

WORLD

Florida's waterways are grossly contaminated in the wake of Ian

ENTERTAINMENT LIFE

SPORTS

By [Karen Graham](#) Published October 5, 2022



Hurricane Ian left parts of Fort Myers Beach, Florida utterly leveled - Copyright AFP Giorgio VIERA

Hurricane Ian washed organic matter and pollutants into waterways, signaling a health risk to humans and serious environmental impacts to come.

President Joe Biden is visiting Florida today to view damage from Hurricane Ian. Besides getting a first-hand look at the damaged or destroyed homes and other infrastructure, Biden will also see and smell the polluted waterways.

One part of the infrastructure that's had problems is the wastewater system. In parts of the state, sewers overflowed, causing raw sewage to seep into waterways – and Florida's natural features aren't helping.

Toppled port-a-potties spilled into floodwaters. Gasoline and motor oil leaked out from partially submerged cars and trucks. Downed trees have started decomposing on waterlogged roads.

Dave Tomasko, director of the Sarasota Bay Estuary Program, described several scenes such as these as he visited the city of North Port and other locations around Sarasota County, according to the Washington Post.

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Tomasko's job is to collect data to determine if the water is safe for the general public to enter. For now, he concluded, people should stay away. "What's in the water is pretty gross. Our bays look like root beer right now," Tomasko said. "It smells terrible."



NASA's Aqua satellite captured this image of the Florida peninsula before Ian made landfall (Sept. 22) (Kasha Patel/NASA EOSDIS LANCE/GIBS/Worldview)



Four days after landfall (Oct. 2). Aqua captured this image. The discoloration indicates a change in water

Most sewage systems use gravity, so the wastewater flows downhill to where it can be treated – except in low-lying places like Florida. Craig Fugate, a former FEMA administrator who lives in Gainesville, Florida used decidedly more colorful language in describing the quality of the water...

“Because Florida is so flat, we have to pump s–t,” Fugatre said, reports [Market Place](#). And Fugate is literally correct. Rather than relying on gravity, Florida’s wastewater systems have to use electric pumps to move sewage along.

“And if those pumps are out, and they don’t have power, then the sewage backs up,” he said.

On a wider scale, Ian’s winds and excessive rain washed leaves, organic matter, and contaminants into streams and the bays, signaling the beginning of serious environmental impacts that may emerge.

Scientists say the degraded water quality could damage aquatic ecosystems for weeks, months, or longer and pose a danger to human health in the short term.

The Environmental Integrity Project (EIP), a nonpartisan nonprofit formed by former

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) attorneys, [published a report](#) in March of 2022 that found alarming results of water quality tests in all 50 states.

The report defines “impaired” as waters that are too polluted to meet standards for swimming and recreation, aquatic life, fish consumption, or drinking water sources. The report found about half of the river and stream miles and lake acres across the U.S. are too polluted for swimming, fishing, or drinking, according to [The Hill](#).

Florida ranks first in the U.S. for total acres of lakes classified as impaired for swimming and aquatic life and second for total lake acres listed as impaired for any use, and this was before Hurricane Ian made landfall.

In this article: Florida waterways, grossly polluted, Hurricane Ian impact, Ranks first for impaired lakes, waste water

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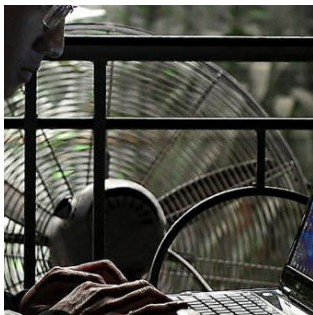
Karen Graham

Karen Graham is Digital Journal's Editor-at-Large for environmental news. Karen's view of what is happening in

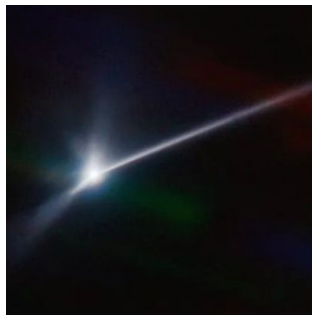


our world is colored by her love of history and how the past influences events taking place today. Her belief in man's part in the care of the planet and our environment has led her to focus on the need for action in dealing with climate change. It was said by Geoffrey C. Ward, "Journalism is merely history's first draft." Everyone who writes about what is happening today is indeed, writing a small part of our history.

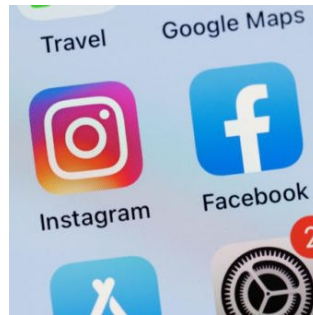
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