

Help The N&O document the aftermath and damage of Hurricane Helene in North Carolina

September 30, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Laura Brache, News & Observer | Section: north carolina | 225 Words OpenURL Link

Four days after Hurricane Helene ravaged through the North Carolina mountains in the western part of the state, we're still learning the extent of the damage and the death toll the storm left.

RAL_092922-HURRICANE-HELENE-TEL-18.JPGWestern North Carolina residents salvage bottled water from a flooded tractor-trailer in Swannanoa on Sunday, Sept. 29, 2024. The remnants of Hurricane Helene caused widespread flooding, downed trees, and power outages in western North Carolina.

Officials say at least 30 people have died in Buncombe County alone, The News & Observer, and its sister publication The Charlotte Observer, previously reported.

How to help NC in Hurricane Helene aftermath. Where to donate and volunteer

Some have compared the historic flooding caused by Helene to the flood of 1916, which at the time was the worst ever documented in the region, according to the Asheville Museum of History.

RAL_092922-HURRICANE-HELENE-TEL-10.JPGA rescue team paddles down the Swannanoa River on Sunday, Sept. 29, 2024. The remnants of Hurricane Helene caused widespread flooding, downed trees, and power outages in western North Carolina.

Both The N&O and The Observer have teams of reporters and photojournalists on the ground documenting the aftermath and learning more from their respective home bases.

Help us document the stories of people and places impacted by Hurricane Helene in our state by sharing your photos and videos below.

 $RAL_SubmitWeatherPhoto_EMBED$

Latest updates from western NC after Helene: Power outages, road closures & more

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A county by county look at Helene's devastation in Western NC. The latest updates.

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Author: Drew Jackson, Richard Stradling and Evan Moore, News & Observer Section: north carolina 2384 Words
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The toll of the tropical storm that was once Hurricane Helene continues to unfold in North Carolina. The state's picturesque and mountainous western region was inundated with historic rainfalls, flooding, land and mudslides.

We're gathering what we know of the damage in each county in Western North Carolina. Here is an evolving snapshot of that toll as new information becomes available.

We'll update this in the coming days with more counties and specific details.

RAL_100124-HURRICANE-HELENE-TEL-25.JPGJen Dombrowski arrives in downtown Marshall to help a friend clean up her business on Tuesday, Oct. 1, 2024 after the French Broad River caused catastrophic flooding. The remnants of Hurricane Helene caused widespread flooding, downed trees, and power outages in western North Carolina.

Hurricane helene deaths by county map embed

Alexander County

All of the power has been restored to homes and businesses in Alexander County.

The Highway 16 bridge, which passes over Lake Hickory near the Oxford Dam, reopened Tuesday, officials said.

The county reports that phone, internet and cell service have improved and have been restored in most government buildings.

Alleghany County

Five of the 9,832 homes and businesses in Alleghany County remain without power as of Friday morning.

Portions of N.C. 93 and N.C. 18 are closed in this rural county along the Virginia border.

Phone service was restored for county offices on Friday.

Tuesday updates from western NC after Helene: Power outages, road closures, recovery efforts

Drone video shows the damage to Biltmore Village in AshevilleBiltmore Village received extensive damage from flooding of the Swannanoa River after the remnants of Hurricane Helene caused torrential rainfall in western North Carolina over the weekend.

Ashe County

There has been one confirmed death in Ashe County.

About 3% of the 21,758 homes and businesses in Ashe County remain without power as of Friday morning.

New River State Park is currently closed.

The New River crested at 18.27 feet, higher than the 18-foot crest during the Great Flood of 1916. The historic

record, though, for the Jefferson water station is 22.5 feet, from 1940.

Avery County

There have been four confirmed deaths in Avery County.

About 11% of the 1,796 homes and businesses in Avery County remain without power as of Friday morning.

There are dozens of road closures in this mountainous county along the Tennessee border.

Grandfather Mountain, which includes Avery, Caldwell and Watauga counties, is closed until further notice.

Five shelters have been set up in Banner Elk, Beech Mountain, Ingalls, Newland and Minneapolis.

Curfew is in place from 8 p.m. to 5 a.m. to keep roadways clear.

RAL_100124-HELENE-KLM-08.JPGVehicles and machinery sit underneath debris near the North Toe River in Avery County on Tuesday, Oct. 1, 2024, days after Hurricane Helene brought heavy rain and flooding to the North Carolina mountains.

Buncombe County

Buncombe County officials said 72 people have been found dead in that county alone.

So far Buncombe, which is home to Asheville, has the most reported Helene deaths in the state.

Buncombe County Register of Deeds Drew Reisinger said Sept. 30 that his office has received 11,000 requests from people seeking help to locate their loved ones amid the spotty cell service and destroyed roadways.

On Saturday, the county launched an online site to report and upload photos of blocked roads and downed trees: report.BuncombeCounty.org.

Around 46,000 customers were still without power on Wednesday, more than 28% of the county.

Portions of U.S. 70, U.S. 74 and N.C. 81 remain closed, as do dozens of other thoroughfares.

Two emergency shelters are open. The shelter in Asheville is full, but one in Fletcher can accept people and pets.

RAL_092922-HURRICANE-HELENE-TEL-29.JPGSwannanoa residents share rolls of toilet paper on Sunday, Sept. 29, 2024. The remnants of Hurricane Helene caused widespread flooding, downed trees, and power outages in western North Carolina.

Burke County

There has been one confirmed death in Burke County.

Less than 1% of the county's 43,609 homes and businesses are without power as of Friday morning.

The Burke County Office of Emergency Services said the number of fatalities and injuries is still being assessed.

A shelter is open at Oak Hill Methodist Church in Morganton.

Supply distribution centers have been set up at George Hildebran Fire/Rescue in Connelly Springs, Longtown Fire Department in Nebo and Enola Fire/Rescue in Morganton.

Caldwell County

Sixteen of the 42,343 homes and businesses in the county remained without power as of Friday morning.

The Caldwell County Sheriff's Office reports the county's emergency system received 1,594 calls to 911 during the first day of the storm.

A shelter remains open at West Caldwell High School in Lenoir.

Donations for people impacted by the storm can be dropped off at Lower Creek Baptist Church in Lenoir.

Catawba County

There has been one confirmed death in Catawba County.

Around 100 homes were flooded in the Lookout Shoals area along the Catawba River, and 50 more homes around the county suffered major damage.

All of the power has been restored to homes and businesses in the county.

Clay County

All of the power has been restored to homes and businesses in Clay County.

Cleveland County

There have been two confirmed deaths in Cleveland County.

Nine of the 48,369 homes and businesses in the county remain without power Friday morning.

Gaston County

There has been one confirmed death in Gaston County.

Twenty-five of the 115,122 homes and businesses in the county remain without power as of Friday morning.

NCDOT: Full extent of damage to roads in Western NC won't be known for a while

Haywood County

There have been four confirmed deaths, according to the Haywood County Sheriff's Office.

Less than 1% of the 39,267 homes and businesses in the county remain without power as of Friday morning.

A large section of Interstate 40 is closed in the county, as well as portions of N.C. 215 and U.S. 276.

An emergency shelter is open in Clyde at the Haywood County Government Armory.

Distribution centers for supplies have been set up at Woodland Baptist Church and Jonathan Valley Elementary in Waynesville, and Bethel Elementary School in Canton.

A curfew remains in place from 9 p.m. to 7 a.m.

The Haywood County fair has been canceled for 2024.

See drone footage of flood-damaged western NC townsNews & Observer visual journalist Travis Long shows the damage fromHelene in the towns of Clyde and Canton in Haywood County, out in the western part of North Carolina.

Henderson County

There have been six confirmed deaths in Henderson County.

About 4% of the 69,28 homes and businesses in the county remain without power Friday morning.

Large sections of U.S. 64 and 74 remain closed near Bat Cave, along with many other roads.

Two shelters remain open in Hendersonville, each with plenty of open beds.

Resource hubs for water and other supplies were opened Wednesday at Etowah Elementary, Rugby Middle, East Henderson High, North Henderson High, Mills River Town Hall and Fletcher Town Hall.

There is a countywide curfew from 10 p.m. to 8 a.m.

Jackson County

Less than 1% of the 30,047 homes and businesses in the county remain without power Friday morning.

Schools are reopening Monday.

Lincoln County

All power was restored by Sunday afternoon.

Public school resumed on Thursday.

Macon County

There has been one confirmed death in Macon County.

Twelve of the 29,273 homes and businesses were without power on Friday morning.

Drone video: Small NC town starts the long recovery from HeleneAerial footage from N&O visual journalist Travis Long shows people trying to dig out from the catastrophic destruction in downtown Marshall, Tuesday, Oct. 1, 2024, after flooding from the French Broad River inundated the small western North Carolina town.

Madison County

There have been four confirmed deaths in Madison County.

Around 2% of the county's 15,878 homes and businesses remain without power as of Friday morning.

Parts of N.C. 63, U.S. 25 and U.S. 70 are closed.

NC residents dig out of the mud, knowing Helene has forever changed their communitiesThe News & Observer's Travis Long, Kaitlin McKeown and Josh Shaffer capture the scenes in Marshall and Avery County, NC as residents begin the long process to recover from Helene's devastation.

An emergency shelter is open at the county wellness center in Marshall.

Food, water and other supplies are available to county residents at A-B Tech Madison, 4646 U.S. 25.

RAL_100124-HURRICANE-HELENE-TEL-12.JPGKelley Greene of Marshall helps clean up downtown on Tuesday, Oct. 1, 2024 after the French Broad River caused catastrophic flooding. The remnants of Hurricane Helene caused widespread flooding, downed trees, and power outages in western North Carolina.

McDowell County

There has been one confirmed death in McDowell County.

Around 5% of the county's 30,790 homes and businesses remained without power Friday morning.

The westbound lane of Interstate 40 is closed to non-emergency traffic throughout the county. Dozens more roads are closed.

There are two emergency shelters open in Marion, though only the YMCA still has space.

The town of Old Fort enacted a curfew on Saturday because of "increased theft issues." It is in effect nightly from 9 p.m. to 7 a.m.

An IV fluid manufacturer has paused operations due to flooding and bridge failures, sparking concerns about a nationwide shortage of IV bags and dialysis solutions.

The county has set up a donation site for water and emergency supplies at 634 College Dr. in Marion. Residents can also call the Helene Assistance Hotline at 828-652-3241 to report missing persons, request transportation or shelter, and report urgent medical equipment needs.

RAL_OLDFORT-NE-100224-RTW_13.JPGBrooke Canning climbs out a window of her damaged home on Wednesday, October 2, 2024 in Old Fort, N.C. Canning was trying to salvage personal items after flood waters from Hurricane Helene flooded Mill Creek and her neighborhood in the center of town.

Mecklenburg County

There has been one confirmed death in Mecklenburg County.

