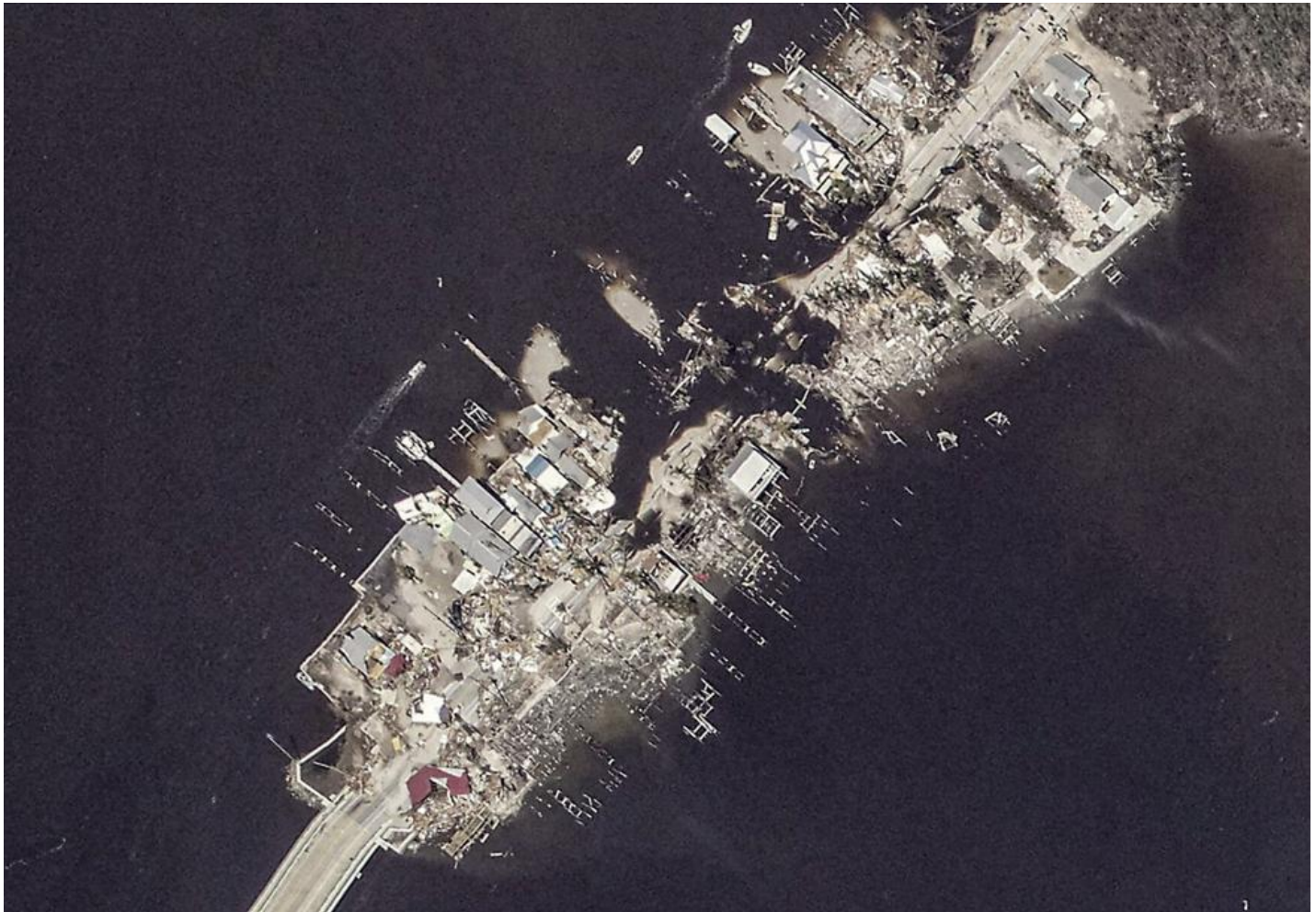


https://www.yoursun.com/coastal/boatingandfishing/barrier-island-blues/article_4df3f7a0-48c6-11ed-a162-2f2f92518894.html

Barrier island blues

Woody Woodworth — WOODY'S WORLD

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This satellite image taken after Hurricane Ian shows Matlacha east of the bridge. Dozens of businesses and homes that were in this area have simply disappeared. To see more post-Ian satellite images, go to <https://bit.ly/3YPFQrz>.

