The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) proposes to fund an emergency temporary housing project, placing about 600 manufactured homes (trailer homes) on land zoned for commercial development near the intersection of I-75 and Airport Road in Punta Gorda, Charlotte County, Florida (Pers. Comm., August 26, 2004, Charlotte County). These homes will temporarily house people displaced by Hurricane Charley in August 2004.

This Environmental Assessment (EA) documents the proposed project's purpose and need (Section 1) and the investigation and evaluation of proposed project alternatives (Section 2), the existing human and natural environment (Section 3), and the proposed alternatives' expected environmental consequences (Section 4).

This EA has been prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, the President's Council on Environmental Quality regulations implementing NEPA (40 CFR 1500-1800), and FEMA's regulations implementing NEPA (44 CFR 10.9). Based on the evaluation described herein, FEMA has concluded that the proposed project would not have significant adverse environmental consequences.

1. Proposed Project Purpose and Need

Hurricane Charley, a category four hurricane with storm surges of 10 to 15 feet, moved across the Florida peninsula in August 2004. Landfall was near Punta Gorda, Charlotte County, it traveled northeastward, and exited into the Atlantic Ocean near Daytona Beach, Volusia County. An estimated 2.4 million persons evacuated. About 1.1 million customers lost electricity in 21 counties. About 47,000 homes were damaged or destroyed statewide, leaving displaced residents in need of housing. Total damages and losses are estimated to exceed $7 billion statewide.

The President signed a disaster declaration (FEMA-1539-DR-FL) on August 13, 2004, authorizing FEMA to provide federal assistance in designated areas of Florida.

FEMA proposes to administer federal disaster assistance funds per the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, 42 USC 5121-5206, as amended (Stafford Act). Stafford Act Section 408 authorizes FEMA's Individual Assistance Program to provide emergency temporary housing for disaster victims whose homes are uninhabitable. Accordingly, more than $46.7 million of temporary housing assistance has been approved to date. FEMA has identified the need to provide temporary housing for residents in Charlotte County.

2. Proposed Project Alternatives

NEPA requires investigation and evaluation of reasonable project alternatives as part of the project environmental review process. Two alternatives are addressed in this EA: not doing anything (No Action Alternative) and building temporary housing on land owned by Charlotte County (hereafter "County") on Airport Road (Proposed Action). Other locations within Charlotte County were identified and evaluated for development. Factors considered in choosing a site include: site topography, property owner willingness, location with respect to the floodplain, distance to occupants' homes, and past land use. It was determined that the Airport

Road Site was the only suitable site available under emergency temporary housing time constraints that offered the adequate access to the impacted community in consideration of other site selection factors.

2.1 Alternative 1 – No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, FEMA would not fund the proposed project. Most Hurricane victims would stay with their family and friends, or in schools, churches, motels, or other locations until they can find other housing. This would result in further economic and personal hardships for affected residents, disrupt school attendance and the school system, and further strain the county social and economic infrastructure.

2.2 Alternative 2 – Build Temporary Housing at the Airport Road Site (Proposed Action)

The proposed site is at the southeast corner of the intersection of I-75 and Airport Road, covers about 60 acres, and is next to the Charlotte County correctional facility in Punta Gorda, Charlotte County, Florida. FEMA tasked the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to build a new manufactured home park (hereafter "Park") of about 600 units. At this time, Park occupancy is expected to not exceed 24 months. Each home is approximately 14 x 70 feet.

New utilities would be installed, including connecting potable water and sanitary sewer service to existing county infrastructure. A new electric substation or on-site generator would be installed for Park power supply. If an electric substation is chosen, an electric generator may be temporarily installed to provide power during substation construction. Park drainage features would include drainage ditches and one or more on-site retention ponds to treat stormwater as required by the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD). A new access road from Airport Road would be built for Park residents' direct ingress and egress. The Park would have necessary gravel access roads for built-up areas, and a gravel pad for each home. A 6- to 8-foot high vegetative buffer would be installed around the Park perimeter. A safety fence would also be installed around the perimeter, electric generator and/or substation, and around stormwater retention pond(s). When temporary housing need has ended, FEMA expects that the trailers would be hauled from the site, to suitable locations elsewhere (to be determined on case-by-case basis). The Park site would then be seeded and restored to previous conditions, covered with shell, and/or used by the county in a manner consistent with its zoning classification.