Mitchell County

About 44% of the 12,071 homes and businesses in Mitchell County are without power as of Friday morning.

Numerous roads throughout Mitchell County are impassable, and "a good bit of the county infrastructure has been either damaged or destroyed by floodwaters and uprooted trees and downed power lines," according to the county. Bakersville, the county seat along Cane Creek, has been particularly hit hard.

The Red Cross opened a shelter at Mitchell High School in Bakersville, while another opened at First Baptist Church in Spruce Pine.

A quartz mine in Spruce Pine owned by Sibelco has been temporarily closed due to flooding and damage in the storm.

Polk County

There has been one confirmed death in Polk County.

Less than 1% of the 20,292 homes and businesses in Polk County are without power as of Friday morning.

The county has set up a phone line with a recorded message for those seeking information, at 828-722-5086. On Saturday, local government described the devastation in Green River Cove as "beyond words."

Polk County High School in Columbus is serving as a shelter, though schools are set to resume Wednesday.

Among the roads closed Friday were portions of N.C. 9 and U.S. 176.

Rutherford County

There have been three confirmed deaths in Rutherford County.

About 2% of 45,550 homes and businesses in Rutherford County are without power as of Friday morning.

There is widespread damage throughout the county. The Lake Lure Dam, once thought in danger of failure, has stabilized.

The town of Lake Lure said firefighters and town workers went door to door rescuing people in the most affected area, many on foot or via helicopter because of closed roads. The top of the lake was covered in debris, including floating propane tanks, that the Broad River swept up on its way through Chimney Rock.

Chimney Rock Village is restricting access to essential personnel only. Not even residents are being granted passes to enter dangerous areas.

Lake Lure officials have advised residents to leave town, if possible, and won't permit nonresidents to enter.

"Please do not come to town unless you absolutely need to be here as this is an ongoing rescue situation and the roads are not safe," town officials wrote Wednesday morning. "Your absence will allow first responders to focus on rescue operations."

Residents can call the county emergency line at 828-278-8920 to make donations or ask for supplies.

Shelters are open at schools in Rutherfordton and Forest City.

There is a countywide curfew from 7:30 p.m. to 7:30 a.m.

Transylvania County

Less than 1% of the 23,988 homes and businesses in Transylvania County were without power as of Friday morning.

The sheriff's office said last Sunday that Transylvania County had "received catastrophic damages, and we have still not been able to access all parts of the county."

U.S. 64 near the South Carolina state line remained closed on Friday, as did sections of U.S. 276 and many roads near Brevard.

No deaths have been reported in the county and all the missing persons reports have been resolved, Transylvania County Manager Jaime Laughter said Sunday.

Schools will be closed at least another week.

Watauga County

There have been two confirmed deaths in Watauga County.

About 3% of 29,117 homes and businesses in Watauga were without power on Friday morning.

Numerous homes and businesses were flooded in Boone, and the town's water pipes were broken in several places. Residents have been told to boil drinking water before using it.

The Red Cross is running a shelter in Boone for residents and Appalachian University students whose off-campus homes were damaged.

Many roads are closed as of Monday morning, including parts of N.C. 194. County and local officials ask all leisure travel to the area be postponed.

There's a countywide curfew from 11 p.m. to 7 a.m.

RAL_100124-HELENE-KLM-05.JPGA person walks by a section of washed out road near Highway 421 in Boone, N.C., days after Hurricane Helene brought heavy rain and flooding to the western part of the state.

Wilkes County

Twenty-four of 38,686 homes and businesses in Wilkes County were without power as of Friday morning.

A county official told MyFox80, a local TV station, that between 150 and 200 homes are inaccessible because of blocked roads. A landslide closed N.C. 18 between Wilkesboro and Sparta, and the road will likely be closed for about a month, said Jason Reavis, the Emergency Services Director.

The county got up to 16 inches of rain, Reavis said, but wasn't as hard hit as others.

"We caught the side of it pretty much," he said. "We are very fortunate and very blessed."

Victim assistance centers will open from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Monday at 307 9th St. in Wilkesboro and 1422 Burtonwood Drive in Gastonia.

Yadkin County

There has been one confirmed death in Yadkin County.

Yancey County

There have been nine confirmed deaths in Yancey County.

Around 36% of the 14,608 homes and businesses in Yancey County were without power as of Friday morning.

N.C. 197 partially collapsed near Burnsville. N.C. 80 and U.S. 19 are also among the many that remain closed Friday.

The Red Cross has set up a shelter at Blue Ridge Elementary School. Residents can now call the county sheriff's office at 828-682-2124 for assistance.

Mary Helen Moore and Chantal Allam contributed to this report.

Helene North Carolina death toll is rising, but incomplete. What we know so far.

Helene devastated this small Ashe County town. Now its residents are feeding one another

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Trying to reach a missing person impacted by Helene in NC? What to do and who to call

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Days after Hurricane Helene swept through the southeast, recovery efforts are still underway for North Carolinians stranded without food, water and other supplies in the western part of the state.

According to Governor Roy Cooper, first responders have received hundreds of calls for rescue and more than 1,000 requests for welfare checks, with that number expected to rise.

How to report missing person or request welfare check

As crews work alongside local governments, state and federal partners and volunteer organizations to support victims impacted by the storm, officials say 911 calls should be made for emergencies only.

If you need to report a missing person or request a welfare check on someone potentially in danger, you should call NC 211 (1-888-892-1162), a information and referral service provided by United Way of North Carolina.

nc 211 emergency management tweet

Available in most languages at all times in every county, NC 211 is used to provide residents verified resources across the state for basic needs, including housing, food and healthcare, its website says.

When disaster strikes, like Hurricane Helene, the service is part of the State's Emergency Plan for updates, storm-related issues or non-emergency related questions. Residents can dial 2-1-1 and speak to a trained Community Resource Specialist or use the online NC 211 search tool at nc211.org.

If you're struggling to contact someone who may need assistance, you can add loved ones to the United Way of North Carolina's search and rescue efforts by submitting a missing persons request, welfare check or rescue request online at unitedwaync.org.

Requests can also be made by texting 'PERSON' to 40403.

You can find more information about Helene-related information and resources, including power outages, open shelters and crisis cleanup, online at ncdps.gov/helene.

Want to donate to people in NC affected by Helene? Here's how to help

Price gouging law is in effect following Helene. How to recognize & report it in NC

After Helene: Tips for assessing storm's damage to your home & filing insurance claims

Ask NC service journalism team EMBED

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Helene North Carolina death toll is rising, but incomplete. What we know so far.

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Update Oct. 4, 2024: For the latest on the Helene death toll in North Carolina, see this story.

Macon County Sheriff's Office officials on Sunday composed what they said was one of the most difficult press releases they ever released.

On Friday morning, Deputy Jim Lau left his courthouse security job for lunch, a Sheriff's Office Facebook post states. He never returned as the former Category 4 hurricane-turned-tropical storm dumped extreme rainfall in Western North Carolina.

Helene's death count in North Carolina is by no means final. But Lau was one of dozens known to have been killed after the hurricane's powerful remnants reached Western North Carolina, with more fatal tragedies yet to be reported or even discovered.

At least 60 people were confirmed killed in North Carolina as of Wednesday afternoon, including a 7-year-old boy in Buncombe County, according to information provided by state officials.

RAL_OLDFORT-NE-100224-RTW_10.JPGA member of a search and rescue team wades into the Catawba River searching for victims of Hurricane Helene on Wednesday, October 2, 2024 near Old Fort, N.C.

A second sheriff's deputy, Capt. Michelle Quintero, 48, in Madison County, died after a damn broke while she was driving to her job at the jail, the Associated Press reported.

And a faint outline of what havoc stole people's lives is coming into view.

At least 15 people died from drowning, along with four more who reported drowning in their motor vehicles, according to the public safety department. Ten people died in landslides, with five from dangers linked to high winds and damaged trees.

Three others died in motor vehicle crashes while the causes of five lives lost are unknown, according to information provided Monday by the North Carolina Department of Public Safety.

Hurricane helene deaths by county map embed

RAL_092922-HURRICANE-HELENE-TEL-37.JPGA search and rescue team out of Atlantic Beach, N.C. examines a van swept into the river in Swannanoa, N.C. by flooding from Helene. They were assisting in the community, Sunday, Sept. 29, 2024.

Toll still unfurling

At least 100 people have died and over 600 are unaccounted for across 10 states hit by Helene, President Joe Biden said Monday.

Leaders of western North Carolina counties, where Helene fed historic flooding that shut down roads and bridges, along with cell and internet connections, say people are unaccounted for across the region.

Buncombe County Sheriff Quentin Miller said Monday morning that 35 have been found dead in that county alone,

but the body count will rise as search and rescue efforts continue. By 4 p.m. Thursday, the death toll had risen to 72 and about 200 people are missing, Miller said. So far the county, which is home to Asheville, has the most reported Helene deaths in the state.

RAL_OLDFORT-NE-100224-RTW_8.JPGA member of a search and rescue team from Colorado wades into the Catawba River searching for victims of Hurricane Helene on Wednesday, October 2, 2024 near Old Fort, N.C.

"Devastation does not begin to describe how we feel," Miller said during a briefing broadcast live on Facebook.

Buncombe County Register of Deeds Drew Reisinger said that his office has received 11,000 requests from people seeking help to locate their loved ones amid the spotty cell service and destroyed roadways.

In response to the thousands of calls, Reisinger's office opened a family assistance center and volunteers are supplementing search and rescue efforts going door to door of local residences, he reported in the briefing.

RAL_092922-HURRICANE-HELENE-TEL-26.JPGA Jeep, swept from the road by floodwaters, lies in a creek in Swannanoa on Sunday, Sept. 29, 2024. The remnants of Hurricane Helene caused widespread flooding, downed trees, and power outages in western North Carolina.

Tragic ending to a search

Officials in Macon County, which includes the town of Franklin and the Nantahala River, noticed deputy Lau didn't return to the courthouse after around 11:30 a.m. on Friday.

Witnesses called 911 reporting a truck being swept under water in a local river with a person inside. Officials soon made the connection to Lau not returning and his truck matched witnesses' descriptions, the post states.

Multiple agencies started searching on foot, with a drone in the air and with multiple swift water rescue teams, the post said. But as the sun started to set, they put the search on hold.

They found Lau's body the next morning.

"Jim was very liked and respected within our department. He was known to be a hard worker, dependable, and he jumped in wherever help was needed. His absence will truly be felt in our agency," the post said.

It also asked for prayers for his family, for the department and for all of Western North Carolina.

"The tragedy that surrounds our mountain communities is unimaginable," the post states.

To report a missing person or request non-emergency support, call NC 211 or 1-888-892-1162 if calling from out-of-state.

(Story updated at 9:20 a.m. on Thursday.)

RAL_OLDFORT-NE-100224-RTW_9.JPGA member of a search and rescue team works a flooded field adjacent to the Catawba River, searching for victims of Hurricane Helene on Wednesday, October 2, 2024 near Old Fort, N.C.

