

Charley among nation's costliest

Chris Bonanno, FLORIDA TODAY 11:40 p.m. EDT August 13, 2014



(Photo: AP FILE)

Wednesday marked the 10th anniversary of one of the costliest hurricanes to ever strike the United States.

Hurricane Charley made landfall near Cayo Costa in southwest Florida on Aug. 13, 2004 as a Category 4 Hurricane with winds of 150 miles an hour. It remains the strongest storm to make landfall in the state of Florida since 1992.

Charley made three landfalls in the U.S.: In the Dry Tortugas, Cayo Costa and near Myrtle Beach, S.C. causing 15.1 billion dollars in damage, making it the eighth costliest hurricane to ever strike the country. The second of those landfalls devastated parts of Charlotte County, most notably Punta Gorda which sustained

the worst of the damage caused by the system.

But what made Charley worse was the impacts weren't limited to the area in and around Charlotte Harbor where the storm made landfall.

"The thing about Charley was the forward speed of motion was upwards of 20 miles coupled with the fact it had a very small radius of winds but concentrated in that area around the eyewall was very significant damage right up all the way from Punta Gorda up through Orlando and up through near Daytona Beach," said Tony Cristaldi, senior forecaster with the National Weather Service in Melbourne.

Brevard emerged relatively unscathed with Melbourne receiving a peak wind gust of just under 45 miles an hour along with 1.44 inches of rain from the fast-moving system despite the center of circulation passing within 40-50 miles of parts of the county.

The storm also serves as both a lesson to forecasters, who anticipated the storm making landfall in the Tampa Bay area shortly prior to landfall and it also serves as a reminder of the "disaster that could have been" had the storm went up into Tampa Bay and affected the heavily-populated and extremely low-lying area.

"The subtle turn to the right that brought it in to the Florida coast further south than had been anticipated. It was forecast to kind of turn northward and then a gradual, very slow bend but it kind of made that bend a little more sharply," Cristaldi said.

Charley and Tropical Storm Bonnie, which made landfall on Aug. 12 became just the second combination of storms to make landfall within 24 hours of one another in the state of Florida. Beginning with Bonnie, five tropical cyclones impacted Florida in a month and a half including Bonnie, Charley, Category 2 Hurricane Frances, Category 3 Hurricane Ivan and Category 3 Hurricane Jeanne.

"It's all about the position of the Bermuda high and it was obviously in a position to where it directed all these storms right into the state," Cristaldi said of the level of activity that impacted the area in 2004.

But following 2005, when Florida was struck by Hurricanes Katrina and Wilma, it hasn't been struck by a hurricane since, going back an incredible 3,216 days.

"We've had years where several systems form since then but I just think it's fortuitous that none of them, you know, impacted the hurricane as it made landfall in Florida or a major hurricane that made landfall on the coast of the United States," Cristaldi said.

"For lack of a better word it's just dumb luck. It will happen. It's just a matter of time."

Some of the same conditions that made the 2013 Atlantic Hurricane Season so quiet are conspiring to help make it possible once again.

"We're noticing these tropical waves that are starting to move off of Africa are encountering fairly hostile conditions. Dry air, maybe the shear isn't quite as prohibitive as it has been but the conditions are still unfavorable," Cristaldi said.

"Seasonal forecasts are certainly not anticipating a big uptick in activity."

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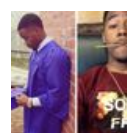


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