NOAA photo

Today was a bittersweet day for my wife and me. It was one of the first days humans who weren't driving a cherry picker or wearing an FPL uniform could venture back onto Palm Island. We've owned a modest condo there for years and always kne

potential for peril in living on a barrier island. But when we bought it, it sure seemed like a good idea.

Along our drive was the comical sight of drunken stop signs, laying at incredibly imaginative angles. “One Way” signs went multiple ways. Signs that once demanded our heed now lay in a stupor as if they just couldn’t care anymore. You have to find humor in the strangest things these days.

Speaking of signs, election signs didn’t stand a chance against hurricane-force winds. If you were driving around Charlotte County today, looking for inspiration as to who you might support for the elective office of your choice ... well, there weren’t many “vote for me” signs still up. Political hot air didn’t stand a chance against Ian’s breath. Let’s hope what stays is leadership and money for those affected in our area.

If a plant can act in a heroic manner, then that is exactly how the mangroves behind our condo performed. There had been talk this year of “windowing” them to provide a more scenic view. Thankfully, that idea was scuttled, and these unloved but, yes, heroic trees mitigated untold damage from the storm.

The water around Rum Bay is almost as dark as ink. Too many fallen leaves and too much runoff have created what the Doobie Brothers immortalized in the song “Black Water.” It’s way too early to determine what will happen to our fishery and seagrass meadows.

Dr. David Tomasko, executive director of the Sarasota Bay Estuary Program, says that we shouldn’t focus on the color of the estuarial water as much as what’s in it. Tannins from leaves and decomposing plants do not, by themselves, make the water unsafe for wildlife. Bacterial levels, which do matter, are being analyzed now.

Also, a stained layer of fresh water can flow over the top of the more dense salt water. This so-called freshwater lens greatly limits the amount of sunlight that transmits downward in the water column, preventing photosynthesis and thus

limiting oxygen. This hypoxia is especially dangerous to smaller or less mobile animals that cannot simply swim to open water.

Looking at the water made me think of one memorable snook I caught a couple months ago. She was a big beauty and I hope she is OK. As I pondered, an osprey swung overhead with a fresh catch in its talons – a good sign for sure. A mama bobcat with a single kitten wandered just yards away, completely unconcerned with me. In destruction, renewal.

As I wandered around the property, a two young workers stopped by. They were clearing roads, spending their days wielding chainsaws and chugging bottles of water. As I thanked them, they said, “You bet, sir. We’ll have this looking good for you real soon.” I know that wasn’t likely, but I sure appreciated their enthusiasm.

And then I thought of some places I visited this summer. Everyone has a favorite joint for grouper sandwiches. Mine is The Snook Inn on Marco Island, which was obliterated. How many great family-owned restaurants were affected by this storm is impossible to know.

I wonder about Tarpon Lodge on the west side of Pine Island, a lovely little inn we have visited on anniversaries. Just months ago, we boated over to Cabbage Key, where I defied state law and ordered the Rueben sandwich instead of the famed “Cheeseburger in Paradise.” I had even stepped foot on Useppa Island this summer, resolving to buy a place there if I ever hit that elusive Powerball. No post-hurricane photos can erase my memories of all these cool places.

Of course there are neighbors, friends from our island church, and others I ache to see made whole. The residents of Punta Gorda. The good people who work at local marinas. Fishing guides. There are so many people hurting right now that I feel embarrassed to complain about anything to anyone.

Our silly little metal bird on a stick survived. My wife keeps it in the garden, where it's supposed to spin gently in the breeze. How it remained upright when other things were hurtled hundreds of feet is beyond me. It means more to us now, simply because we bought it from a shop in Boca Grande. Florida Strong!