Flood Zones – Long Island, The Bahamas:
Report and Maps Post-Hurricane Melissa

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Abstract

Long Island, alongside neighbouring islands, were affected by Hurricane Melissa in October 2025. As a result, parts of the island sustained extensive flooding, putting some residents at risk, leading to evacuations being carried out amidst the storm (Campbell, 2025). and limiting the passage of vehicles, inhibiting access to local settlements. days after the storm had passed. (Eyewitness News, 2025). This report aims to provide a better understanding of the storm and its effects on locals relating to flooding. Furthermore, to provide an assessment of Long Island's terrain and areas vulnerable to flooding through visualisation using maps. Lastly, to provide meaningful information and recommendations that will assist stakeholders in circumventing concerning details revealed in this report.

Foreword

This report was spearheaded by Paige Adderley- Strachan, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Strategy and Governance specialist, Certified Drone Pilot, Founding Member and President of the Geospatial Advancement Initiative Network (G.A.I.N) and resident of Long Island at the time of the passing of Hurricane Melissa. She received advice on historical and community-related matters. and overall assistance for this project from Joanna Taylor, Geography and History educator, Vice President of G.A.I.N, a native and lover of Long Island.

It was completed as a personal contribution to the residents of Long Island and its stakeholders. Additionally, to strengthen the efforts of hurricane preparedness and planning for the Island.

Thank you to the people of Long Island who participated in the survey activity and encouraged us. Thank you to Ramona Ritchie for granting permission to use photographs published on Facebook after Joaquin. Lastly, thank you to Chief Councillor Ian Knowles of local government, who took a keen interest in the project and supported its efforts.

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Introduction

This report aims to strengthen the planning, preparation and remediation efforts of the entities involved in the hurricane efforts on Long Island by promoting informed decision-making through enhanced communication via maps. This report was compiled specifically for Long Island, especially after the passing of Hurricane Melissa in 2025. This report is meaningful, timely and relevant because the Island comes under threat of hurricane activity annually between June and November. The hurricane season is filled with uncertainty and evokes an overall uneasiness in islanders and local governing bodies alike. This is partly because hurricanes can lead to catastrophic impacts, including destruction of infrastructure, extreme flooding, displacement of population and loss of life. As a result, efforts in planning and preparation should be ongoing and information, no matter how insignificant, is advantageous in safeguarding human life. Therefore, the objectives of this report include providing further background information, which will solidify the benefits of this report. Next, a total assessment of the Island will be provided for the Island through the provision of maps. Then, the findings from the survey will be provided and discussed, including a map to visualise the data received. Finally, the recommendations will be provided based on critical information revealed in this report.

1.0 Background Information

1.1 Climate Change, Hurricanes and Storm Surges

Small islands like Long Island are particularly vulnerable to the disastrous effects of hurricanes, especially related to flooding. According to Méndez-Tejeda, R., & Hernández-Ayala (2023), hurricanes in the Atlantic Ocean are beginning to intensify rapidly due to warmer sea surface temperatures and moisture from cloud cover, resulting in excessive rainfall and dangerous storm surges. Additionally, there is a decreased opportunity for meteorologists to predict the strengths at which hurricanes will make landfall due to rapid intensification. This was evident during Hurricane Dorian (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration [NOAA], n.d.) and Hurricane Melissa, with multiple reports of rapid intensification (Climate Central, 2025). For this reason, it is important for all stakeholders involved in hurricane response efforts to consider all factors that contribute to the proper planning, preparation and mitigation of hurricane impacts. By doing so, more lives can be saved.

1.2 Geographic Information Systems, Mapping and Informed Decision Making

Geographic Information Systems are important because they help decision-makers focus on the attributes and features of a particular area and unearth significant findings that may not be apparent to the naked eye. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) professionals focus on the collection, the digital processing, close analysis and visualisation of geospatial data. GIS data can be visualised in multiple ways. For this project, printed maps were selected.

Maps are a useful means of communication because they convey meaningful information to stakeholders, whether they are familiar with or have visited a particular

location. For this report, maps were provided to give stakeholders a better understanding of the island's topographic features, areas of low to high flood risk, built areas and mangrove cover. Consequently, stakeholders will gain a better understanding of the island without the need to physically explore it.

