This Solar-Powered Florida Town Was Built to Withstand Hurricanes. Did It Work?

As Hurricane Ian ravaged Florida last week, causing fatalities, destruction, and billions of dollars worth of damage, one south Florida town went relatively unscathed.

Babcock Ranch, a community of 4,600 residents, reported no power outages, no flooding, and no major structural damage. Except for a fallen traffic light, a few dislodged street signs, and some toppled palm trees, the town is still fully functional.

How is this possible?

Babcock Ranch is the first solar-powered town in America. It was built to withstand Mother Nature's fury and protect its residents from being flooded or losing electricity, water, or access to the internet.

"Storm safety and resiliency has been factored into every element of design and engineering of the town," Lisa Hall, a representative for the community, told CBS News.

Located 20 miles from Fort Myers, the community is strategically situated on higher ground, which protects it from coastal storm surges. All of its buildings are designed to withstand winds of up to 145 mph. The power lines are underground, so powerful winds can't damage them. Retaining ponds surround the town to protect it from flooding. And its clean energy comes from 650,000 solar panels operated by Florida Power & Light.

While most of the surrounding areas went without power for days, Babcock Ranch had no power outages, save for a few flickering lights.

It was the solar power that kept a nearby storm shelter open during the delayed delivery of a generator.

Related: ‘Always Look for the Helpers’: Man Heroically Rescues Cat from Hurricane Ian in Viral Video

The History of Babcock Ranch

Babcock Ranch gets its name from Edward Babcock, a Pittsburg lumber magnate and politician, who purchased the land in 1914.

The Babcock family eventually sold the 91,000-acre property to the State of Florida and a real estate development company called Kitson & Partners, which was founded by Syd Kitson, a former football player with the Green Bay Packers. It was Kitson who had the idea to build a sustainable community.

Kitson & Partners developed a new solar-powered town called Babcock Ranch, while the remaining 80% of the ranch land belongs to Florida.

The preserve protects important water resources, diverse

natural habitats, and scenic landscapes. It’s home to a wide range of wildlife, including alligators, wild turkeys, wild hogs, and deer.

Babcock Ranch’s sustainable layout appears to have also preserved the resident’s safety, for which they are grateful.

“They were told that Babcock Ranch was built to stand up to storms — but you never really know for sure until you see how everything performs when a storm comes. Ian put it to an extreme test,” said Hall.

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