Virginia Bridges covers criminal justice in the Triangle and across North Carolina for The News & Observer. Her work is produced with financial support from the nonprofit The Just Trust. The N&O maintains full editorial control of its journalism.

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Price gouging law is in effect following Helene. How to recognize & report it in NC

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A law against price gouging is in effect in North Carolina as a result of Helene.

When the state of emergency was declared, it became illegal for businesses to charge too much to make a profit.

The office of N.C. Attorney General Josh Stein is asking consumers to look out for price gouging and report it.

As of Monday, Sept. 30, the attorney general's office has received and is looking into 43 complaints of price gouging since Helene, Nazneen Ahmed, a spokesperson for Stein's office, told The News & Observer. Most of the reports are concerning prices of hotel stays and fuel stemming from businesses in western North Carolina, and particularly the Boone area, Ahmed said.

What is price gouging?

Businesses and industries that are heavily affected by storms like Helene or other severe incidents may need to raise prices to resupply, and they should disclose the increases so people can make informed decisions.

However, businesses can't "unreasonably raise the price of goods or services to profit from a state of emergency," according to a press release announcing the price gouging law.

The attorney general's office can seek refunds for people who paid too much, and courts may impose civil penalties against price gougers of up to \$5,000 per violation, according to the N.C. Department of Justice.

Stein has brought 12 lawsuits against 29 defendants under the price-gouging law since 2018, and has obtained 14 judgments or settlements totaling \$1.08 million against 25 defendants.

How to report price gouging in NC

North Carolinians may submit complaints of price gouging online or by phone.

To report potential price gouging, call 1-877-5-NO-SCAM or go to ncdoj.gov/pricegouging.

Be ready to provide your name, address and contact information, along with the name and address of the company against which you are complaining.

Also be prepared to share details of the product, item or service involved in the price gouging, including its current price and the reason given by the business for the current price, if provided.

Ask NC service journalism team EMBED

After Helene: Tips for assessing storm's damage to your home & filing insurance claims

Latest updates from western NC after Helene: Death toll, power outages, road closures

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After Helene: Tips for assessing storm's damage to your home & filing insurance claims

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Following Helene, North Carolinians are examining damage to their homes and properties and planning for clean-up and repairs.

Filing an insurance claim may be part of that process.

As recovery efforts continue, here's what to know about taking an inventory of the damage and preparing to file an insurance claim.

How to assess damage to your home and property

If your home was damaged by the storm, follow these tips from the N.C. Hurricane Guide:

If you evacuated, don't return home until local and state officials say it's safe to do so. Don't walk or drive through flood waters, and don't drive through or around barricades. Many roads in western North Carolina have been rendered impassable by Helene, The News & Observer previously reported. At home, walk around your property to check for loose power lines, gas leaks and structural damage. If you smell gas or see structural damage, make sure local officials inspect the home to ensure it's safe before you enter. Don't block roadways, fire hydrants and utility boxes when cleaning up debris. Separate debris into limbs and brush, household trash and other materials, such as construction debris. Local officials will provide directions on how to properly dispose of it. Stay aware of announcements about the safety of public water supply. In Asheville, where preliminary assessments showed that the water system had been damaged, a boil water advisory is in place, The Asheville Citizen-Times reported Sept. 29.

What to know about filing an insurance claim after storm damage

Here are some tips from the N.C. Hurricane Guide:

Your first step should be talking with your insurance company. Contact your agent as soon as you can, but be patient because companies are likely dealing with many requests. Take photos and make a detailed inventory of all damaged property before making any repairs. Only make repairs that are necessary to prevent additional damage. Don't make any permanent repairs before speaking with your agent because you may not be reimbursed for unauthorized repairs. Keep receipts for items purchased to make temporary repairs. Ask your insurance company about which expenses will be reimbursed before renting a temporary shelter. Ask your insurance agent before calling a tree removal service, because some removal costs may be covered.

Homeowners may file a claim with the Federal Emergency Management Agency if their insurance does not adequately cover loss of or damages to a home, according to North Carolina Emergency Management. But the claim with FEMA can only be filed after a homeowner has filed a claim with their insurance company.

Flood damage is not covered by standard homeowners insurance. To protect your home from flood losses, you'll need flood insurance.

Homeowners and renters in 25 counties in western North Carolina and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians who had uninsured damage or losses caused by Helene may be eligible for disaster assistance from FEMA.

Latest updates from western NC after Helene: Power outages, road closures & more

Western North Carolina communities hope for 'some sort of lifeline' after Helene damage

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Want to donate to people and animals in NC affected by Helene? Here's how to help

September 30, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Chyna Blackmon and Julia Coin, News & Observer Section: weather news 902 Words OpenURL Link

Days after Hurricane Helene swept through the Southeast, many in North Carolina are struggling in the aftermath of the deadly storm that damaged homes, destroyed communities, flooded and washed away roads and left many stranded without food and water.

Officials expect a long road to recovery for those affected.

"This is going to be a tremendous effort in the short run - but looking at it in the long run with the hundreds of roads that are destroyed, communities that were wiped off the map- we have to make sure that we get in there, are smart about rebuilding, doing it in a more resilient way but right now, we're saving lives and getting supplies to people who desperately, desperately need them," Governor Roy Cooper said in an on-air interview with CNN Monday. Sept. 30.

Here are ways to help and donate, along with a list of things not to do.

cooper cnn helene interview 093024

NC Disaster Relief Fund

In partnership with United Way of North Carolina, Governor Cooper's office is managing the North Carolina Disaster Relief Fund, which will go towards supporting nonprofits working on collecting food and water, cleaning supplies and other emergency supplies for victims.

cooper nc disaster relief fund tweet

You can make an online donation at nc.gov/donate. You can also make a contribution to the disaster fund by mailing donations to the following addresses:

NC Disaster Relief Fund, 20312 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-0312.NC Disaster Relief Fund, c/o United Way of NC, 1130 Kildaire Farm Road, Suite 100, Cary NC 27511.

Photos: Search for victims of 'apocalyptic' flooding in NC continues with many still cut off from help

Organizations collecting donations, supplies for storm Helene

In addition to the North Carolina Disaster Relief Fund, here's a list of other organizations collecting donations and supplies to help those in need:

Americares

How to donate online: Visit my.americares.org.

American Red Cross

How to donate online: Visit redcross.org/donateHow to donate by mail: Send a check donation form and check to: American Red Cross, PO Box 37839, Boone, IA 50037-0839. To send via FedEx or UPS, send check and donation form to American Red Cross, c/o CDS Global, 2005 Lakewood Drive, Boone, IA 50036.How to donate by phone: Text

"REDCROSS" to 90999 to donate to American Red Cross Disaster Relief or call 1-800-HELP NOW (1-800-435-7669).

You can find more information about how to help, including blood donations and being a volunteer, online at redcross.org.

Boone Area Chamber of Commerce Foundation

How to donate online: Visit boonechamber.com/foundation.

CARE

How to donate online: my.care.org.How to donate by mail: Send the donation form with check or credit card information to: CARE, Gift Center, P.O. Box 1870, Merrifield VA 22116-8070How to donate by phone: Call 1-800-422-7385.

You can find more information about how to make a donation, including how to wire transfer contributions, online at care.org.

The Community Foundation of Western North Carolina

How to donate online: Visit cfwnc.fcsuite.com.

The Salvation Army

How to donate online: Visit give.helpsalvationarmy.org.How to donate by mail: Send checks with the name of the disaster relief effort you wish to support to: The Salvation Army - Disaster Relief, PO BOX 1959, Atlanta, GA 30301.How to donate by phone: Call 1-800-SAL-ARMY (1-800-725-2769).

You can also find more information and search for your local Salvation Army location online at southernusa.salvationarmy.org/north-south-carolina/.

Samaritan's Purse

How to donate online: Visit samaritanspurse.org.

You can also find more information about how to volunteer in Watauga and Buncombe counties online at spvolunteer.org.

United Way

How to donate online: Visit unitedway.org/hurricane-helene.

You can find specific chapters in counties around North Carolina to donate to online at unitedway.org/local/united-states/north-carolina.

How to help people and volunteer in NC in Hurricane Helene aftermath

Charities helping animals in Western NC after Hurricane Helene

There are a number of good organizations working to aid animals suffering after Helene. Here are a few to start with.

Asheville Humane Society

How to donate online: ashevillehumane.org

The Asheville Humane Society has been Buncombe County's critical safety net for animals since 1984. They have a 100% rating on Charity Navigator.

US Humane Society

How to donate online: humanesociety.org

The US Humane Society's Animal Rescue Team is on the ground helping communities affected by Helene. As of Thursday, Oct. 3, donations were being matched by Fetch Pet Insurance. They have a 98% four-star rating on Charity Navigator.

Greater Good Charities

How to donate online: greatergood.org

Greater Good Charities says its devoted to improving the health and well-being of people, pets and the planet. The group has teams on the ground in North Carolina, Georgia and Florida delivering emergency relief after Helene. As of Thursday, Oct. 3, donations were being matched by Purina. The group has a 96% approval on Charity Navigator.

More Helene disaster relief organizations in NC

Here's a list of more vetted disaster relief organizations to make donations to online at ncdps.gov.

What items not to donate, what not to do

When supporting victims impacted by a storm, financial contributions are best to provide important and immediate services to provide help in need, according to the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

"Financial contributions to recognized disaster relief organizations are the fastest, most flexible and most effective method of donating," the agency's website says. "Organizations on the ground know what items and quantities are needed, often buy in bulk with discounts and, if possible, purchase through businesses local to the disaster, which supports economic recovery."

Though it may seem helpful, FEMA says used clothing is never needed and recommends connecting with organizations about what may be needed before contributing supplies.

At this time, the North Carolina Department of Public Safety is also discouraging anyone from sending physical donations or volunteers to western NC.

Ask NC service journalism team EMBED

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How Helene's destruction could affect voting in North Carolina's election

September 30, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Kyle Ingram, News & Observer | Section: election | 1108 Words OpenURL Link

In the aftermath of Hurricane Helene's destruction in Western North Carolina, concerns have emerged about whether residents affected by the storm will be able to cast their ballots in the November election.

Disruptions to the postal service, destruction of polling places, missing or damaged IDs and more could all pose challenges to voters with only 36 days left until the election.

"This is all a cascading series of disasters," Gerry Cohen, a member of the Wake County Board of Elections, said.

Disruptions to postal service

On Sunday, the U.S. Postal Service announced it had temporarily suspended services in much of Western North Carolina, including any areas with ZIP codes starting with 286, 287, 288 and 289.

It also listed 39 post offices whose operations would be suspended until conditions are safe.

These closures could present challenges to voters in Western North Carolina seeking to vote by mail.