3 Affected Environment

3.1 Project Location

The project site is located in Punta Gorda, Charlotte County, in southwestern Florida (Figure 1). The site is at the southeast corner of the intersection of I-75 and Airport Road in Section 09, Township 41 South and Range 23 East. It is about 24 miles north of Fort Meyers, 104 miles south of Tampa, and 174 miles southwest of Orlando.

3.2 Geology and Soils

Western Charlotte County is a peninsula less than 10 feet above mean sea level (amsl). Central Charlotte County is up to about 40 feet amsl, and most lands slope gently to the south. Except for the incised drainage of Shell Creek, Eastern Charlotte County is a broad, gently sloping, sandy, low-level plain. The plain rises for several miles from the eastern edge of Charlotte Harbor to an elevation of about 20 feet amsl, and is flat for the next 20 miles. The County's highest elevation is 70 feet amsl, in the northeast corner of the county.

Most of Charlotte County has a thin sand mantle, generally less than 25 feet thick, underlain by the Tertiary Tamiami Formation which consists of clay, limestone, and sandstone. The units below the Tamiami Formation consist chiefly of limestone and dolomite and the sequence is increasingly dolomitic with depth. Many of these rock beds form aquifers.

The proposed site is located in the Gulf coastal lowlands, a flat area with wetlands interspersed with pine-palmetto flatwoods. Area soils are typically acidic because of the dominant types of vegetation and lack of underground drainage (SWFWD, 2004). Site soils are classified as Boca fine sand and Wabasso fine sand. Boca fine sand is poorly drained with the water table within 10 inches of the surface for 2 to 4 months. Wabasso fine sand is poorly drained with the water table within 10 inches of the surface for 1 to 3 months (Charlotte County Soil Survey). These soil descriptions were verified during a USACE regulatory staff site survey on August 26, 2004.

3.3 Hydrology and Floodplains

The Charlotte County climate is subtropical, with warm, wet summers and mild, relatively dry winters. Frost occurs in the eastern part of the county in about three out of four winters. The dry period usually extends from November through May, and the wet seasons from June through September. The county average annual rainfall is 54 inches and can vary considerably from site to site. About 60 percent of the rain falls between June and September.

During wet weather, Charlotte County stream flow is from rainfall either in the county or in the streams' headwaters outside of the county. During dry weather, most stream flow is from shallow aquifers both inside and outside Charlotte County. A preliminary survey of the Airport Road Site found that it was at a lower elevation than the surrounding land and had a higher probability of collecting and retaining rainfall and runoff.

The FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Map shows that the proposed project site is outside of the 100-year floodplain (Figure 2). The FEMA Region IV Federal Insurance and Mitigation Division confirmed that this site was outside of the Special Flood Hazard Area in a written flood determination dated August 25, 2004 (Appendix).

3.4 Wetlands

USACE-Jacksonville District, Ft. Meyers Regulatory Field Office wetlands biologists surveyed the proposed project site on August 26, 2004. Regarding the three indicators for jurisdictional wetlands (i.e., hydric soil, hydric plants, and hydrology), the survey found: (1) no hydric soils at the site, (2) hydrology comprises 6 to 10 percent of the site in the form of standing water, and (3)

less than 10 percent of the plants are wetland species. The wetlands on-site are isolated, have no surface hydrologic connection to outside waters (e.g., streams and creeks), and are not adjacent to other wetlands. Based upon this survey, it was determined that there are no jurisdictional wetlands in or near the proposed project site. A field report and determination of no jurisdictional wetlands was submitted by USACE on August 27, 2004 (Appendix). Figure 3 depicts mapped wetlands from the National Wetlands Inventory maintained by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Figure 4 includes a photo of a typical non-jurisdictional freshwater wetland found on this site.

3.5 Water Quality

The proposed project site is within the Charlotte Harbor watershed, which has been designated as an "impaired water" by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the State of Florida due to levels of fecal coliform bacteria, mercury, nutrients, turbidity and low dissolved oxygen (EPA, 2004). Charlotte Harbor has also been designated as a National Estuary under EPA's National Estuary Program. Based upon the survey results in Section 3.4, it is believed that the proposed project site is not hydrologically connected through surface water to the Peace River or any other surface water that drains into Charlotte Harbor. Water that enters the site through either rainfall or runoff is expected to remain on the site until it evaporates or returns to the shallow aquifer.

