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State still working with boat owners to remove vessels in wake of Hurricane Ian



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Fort Myers News-Press

Published 5:06 a.m. ET Dec. 9, 2022

Grounded boats are still a huge headache for some owners and others as recreational vessels are still scattered across the region in the wake of Hurricane Ian.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission started a grant program, offered to take ownership of lost boats and is even holding a public meeting next week to take input on the issue.

It's no small undertaking in a county that has more than 50,000 registered vessels (third most in the state behind Miami-Dade and Pinellas), and many of those boats were tossed, flipped, impaled and pushed ashore by powerful Hurricane Ian on Sept. 28.

The Category 4 storm pushed boats as big as 65 feet more than a quarter-mile inland. Pontoon boats were left in trees. Center console boats were on the tops of houses.

Many neighborhoods in Lee and Collier counties were covered with boats of all shapes and sizes.

Some people have been living with multiple boats in their yards for several weeks.

Barbara Adams had four boats in her yard post Ian, and it ruined her waterfront view and damaged her landscaping.

"(I) just found the owners of the last two only a few weeks ago," said Adams, who lives in Cape Coral. "The owners were neighbors several blocks away on my canal; one from Canada, the other from Germany, (they) just got here."

Adams said she expects she will be left with the bill to redo her yard and landscaping.

"I'm left with yard damage, knocked over light posts and severed sprinkler lines from boat propellers, but I finally have my view back," she said. "Thankfully all owners once found were very concerned and anxious to get them moved, but all through their insurance companies. At least one has tried to get their insurance to help with lawn repairs but I think I'm on my own for those."

There are also questions about boats that may have been moored or anchored during the storm, and whether that type of boat securing system is appropriate for long-term use.

FWC is holding a public meeting at 6 p.m. on Tuesday, Dec. 13 to take input on moored and anchored boats and whether they add to the number of unclaimed vessels.

Some unclaimed vessels washed up on the landscape, and finding an owner to take responsibility for the boat can be almost impossible.

Hurricane Ian slammed into Fort Myers Beach one month ago. This is what the area looks like now

"The FWC takes the quality and safety of our waterways very seriously," said Bob Beaton, with FWC's waterways management division. "This change provides a means for vessels to be removed from the water before they become a danger to our public and our environment."

The area with the most moored boats (Fort Myers Beach) was also the area hit hardest by Hurricane Ian and the 15-feet of storm surge that came with the ferocious storm.

Collier County has nearly 25,000 registered vessels, and many of them were dislodged, damaged or destroyed during the storm surge.

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