So far, nearly 250,000 North Carolinians have requested an absentee ballot for this year's election. Nearly 10,000 requests have come in from Buncombe County, which was severely impacted by Helene.

Corinne Duncan, Buncombe County's election director, said the county's main focus now is life, safety and basic needs.

"Personal safety of election services staff is currently our top priority," Duncan said in an email. "We are working to account for all staff and board members. Some are stranded due to road blockage."

She added, however, that the post office is running and election staff were able to drop 200 ballots in the mail on Monday.

Phone lines for several of the counties hit hardest by Helene were down on Monday as The News & Observer attempted to contact board of elections offices.

The absentee voting period has already been reduced this election.

While mail-in ballots were supposed to be sent to voters on Sept. 6, most were delayed another 18 days by a court order after third-party presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. sued to get his name off the state's ballot.

Most absentee ballots went in the mail just a few days before Helene hit Western North Carolina.

"I suspect if these things were in people's mailboxes Thursday and Friday, a lot of these counties, you can see stuff just completely washed away," Cohen said.

In addition to that, voters now have a shorter deadline to get their absentee ballots in. State lawmakers passed a bill last year that requires all mail-in ballots to be received by the county board of elections office by 7:30 p.m. on Election Day.

Previously, any ballots that came in within three days after the election would still be counted, so long as they were postmarked by Election Day.

Voters concerned about postal delays can deliver their absentee ballot in person at their county board of elections office. A voter who has requested an absentee ballot may also choose to vote in person instead, so long as they do not return the absentee ballot.

Polling places for early voting

Flooding and destruction may make polling places unusable as election workers prepare to begin in-person early voting on Oct. 17.

Duncan said that Buncombe County has not yet completed site assessments at polling locations. The facilities where election staff work, however, were not damaged but are currently without access to water.

Changes to a county's early voting plans can still be made, but state law sets out certain limitations.

Previously, the executive director of the State Board of Elections could exercise emergency powers to respond to the impact natural disasters might have on elections.

Last year, however, state lawmakers stripped the director of that power and instead gave it to the State Board of Elections itself. That board is currently comprised of three Democrats and two Republicans, who would have to use these emergency powers in an open meeting.

There also isn't much time left to make changes to early voting sites.

State law requires all early voting sites within a county to be open for the same number of days. That would appear to make any changes to polling sites difficult after Oct. 17.

Having usable polling sites isn't the only concern for counties conducting early voting. With many residents displaced by Helene, counties may have difficulty staffing polling sites.

"It's gonna have a likely enormous impact if all these polling places have been washed away and early voting sites are not available and poll workers are not available," Cohen said. "So I don't know what the solution is, but there's not much time to figure it out."

Voter ID

For the first time in North Carolina's history, voters will have to present photo identification to vote in a presidential general election.

However, state law provides an exception to this requirement for voters affected by natural disasters.

Anyone affected by Helene can fill out an affidavit, either in-person at a polling place or via absentee ballot, saying that they have been a victim of a natural disaster and are unable to produce their ID.

They will then cast a provisional ballot, which will be reviewed by the county board of elections before being accepted.

What can be done to help?

Counties could face heavy financial burdens as they attempt to recover polling places, fix damaged equipment and prepare for voting after Helene.

This also comes after counties were forced to foot the bill to reprint millions of ballots following the state Supreme Court's decision in Kennedy's lawsuit allowing him to withdraw his candidacy.

Cohen said the legislature, which will be back in session next week, should reimburse counties for those costs.

A law passed last year prohibits the use of any private donations for election administration.

Counties are also still accepting volunteers to work the polls during early voting and Election Day.

State grants flexibility to election workers facing closures, power outages

In an emergency meeting on Monday, the State Board of Elections voted to give local election workers greater flexibility in processing absentee ballots in the coming weeks, as western counties reel from Helene's impacts.

Executive Director Karen Brinson Bell said 14 of the 22 western counties contacted by the board reported that their elections offices are currently closed and could be for several more days.

"Our hearts really do go out to these people that we consider elections family," she said. "... At this time, many of them still don't have contact with family members. They're facing damages, some total losses at their own personal properties, and so we are trying to be as responsive as we can to what their needs are."

County election boards are typically required to meet every Tuesday to receive and process absentee ballots, but the state board's resolution will allow them to reschedule those meetings.

Brinson Bell also said the state is currently in the process of creating a webpage to answer questions about the hurricane's impact on elections.

Under The Dome embed (2022)

New Under the Dome newsletter subscriber embed (graybox)

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Latest updates from western NC after Helene: Death toll, power outages, road closures

September 30, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Renee Umsted, News & Observer | Section: north carolina | 1554 Words OpenURL Link

Days after Helene made landfall in Florida late Thursday night as a Category 4 hurricane, many communities in western North Carolina are dealing with the storm's devastating aftermath.

Hundreds of thousands of Duke Energy customers in western North Carolina and South Carolina were still without power as of Sunday, Sept. 29, the company said in a press release. Meanwhile, several highways were washed out or destroyed by the storm.

As electric companies, power plants and emergency personnel continue with recovery efforts, here's what you need to know on Monday, Sept. 30.

RAL_092922-HURRICANE-HELENE-TEL-39.JPGA man crosses a narrow section of flood damaged bridge in Swannanoa on Sunday, Sept. 29, 2024. The remnants of Hurricane Helene caused widespread flooding, downed trees, and power outages in western North Carolina.

Death toll from Helene continues to rise

In North Carolina, 34 storm-related deaths have been confirmed, according to a Sept. 30 press release from the office of Gov. Roy Cooper.

"There are significant reports of storm-related fatalities," according to the press release, and the office of the state medical examiner will continue to confirm the reports.

A portion of those occurred in Buncombe County, where at least 30 people have died as a result of Helene, Sheriff Quentin Miller said in a press briefing Sunday, Sept. 29.

Two deputies in western North Carolina have died as a result of the dangerous conditions caused by the storm. A deputy from the Macon County Sheriff's Office and a deputy from the Madison County Sheriff's Office died "in raging flood waters," the North Carolina Sheriffs' Association wrote in a social media post Sept. 29.

Overall, at least 107 people in six states have died, AP News reported around 11 a.m. Monday, Sept. 30.

More than 600 people are unaccounted for, President Joe Biden said Sept. 30.

How many people are still without power in western NC?

While Duke Energy has restored power to more than 1.1 million customers affected by the storm in the Carolinas, there are still nearly as many who are without power.

As of 6 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 29, around 508,000 people in South Carolina and 396,000 in North Carolina - mostly in the western regions of each state - still lacked power.

Use Duke Energy's map to track outages.

When will power be restored in western NC?

"Based on what we can see on the ground, from helicopter and by drone, there are lots of areas across the South

Carolina Upstate and North Carolina mountains where we're going to have to completely rebuild parts of our system, not just repair it," Jason Hollifield, Duke Energy storm director for the Carolinas, said in a Sept. 29 press release. "And there are stretches of damage that we still can't even assess due to mudslides, flooding and blocked roads."

Helene damaged Duke Energy's infrastructure, submerging substations and toppling utility poles and transmission towers.

Restoring power to the hardest-hit areas could take "several days or longer," according to the press release. Duke Energy restores power first to public health and safety facilities, but it also considers how to restore service to the greatest number of customers.

The company can't restore power to homes or businesses that have been flooded until the electrical system passes inspection by an electrician.

RAL_092922-HURRICANE-HELENE-TEL-09.JPGSwannanoa residents walk through devastating flood damage from the Swannanoa River on Sunday, Sept. 29, 2024. The remnants of Hurricane Helene caused widespread flooding, downed trees, and power outages in western North Carolina.

Which roads are closed in western NC?

The North Carolina Department of Transportation said all roads in western North Carolina should be considered closed, and "non-emergency travel is prohibited," The News & Observer previously reported.

Parts of Interstate 40 are "impassable," according to NCDOT.Near the Tennessee border, Interstate 40 has been washed out, and Interstate 26 is closed.All of US 276 and US 64 are closed in Transylvania County, according to NCDOT.Two bridges leading to Burnsville, a town in Yancey County northeast of Asheville, have been damaged, former N.C. Supreme Court Justice Bob Orr shared on X.

NC towns and cities destroyed by flooding

« Roads and buildings in the village of Chimney Rock were swept away by the flooding, a resident captured in a video.

Video: Scenes of Helene flooding devastation around NC's Lake LureSee scenes of the massive devastation caused by flooding from Helene in the Lake Lure and Chimney Rock areas of North Carolina, Sunday, Sept. 29, 2024.

- « Many businesses in Asheville's River Arts District, a popular cultural hub, were destroyed by the flooding, according to the Asheville Citizen-Times.
- « The Old Marshall Jail Hotel in Marshall regained internet access on Sept. 29 and shared an update on the situation in the town. "We are safe but the town of Marshall is destroyed," the hotel wrote in an Instagram post. "Whole buildings are gone. All the businesses are destroyed."

Old Marshall Jail Hotel IG

« Southeast of Asheville, the Lake Lure Dam nearly failed, the National Weather Service shared on X around 11 a.m. Sept. 27. Water crested the dam, but Josh Kastrinsky, a spokesperson for the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality, said it continued to hold despite structural damage, The Charlotte Observer previously reported.

Lake Lure Dam is now stable, and emergency repairs are set to begin, The N&O reported.

Recovery efforts from Red Cross, NC National Guard

As of the evening of Sept. 29, there were more than 30 shelters with more than 1,000 people looking for refuge in the Carolinas, according to a Red Cross press release, and the organization is working to increase its shelter footprint.

Along with providing refuge, the Red Cross is also increasing its mass care services such as food, health and mental health care, and relief supplies.

Gov. Roy Cooper has activated more than 400 personnel from the National Guard, according to a Sept. 30 press release. Search and rescue teams have rescued more than 500 people, and 422 of them were rescued by the North Carolina National Guard.

On Sept. 28, President Joe Biden approved a "major disaster" declaration for North Carolina, which will allow the Federal Emergency Management Agency to supply additional help quicker to people who need it. Federal funding is available to more than two dozen counties along with the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians.

FEMA and the Department of Defense are airlifting supplies such as food, water and tarps to places that are faced with flooding from the storm. FEMA has delivered about 1 million liters of water and more than 600,000 meals to North Carolina, according to a Sept. 30 press release from the office of Gov. Roy Cooper.

"I've directed my team to provide every, every available resource as fast as possible to your communities to rescue, recover and to begin building," Biden said Sept. 30.

Triangle police & fire departments send personnel to western NC

Police departments from Zebulon, Rolesville and Wendell have sent officers to Hendersonville to help with safety and law enforcement during the recovery after Helene.

"During times of crisis, we have a duty to take care of each other-our family, our neighbors, and our loved ones-for North Carolinians, that starts in the WNC," Zebulon Police Chief Jacqui Boykin said in a press release. "I am proud of our officers for volunteering to help local law enforcement and their citizens as we keep the people of Hendersonville in our thoughts and prayers."