3.6 Air Quality

Charlotte County is currently in attainment for the six criteria pollutants (ozone, lead, particulate matter, nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide and carbon monoxide) under the Clean Air Act (CAA) (EPA, 2004). Charlotte County has been in attainment for the criteria pollutants since records have been kept. The ambient air quality at the project site is very good given Charlotte County's proximity to the Gulf of Mexico's strong air circulation and southwest Florida's low, open topography.

3.6 Vegetation and Wildlife

On-site vegetation includes: a tree layer of scattered slash pine (*Pinus elliottii*) and Brazilian pepper (*Schinus terebinthefolius*); a shrub layer of saw palmetto (*Serenoa repens*); and an herbaceous layer of red root (*Ceanothus americanus*), torpedo grass (*Panicum repens*), and various sedges (*Carex* spp.). Brazilian pepper is a non-native, invasive species. Many of the slash pine were "topped" by the hurricane, meaning that the tree tops broke off, leaving just lower trunk and a few branches (Figure 4). Based upon a survey, the site is believed to have been scraped and the top sand layer removed within the last five years. The saw palmetto has re-colonized the site, and most individuals are young (less than five years old) and under 4.5 feet tall. Figure 4 includes representative photos of site vegetation.

3.7 Threatened and Endangered Species

Per Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA) Section 7, USACE initiated consultation with the USFWS Vero Beach Field Office on August 27, 2004. An USACE biologist conducted a field survey for special status species on August 25 and 26, 2004, and did not identify any endangered or threatened species, or their habitat, within the proposed project site. In a communication

dated August 27, 2004, the USFWS found that special status species have a low potential to occur at the project site. However, the USFWS database search found a documented bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) nest 0.54 miles south of the site. The USFWS protective buffer zone surrounding the bald eagle nest does not intersect the site. Although it is not known if this nest survived Hurricane Charley, it is unlikely.

As a precautionary measure, the USFWS requested that if substantial land clearing is to be done, the contractor must implement the USFWS's standard construction protocol for threatened eastern indigo snakes (*Drymarchon corais couperi*) to minimize any potential impacts on the snakes. A copy of this consultation and recommendations are in the Appendix. As a courtesy, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission was consulted on August 28, 2004 regarding this project, and did not express any concerns regarding state-listed species.

3.8 Cultural Resources

No structure was found on the site at the time of survey on August 25 and 26, 2004. The Charlotte County correctional facility is located north of the site, and a heavily damaged building is located immediately off-site to the northeast. The Florida State Historic Preservation Office (FSHPO) was contacted on August 27, 2004 to determine the potential for historic or archaeological resources at the site. The FSHPO found that no historic properties were recorded on the property and determined that it is unlikely that any are located there. The FSHPO issued an opinion that the proposed project would not likely effect historic properties on August 27, 2004 (Appendix).

3.9 Socioeconomics

Charlotte County population was estimated to be 141,627 people in 2000 (Census Bureau, 2004). Median household income in 2000 was estimated at $42,653, with 5.30 percent of the population below the poverty line. Due to the large number of retirees living in Charlotte County, it is one of the "oldest" counties in the country with a median age of 54 years. For comparison, U.S. median age is 36 years, and Florida median age is 38.7 years.

As of August 27, 2004, FEMA had determined that Hurricane Charley had destroyed or damaged about 47,000 homes. Most of the destroyed homes were in Charlotte County.

Executive Order (EO) 12898 (Environmental Justice) requires federal agencies to identify and address the effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority and low-income populations, to avoid disproportionately high and adverse public health or environmental impacts on these populations. EO 12898 also requires federal agencies to ensure that public notifications regarding environmental issues are brief, understandable, and highly accessible.

Within the declared disaster area, the overall population is approximately 91 percent white and 9 percent minority (Table 1).

Table 1. Charlotte County, Florida Racial Composition

Location	*Race (percent)*				
	White	***Black***	***Hispanic or Latino***	***American Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut***	***Other***
Charlotte County	90.4%	4.4%	3.3%	0.2%	0.9%
Florida	65.4%	14.6%	16.8%	0.3%	3.0%

Source: United States Census Bureau, Census 2000. http://factfinder.census.gov

3.10 Safety and Security

Safety and security issues that have been considered in this EA include the health and safety of area residents, the public at large, and personnel involved in activities related to the proposed site development, operation, and closure.