1.3 Report Relevance

The Bahamas is an archipelago with water surrounding each island; therefore, it is important to understand flood risks in The Bahamas. For this report, the focus will be primarily on Long Island and its flood risks. As of the last census in April 2022, Long Island has approximately 2,718 residents, many of whom, at one point in their lives, should have experienced flooding. The low-lying communities such as Scrub Hill, Petty's, Gray's, Buckley's, Mangrove Bush and The Bight are especially prone to flooding; this is evident even with prolonged rainfall. Rainwater sometimes crosses the road in these areas, which can lead to transportation problems.

The cause of flooding in The Bahamas is due to hurricanes and tropical storms, which bring excessive rainfall and storm surges. Hurricane Dorian, which affected Abaco, Freeport, and New Providence, and Hurricane Joaquin's impact on Long Island, Crooked Island, and Acklins, show just how destructive flooding can be.

1.4 Long Island's History with Hurricanes and Flooding

Long Island has been a hotspot for Hurricanes, and within the past 25 years (2000-2025), Long Island has been directly impacted by over three Hurricanes, namely Irene in 2011, Joaquin in 2015 and Melissa in 2025. Joaquin was catastrophic, causing extensive damage to infrastructure, leaving 413 homes destroyed and widespread flooding (The University of the West Indies, 2015). No reports of drowning or loss of life were reported in the aftermath of Hurricane Joaquin. However, days after Hurricane Joaquin had passed, water

settled in areas such as Scrub Hill, Gray's and Petty's, making it unpassable for small vehicles. High water levels were reported up to 12ft into homes and businesses. Boats were a necessity in areas with flooding to transport locals back to their homes, to food stores, relief supply drops and shelters.

See figures 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5.

Figure 1: Car submerged under flood water days after Joaquin passed.

Note: From a Facebook post by Ramona Ritchie

Figure 2: Swampthing Restaurant and Bar, Scrub Hill, Long Island, flooded days after Joaquine passed.

Note: From a Facebook post by Ramona Ritchie

Figure 3: Locals being transported by boat to return home. Scrub Hill, Long Island

(Photo distorted to maintain the privacy of individuals)

Note: From a Facebook post by Ramona Ritchie

Figure 4: Queen's Highway passing through Hamilton's flooded days after Joaquin passed.

Note: From a Facebook post by Ramona Ritchie

Figure 5: Petty's behind the main apartment complex flooded days after the hurricane passed.

Note: From a Facebook Post by Ramona Ritchie

Joaquin evolved into a tropical storm on 29 September 2015 and intensified into a major hurricane by October 1st (Curran, 2016). Long Island was flooded before the Hurricane arrived; storm surges caused water levels to rise before some individuals had the opportunity to find shelter elsewhere. Storm-surge flooding was widespread on Long Island, and it was recorded that the highest surge was 5.5 m (18 feet) (Curran, 2016). Although Hurricanes are a major cause of flooding in The Bahamas, there have been tropical storms which have induced flooding as well. Notable tropical storms such as Noel in 2008 have caused major flooding on Long Island.

Hurricane Melissa recently affected Long Island with "strong winds and heavy rainfall, and left residents cleaning up the debris in the aftermath" (Scott, 2025). Flooding

caused by this Hurricane resulted in settlements in central Long Island being unpassable due to excessive amounts of flooding days after the storm had passed. Scott (2025) stated that: “She also noted 'extreme flooding' in Alligator Bay, the Crossing and the Bight, and cautioned motorists against attempting to cross those areas because of the depth of the water.” Also, Scott (2025) noted, “Unrelenting rain created lakes in low-lying areas, leaving some parts of the island’s roads impassable for motorists up until yesterday evening."

1.5 Forecast for the next major Hurricane for Long Island

With the following information available, there is a possibility of another major Hurricane making landfall on Long Island as soon as the year 2027/2028. According to Long Island Bahamas’ History with Tropical Systems, the average years between direct hurricane hits are once every 5.70 years, and the average years between major hurricane hits are every 12.83 years. This data does not include flooding that can be caused by tropical storms, and although it is a mere prediction, it is always important to take it into account.