The officers are expected to provide assistance over the course of five days, according to the press release.

Firefighters from Raleigh, Durham and Chapel Hill fire departments, along with Wake County EMS personnel, deployed to Haywood County to help with search-and-rescue efforts.

According to a press release from Wake County, many other local resources have been sent to western North Carolina:

Swift water rescue teams from Wake Forest, Knightdale, Cary and Raleigh were sent to assist with urgent rescue operations in flooded areas 75 more firefighters will be sent over several daysWake County Sheriff's Office and Wake County EMS are sharing therapy dogs with State Emergency Operations Center personnel and affected residentsA Wake Fire Services and Emergency Management logistics team will be in Buncombe County for two weeksApex has sent six utility personnel, and Raleigh Water staged resources to be prepared to help other water providers

RAL_092922-HURRICANE-HELENE-TEL-23.JPGA rescue team paddles down the Swannanoa River on Sunday, Sept. 29, 2024. The remnants of Hurricane Helene caused widespread flooding, downed trees, and power outages in western North Carolina.

UNC System sends help to campuses in the west

Campuses throughout the UNC System are providing assistance to universities in the western part of the state,

according to a press release from the UNC System.

North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University and Winston-Salem State University sent emergency managers and law enforcement personnel to UNC Asheville. N.C. State sent student affairs professionals, counselors and facilities crews and equipmentEast Carolina University provided two food trucks The System Office sent IT experts to help restore internet UNC-Chapel Hill deployed an environmental safety team

Additional teams from North Carolina Central University, UNC-Chapel Hill, UNC-Charlotte, UNC-Pembroke and UNC-Wilmington are expected to assist UNC Asheville.

How to contribute to recovery efforts in western NC

Several organizations are collecting monetary donations to help communities in need following Helene:

The North Carolina Disaster Relief FundAmericaresAmerican Red CrossBoone Area Chamber of Commerce FoundationCareThe Community Foundation of Western North Carolina Salvation ArmySamaritan's Purse United Way

'There's just nothing left.' Helene wipes out Chimney Rock's Main Street

Helene's devastation changed everything about their wedding, except the important part

At least 10 people dead in Western NC from Helene, 200 rescued from floods

Western North Carolina communities hope for 'some sort of lifeline' after Helene damage Copyright 2024 The News and Observer

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Federal aid is available for North Carolinians affected by Helene. Here's how to apply.

September 30, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Luciana Perez Uribe Guinassi, News & Observer | Section: north carolina | 706 Words OpenURL Link

When a hurricane such as Helene strikes, one of the first forms of federal aid available is through FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

This agency provides disaster assistance before, during and after a disaster, including via help for individuals and families affected.

Events declared disasters by the president are eligible for help from FEMA, and on Friday, North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper requested a major disaster declaration. President Joe Biden announced Saturday he had approved the declaration.

RAL_092922-HURRICANE-HELENE-TEL-10.JPGA rescue team paddles down the Swannanoa River on Sunday, Sept. 29, 2024. The remnants of Hurricane Helene caused widespread flooding, downed trees, and power outages in western North Carolina.

Cooper requested that declaration for federal help for 38 counties and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, and Biden approved it for 25 North Carolina counties and the Eastern Band.

This declaration means that FEMA can expedite help for the state, reimburse local governments, state agencies and nonprofits for funds spent on repairs and provide individual assistance for people affected.

Forms of aid for individuals through FEMA can include funds for temporary housing (for rental assistance or covering hotel costs), repairs and rebuilding of homes, or other needs such as medical expenses, damage to an essential vehicle, funeral expenses, child care expenses and more.

RAL_GUARD01.JPGSoldiers assigned to the N.C. National Guard 2nd Battalion, 104th Aviation Regiment airlift stranded citizens from Avery County to Hickory. U.S. National Guard aviation crews from Connecticut, Maryland, Pennsylvania and Iowa are supporting the N.C. National Guard.

The 25 counties approved for aid are: Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Clay, Cleveland, Gaston, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Lincoln, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes and Yancey counties, according to a press release by Cooper's office.

RAL_092822-HURRICANE-HELENE-TEL-16.JPGResidents in Clyde begin cleaning up on Saturday, Sept. 28, 2024 after massive flooding damaged dozens of homes and businesses. The remnants of Hurricane Helene caused widespread flooding, downed trees, and power outages in western North Carolina.

How to apply for FEMA assistance

As for how to apply for individual aid, there are multiple ways you can do so.

Online at DisasterAssistance.gov.Via the FEMA App By calling the FEMA helpline at 800-621-3362 from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. ET daily.

If you use a video relay service, captioned telephone service, or other communication services, you should provide FEMA the specific number assigned for that service.

FEMA does not provide aid for losses already covered by insurance, so the agency recommends immediately filing a claim with your insurance company if you have insurance. You do not need to file your insurance claim before applying for FEMA aid, but will be required to provide FEMA with insurance settlement details or denials for some forms of assistance, according to the FEMA website.

Be sure to take pictures of damage to your home and personal property before any cleanup or repairs. Document all the information you can.

FEMA aid is available for U.S. citizens, noncitizen nationals, or qualified noncitizens such as legal permanent residents, refugees and more.

Renters and small business owners may also be eligible for federal help through the U.S Small Business Administration (SBA), which provides disaster loans.

See photos and video from Helene's devastation in the mountains of western NC

What is needed for the application

For the FEMA application, here's what you need:

Social Security number Annual household incomeContact information such as your phone number, mailing address, email address and the damaged home address Bank account information Insurance information

After applying for aid, an inspection might be required, in which a FEMA employee comes to survey damage to your home and personal property. FEMA may also request more information. After the review, FEMA will notify you of any aid you are eligible for. You can appeal the decision.

The application deadline in North Carolina for this aid is Nov. 27, according to the FEMA website.

For more immediate emergency assistance, contact 911.

For shelter, visit the American Red Cross, or Salvation Army, or by texting SHELTER and your zip code (for example, "SHELTER 01234") to 4FEMA (43362).

For local aid options, call 2-1-1.

FEMA is just one form of federal aid. More aid is often provided by other agencies, including through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Be sure to be on the lookout for other federal aid and other local and statewide aid that may become available.

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Helene devastated this small Ashe County town. Now its residents are feeding one another

September 30, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Josh Shaffer, News & Observer | Section: weather news | 518 Words OpenURL Link

In just a few hours, Big Horse Creek sent a 10-foot wall of water into the tiny mountain town of Lansing, destroying its row of quaint brick art shops, antique stores and cleverly named pizza parlor - Pie on the Mountain.

Hurricane Helene roared through Lansing's section of the popular Virginia Creeper Trail and left it strewn with mud, tree trunks and a Winnebago-sized camper turned upside-down in the water.

All along Lansing's main street, the shopkeepers pulled out soaking walls and floorboards already reeking with mildew, and they offered their canned goods and water bottles for all needy comers.

"This area has been devastated," said Jeff Pierce, a volunteer at the fire department, "Something we've not seen since the 1940s. You're familiar with Carter-Finley Stadium. Two of those, 40 feet high. That's how much water."

As rescue crews cut trees off roads and cleared branches and strips of sheet metal off bridges, the larger world began to see the extent of ruin in North Carolina's northwest corner.

RAL_093024-HELENE-KLM-05.JPGCommunity members sort canned goods outside of CJ's Market while cleaning up following damage from Hurricane Helene on Monday, Sept. 30, 2024, in Lansing, N.C.

'Caskets floating in the river'

While repairing a broken gas line in Boone, Steve Calhoun recalled the worst he'd seen in Ashe County since Friday.

"Caskets floating in the river," he said. "People in the water and nobody can get to them. Houses in the road. Cars in trees."

The water has receded, but locals do not expect all the area's power to be restored for months. The roads to many remote areas, including west of Lansing, are too washed out for crews to reach.

They worry about those still missing, unaccounted for in the chaos.

RAL_093024-HELENE-KLM-06.JPGThe asphalt buckles and slopes outside of Bald Guy Brew following damage from Hurricane Helene on Monday, Sept. 30, 2024, in Boone, N.C.

In Lansing, the Squirrel and Nut got walloped only four months after it opened. It sold local and vintage art, including pieces made by Lora Young, who spent Saturday, Sunday and Monday grilling donated food.

"A lot of us don't have power," she said, "so they're bringing us stuff out of their freezers. Need some food? We've got chicken grilling now."

RAL_093024-HELENE-KLM-01.JPGAn overturned camper van sits in Big Horse Creek in Lansing, N.C. following Hurricane Helene on Monday, Sept. 30, 2024.

Volunteers feeding hundreds

At the fire department, volunteers fed 300 people barbecue though the population of the town 33 miles northeast of Boone is only 128.

Pierce led a prayer over the pig cooker, giving thanks and asking for guidance.

"One thing you have to understand about mountain people," he said. "We're resilient. We keep fighting."

RAL_093024-HELENE-KLM-03 (1).JPGHope Miller sorts canned goods to be donated to the food bank outside of CJ's Market as community members clean up following damage from Hurricane Helene on Monday, Sept. 30, 2024, in Lansing, N.C.

As he spoke, the shopkeepers moved up and down Lansing's main street, shoveling mud.

Young smiled at them over her grill.

"You have to," she said. "Once you get a chance to slow down, it'll all sink in."

IMG_1155.jpgSome of the devastation in Lansing, North Carolina after Helene tore through Western North Carolina in 2024.

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Biden says Trump is lying about Cooper, NC Helene response. Here's what's really happening.

September 30, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC)
Author: Dawn Baumgartner Vaughan and Danielle Battaglia, News & Observer Section: politics government | 1428 Words
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Former President Donald Trump complained about North Carolina's disaster response on social media on Monday, claiming without evidence that Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper isn't helping Republican-leaning areas of the state impacted by Hurricane Helene.

President Joe Biden told reporters on Monday that Trump is lying.

The Republican presidential candidate targeted Cooper in a social media post about how he was going to Valdosta, Georgia, "in order to pay my respects and bring lots of relief material."

He goes on to say that he "was also going to stop into North Carolina, which has really been hit hard. I have a lot of supplies ready for them, but access and communication is now restricted, and we want to make sure that Local Emergency Management is able to focus on helping the people most affected, and not being concerned with me. I'll be there shortly, but don't like the reports that I'm getting about the Federal Government, and the Democrat Governor of the State, going out of their way to not help people in Republican areas. MAGA!"

In reality, federal, state and local governments are working together on relief. And relief is also coming from other states.

Trump did not explain where he was getting "reports" of some people not being helped because of their political party affiliation. In general, urban areas like Asheville have concentrations of Democratic voters while Republican voters are in rural areas.

Biden, asked Monday about Trump's comments on Cooper's Helene response, angrily interjected before a reporter finished asking the question, according to the White House pool report.

