

Florida's Big Bend –A Region for Mild Hurricanes

By
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St. George Island is located in Florida's Big Bend region. **The Big Bend area, based on 150+ years of National Weather Service data, is in a region where no major hurricanes have made landfall.** It is no secret that over the years we have had damage from hurricanes, but we have never had major damage such as other regions of Florida have experienced throughout recorded history. The bottom line is if you want beach property but you are worried about hurricanes, then St. George Island is the place for you.

Florida's hurricane activity in the 1994 & 1995 caused great destruction, personal tragedy, and monetary loss. In addition to that, many people have decided that Florida's coast is a risky place to own property. In this article I will outline some facts that may give the reader a new perspective on hurricanes and their potential for destruction in various regions of Florida's coastline.

There is no doubt hurricanes can be extremely damaging. This leads one who wants to have that place on the coast to wonder if it is practical to invest their money there. I want to put a different perspective on the prospect of investing on Florida's coast, and especially on St. George Island, based on analyzing regions of potential hurricane landfall. It should lead one to select locations shown to have minimum potential for major hurricane landfall for their place in **Paradise.**

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has as one of its divisions, the National Hurricane Center in Miami, where the hurricane predictions originate almost hourly on the Weather Channel during hurricane season. NOAA and its predecessor organizations have been collecting hurricane data and statistics for over 150 years. I have examined hurricane landfall data in an article on "The Deadliest, Costliest, and Most Intense United States Tropical Cyclones From 1851 to 2006". You can view that article at http://www.nhc.noaa.gov/Deadliest_Costliest.shtml. The best way to view hurricane impact is to segment the United States coastline from the Texas-Mexico border all the way around the southern tip of Florida and on up to Maine. Segment 1 extends from Corpus Christi, Texas to a point just east of Panama City, Florida. This is seen in the chart below that shows major hurricanes from 1899 to 1996. In that segment of the coastline, there have been 50 major hurricanes of Category 3 or stronger (wind speed exceeding 110 mph at landfall), by also accounting for those from 1850 to 1899.

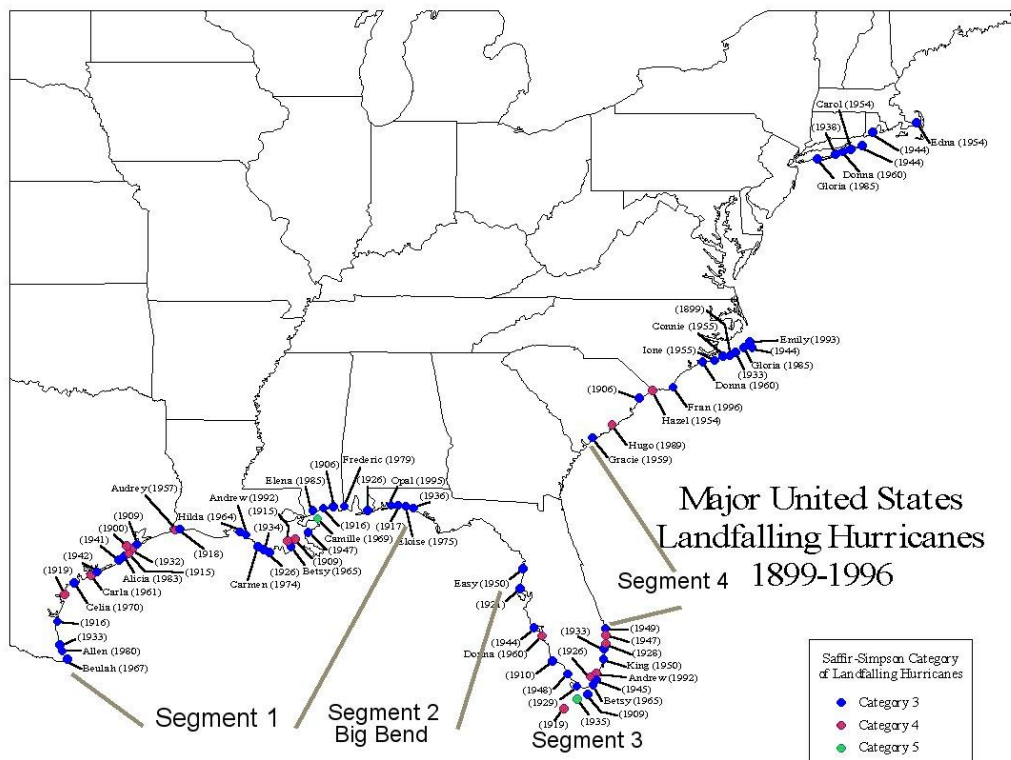
Segment 2 extends from Panama City, Florida around the "Big Bend" down to Crystal River (about 100 miles north of Tampa). This segment seems to be in a protected area, since **there have been no major hurricanes making landfall in this coastal segment since 1850, according to NOAA.**

