



# Leon County

## Board of County Commissioners

301 South Monroe Street, Tallahassee, Florida  
(850) 606-5300 [www.leoncountyfl.gov](http://www.leoncountyfl.gov)

### YOUR TURN

## **Michael's Lessons to be Remembered**

*Vincent S. Long, Leon County Administrator*

Just four short months ago, Hurricane Michael made landfall as a high-end Category 4 hurricane – the strongest storm to strike the Florida Panhandle in recorded history. Michael devastated Florida's Forgotten Coast, roared through Georgia, claimed lives with floodwaters in Virginia, and even impacted areas in southwest Europe. While Leon County was spared Michael's catastrophic wind damage, flooding, and loss of life, you need only look to our still-recovering neighbors to know Michael cannot and should not be forgotten.

Although the County's major recovery efforts have concluded, our work continues to ensure we remember every lesson learned from Michael. After each disaster, we listen to the citizens we serve and analyze all aspects of our emergency operations through comprehensive after-action reviews. Following both Hermine and Irma, these reviews identified 205 findings and 145 specific recommendations. I am proud to report that every recommendation and enhancement was in place before Michael, preparing the County to coordinate our largest disaster response and recovery effort ever. And because of this focus on learning from disasters, in 2018, FEMA and the Federal Alliance for Safe Homes named Leon County the nation's first #HurricaneStrong community.

Building on this commitment to continuous improvement, I recently presented the Michael after-action report to the Board of County Commissioners, outlining another 83 findings and 68 recommendations to help us better prepare for future storms. Just a few improvements include evaluating how to increase special needs sheltering capacity for our most vulnerable, and ways to help our neighboring rural communities coordinate volunteers and donations.

The Michael after-action report extensively details Leon County's actions to prepare, respond, and recover from disaster, as well as our efforts to enhance our community's resilience. Michael required an unprecedented emergency response in the wake of 12 hours of sustained high winds that blocked more than a thousand County roads, damaged more than 1,200 homes, and left 95 percent of utility customers without power.

The report also outlines how more than 530 Leon County employees joined hundreds of personnel from 58 partner agencies to help shelter nearly 1,600 citizens, remove thousands of downed trees, and distribute nearly one million bottles of water, MREs, and bags of ice. To coordinate around-the-clock disaster recovery efforts, the County's Emergency Operations Center remained active for 194 consecutive hours. In the weeks following Michael, Leon County also collected more than one million cubic yards of debris, enough to stack a football field more than 60 stories tall--five times more debris than we collected after Hermine.

Michael tested our plans and resolve unlike any other hurricane, and our citizens were more prepared than ever before to weather the storm; so many families had disaster plans, listened to emergency messages on the radio, downloaded the County's mobile app, and helped neighbors in need. Leon County is also proud and thankful for the hard work of the City of Tallahassee, Leon County Sheriff's Office, Leon County Schools, American Red Cross, and all our public safety and nonprofit partners who again proved the strength and resilience of our community.

While our County will continue to face challenges surrounding disaster, we are committed to learning, improving, and leveraging our partnerships. We should all remember Michael and prepare for the 2019 hurricane season by reviewing our plans, gathering our supplies, and staying informed!

I urge all citizens to read the complete Hurricane Michael After-Action Report at [www.LeonCountyFL.gov/MichaelAAR](http://www.LeonCountyFL.gov/MichaelAAR) . As always, I welcome your feedback.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Vince Long became County Administrator on July 1, 2011, and has worked for Leon County since 1995. He can be reached at (850) 606-5300 or [LongV@LeonCountyFL.gov](mailto:LongV@LeonCountyFL.gov).

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