"He's lying, and the governor told him he was lying. The governor told him he's lying. I've spoken to the governor, spent time with him, and he told him he's lying. I don't know why he does it ... that's simply not true, and it's irresponsible," Biden said.

RAL_092922-HURRICANE-HELENE-TEL-37.JPGA search and rescue team out of Atlantic Beach, N.C. examines a van swept into the river in Swannanoa, N.C. by flooding from Helene. They were assisting in the community, Sunday, Sept. 29, 2024.

Cooper surveyed the damage Monday, joined by FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell and leaders of the departments of transportation, public safety and Health and Human Services, which are part of his Cabinet.

"People are working around the clock to provide help to them right now - food, water, working hard to make sure that we've got shelters open all across this area, and working to get power back on," Cooper told reporters in a press briefing at the Asheville airport on Monday, when asked about the speed of the response. "When you have a situation where communities are completely cut off, when first responders can't even get in, because water is still there, and rivers are rising right now, as we speak."

"A lot of work is done. What we want to tell people is that more help is on the way, and help is continuing. This is our main mission right now, and this is a massive coordinated effort to help this area, both in the short term and in the long term," Cooper said.

Rep. Edwards, Speaker Moore survey damage

Also at the briefing in Asheville with Cooper were Republican U.S. Rep. Chuck Edwards and Republican N.C. Sen. Tim Moffitt.

Edwards and Republican House Speaker Tim Moore surveyed damage via a helicopter on Monday, Edwards said in a news release.

"We've had a very disappointing response from FEMA, and a very disappointing response, initially, from the North Carolina Emergency Management services," Edwards, who represents far western North Carolina, said in an interview with McClatchy.

"But we're seeing resources start to show up. Today, the governor has given us assurances that there will be more and I think we're on our way to a good solid recovery."

Edwards said he was frustrated because the storm ended at 10 a.m. Friday in the western part of the state.

"I'm only seeing resources brought into Western North Carolina today," Edwards said. "We lost, I'm going to say 80 hours - and we knew the storm was coming, so 80 hours ago we should have seen FEMA deploying resources to the perimeter of where we expected the storm to hit. But instead it looked like folks took the weekend off. They're just showing up today."

"The people in this district are hurting, and they're really disappointed with the response from the federal government, and our state government."

Edwards said it was Cooper's responsibility to oversee North Carolina Emergency Management, which is responsible for the initial response in a disaster.

"I had a call from the White House earlier today, saying, Congressman, we know that the response from FEMA has been slow, but tell me what you need me to do," Edwards said. "And my response is, 'I don't need people to continue to ask me what I need them to do. I need people to do things.""

Edwards said to White House officials' credit, they told him to put together a list of immediate needs and promised to help check things off that list.

Edwards asked for temporary cellphone towers, unprecedented amounts of water, meals ready-to-eat, a communication center and a grocery distribution warehouse to replenish stores.

"I'm giving the White House a chance to live up to their promise that they'll help us get the things on that list," Edwards said.

Republican Senate leader Phil Berger said Monday that he had been "briefed by Emergency Management officials on the impacts of Hurricane Helene and the emergency response efforts. This was an absolutely devastating storm."

"The General Assembly is evaluating what a disaster recovery package could look like and what other steps we can take. North Carolina has a healthy savings account that will help us respond to the catastrophic nature of this storm," Berger said on social media.

'Major access challenges'

N.C. Emergency Management Director William Ray said that state officials are using ground routes to distribute water and food that they can access "reliably and safely," including through Interstate 40 and Interstate 26.

"We know there are many areas of the western part of the state that still have major access challenges, which is

why we put in place the operation you see here of moving, using aircraft to move commodities into those impacted areas," Ray said at the Asheville airport.

RAL_092922-HURRICANE-HELENE-TEL-15 (1).JPGA washed out bridge over the Swannanoa River in Black Mountain on Sunday, Sept. 29, 2024. The remnants of Hurricane Helene caused widespread flooding, downed trees, and power outages in western North Carolina.

"Right now, we are trying to surge as much of the commodities into the entire impacted region. Yesterday as an example, either via ground or by air, 30 counties had commodities delivered to them yesterday," he said.

"We know that we're not going to be able to meet right now, out of the gate, the universal need that everyone has, that's why we are surging up both our distribution so we're putting additional drivers on, to be able to get more trucks on the road, to get commodities in faster," Ray said, as well as aircraft.

Emergency Management officials have 40 trailers a day of food and water they are trying to distribute to the "entire impacted area," he said.

National Guard response

Cooper activated more than 400 service members in the N.C. National Guard. The National Guard has rescued 422 people since the storm, out of more than 500 total rescues that includes search and rescue teams from 27 states and 18 federal teams. Of those rescued, 42 were critically injured people and four were infants. There were 64 animals rescued as well.

The Guard has also delivered 306 pallets of water and 230 pallets of food.

Republican U.S. Rep. Virginia Foxx of Banner Elk said Monday she wanted to see more from Cooper's office. Only six members of the National Guard were on the ground in Avery County, she said.

"We don't have enough National Guard," Foxx told McClatchy. "Last night, they had sent out 400 National Guard for 25 counties. That's a very small number."

The North Carolina Department of Transportation posted several times on social media and on its website that "all roads" in Western North Carolina are closed and the only travel on them should be for emergencies, over the weekend and on Monday. NCDOT is a Cabinet agency of Cooper's administration.

On Saturday, the North Carolina National Guard shared photos of the work they had already begun, joined by other states' National Guard soldiers from Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Iowa and Maryland to support relief efforts by air.

NC Reality Check is an N&O series holding those in power accountable and shining a light on public issues that affect the Triangle or North Carolina. Have a suggestion for a future story? Email realitycheck@newsobserver.com

Under The Dome embed (2022)

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Baptists on Mission among helpers at work in Western NC after Helene devastation

September 30, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Martha Quillin, News & Observer | Section: north carolina | 559 Words OpenURL Link

Until last week, Bill White had the kind of home in Arden, just south of Asheville, that real estate agents would describe as park-like, with a lot so dense with trees it was hard to see the house from the road.

Then destructive remnants of Hurricane Helene came through and did some unwelcome landscaping, dropping at least 10 mature trees, including a four-trunk oak that landed on the house.

White, 86, was just about to climb onto the roof and size up the damage Monday afternoon when a trio of men from the N.C. Baptists on Mission pulled into his driveway and started unloading chainsaws and limb loppers.

"This is unbelievable," White kept saying, his sea-blue eyes filling with tears. "It's unbelievable that they do this."

ncbaptist_04.JPGBill White watches as a crew with NC Baptists on Mission Disaster Relief work to remove trees from his home in Arden, N.C. on Monday, September 30, 2024.

Craig Schomburg, John Miller and Mark Cantrell have been doing this together for years. They know each other from Apex Baptist Church, and now that they're retired, they have the time to travel to the places where people are the most relieved to see them.

Between them, they have done disaster relief in several states, and regularly volunteer at the Baptist on Mission's Rose Hill outpost, where workers still are rebuilding homes lost in Hurricane Florence n 2018.

This week, they're working with teams based at Biltmore Baptist Church, where several disaster-relief efforts have converged in response to the widespread need Helene created.

helene_volunteers_04.JPGBarbara Garland, left, with NC Baptists on Mission Disaster Relief hands out food to other volunteers at Biltmore Church Arden Campus in Arden, N.C. on Monday, September 30, 2024.

The Baptists have set up two of their mass-feeding kitchens behind the church and have been preparing meals for students and faculty at UNC-Asheville, a nursing home in Asheville and some of the shelters around Buncombe County where people are staying-because their homes are uninhabitable.

Feed the Hunger has delivered thousands of bags of pre-mixed rice and pasta meals that church volunteers were giving away Monday along with donated bags of ice and cases of water. Inside the church more volunteers were sorting gifts of baby diapers, formula and other items displaced residents will need.

helene_volunteers_02.JPGVolunteers with Biltmore Church Arden Campus give out water, ice, and meals in Arden, N.C. on Monday, September 30, 2024.

Drinking water has been an urgent need since the storm. The city of Asheville had to shut off water to make repairs to its system and those on wells in rural communities need electricity to power pumps.

Biltmore Baptist's pastor, Jason Gaston, who used to serve Raleigh's Summit Church, has been working with Raleigh sources to bring in some of the water and other supplies. Monday afternoon, a line of cars wrapped around Biltmore Baptist's parking lot as residents rolled through and volunteers placed the items in their trunks or back seats.

The campus bustled with the work of more than 100 volunteers Monday.

"Hope showed up today," Gaston said. "Hope has been here, of course, but hope showed up tangibly for our community today."

Watching the chainsaw crew work in his yard a few miles away, Bill White agreed.

"It's here," he said.

ncbaptist_01.JPGJohn Miller, from left, Craig Schomburg and Mark Cantrell with NC Baptists on Mission Disaster Relief remove trees from Bill White's home in Arden, N.C. on Monday, September 30, 2024.

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Cut off by Helene in Western NC, Rep. Foxx calls for more aid for her district

September 30, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Danielle Battaglia, News & Observer | Section: politics government | 1687 Words OpenURL Link

Rep. Virginia Foxx's husband used his last match on Monday morning to light a candle in their Banner Elk house.

Tropical Storm Helene had ripped through Western North Carolina, sending flash floods, mudslides and devastation throughout the region.

The storm didn't spare the Foxx family.

"My own husband is trapped because our driveway washed away," the Republican congresswoman said Monday in a phone interview with McClatchy. "He has no power, and he didn't have cell reception for a long time."

But if you thought a washed-out driveway was enough to stop the feisty 81-year-old congresswoman, you don't know her very well.

Foxx said she walked from her property until she could get into a car and drive around her district Saturday to assess the damage.

"The roads were closed everywhere," Foxx said. "I had to keep taking detours and detours. I drove under power lines, barely getting around fallen trees, over fallen trees and power lines down everywhere. And then, DOT trying to clear the roads, but being stuck in traffic, in what should have taken 10 minutes, for an hour and a half. It's a really bad situation."

RAL_092922-HURRICANE-HELENE-TEL-15.JPGA washed out bridge over the Swannanoa River in Black Mountain on Sunday, Sept. 29, 2024. The remnants of Hurricane Helene caused widespread flooding, downed trees, and power outages in western North Carolina.

For three days, Foxx worked from her office making calls to anyone she thought could help, from the White House to the National Guard to the Governor's Mansion.

News coverage has largely focused on areas in North Carolina's 11th Congressional District to the west. There, photos and videos show two tourist destinations - Chimney Rock and Asheville - damaged by the storm.

"We know it's bad in Asheville, we know it's bad west of us, but it's very bad here in the High Country: Ashe, Avery, Watauga," Foxx said. "Watauga, particularly has been hit very, very hard."