EO 13045 (Protection of Children) requires Federal agencies to make it a high priority to identify and assess environmental health and safety risks that may disproportionately affect children.

3.11 Hazardous Materials and Toxic Wastes

Hazardous materials and toxic wastes are primarily regulated under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA), the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA), and their reauthorizing amendments, the Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act (SARA), and the Hazardous and Solid Waste Amendments (HSWA). An abbreviated Phase I Environmental Site Assessment for hazardous and toxic waste was done on the proposed project site. This assessment consisted of a search of existing state and federal databases for known problem sites and spill locations. An on-site field survey was conducted on August 25 and 26, 2004. No apparent hazardous contamination was found on or near the site.

The database search identified two locations near the proposed project site as having reported hazardous materials or waste incidents (Appendix). First, a pump and pump control manufacturing facility about 0.30 miles east of the site had several reporting violations from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection between 1998 and 1999. The manufacturer achieved RCRA compliance in 1999 and is currently an ISO 14000-certified facility (Pers. comm., August 30, 2004, Pulsafeeder, Inc.). The second incident involved the release of about 1,000 gallons of aviation fuel from an above ground storage tank located at the Charlotte County Airport (Pers. comm., August 30, 2004, Charlotte County Airport). The release was located about 0.5 miles east of the proposed project site. About 800 gallons were immediately contained while 200 gallons escaped the containment area and entered into the soil. A remediation contractor recovered the contaminated soil and disposed of it in compliance with state and federal regulations (Pers. comm., August 30, 2004, Charlotte County Airport).

3.12 Traffic and Transportation

The proposed project site fronts Airport Road, a 2-lane secondary road, east of the I-75 overpass, in an industrial area characterized by the municipal airport and County correctional facility. In a meeting between representatives from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Charlotte County held at the site on August 28, 2004, Charlotte County officials stated that Airport Road is a low traffic road. Most traffic on Airport Road exits at Edison College, before the I-75 overpass west of the site.

4. Environmental Consequences

4.1 Soils

Proposed activities would disturb site soils during construction of utilities, roads, and housing pads, and with resident and visitor foot traffic. Due to the site's low topography and being disced and scraped within the last five years, the potential for soil erosion and sedimentation is low. Use of best management practices (e.g., installation of silt fences or straw bales) in construction would reduce these adverse impacts.

4.2 Hydrology and Floodplains

No notable consequences expected.

4.3 Wetlands

Based upon the USACE determination (Appendix), no jurisdictional wetlands were found at the proposed project site. Therefore, no Clean Water Act (CWA) Section 404 permit would be required. However, it is expected that most of the non-jurisdictional wetlands would be filled, resulting in the short-term loss of wetland plant and wildlife species. It is expected that the building the drainage ditches and retention ponds for on-site stormwater management would provide some long-term replacement wetland habitat.

4.3 Water Quality

Given that the site is not believed to be hydrologically connected to the Port Charlotte watershed through surface water, few water quality impacts are anticipated. Building the Stormwater retention ponds would prevent water pollution from sedimentation.

4.4 Air Quality

If an electric generator is required at the project site, it would be required to meet local, state and federal standards. Any CAA compliance permits for operating generators would be obtained prior to construction.

The proposed project would include activities that would produce a minor, temporary, localized increase in vehicle emissions and dust particles. Tractor-trailers would transport manufactured homes to the site. Grading equipment would be required for site preparation. While such equipment use would temporarily increase emissions, no long-term air quality impacts are anticipated in Charlotte County. Federal or state air quality attainment levels would not likely be exceeded.

Periodic wetting during construction would help to reduce fugitive dust. Open areas of the temporary housing site would be seeded with grass. Roads would be constructed of permeable asphalt millings or similar material to reduce the potential for airborne particulates. These mitigation measures would help reduce air quality impacts to asthmatics, seniors, and other sensitive residents. During home removal, the contractor would be required to periodically wet-down the site. If any fill is stored on site as part of home installation or removal, the contractor would be required to cover it.

4.5 Vegetation and Wildlife

Most site vegetation would be removed and replaced with cultivated grass species. The site has been previously cleared and re-colonized with saw palmetto, slash pine, and herbaceous species within the last five years. After housing is removed, the site would naturally re-vegetate with saw palmetto, slash pine, and herbaceous species, depending on how the County chooses to redevelop the site.

