

Florida's Emergency Evacuation Routes: Are We Prepared for the Future?

Mark R. Trammell

The unique peninsular shape of the State of Florida projects it into the warm waters of the Caribbean Basin and directly into the path of many Tropical Storms and Hurricanes, which are a way of life for Floridians from June to November every year. Over 70% of the population of the 4th most populated state in the country live in one of the coastal counties that face either the Atlantic Ocean or the Gulf of Mexico. When a tropical storm or Hurricane approaches Florida, it becomes necessary to move citizens and visitors away from regions of the densely populated coastal areas to areas inland, possibly even out of the state. Over the last two years several state agencies, in cooperation with local emergency management officials, have developed a Regional Emergency Evacuation Plan which was tested during the Great East Coast Fires of 1998 and during Hurricane Georges. The plan worked. These two incidents confirmed the effectiveness of the current plan, but leaves questions about the Future. Will these same routes support an evacuation in 2005 or 2010? This project compares population projections to projections for highway construction and vehicle registrations in the areas of largest growth in Florida. Will we be prepared for the future?