RAL_092922-HURRICANE-HELENE-TEL-22.JPGLittle relief has come to flood survivors in Swannanoa on Sunday, Sept. 29, 2024. The remnants of Hurricane Helene caused widespread flooding, downed trees, and power outages in western North Carolina.

For 19 years, Foxx has represented in Congress the counties around her Banner Elk home. Her 5th Congressional District currently encompasses Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Caldwell, Davie, Forsyth, Mitchell, Stokes, Surry, Watauga, Wilkes, and Yadkin counties.

Hurricane Helene reached the U.S. Thursday, near Perry, Florida, as a Category 4 hurricane. When it reached North Carolina, on Friday, it had been downgraded to a tropical storm, but dumped tens of inches of rain on the mountains.

As of Monday, at least 120 people had died from the storm throughout the Southeast. And many others remain unaccounted for. It is unclear if that's because they're isolated, have no means of communication or are dead.

Over Foxx's house, 2 feet of rain fell, she said. Banner Elk is home to Lees-McRae College, and has a population of just over 1,000 people.

The most rainfall was measured at Busick Raws in nearby Yancey County, where 29.5 inches fell, The News & Observer reported.

That's close to Mount Mitchell, the highest peak in the Appalachian Mountains and east of the Mississippi River in the continental United States.

Helene's devastation

Rep. Chuck Edwards, a Republican representing the 11th Congressional District, also spoke with McClatchy on Monday about the devastation Helene left in its path through the state.

"It begins with the fact that so many roads are closed and impassable," Edwards said.

Edwards said traffic has to be routed around the region. Smaller roads and bridges have been washed out.

"We've got communities here in the mountains that are severed from civilization, and they also have no power, and they have no cell service. They literally are cut off from the rest of the world."

People who can get out lined up for more than three hours to get gas, and he worries that the region will run out. A few grocery stores can run on generators but their food supplies are low.

And then there are those who can't be reached.

"There's several we have not heard from yet," Edwards said. "We don't know their condition. Cell service is sporadic at best."

Cellphone outage

Foxx's cell phone cut in and out, and then cut off, as she spoke about the devastation.

She called back, sounding exasperated.

"One of the biggest problems that we have here is phone service," Foxx said. "We have people isolated, all over, who don't have phone access."

Foxx said she's been begging federal and state agencies to get her counties access to Starlink, a satellite internet company owned by SpaceX, that offers mobile broadband. On Monday, the White House announced that every emergency operations center in North Carolina would be sent Starlink satellite systems. On Monday afternoon, FEMA announced they delivered 40 Starlink systems to the state.

Foxx said lack of working cellphones was one of the biggest frustrations among lawmakers, first responders and residents. They aren't able to communicate about problems throughout the area.

In the 11th District, Canton Mayor Zeb Smathers posted on social media his "frustration and anger" with cellphone providers, saying they failed his community when they needed them the most.

"It is unacceptable and disgusting that in our time of need, cellular service for the entire region is blocked out," Smathers told The Charlotte Observer. "There's no excuse for that. I mean, we knew the storm was coming." Canton, a town with fewer than 4,500 people, is located 17 miles west of Asheville.

In Foxx's district, she said, an information technology employee in Ashe County was able to connect to Starlink. But other counties had not.

And that concerns Foxx, where she says there there are places with no access to the outside world - like Beech Mountain, home to around 700 people.

"The only way to get to Beech Mountain is by helicopter," Foxx said. "We've got communications with the manager up there, but it is a big issue, being able to talk to people and getting supplies to them."

Missing people

Mid-conversation, Foxx's other phone rang.

"I don't need to take that one," she said. "That is somebody calling to tell me they're worried about me and praying for me."

That's a constant for people living in Western North Carolina.

And something Foxx says she really appreciates right now.

When Foxx isn't assessing the damage, she's been in her office making calls.

Foxx and other members of Congress were among those who wrote to Biden asking for him to declare a major disaster. On Saturday, Biden announced he had approved the declaration, which offers grants for temporary housing and home repairs, low-cost loans to cover uninsured property loses and programs to help individuals and business owners.

On Monday, Biden announced in a news conference that FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell would be staying in the Asheville area for the foreseeable future. He said he, too, plans to travel to North Carolina on Wednesday.

There's been some criticism that Congress left town Wednesday after passing a temporary funding measure but not the 12 appropriation bills needed to fund the federal government. Edwards noted how close Congress came to another government shutdown and where his district would be today, had that happened. Congress plans to be out until after the November election.

On Monday, Biden said he is considering calling Congress back into session. But Foxx said there's more Biden can do without Congress, like spending unused COVID-19 relief money on storm relief efforts.

Foxx said she wanted to see more from Gov. Roy Cooper's office.

In Avery County, only six members of the National Guard were on the ground, she said Monday.

"We don't have enough National Guard," Foxx said. "Last night, they had sent out 400 National Guard for 25 counties. That's a very small number."

She urged Cooper, a Democrat, to do more.

On Sunday, the North Carolina National Guard said more than 500 soldiers and airmen had been deployed. The U.S. National Guard said over 5,500 had been deployed from 11 states.

Edwards was also frustrated by the response.

"The people in this district are hurting, and they're really disappointed with the response from the federal government, and our state government," Edwards said.

He said he was only seeing federal and state resources brought into the region beginning Monday.

Baptists on Mission among helpers at work in Western NC after Helene devastation

Volunteering

But Edwards added that Western North Carolina communities are resilient.

One of his own businesses was devastated in the storm, and it will take months to get it back up and running, but he said that it's nothing compared to what some of his neighbors are dealing with, with homes and businesses lost for good.

"I certainly see the community coming together," Edwards said. "Folks in the mountains are prideful and resilient. Our law enforcement and first responders are coming together in a big way. We're seeing more and more neighbors helping one another, checking on neighbors, seeing that they've got some of the basic things they need, sawing trees out of the way, so that their neighbors' cars can get by."

That uplifted Edwards, despite his frustration with state and federal leaders.

Next on Foxx's schedule was to go to Samaritan's Purse, a humanitarian aid organization based in Boone. There volunteers had come from across the country to help with relief efforts and she wanted to thank them for their work.

"We've very grateful to Samaritan's Purse," Foxx said. "It's one of the most effective relief organizations anywhere in the world, maybe the most effective. When Samaritan's Purse in on the ground, then we all feel better."

And Foxx said people looking to come to Western North Carolina to help should find an organization to volunteer with like Samaritan's Purse. She warned that people should not try to help on their own.

"We don't need people just going out on their own and trying to help because they don't know the situation here, and it's really dangerous for people to be trying to do things," Foxx said. "Roads are still caving in everywhere, and so it would be better for them to work through an established organization."

She suggested contacting the local emergency management agency where a person wanting to volunteer lives, to ask that county what is needed.

And she urged those wanting to help to donate to a reputable organization, and call their legislators or members of Congress to encourage the White House and Cooper's office to do everything needed.

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Helene shuts down Spruce Pine, NC mine that is pivotal to world's semiconductor supply

September 30, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Brian Gordon, News & Observer | Section: business | 581 Words OpenURL Link

The remnants of Hurricane Helene ripped through the Western North Carolina mountain town of Spruce Pine last week, disrupting a quartz facility integral to the global production of solar panels and semiconductor chips.

The largest Spruce Pine mine is owned by Sibelco, a private Belgium mineral company that is Mitchell County's top employer. Sibelco told The News & Observer Monday that the company has "temporarily halted operations at the Spruce Pine facilities" since Sept. 26.

"The hurricane has caused widespread flooding, power outages, communication disruptions, and damage to critical infrastructure in the area," the emailed statement said. "Many people in the area, including our employees and their families, are facing displacement and significant disruptions."

As of Saturday morning, the storm had dumped more than 2 feet of rain on the town, submerging its downtown buildings and overwhelming area roads, railways, utilities, and homes.

Sibelco's mines are north of downtown in an area called the Spruce Pine Mining District. From above, they look like giant white sandy beaches. The area is set back from the local North Toe River, which flooded.

But news reports indicate surrounding Mitchell County has experienced extensive damage to roads and rail lines, which could impact workers' ability to get to the site and the company's ability to transport materials.

The town is home to the purest quartz on the planet, a byproduct of continental formations that occurred more than 380 million years ago. High-purity quartz is essential to making the silicon wafers that get cut into chips. While there are other sources of quartz, the purity many producers demand is only found around the mines of Spruce Pine.

"It is rare, unheard of almost, for a single site to control the global supply of a crucial material," wrote Ed Conway in his 2023 book "Material World." "Yet if you want to get high-purity quartz - the kind you need to make those crucibles without which you can't make silicon wafers - it has to come from Spruce Pine."

Peaks in the Blue Ridge Mountains near Spruce Pine, North Carolina. Peaks in the Blue Ridge Mountains near Spruce Pine, North Carolina, where the world's purest quartz is found.

Nowhere else matches the purity

Facility issues have hindered the global supply chain of quartz before. In 2008, a fire at a Spruce Pine quartz refinery "temporarily brought production to a halt and impacted the market," reported Global Risk Intel, a Washington D.C.-based consulting firm.

Throughout the 20th century, local miners extracted mica and feldspar from the Mitchell County sites, yet, in the past 30 years, escalating demand for newer technologies has made high-purity quartz one of North Carolina's most important exports. Last year, Sibelco announced it would invest \$200 million into the site by 2025 to double production. The company sells its quartz under the brand name IOTA.

"I've been sent to Brazil, I've been sent to Australia, and nothing matches the final purity of the Spruce Pine quartz," local geologist Alex Glover said during an interview last March.

More recently, a second company named The Quartz Corp has invested in mines around Spruce Pine. On Tuesday, the company announced it too had stopped operations on Sept. 26, adding "we have no visibility on when they will restart."

"This is second order of priority," The Quartz Corp said in an online post. "Our top priority remains the health and safety of our employees and their families."

Compared to Sibelco's sites, The Quartz Corp location is closer to the North Toe River, aerial images on Google Maps show.

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Tar Heels keep football 'in perspective' post-Helene as UNC prepares to face Pittsburgh

September 30, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Chip Alexander, News & Observer | Section: university of north carolina | 1004 Words OpenURL Link

For North Carolina's football coaches and players, any lingering pain from the loss to Duke has been tempered by the devastation that has been experienced by so many in the western part of North Carolina.

Lives have been lost, homes have been destroyed and families and communities badly disrupted by the carnage caused by Hurricane Helene.

"I know how important our sport is," UNC coach Mack Brown said Monday. "We love football and we love the kids. But I want thoughts and prayers for the people in western North Carolina. ...

"Roads are out, trees are down. They are encouraging people not to go to the mountains. The people up there can't get off the mountain. They don't have food. There's no water in some of the hospitals. I mean, it is totally devastating to think a storm can do that much damage."

UNC defensive coordinator Geoff Collins played college football at Western Carolina. He said his mother lives in Franklin, southwest of Asheville. His wife is from Lenoir and has long-time friends there. One of his best friends lives near Swannanoa.