4.6 Threatened and Endangered Species

In correspondence dated August 27, 2004, USFWS determined that the project would have "No Effect" on any ESA listed species in Charlotte County, Florida (Appendix). As a protective measure, the contractor must implement the USFWS's standard construction protocol for eastern indigo snakes.

4.7 Cultural Resources

No cultural resources at the site are expected to be affected by proposed project. FSHPO concurred with this determination on August 27, 2004 (Appendix). Although no historic properties were identified at the site, in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, should unanticipated historic or cultural materials be found during construction, all construction activities shall cease immediately within 100 feet of the materials until their cultural affiliation and ultimate disposition are determined in consultation with FSHPO and other interested parties.

4.8 Socioeconomics

The proposed project would beneficial affect people affected by Hurricane Charley. It would also benefit the County by keeping area individuals rebuilding their communities, working, attending school, and paying taxes that support County and community social and economic infrastructure. All forms of FEMA disaster housing assistance are available to any affected household that meets the eligibility conditions. No federal entity or official (or their agent) may discriminate against any individual based on race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, disability, or economic status.

In compliance with EO 12898 (Environmental Justice), the Proposed Action Alternative site selection would pose no disproportionately high and adverse effect on minority and low-income populations.

4.9 Hazardous/Toxic Materials

Site survey and database search revealed minimal presence of hazardous, toxic or radiological materials or waste. Based on these findings, there is a low potential for exposure of Park residents to these types of materials.

Although no hazardous materials were found on-site, if any are found between start of construction and final Park closure, all hazardous materials shall be either remediated, abated, or disposed of as appropriate, and otherwise handled in accordance with applicable local, state, and federal laws and regulations. Alternatively, the site could be abandoned in view of finding another site that better meets the identified project purpose and need.

4.10 Safety and Security

Under EO 13045 (Protection of Children), the contractor would place fencing around the site perimeter to keep children separated from vehicular traffic on Airport Road, around the electrical generator and/or substation to prevent shock and electrocution; and around the stormwater retention pond(s) to prevent access to the water by children and protect them from drowning and other waterborne hazards.

To minimize worker and public health and safety risks from project construction and closure, all construction and closure work would be done using qualified personnel trained in the proper use of the appropriate, properly maintained equipment, including all appropriate safety precautions. Additionally, all activities would be conducted in a safe manner in accordance with the standards specified in Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regulations and the USACE Safety Manual.

The proposed project site is about 0.6 miles west of the County Airport. The airport is a municipal airport that does not have regularly scheduled commercial flights and is not expected to pose a notable noise or safety problem.

Any safety and security concerns regarding the proximity of the proposed site to the Charlotte County correctional facility would be resolved by coordination between the FEMA, USACE and Charlotte County prior to occupancy of the homes.

The USACE would post appropriate signage and fencing to minimize potential adverse safety impacts. Appropriate signage and barriers should be in place prior to construction activities in order to alert pedestrians and motorists of project activities and changes in traffic patterns.

4.11 Traffic and Transportation

Traffic would include project workers and supply trucks; and the temporary residents and their visitors; resulting in an up to 30% local traffic increase during project construction, operation, and closure. These traffic increases would be localized and would not exceed current transportation network infrastructure capacity. The adjacent neighborhood may experience temporary traffic delays when manufactured housing units are moved into and removed from the Park.

A Park access road is planned for Airport Road, west of the County correctional facility driveway and service road. This would place the Park entrance road between the correctional facility and the I-75overpass, as far from the correctional facility entrance as possible. The County plans to add school bus service for the temporary Park.

