

## PROJECT OF THE YEAR:

DISASTER OR EMERGENCY CONSTRUCTION/REPAIR

\$25 MILLION–\$75 MILLION

# Seawall Recovery after Hurricane Irma

Managing Agency: City of Punta Gorda, Florida

Primary Contractors: Marine Contracting Group, Inc.; Lake and Wetland Management, Inc.; Neubert Construction Services, Inc.; Duncan Seawall Dock and Boat Lift, LLC; Shoreline Foundation, Inc.

Primary Consultant: City of Punta Gorda, Florida

Nominated By: Florida Chapter

The City of Punta Gorda offers a unique benefit to its waterfront property owners. The Canal Maintenance Assessment District was created by the City of Punta Gorda by the adoption of Ordinance 1156-96 on July 3, 1996, and is authorized pursuant to Section 189.02 Florida Statutes for the purpose of the maintenance of canals, waterways and navigable channels including the maintenance and reconstruction of bulkheads and retaining walls. There are two canal maintenance districts that have been accepted by the City of Punta Gorda: Punta Gorda Isles (PGI) with 45 miles of canals and 90 miles of seawalls; and Burnt Store Isles (BSI) with nine miles of canals and 18 miles of seawall. Each district is its own special assessment and is governed by board members appointed by City Council.

On September 10, 2017, Hurricane Irma (at that time a Category 4 classification) passed 18 miles east of Punta Gorda, Florida while traveling in a northerly direction with wind gusts up to 120 mph. The highest rainfall total was 9.76 inches recorded at the Mesonet Station in Charlotte County. Offshore winds on the northern side of Irma's circulation initially caused water levels to recede below normal levels along much of the west coast of Florida. In fact, some normally submerged areas went virtually dry, while stranding or grounding marine vessels.



Heavy rainfall combined with a negative storm surge damaged over 55,530 lineal feet (approximately 10.5 miles) of Punta Gorda's seawalls—affecting approximately 988 parcels.

By September 13, 2017, city offices returned to normal business and FEMA had been notified soon after. By October 25, 2017, FEMA representatives met with City staff to discuss storm damage and develop a program delivery plan. At that time FEMA decided they wanted to inspect every site. Beginning on November 29, 2017, a team of FEMA inspectors partnered with City inspectors and assessed every damaged seawall and the work program was established.

Before the estimated cost for damage of \$33,000,000 was determined, Punta Gorda Finance Department secured a loan for \$15,860,000 in an effort to get seawall restoration started while waiting for FEMA grant reimbursements. That loan was paid in full by September 30, 2019. The City was eligible for FEMA grant funds because the City owned the canal maintenance infrastructure. FEMA grant reimbursement was increased from 75% to 90%. Therefore, State grant reimbursement was lowered to 5% and city property owners were responsible for the remaining 5%.