

ENVIRONMENT

Tropical Storm Isaias went easy on Brevard County beaches

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Tropical Storm Isaias proved a good dry run for Brevard County's newly rebuilt coastline, stealing hardly any sand, barely denting the beach, and mostly just lapping up more of that stringy brown seaweed.

"We had no damage at all," said a relieved Warren Zorzi, who lives near Driftwood Plaza in Melbourne Beach.

"The sea turtle stakes are still up," Zorzi said of the wood stakes used to delineate endangered turtle nests. "It (the ocean) didn't even get to them."



McGarry said it appears unlikely, but still too early to tell whether the county will need to make any claims to the Federal Emergency Management Agency for beach erosion caused by the storm.

Isaias' core — broken up by shearing winds — stayed far off Brevard's coast, passing 65 miles off of Cape Canaveral by 2 a.m. Monday. The storm stirred up barely any storm surge, and didn't linger long enough to strip much sand from beaches. Sustained winds only reached about 32 mph at Orlando Melbourne International Airport, which recorded its highest sustained wind at 3:04 p.m. Sunday, according to the National Weather Service.

Brevard's beaches were buffered by renourishment projects that repaired erosion caused when Hurricane Matthew passed far offshore in 2016 and then Hurricane Irma in 2017 and after Hurricane Dorian did the same last year.

"The engineered dune constructed this past winter remains in place," McGarry said of the south beaches area. "The sand did its job and took the punch, but most erosion is limited to the eastern beach berm. This eastern berm is where natural recovery can occur most quickly."

"Scarps," or small cliffs, often form on the beaches during storms and sand gets stripped to offshore shoals. But, as in past storms, much of that sand washes back in with the tides in the weeks after the storm, officials say. That happened in Hurricane Dorian last year.

Some small cliffs already had been on the beach before Tropical Storm Isaias.



There were some signs of exposed turtle nests scattered sporadically along the barrier island, turtle advocates said, but nothing that would put a significant dent in an already robust sea turtle nesting season.

Brevard's \$61.6 million in beach renourishment projects over the past year had raised concerns from some activists who worried whether sea turtles would nest where the new sand seemed too loose and fine-grained, like in the Melbourne Beach area, or where it's more densely packed, like on Satellite Beach and Indian Harbour Beach.

"I think there was some loss of a few nests, but that happens in any storm," said Roger Pszonowsky, the marine turtle stranding permit holder for the nonprofit Sea Turtle Preservation Society.

Overall, STPS took in some 60 to 90 turtles related to the storm or people bringing them in before the storm, he said.

Beaches that had undergone renourishment projects in recent years tend to fare best in storms, county officials said. Older properties built closer to or on top of the dune were of most concern.

Zorzi's just glad Isaias left his beach alone.

"It was a non-event," he said.

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