5.0 Agencies and Persons Consulted

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Brett Bowen	Reviewer	Environmental Liaison Officer, Disaster Field Office, FEMA Region 4 (Seven years NEPA experience)
William Straw, PhD	Final DHS/FEMA Reviewer	Regional Environmental Officer, FEMA Region 4 (15 years NEPA experience)

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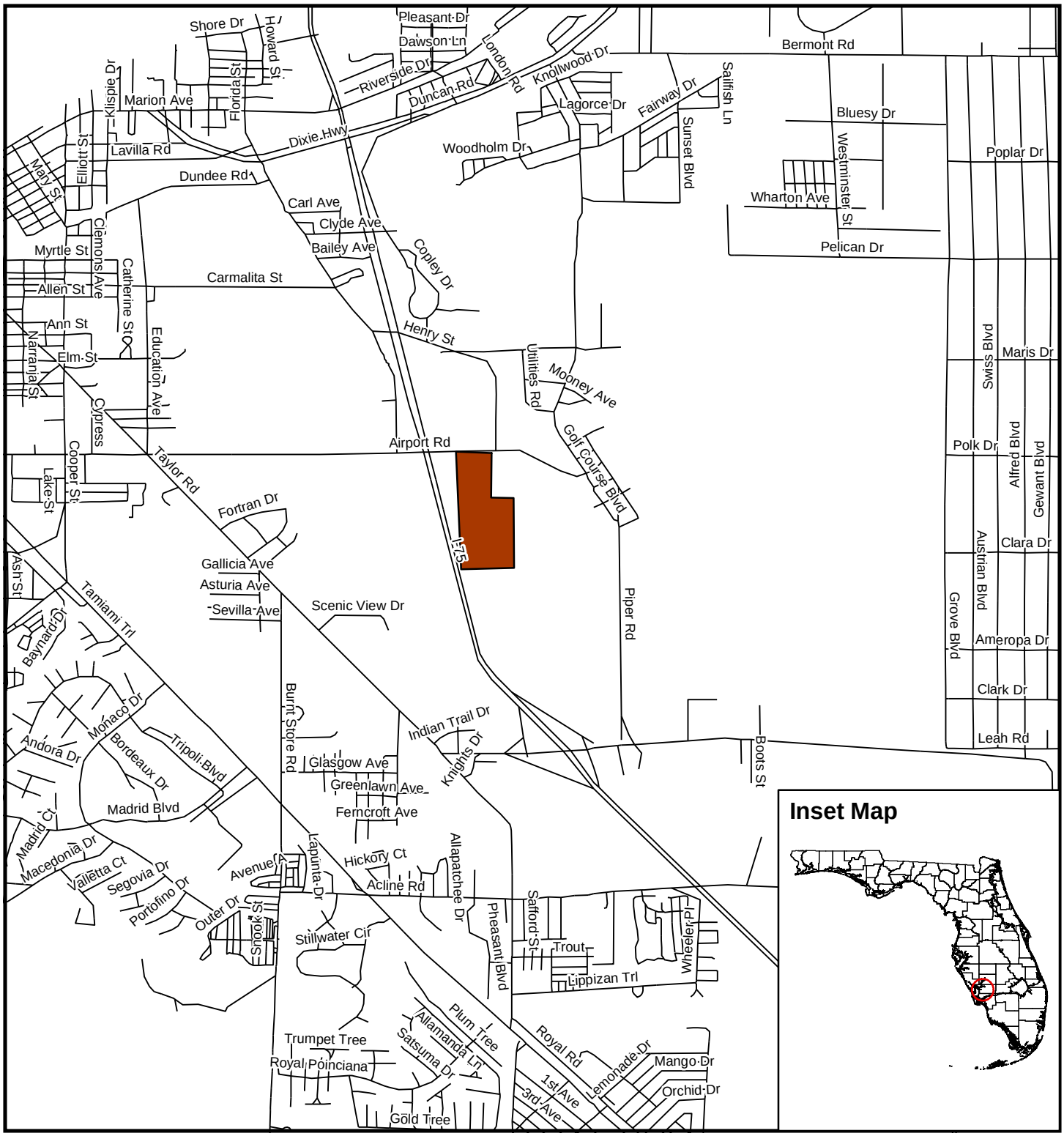
Figure 1

Vicinity Map
Hurricane Charley
Proposed Temporary Housing Site
Charlotte County Airport Road



