

next thing we'll do is swim."

They kept an eye on things around the lodge all night. When it started looking bad this morning, they joined others rushing around to turn off gas valves and move golf carts.

The Smiths aren't complaining about their bad luck, especially when early estimates put the number of destroyed RVs and campers around 60.

"We didn't have any loss of life," said Carroll. "All the rest of this can be replaced."

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Wally Hill woke up in the Wal-Mart parking lot to the sound of a horn and a woman's voice yelling, "Ya'll need to get out."

He had already evacuated once Wednesday. Wally, who lives in Charlotte, was one of hundreds at Tom Johnson Rally Park for the business' annual customer appreciation rally. Emergency officials with sirens blaring drove into the campground earlier that night, using a loudspeaker to clear out the place.

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Gail Bagwell's house was OK. So was Wal-Mart, where she works. It was everywhere in between that kept her from getting home to Old Fort.

She works second shift at the store, but when floodwaters closed down U.S. 70 West Wednesday night, she decided to stay and help on third.

After emergency workers paddled her and other workers out of the parking lot, the shelter at First Baptist was the only place to go.

Sydney Wilson, executive director of the local Red Cross chapter, loaded Gail into her car around noon Wednesday hoping they could make down U.S. 70.

Gail was back at the shelter, wrapped in a Red Cross blanket, in less than an hour.

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Scott and Vickie Bear moved with their 11-year-old daughter Michaelle from Florida to North Cove two months ago. They watched the hurricane tear through their home state and counted their blessings.

They never expected the storm would reach them in the mountains of North Carolina. But as they watched the creek by their house grow from a shallow waterway to a 12-foot

massive vehicle.

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The rumbling sound of boulders tumbling down Buck Creek kept Beth and Bill Ross awake Tuesday night.

Floodwaters took out the road between their trout ponds and their house. Mud and rockslides blocked the highway into town for much of Wednesday morning and early afternoon. Above their home, they said slides completely wiped out the road.

In her 24 years there, Beth said she'd never seen such destructive weather.

The news was mixed at the Moose Lodge, where their fishing boat sank but their houseboat stayed on top of the water.

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It was 3:30 a.m. when Van Anderson heard a thud that sounded like it was coming from his basement.

Then he got a surprising view of his front yard. The base of the front wall crumbled underneath the soggy ground and fell into the basement, which houses Anderson's upholstery shop.

The fire department evacuated the Andersons — Van, Joyce and their son Justin — from the Hilltop Drive home.

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Scott and Regina Cunningham thought it might have been thunder they heard Wednesday night.

Instead, it was a massive red oak tree that fell into the roof of the North McDowell Avenue home. The tree sent ceiling tiles toppling and rain pouring into the kitchen.

Firefighters lined the room with tarps and tried to route water out their back door.

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When John and Linda Buck of Fairview got to the Moose Lodge Wednesday afternoon, they found their furniture floating.

The couple saved their pictures, then left the rest to the floodwaters.

Three feet seeped into their camper. Linda buried her red-ringed eyes in her husband's shoulder as they surveyed the damage in front of them.

"We have another house to go to but some of these people don't," she said.

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#### (Continued from Page 1)

him there," Cable stated. He added that the Rescue Squad and Woodlawn-Sevier and Ashford-North Cove fire departments responded to North Cove School Road around 5:30 a.m. but couldn't attempt to free the man until daylight. They rescued him around 7:30 a.m.

Another incident sent rescuers out in boats to free stranded campers.

Late Tuesday night, visitors attending an event at Tom Johnson Camping Center briefly escaped the storm's wrath by moving their campers to the Wal-Mart parking lot. However, around 3:30 a.m., emergency and law enforcement personnel, as they stood chest-deep in the rising water, knocked on camper doors, helped about 40 people out and loaded them onto boats. They were among the more than 160 who sought shelter at local churches.

They also rescued a couple of workers trapped at McDonald's. Hemphill said officials reported 4 to 5 feet of water inside Wendy's.

Peebles Manager April Grindstaff said the wait to get into her store was worse than what she found once she was allowed to do in. The business escaped with little or no damage and was scheduled to open late Wednesday.

Flooding in that area left 240 people trapped inside the Comfort Inn, according to Hemphill.

Swift-water rescue crews with boats also freed residents

from a mobile home on Cannon Road and a man from a mobile home at Shiflet Field. Local emergency officials requested — and received — help from swiftwater rescuers from Lumberton and Pitt County and high-wafer trucks from the National Guard. Cable said they will stay in McDowell County until 10 a.m. today when local emergency workers feel the threat of further danger has passed.

No injuries were reported.

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Firefighters, rescue workers and law enforcement officers spread out across the county early Tuesday evening as reports of flooding, toppled trees and downed power lines began to surface.

Rain pounded the county throughout the night and into the wee hours of the morning before tapering off to showers Wednesday afternoon.

Water blanketed several roads in the Old Fort, Pleasant Gardens, Woodlawn and North Cove areas and drove the Lake Tahoma Dam overflow up to 4 feet, prompting an evacuation of the area. Officials had already set up shelters at the Old Fort and Marion First Baptist churches, but the Tahoma evacuation prompted a third at P.G. Baptist Church. In all, the three housed 166 stranded residents Tuesday and Wednesday.

One of the hardest-hit areas, according to Hemphill, was Mountain Paradise Campground on U.S. 221 North, where the flood wiped not only the campers but the road.

"We don't have access to anything north of Mountain Paradise because the road is gone," said Hemphill. "We've notified surrounding counties that, in case of an emergency, we will need their help."

They evacuated the Alpine Motel at Mountain Paradise.

A mudslide around 5 a.m. at the top of Old Fort Mountain left all lanes in both directions of travel closed for a couple of hours. Once transportation crews arrived and began cleanup, authorities opened one eastbound and westbound lane.

The rain also surrounded and isolated Baxter Healthcare, forcing the third-shift employees to stay an extra 1 1/2 hours. Hemphill stated that the exiting employees had to be rerouted, which meant dismissing them in groups instead of all at once.

"Things went pretty smooth, but there were still a lot of challenges for emergency services personnel, especially the swiftwater rescues," said Hemphill.

"There was tremendous cooperation between all the emergency agencies, both paid and volunteer. Local governments showed

total support for emergency services response. If cooperation is there, it makes difficult times more easy to deal with."

The storm also prompted the cancellation of school Wednesday and today.

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Now that the rain has stopped, water contamination, health care issues and damage assessments will be on the forefronts of people's minds over the next few days, said Hemphill.

He added that the flooding is also expected to have some devastating affects on crops.

Local emergency officials will study areas where they have little or no access, such as Oconee Falls off Old Linville Road in the Ashford community. Because personnel cannot get to about 20 residences there, Hemphill said he would probably request portable bridges until new ones can be built.

In other places, like Mountain Paradise, footbridges may work until other arrangements can be made, he added.

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