Segment 3 extends from Crystal River around the tip of Florida and up to Palm Beach. In this segment of the coast there have been close to 25 major hurricanes making landfall since 1850. This includes Andrew, which hit Homestead in 1992, and Wilma which crossed South Florida last year.

Segment 4 extends from Palm Beach up to Hilton Head, SC. There were 3 Category 3 or greater hurricanes before 1900, but none in Segment 4 since then.

Thus, these records show there are 2 regions in Florida where no Category 3 or greater hurricanes have made landfall—Florida's Big Bend and Florida's northeast Coast from Palm Beach to Jacksonville.

There are also many weaker Category 1 and 2 storms that made landfall along Florida's Gulf Coast from time to time. Once again the distribution of hurricane landfall locations is similar to that for major hurricanes, with clustering from Ft. Walton Beach westward to Corpus Cristi and again in South Florida.



To illustrate hurricane landfall, there is a chart prepared by NOAA and included below that includes all the hurricanes hitting the Gulf and Atlantic coasts from 1950 to 2004. Between Panama City Beach and Cape San Blas there have been 5 hurricanes (4 category 1 and 1 category 2) which made landfall since 1950. Looking further east we can see in the Big Bend area only one hurricane making landfall between 1950 and 2004. I found records on Hurricane Alma which hit around St. James Island in 1966. They show it hit the coast with around 90 mph wind speed, accompanied by a tidal surge of 5 or more feet. Of course this would be damaging to unanchored or poorly constructed buildings and houses built on the ground adjacent to the water, but certainly not to buildings built to Florida's hurricane standards of construction enacted since Hurricane Andrew and updated in 2002.

The hurricanes which affected the Big Bend area in 2005 were Dennis and Katrina. Let's dispel the effects of Katrina first. There was no damage here from Katrina. Wind speeds were

on the order of 50 mph. There was a high tide about 5 feet above normal. We did have some aftereffects related to a Red Tide, but no wind damage.

Finally the effects of Hurricane Dennis were unusual and unpredictable. It made landfall near Pensacola, Florida approximately 150-200 miles west of the Big Bend Area and St. George Island on July 10 as a Category 3 storm. This area should have seen minor effects of the storm. However, the Big Bend did experience an unusual effect in that the counterclockwise winds from this extremely large diameter hurricane created a very high tidal surge which hit this area with tides exceeding 10 feet. Damage was to the coastal sand dunes and poorly constructed houses that were too close to the water. Once again winds were not up to hurricane strength.

The data shown and discussed above establishes that the Big Bend area, including St. George Island, is in a region along Florida's Gulf Coast that is generally protected from major hurricanes and over 150 years of NOAA Weather Service data supports this conclusion.

St. George Island did suffer some beach and dune erosion from Hurricane Dennis, but nothing major and in the past 3 months the shoreline has accreted about 50 feet seaward. **The beaches look great!** It is a terrific time to buy, and you can find some great bargains, as we are in a buyer's market at the time of this posting. If you have any questions about this data or my conclusions, or if you wish to find out more about available property here, you may contact me at harryp@AnchorFL.com, or call me at 850 323 0969.

