

WCF ARES® Communicator

When the Skies Turn Gray, What Next

September 2025

Fellow ARES® Members,

In the Emergency Management world, we speak of two significant periods: Blue Skies – meaning our everyday activities during normal operations and weather and Gray Skies – covering the times we are responding to and recovering from a disaster event such as a hurricane or tornado. During Blue Skies, we update our disaster plans, inventory and replenish our family emergency kits, test and update our emergency communications equipment, and complete any training we need for the next incident when it comes.

During the Gray Skies period, we will have little time to collect resources we may need. We need to be ready to mobilize when called. Remember, never self-activate – wait for official tasking from your sponsoring agency. Depending on how austere your reporting location may be, you may have to be self-sufficient for 7 to 14 days. That may include food, clothing (appropriate for a range of weather conditions), bedding, and toiletries (which may include field sanitary necessities). For the radio equipment, you will need power sources such as batteries, a generator, solar panels, and assorted connectors and adapters. Those of us who deploy beyond our county's boundaries during incidents have our Level-2 credentials and go-kits ready. Also, remember that your individual and family's safety come first. Make sure your family members and pets are safe and have the resources they need while you are activated.

Now let's talk more about Blue Skies. In addition to the time spent getting our gear ready, this is the time to learn our skills, practice them, and become more proficient at providing communications services. It's also a good time to expand your knowledge and training in the National Incident Management System (NIMS). All of us have probably taken the Emergency Management Institute (EMI) Independent Study (IS) courses about the Incident Management System (ICS) and NIMS. Those are introductory courses. During your Blue-Sky periods, sign up for additional courses online or at your local agencies. The more you know about how your agencies operate during an incident, the better you will be serving them. Besides, for many of us, the courses are great for building our networking and contacts.

In addition to training opportunities, Blue Skies are the perfect time to practice our radio and computer skills in low stress environments. All Amateur Radio Emergency Services® (ARES®) members should become proficient in controlling a net; and sending and receiving message traffic, both by voice and digital methods. Most every ham participates in local

nets. Often, we become complacent about our skills. Many of us think we can jump right in controlling nets and passing traffic. It's like learning to ride a bicycle. If you are like me, who hasn't been on a bicycle in about 4 years, you'll be a little wobbly on your first ride. It's the same with radio. If you don't do net control on a regular basis, you may find yourself marble-mouthed and forgetful. The Blue-Sky period is the perfect time to volunteer to run your local ARES or SKYWARN® net. If your sponsoring agency conducts practice sessions in sending and receiving messages, join in. Many agencies have adopted Winlink as their preferred messaging capability. Use your Blue-Sky time to become skilled at sending the appropriate message forms using Winlink.

Lastly, Blue Skies are the perfect time to build and expand your relationship with other ARES members. Attend your ARES group meetings each month and actively participate in any nets your group runs. Consider taking a leadership role in your organization. Interpersonal skills are critically important during a Gray Skies incident. The Blue-Sky period is the perfect time to build your people skills in a low stressed, collegial environment.

By taking the initiative to strengthen both our technical abilities and our familiarity with emergency protocols, we set ourselves up to serve our communities more effectively when the need arises. Whether we are reviewing procedures, experimenting with new equipment, or simply reaching out to share insights with fellow operators, every effort in the Blue Skies phase pays dividends when conditions turn gray. Let's continue supporting one another, sharing knowledge, and remaining ever-ready to answer the call—no matter what challenges lie ahead.

At the same time, your consistent participation makes you a well-known entity in your organization.

Sincerely,

Dave Rockwell, W4PXE

Section Emergency Coordinator

ARRL® West Central Florida Section

Email: w4pxe@arrl.net

(Thanks to guest editor, Steve Parks, Manatee County EC)



ARES Field Reports

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Report: Form4

Division: Southeastern

Section: West Central Florida

Month/Year: July 2025

History: Reported by David Rockwell, W4PXE, SEC on 2025-08-11 19:07:28 UTC

Number of DECs/ECs reporting this month: 7

Total number of DECs/ECs appointed in section: 9

4. Total number of ARES members: 206

Difference in ARES members from previous month: N/D

5. Number of ARES net sessions held: 38

6. Number of ARES net sessions held with NTS liaison: 15

7. Number of participants in nets: 675

| | Number | Person-Hrs |
|--|--------|------------|
| 8. Exercises this month: | 4 | 26.00 |
| 9. Training events this month: | 11 | 169.00 |
| 10. Public service events this month: | 0 | 0.00 |
| 11. Community service events this month: | 0 | 0.00 |
| 12. Emergency events this month: | 0 | 0.00 |
| 13. SKYWARN events this month: | 11 | 245.70 |
| 14. Meetings this month: | 12 | 118.00 |
| 15. Unclassified events this month: | 12 | 57.00 |

Call signs of DECs/ECs reporting:

W4PXE

Activity Details:

CHARLOTTE COUNTY-----

Conducted 4 Training Sessions for 40 employees of Served Agency, County EM.

Constructed portable repeater for Community Service events. Conducted 4 range testing sessions.

