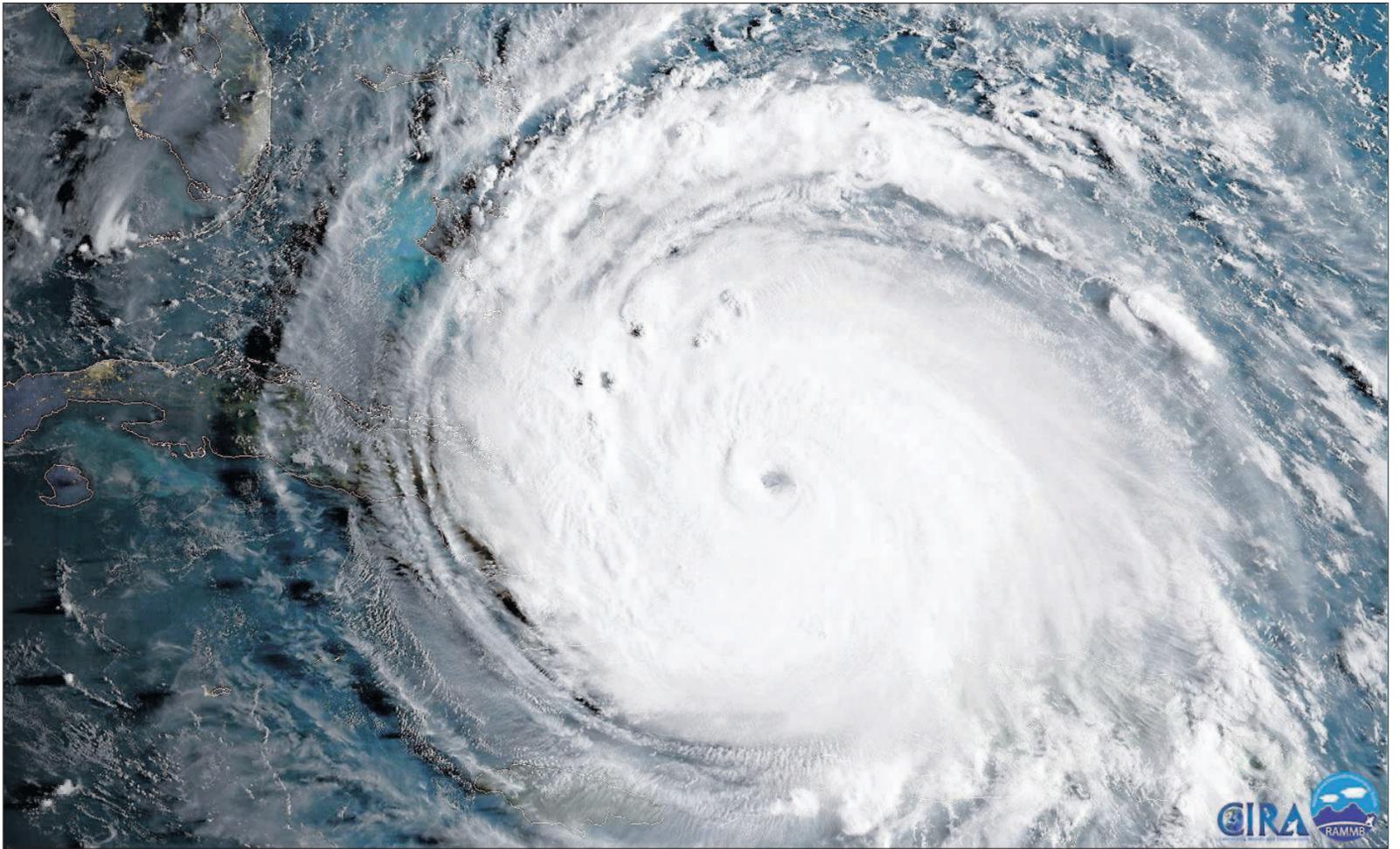


# Hurricane 911

## HIT or MISS



A geocolor image from the GOES-16 satellite shows Hurricane Irma about 7:45 a.m. Friday as the storm approached Cuba and Florida. Irma killed at least 20 people and left thousands homeless on a string of devastated Caribbean islands.

Where once Hurricane Irma was projected to blow near or through the Pee Dee, its path out of Florida now is expected to go well west of our region. But projections can change, as we have seen this week. Whether the weather is severe here next week or not, it's good to be prepared. Hang on to this special section, because if you don't need it next week, you might need it the following week, or next month. Devastating storms have hit the Pee Dee in each of the past two Octobers. Do your homework, heed warnings and stay safe.

## Forecasters strive to make warnings more helpful

BY MATTHEW ROBERTSON  
Morning News  
mrobertson@scnow.com

WILMINGTON, N.C. — Hurricane forecasting is model-based science, but what forecasters do with the predictions is more nuanced and has evolved greatly since Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans in 2005.

Now forecasting is as much about the message as it is about the science. It's as much about context and impact as it is about storm path and wind

speeds.

"We do our best not to just forecast what the winds are going to be, what the temperate is going to be. We also forecast what the impacts are going to be," said Steve Pfaff, warning coordination meteorologist with the National Weather Service office in Wilmington.

"That is often difficult. If we forecast 10 inches of rain, some people think 'That's just 10 inches of water, no big deal, I'm OK.' They don't understand the

hydraulics," he said.

The forecasts have to include context to describe what that water will mean to roads, to low-lying areas and to people and buildings in the way of the storm.

"It's gone from 'It's going to be windy with 20-30 mph winds' to 'It's going to be windy 20-30, (and) because the ground is saturated that might easily topple trees onto some homes and cause power outages," Pfaff said. "Taking it to that next level. We call it 'dec-

sion support services.'

"The speed of getting information, the accuracy of getting information, the ability to display it in ways that are useful and meaningful — and then there's the social science component. As decision support services evolve, the social science has to evolve with it.

"Look at Katrina, a phenomenally good forecast, plenty of lead time and over a thousand fatalities.

See **FORECAST**, Page 4B



Meteorologist Richard Kreitner catches lunch in the saddle Tuesday in the National Weather Service's office in Wilmington, N.C.

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