2.0 Methods

2.1 Data Acquisition: Survey

Two methods were used to complete this undertaking. The first method was the development of a survey, which was distributed to Long Islanders who were present during the Hurricane on October 29th, 2025. A survey was distributed via social media between January 16th and February 5th, 2026. Long Islanders were encouraged to provide an account of their residence, location during Hurricane Melissa, relocation information, including areas and reasons for relocation. Moreover, details of flooding observed, including location, water coverage and water depth. ESRI’s Survey123 application was used as the data collection tool. The survey was distributed via social media, including WhatsApp and Facebook.

2.2 Geospatial Data Acquisition and Map Production

The second method was the production of maps, which included research and data acquisition, and extensive data processing using ArcGIS Pro, a data processing software for GIS professionals. This mechanism was established to provide a visual representation of the topography of Long Island, highlighting areas that are low. moderate to high risk for flooding, based on elevation. In addition, buildings, settlement boundaries, and mangrove vegetation cover were visualised. These maps are intended to assist in fast-paced and informed decision-making in cases of emergencies, decision-making on the fly, pre-evacuation planning, and to expose the overall vulnerability of the island and its strengths and weaknesses in withstanding the effects of hurricanes, especially flooding. Furthermore, for external stakeholder engagement, visualising data that is unique to the island and common knowledge among locals is crucial for external stakeholder engagement (DRM, U. S Coast Guard, NGO's etc.).

3.0 Limitations

3.1 Limitations to Survey Collection

The survey was conducted post Hurricane Mellisa to evaluate the flood zones on Long Island; however, this study was limited for various reasons. The initial goal was to have one hundred or more respondents across the settlements to participate in the survey and to have substantial representation from every age group and gender represented on the Island. However, after reviewing the data collection total, it was revealed that only 35 responders participated; 86% of whom were from South Long Island and 86% of whom were females, thus limiting island-wide and non-gender-biased results. Females in Long Island are more active and willing to respond to the survey due to social norms. Financial resources were limited; as a result, one-on-one interviews were impossible, and the project relied on resident accounts via an unprobed survey, which were not always comprehensive. Collaborative

efforts were minimal, thus limiting reach. However, the survey resulted in meaningful revelations and provided enough context to carry on with this work.

4.0 Limitations to Data Acquisition and Mapping

The data acquisition and mapping for this project encountered a few limitations. GAIN's Drone Pilot was not an essential worker at the time of the hurricane, thus prohibiting drone launch and field assessments; as a result, drone images to document flooded areas were impossible. As a result, this project relied on secondary data, which was not as comprehensive.

Financial constraints were also a limitation, including the acquisition of primary data. The main data used was sourced from a project carried out in 2019 by the Bahamas National GIS Centre, which is largely outdated. For example, the elevation in the Deadman's Cay area changed due to land being cut down for airport redevelopment. Furthermore, the acquisition of advanced software licenses to perform extensive flood analysis using machine learning and artificial intelligence was limited. The creation of interactive web maps requires the purchase of storage, which was not optional. Although this project was limited, the data used to complete the maps were beneficial in understanding the topographic features of the island. Furthermore, satellite imagery was used to circumvent the inability to carry out primary data acquisition activities.

4.1 Survey Findings and Discussions.

- Females in Long Island were more active and willing to respond to the survey, which suggests social norms exist.
- Residents reported flooding in Alligator Bay, Burnt Ground, Cartwright's, Deadman's Cay, Hamilton's, Gray's, Mangrove Bush, McKann's, McKenzie, Petty's, Pinder's, The Bight and Wemyss, because of Hurricane Melissa.

- 77% of respondents remained home during the hurricane.
- The main reason people remained home and did not relocate before the hurricane was, firstly, sound structure. Elevation and comfort followed.
- Although some individuals did not report having sound structures and elevated properties, they opted to remain at home for comfort.
- Two individuals reported that they did not go to a hurricane shelter during Hurricane Melissa because they were unsure of the activated hurricane shelters list.
- One individual stated that he/she did not relocate before the hurricane due to mobility and transportation issues.
- In the survey, an individual stated that she decided to stay in her settlement at home during Hurricane Melissa because it "did not flood during Joaquin", however, she did have water settled in the area after Mellisa (1-3 inches of rainfall).

Discussion: The report revealed interesting information. Many settlements flooded during Hurricane Melissa across the island, and remained flooded, proving that the island has many low-lying surfaces with very little drainage. A large percentage of the respondents remained home for the hurricane. Comfort is a major aspect for some individuals in remaining at home, although hurricanes pose serious threats. There was a breakdown in communication relating to shelter activation based on two accounts. There also seemed to be a need for greater attention towards persons who are vulnerable during evacuation notices.