Weekly CCFLARES events reported by W4AII:

-Wednesday 7-30-25 Two CCFLARES Nets:

NXDN at 1900 ET: 23-check-ins, 23-Minutes.

FM 1930 ET 26-check-ins , 24-Minutes

NB9X Paul
NI4CE skywarn net is now Tuesday 7:30 pm

W4PXE Dave
Net Mgrs, OES, and Relay reports due at Aug 5.
EC Reports and Emergency Stations report due 8-5-25.

K4KJN Christine:
8-23 TARCfest, Tampa ARC clubhouse.
10-10 Melbourne Hamfest and ARRL FL state convention
11-8 SparcFest Pinellas Park
12-12 Tampa Bay Hamfest and ARRL WCF Section Convention

KT4WX Daryl
KK4LI silent key. Lake Placid Active ARES member.

HARDEE COUNTY-----
Held three sessions of the Hardee County ARES Net on Monday July 7, 21, and 28. Had a total time of 9 check-ins for a total net time of 18 minutes. Total volunteer time for nets was 1 hour.

HIGHLANDS COUNTY-----
Equipped our "Go Kits" with the new radios.

MANATEE COUNTY-----
There was no monthly Membership Meeting in July.
We conducted two New Member Orientation and two Level-1 Fundamentals of EmComms Training classes in July.
The Manatee County Official Emergency Stations participated in a national FEMA SHARES Exercise on July 9 via Winlink.

PASCO COUNTY-----
Monthly meeting held with presentation of Shelter operations.

POLK COUNTY-----
We had several members who also attend the QRPs and participated in this month's PtoP WinLink exercises.

SARASOTA COUNTY-----
Nothing significant to report.

OFFICIAL EMERGENCY STATIONS-----

KM4WXX Sanford Wyatt SARASOTA COUNTY 36.5 hours
KO4IHP Tim Gardner SARASOTA COUNTY No Activity
N4OA Bill Johnson HILLSBOROUGH CTY ARES/RACES Net 3
SFL ARES Net 13
WCF ARES NET 3
WCF 80M Net 3 Total: 22 hours
KR4X Larry Gispert HILLSBOROUGH CTY 2 times checked into the CGCWOA CW Net on 14.052 mhz CW
4 times checked into WCF ARES EC/OES Net on 3.940 mhz LSB
4 times checked into SFL ARES Net on 3.940 mhz LSB
1 time checked into Hillsborough ARES/RACES Net on 444.425 mhz NBFM
1 time checked into The Florida NXDN Net on 442.0875 mhz
3 hours attended the Bi-Monthly ARES/RACES Meeting at

PSOC 20 miles of travel 15 hours of total activity
with 20 miles of travel

SKYWARN WX ALERT NET (Section-wide)-----
5 Sessions, 259 Check-Ins, 155.7 person hours

Administrative and Other Comments:

CHARLOTTE COUNTY-----
Reported by James Nelson, W4AII

HARDEE COUNTY-----
Darrell Davis KT4WX, Hardee EC, met with Emergency Management Director Lane Schneider to request materials to finish out a station installation at the alternate EOC. Materials were approved and ordered. Still need to obtain coax and one other VHF/UHF antenna to complete station installation.

Reported by EC, Darrell Davis, KT4WX

HIGHLANDS COUNTY-----
Met with OIC of the ROTC program at Sebring High School. We are setting up a Tech class for this group.
Local ARES members are setting this up. We have already been contacted looking for information from the other two High Schools in Highlands Co. We will begin classes at the High School in September and hope to hold a test session prior to the end of the first semester. Then, we will consider doing a general class the second semester. We hope to include "labs" in the session including an attempt to contact the Space Station.

SECTION EMERGENCY COORDINATOR-----
Developed MOU between WCF ARES and West Central Florida Group, Inc., repeater system operators, to allow
WCF Counties to use the NI4CE linked repeater system for contingency communications.

24 administrative hours.

Reported by EC, Jeff Bronsing, KI4NEO

MANATEE COUNTY-----
2025 FDACS Filing - Small Charitable Organizations Sponsors Registration Application was submitted on 7/5/2025.
Several members attended WebEOC Training July 8 & 15.
Elmering continues on Packet Winlink for many new members and CERT Officers with amateur licenses.
I continue to chair the EmComms Working Group for the Manatee County CERT Coalition.
Month end July 2025 Membership Metrics
1) 54 Active Members
2) 41 Qualified (76%) - 16 at Level 1, 19 at Level 2, 6 at Level 3
3) Amateur Licensees: 24 Extra, 4 Adv, 14 Gen, 12 Tech

Reported by EC, Steve Park, W4OEP

PASCO COUNTY-----
Nothing significant to report.

POLK COUNTY-----
EC will be meeting with Paul Womble, Polk County Emergency Management Director, about ARES activities during a full activation.

Reported by EC, Christine Duez, K4KJN

SARASOTA COUNTY-----

Nothing significant to report.

Reported by EC, Mike Kearney, KG4KIQ

Send comments or questions about this page to [ARES Support](#).

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