

"It's been so busy here I haven't had time to prepare myself," Zombar said. "I'm hopeful this is not going to be too bad."

The bridge to Cedar Key and the roads to the coastal hamlet of Yankeetown were closed at mid-afternoon. Most residents moved inland. "We've got a few trees down; we lost power for a while, but water is what we're worried about," said Levy County Sheriff Maj. Bob McCallum.

Rains associated with Gordon caused floods and landslides that killed 19 people in Guatemala last week. More than 50 people were reported injured.

Campaign 2000 UPDATE UPDATE UPDATE

Bush targets middle class with focus on issues

by Terry M. Neal and Dan Balz
The Washington Post

AUSTIN, Texas - Texas Gov. George W. Bush sets off Monday on a week-long campaign swing determined to outline cradle-to-grave differences with Vice President Al Gore on the issues, determined to woo middle-class voters. With his fellow Republicans urging him to "get on message," Bush hopes to regain some of the ground he has lost over the past month by using an issue a day to draw ever-sharper contrasts with Gore.

"This is a very focused, more aggressive effort to let voters know where Governor Bush stands on the major issues of the day," campaign spokesman Ari Fleischer told reporters during a conference call.

To highlight the differences with Gore, Bush's campaign Sunday released what it called a "Blueprint for the Middle Class," a 16-page summary of the Republican nominee's policy proposals for education, Social Security, health care, taxes and other areas.

Fleischer said Bush's focus this week will be on the middle class, which Gore has targeted. Bush's goal will be to win back the support of women and stem more erosion among male voters who have responded to Gore's populist appeals.

Gore has a wide lead among women in current polling, and according to the most recent Gallup Poll for CNN and USA Today, has narrowed the gap with Bush among men. Two weeks ago, Bush led Gore among men by 58 to 38 percent, but in the latest daily snapshot of the race, Bush's lead among men was 47 to 44 percent.

Fleischer said the campaign believes "women are a group that is going to come back to Governor Bush the more they hear his plans," but he said the events this week will be aimed as much at men as women.

Gore advisers dismissed the Bush middle-class blueprint. "It says a lot about the Bush campaign," Gore spokesman Chris Lehane said. "It's 12 pages of pictures and no substance, reflective of a campaign that's all imagery and no ideas."

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-Chris Lehane, Gore spokesman

Fellow Republicans expressed confidence that Bush has plenty of time to put his campaign on track and defeat Gore. But they agreed Bush must do a better job of competing with Gore on the issues voters care about most.

Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, R-Miss., speaking on CBS's "Face the Nation," said, "I think Governor George W. Bush has to get out there and really get on message."

Bush begins the tour Monday in Little Rock, Ark., where he will speak at a hospital about his proposal to double the child tax credit from \$500 to \$1,000. He will carry the same message to Kansas City, Mo., and also visit the Negro Baseball Hall of Fame.

Tuesday, Bush will appear on the "Oprah Winfrey Show" in Chicago before discussing how to stem school violence at an elementary school. Wednesday, he will promote his tax plan in Pittsburgh, focusing on the marriage penalty.

Thursday he will travel to Cleveland and Nashville, Tenn., to tout his plan to allow workers to put a portion of their Social Security contributions in private investment accounts. Bush will also tape the Regis Philbin show in New York. Friday in Florida, Bush will offer a new proposal designed to help the elderly with health care, Fleischer said.



Republican presidential candidate Texas Gov. George W. Bush speaks to students and teachers in the school library Thursday, September 14, 2000 in Santa Ana, California.

KRT PHOTO BY MICHAEL KITADA



Al Gore campaigns at Howard University in Washington, D.C. Friday. Speaking to a crowd of about 1,600 students, teachers and lawmakers, Gore said he wants to hire 100,000 new public school teachers, give big bonuses to people who teach in underserved areas and offer paid leave to teachers for professional development.

KRT PHOTO BY HARRY HAMBURG



Democratic Vice Presidential Candidate Sen. Joe Lieberman (D-CT) hugs Senator John McCain (R-AZ) following his statement before the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation on the marketing of violence to children. Lieberman, among others including Lynne Cheney, vice presidential aspirant Dick Cheney's wife, provided testimony on violence in teen entertainment.

KRT PHOTO BY CHUCK KENNEDY

Growling for attention...



"It's a little uncomfortable," said Amie Richards, who spent time in a "cage" for People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, last week, trying to persuade Seattle residents not to attend the Ringling Bros. circus.

KRT PHOTO BY ALAN BERNER

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