A major point worth discussing is the fact that one individual decided to remain at home because the area did not flood during Joaquin. However, the area flooded during Melissa. This is notable because the effects from Hurricane Joaquin were not only rainfall but storm surge due to the high winds and wind direction, whereas Hurricane Melissa's flooding was due to rainfall. This respondent's decision not to relocate based on the effects of a past hurricane that occurred 10 years prior was ill-advised. As stated by Rabinowitz (2018), "Past

experiences and other cognitive biases can determine whether a person decides to evacuate from the path of a hurricane". This is proven to be an issue for some individuals because there is a belief that surviving previous storms should decrease preparedness for future storms. Preparation and awareness can protect homes, property, and lives. It is better to prepare for flooding caused by hurricanes and tropical storms in advance than to have to struggle and relocate during or after they hit.

5.0 Recommendations resulting from survey findings

5.1 Local Stakeholder Engagement Recommendations:

- Special attention must be given to areas that flooded in Hurricane Joaquin and Hurricane Melissa in future hurricane preparedness and planning.
- Proper evacuation measures should continue to be implemented and carried out: preparation and awareness can protect homes, property, and lives.
- Hurricane shelters should be updated regularly and displayed year-round to the public. (not only for locals but for tourists and winter residents).
- Means of hurricane communication can be expanded on the Island. (Printed and interactive web maps, live radio, SMS messages, etc.).
- Hurricane Shelter managers should also consider places that are structurally sound, comfortable and accommodating for the people of Long Island when selecting hurricane shelters.
- A call line for persons with mobility issues/lack of transportation can be established and shared with the wider community if someone needs assistance.

5.2 Resident Engagement and Recommendations:

- Individuals who are living in low-lying areas or those who are not in elevated areas or in solid structures should attend the hurricane shelters before any storms/hurricanes to avoid evacuations during storms.
- Each resident should obtain relevant contacts for hurricane updates, like shelter activation (Social Services, Administrator's office, Local Police) and remain updated on crucial information for hurricane preparedness.
- Locals should continue to incorporate stilts, impact windows and doors and build within the established building codes to limit flooding inside of homes.
- Sandbags should also be used to block water entry into homes.

6.0 Map Production: Findings and Discussions

See the appendix for maps.

6.1 Long Island Elevation Map Findings

- Elevation ranges from 2ft to 178ft across the island.
- The eastern portion of the island is significantly higher than the western portion.
- Very few portions of the island are above 100ft compared to the other areas of the island.

6.2 Long Island Low to High Flood Risk Map

- Long Island was categorised into three major flood risk zones. The eastern side showed low flood risk, the center of the island showed moderate flood risk, and the western side showed high flood risk.

6.3. Long Island Low Flood Risk Map

- Along the western coast, spanning from North to South, there is a high occurrence of elevation between 1ft and 10ft.

- The Deadman's Cay area is a prominent location for elevation between 1ft and 10ft.

6.4 Long Island High Flood Risk Map

- Elevation above 50ft is predominant on the eastern side of the island.
- A small portion of the island is within this zone compared to other areas.

Discussion: According to Encyclopaedia Britannica (2026), **t**he islands of The Bahamas are known to have flat topographic features. Long Island and Eleuthera have the highest concentration of elevated points above 100 feet (ft). These topographic features must be maintained because they are unique to The Bahamas. They are also beneficial for lessening hurricane impacts (elevated areas break down the strength of hurricanes) and may become beneficial in the future. For example, they can be used as evacuation hubs.

Elevations between 1ft and 10ft, 11ft and 49ft and 50ft and above were used for the low, moderate and high flood risk maps. Elevations 1ft to 10ft are extremely susceptible to flooding. These areas should be evacuated in the event of an impending storm. Areas ranging from 11ft to 49ft are classified as moderate flood risk areas for this report; however, storm surges can reach up to 20ft (National Hurricane Center, n.d.).

Other factors should be considered, including water flow, drainage and topographic features, when considering flood risk. For example, a building situated on 80ft of land can be lower than the land surrounding it; as a result, water can settle. These maps are to be used as a general overview and guide for the island.