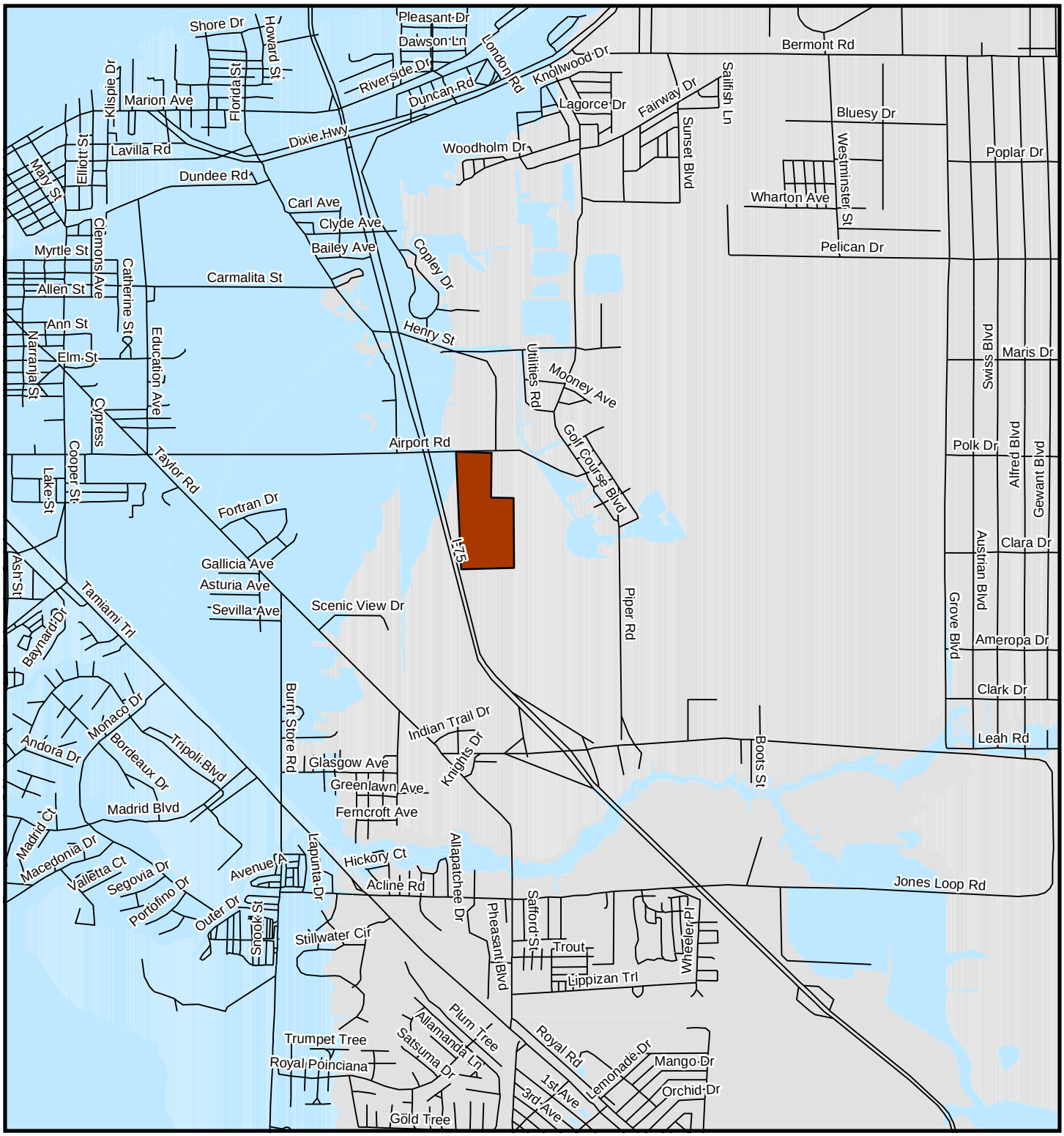
Proposed Temporary Housing Site

Data Source: The data sets utilized for this map are nationwide data sets. The roads are from the U.S. Census Bureau.

punta_gorda_site_vicinity.crb

Figure 2

Floodplain Map
Hurricane Charley
Proposed Temporary Housing Site
Charlotte County Airport Road