6.5 Long Island Reported Flood Zones -Post Hurricane Melissa Map:

- Several areas were impassible after Hurricane Melissa due to flooding, including Deadman's Cay, Hamilton's, The Bight, Grays, Pinder's, Alligator Bay and Wemyss.

Discussion: This map lacked comprehensive data relating to the exact flood location, water depth and coverage. However, general areas that flooded were documented, providing critical information for future planning.

6.6 Long Island Built Areas Maps

- Long Island does not have a concentration of built areas; rather, built areas are widespread.
- Built areas are predominantly in the low to moderate flood risk areas.

Discussion: Built areas show where infrastructure can be found. Although the map shows data collected in 2024, very little development has occurred in the past two years, and the areas highlighted still provide a general understanding of built areas. This map can be used for pre- and post-hurricane assessments.

6.7 Long Island Mangrove Assessment and Development

See figures 6, 7 and 8.

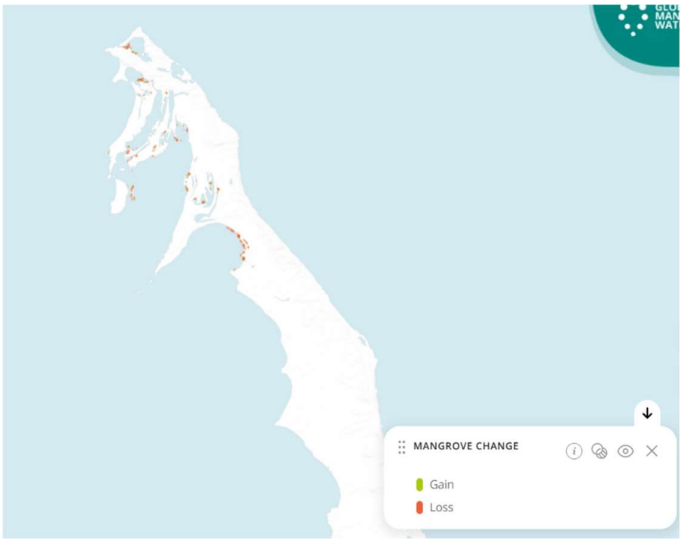

Figure 6: Northern Long Island Mangrove Change (1996-2020)

Note: Screenshot captured from Global Mangrove Watch

Figure 7: Central Long Island Mangrove Change (1996-2020)

Note: Screenshot captured from Global Mangrove Watch

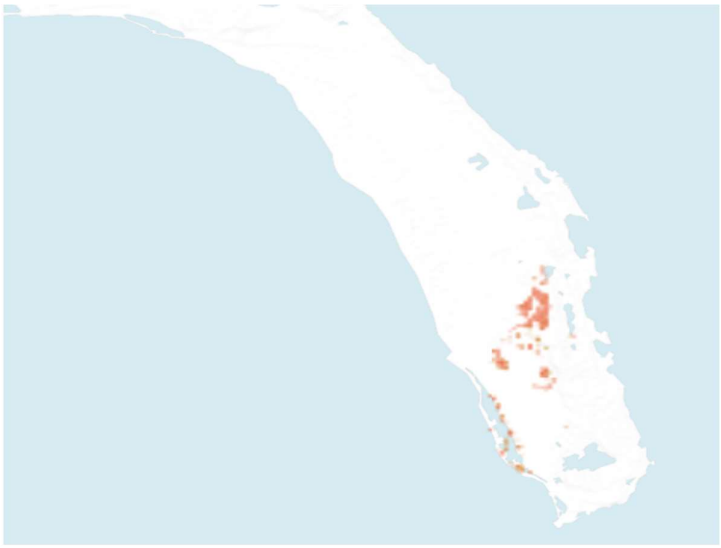

Figure 8: Southern Long Island Mangrove Change (1996-2020)

Note: Screenshot captured from Global Mangrove Watch

- Long Island has experienced a loss in Mangrove Cover in the northern, central and southern parts of the island.

Discussion: The images above show mangrove loss for Long Island for a period of twenty-four (24) years. Although the figures above do not show mangrove loss for the last six (6) years, they are relevant for mangrove assessment and rehabilitation projects.

Coastal areas are protected from storm surges with the presence of mangroves (Zhang et al., 2012). The presence of mangroves weakens storm surges. They serve as a natural barrier for protection from storms, and their preservation should be prioritised.

6.8 Recommendations:

6.9 Enhanced Stakeholder Engagement:

- Use maps so that stakeholders can have a better understanding of the island to make informed decisions.
- Map use locally: interactive shelter maps for mobile use and printed maps positioned around the Island.
- Monitor and prohibit the excessive cutting down of elevated land.
- Monitor and prohibit the destruction of mangroves.
- Plan mangrove rehabilitation projects.
- Strengthen drainage systems (culverts, storm drains, pipes etc.) across the island.

6.10 Local Stakeholder Engagement:

- Purchase elevated plots of land for future development, if possible.
- Optimise use of generational land on elevated properties.
- Always be prepared to provide information via survey collection and participate in projects like these to strengthen informed decision-making.
- Engage in mangrove restoration and elevation preservation activities.

7.0 Conclusion

Long Island's topographic features must be maintained, as it is one of two islands of The Bahamas with multiple ridges exceeding 100ft. Because of this, its locals can combat flooding with proper planning, strategic evacuation measures and strategic housing and infrastructure development. Flooding on the western coast can

also be lessened by the presence of mangroves, but greater evacuation planning must be enforced.

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Appendix

Survey

The Geospatial Advancement Initiative Network (GAIN) would appreciate your participation in completing this short survey in an effort to identify areas prone to flooding on the Island of Long Island, The Bahamas.

In October 2025, Hurricane Melissa travelled over the southern portion of the island, with heavy rainfall and strong winds. The eye of the hurricane extended over the island for miles and remained for an estimated two hours until the storm continued on its path.

As a result, some areas of the island were flooded for several days, resulting in some parts of the Island being inaccessible.

Instructions: If you were present on the Island of Long Island during the passage of Hurricane Melissa, please complete this survey to the best of your ability.

If you are unable to do so, you can have someone complete it with your knowledge of the events.

Thank you for your support!

Sex

- Male
- Female

Age

- 13-19
- 20-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60+

Where do you reside?

- Within the boundaries of Salt Pond and Seymour's
- Within the boundaries of Pinder's and Gordons
- What settlement did you remain in during Hurricane Melissa?

Why did you remain in this settlement? Select all that apply.

- Comfort
- Sound Structure/Building
- Elevated Property
- Difficulty relocating (poor mobility, transportation etc.)

- Unsure of the list of activated shelters
- Other

Did you relocate before or during Hurricane Melissa due to the impending storm?

- Yes, I relocated before the hurricane
- Yes, I relocated during the hurricane
- No, I did not relocate
- I rather not say

If you answered yes to the above question, why did you relocate?

- Comfort
- Structural damage to property
- Low-lying area/flooding
- Other

Did the area you remain in during Hurricane Melissa flood?

- Yes
- No

If you answered YES to the above question, about how many inches of water settled in your area?

- 1-3 inches of rain
- 4-6 inches of rain
- 7-9 inches of rain
- 9-12 inches of rain
- more than 12 inches of rain

Was there an area you approached once the "All Clear" was given after hurricane Melissa that was inaccessible to you due to flooding?

- Yes
- No

If you answered YES to the above question, give a description of this area, including location, water coverage, water depth and anything significant you observed.

For example, Clarence Town was flooded from the Community Centre to the corner just before Lochabar beach. The water was more than 2ft deep. Only large trucks were able to pass through the area.

Contributions for this report were made as follows:

Report Structure and Execution: Paige Adderley-Strachan

Abstract: Paige Adderley- Strachan

Introduction: Paige Adderley- Strachan

Methods: Paige Adderley- Strachan

Completion of the Data Collection Tool (Survey): Paige Adderley Strachan reviewed by Joanna Taylor

Distribution of Data Collection Tool: Paige Adderley- Strachan, Joanna Taylor and the local community.

Background Information: Joanna Taylor and Paige Adderley-Strachan

Limitations to Survey: Joanna Taylor and Paige Adderley-Strachan

Historical Significance: Joanna Taylor

Key Survey Findings: Joanna Taylor and Paige Adderley-Strachan

Recommendations based on survey findings: Joanna Taylor

Map Production: Paige Adderley-Strachan

Limitations and Relevance for Map Production: Paige Adderley-Strachan

Findings and Discussion for Map Production: Paige Adderley-Strachan

Recommendations for Map Production: Paige Adderley-Strachan

Conclusions: Paige Adderley-Strachan