Proposed Temporary Housing Site

Flood Zone

100 Year Flood Zone

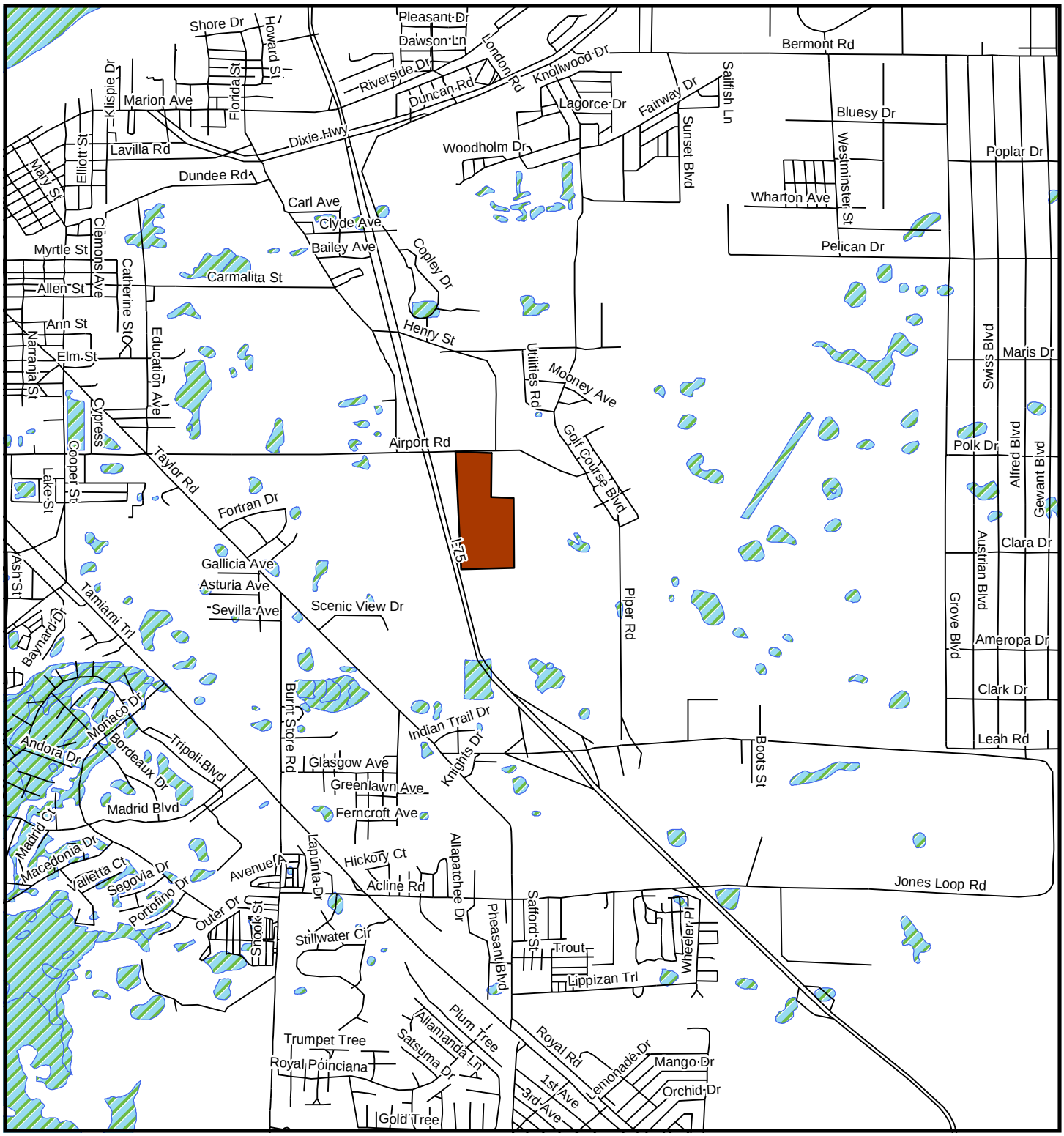
No Special Flood Hazard Area

Data Source: The data sets utilized for this map include roads from the U.S. Census Bureau and the FEMA Digital Flood Insurance Rate Map (DFIRM) flood zones.

punta_gorda_site_flood.crb

Figure 3

Wetlands Map
Hurricane Charley
Proposed Temporary Housing Site
Charlotte County Airport Road



Proposed Temporary Housing Site

Mapped Wetlands

Data Source: The data sets utilized for this map are nationwide data sets. The roads are from the U.S. Census Bureau and the wetlands are from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's National Wetlands Inventory.

punta_gorda_site_wetlands.crb

Figure 4 – Photos of Vegetation at Proposed Project Site

Photo taken from the Northwest corner of the site looking west & I-75.

Isolated non-jurisdictional freshwater wetland (typical of wetlands on site)

Topped Slash pine with saw palmetto

Saw palmetto with herbaceous cover