"That area is near and dear to my heart, for a lot of reasons," Collins said Monday.

Brown said it was important this week to "keep things in perspective." And, yes, there is another football game to prepare for - Saturday against undefeated Pittsburgh.

UNCDUKE-SP-092824-RTW_3.jpgNorth Carolina coach Mack Brown reacts after a field goal by Noah Burnette to give the Tar Heels a 3-0 against Duke in the first quarter on Saturday, September 28, 2024 at Wallace Wade Stadium in Durham, N.C.

'They are great kids'

The noon game at Kenan Stadium offers the chance for the Tar Heels (3-2, 0-1 ACC) to put aside the 21-20 loss at Duke, even its ACC record and perhaps tamp down the increased "outside noise" that has come - much of it on social media - after a couple of losses.

Brown realizes the "Mack must retire" crowd will not quiet down anytime soon. At 73, after 36 years as a head coach, after winning a national championship, the Hall of Famer might also come to that conclusion - after the season, not during it. Or not at all.

While Brown was so angry after the 70-50 loss to James Madison that he apparently offered to step aside, he's still the coach and its his program. He has work to do. And he wants to do it while shielding, as best he can, much of the criticism from the players.

"We have great fans," Brown said. "Some are better than others. Some are vocal, some are not. Usually the really positive fans don't say anything; they go back to work. The negative fans gripe when you're winning. They go crazy when you're losing.

"What we've got, like Saturday, is be mad at me. I'm mad at me. So come to the game to support the kids. They are great kids. And they are trying and they are college kids. I've been a head coach for 36 years, so there's

nothing anyone can say, to me or about me, that I haven't heard, good or bad. I've had it all."

UNCDUKE-SP-092824-RTW_20.jpgNorth Carolina center Austin Blake (53) leaves the field following the Tar Heels' 21-20 loss to Duke on Saturday, September 28, 2024 at Wallace Wade Stadium in Durham, N.C.

Explaining the loss at Duke

Brown, Collins and offensive coordinator Chip Lindsey did their best Monday to explain how the Tar Heels took a 17-0 halftime lead over Duke, increased it to 20-0 in the third quarter and then lost the rivalry game.

There were the expected plaudits for Duke, now 5-0. Lindsey noted the Heels' lost their offensive rhythm in the second half against a Duke defense that intensified the pressure. As for Collins, he talked about missed tackles and needing better execution in alignments and taking care of assignments.

Brown said he thought his team became frustrated and "panicked" - his word - during the loss to James Madison two weeks ago at Kenan. That didn't happen against Duke, he said.

"We tried to do too much," he said. "That's when missed assignments come and missed tackles. They tried to do too much because they want to win so badly.

"And (Duke) has good players. So when they make a play, don't think the world is coming to an end."

Collins said the same. The Blue Devils got in a nice groove running the ball in the second half, winning the play upfront, mixing in some sizable pass plays, and the Heels could not slow their momentum.

"Some things started sliding away from us," Collins said. "When things started happening negatively, and we're going to stop doing this, we have a tendency to try to do too much and try to do things outside the framework of what our individual responsibility is."

86176293-3aef-4925-95d6-e38eeec545b4Sep 14, 2024; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA; Pittsburgh Panthers quarterback Eli Holstein (10) throws a touchdown pass against the West Virginia Mountaineers during the second quarter at Acrisure Stadium. Mandatory Credit: Barry Reeger-Imagn Images

On Rucker, and Holstein

Collins said the defensive staff identified 12 plays that affected the game, saying eight of those plays involved missed tackles. That's correctable stuff, he said, and the possible return of edge rusher Kaimon Rucker - out the first five games with a lower-body injury -- for the Pitt game would be a boost for the defense.

And not just on the field with his play. "He knows which buttons to push, which guys to put his arms around, which guys to ramp up or which guys to calm down," Collins said.

Brown said Pitt (4-0) has more of a multiple look on offense this season with Alabama transfer Eli Holstein taking over at quarterback. The 6-4, 225-pound freshman had thrown for 1,183 yards, with 12 touchdowns and two picks - three TD passes in each game.

"He, to me, is the difference on the football team," Brown said. "Same defense, same tough guys. They make it really hard to run. For us, again, we're going to have to throw the ball better.

"They are the most complete football team we've played this year."

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Triangle college football teams collecting supplies to help western NC storm victims

September 30, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Jadyn Watson-Fisher, News & Observer | Section: nc state | 1115 Words OpenURL Link

Two NC State football players are working with their family to assist survivors of Helene, the massive storm that ravaged western North Carolina.

Brothers Davin and Rylan Vann are working with their mother, Joy Hall-Haley, who owns Joyful Moving, and Durham Rescue Mission to collect supplies for residents in western North Carolina. They have set up on the east side of Close-King Indoor Practice Facility, across from Carter-Finley Stadium. The goal is to "fill a truck" that will leave Thursday.

"It's just devastating to see people that have lost everything; their whole livelihood, their homes," Hall-Haley said on Monday afternoon. "I can't imagine, as a mom, going through that same kind of thing. It's just amazing to see people already. I really didn't think that people were gonna come and bring stuff, but I was wrong."

About two hours after the game on Saturday, Hall-Haley said the family discussed how it could help support the survivors.

Hall-Haley admitted she second-guessed herself on Sunday, unsure if they could pull off the feat. Monday, they decided it was possible.

"I just said, 'Nope, I'm going to do it. I want to help. Davin wants to help, so let's do it,'" Hall-Haley said.

She texted N.C. State head coach Dave Doeren on Monday morning about using the football facilities as a collection site. His response came within seconds and he was "on board immediately," Davin Vann said.

It means a lot to be part of a program and to play for a coach who supports efforts like this, Hall-Haley and Davin Vann said.

"I think it says a lot about coach Doeren," Davin Vann said. "He does a lot of charity work himself, so I think him allowing us to use the facility for us to do some is very great."

"It makes me feel happy and thankful for Coach Doeren," Hall-Haley added. "And, thankful that my boys made the right choice to come here."

All items collected by the family and its Joyful Moving team will be given to Durham Rescue Mission for distribution. Due to the storm's impact, organizations must obtain specific authorization. There were also concerns about reaching the affected areas.

If the truck ends up full, Hall-Haley said there are plans to bring more on site. They are also willing to lead other efforts, because she knows the recovery period will take years.

vann2.jpgN.C. State defensive end Davin Vann, left, and his brother Rylan, an offensive lineman, help collect supplies at Close-King Indoor Practice Facility Monday, Sept. 30, 2024. The Vanns are working with their mother Joy Hall-Haley to collect supplies that will be transported to residents in western North Carolina.

Collection times are Monday from 3 p.m. to 8 p.m., and Tuesday and Wednesday from noon to 8 p.m. During his weekly news conference, Doeren encouraged residents to bring items and fill the truck with supplies.

"Really proud and thankful for Davin and his family. Davin probably just came off the best game of his career, as well," N.C. State coach Dave Doeren said on Monday. "For that to be on his mind today, I think, says a lot about that young man and his family."

Davin, a defensive end, is in his fifth season at N.C. State and second consecutive as a team captain. The graduate student recorded career highs with 10 tackles, 3.5 tackles for loss and two forced fumbles Saturday against Northern Illinois

Rylan, a redshirt sophomore offensive lineman, is in his third season with the Pack.

Aydan White, Isaiah Shirley and Zack Myers are all from the impacted region, Doeren said. Their families are safe but called it a "scary time for them." Doeren's son, Jacob, attends Appalachian State in Boone. His second son, Connor, plays at East Tennessee State. ETSU's team bus was stranded in the flooding on its way to a game. Both are safe, as well.

"I think the damage is so much worse than people even understood," Doeren said. "All the people, the homes, the businesses, communities, state parks that have just been devastated by this flood, it's really sad and tragic. We are here praying and thinking a lot about the folks in the western part of the state."

RAL_092922-HURRICANE-HELENE-TEL-39.JPGA man crosses a narrow section of flood damaged bridge in Swannanoa on Sunday, Sept. 29, 2024. The remnants of Hurricane Helene caused widespread flooding, downed trees, and power outages in western North Carolina.

Duke launches donation drive

Duke University's football coach announced Monday that the Blue Devils will also shepherd a donation drive.

The donation drive will run through Oct. 11, with items accepted at the Duke athletics ticket office in Scott Family Athletics Performance Center at 110 Whitford Drive, Durham, from 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m., Monday-Friday. In addition Two Men and Truck will have truck parked at Tribull Plaza during Countdown to Craziness this Friday to collect items.

Items requested are: non-perishable food, bottled water, contractor-size trash bags, blankets, first aid supplies, feminine hygiene products, diapers and baby clothes, hand sanitizer, toilet paper, paper towels, bleach, shovels, brooms, gloves, coolers, flashlights, batteries and fans.

As an extra incentive, Duke offers two discount ticket packages.

The first offer is \$25 for one east reserved football ticket for Virginia Tech at Duke on Nov. 23 plus one reserved women's basketball ticket for Belmont at Duke on Nov. 21.

The second offer is \$45 for one general admission (standing room only) men's basketball ticket for Seattle at Duke on Nov. 29 plus one general admission women's basketball ticket for Belmont at Duke on Nov. 21.

For every five items donated from the list, fans can purchase one ticket package.

In addition, a Two Men and a Truck vehicle will return to Morton Plaza at Duke on Oct. 18 to collect donations when Florida State and Duke play football that night at Wallace Wade Stadium. The ticket offer will not be in effect for the Oct. 18 donation site.

Duke football coach Manny Diaz said one of his assistant coaches got in touch with a high school football coach from Western N.C. on Monday and heard grim details of the situation.

"To hear (about) people just cut off from civilization because of the roads either being impassable or just flat out

gone," Diaz said, "Bridges wiped out. People who have cars who can't take them anywhere. People who can't get to their cars or are out of gas. Just the destruction and the disruption of life.

"These are the things that you would expect in a movie. And this is real life going on in our state right now. And so again, it's something that we want to be a part of helping in any way we can."

Requested supply donations
Toothbrushes
Toothpaste
Deodorant
Hand sanitizer
Menstrual products
Diapers
Baby wipes
Pre-mixed baby formula
Cleansing wipes
Shampoo
Body wash
Flashlights, lanterns and batteries
Blankets, sleeping bags and pillows
Socks
Shelf-stable food
Canned goods (preferably pop-top cans)
Bottled water and water jugs
Electrolyte drinks (such as Gatorade) Copyright 2024 The News and Observer

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Dean's List: What to know about the search for NC State's next chancellor, so far

September 30, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Korie Dean, News & Observer | Section: raleigh deanslist newsletter | 1363 Words OpenURL Link

Next academic year will mark a new era for NC State University, as a new leader takes the helm from longtime Chancellor <person value="APIN:3819634368">Randy Woodson.

Woodson announced in July his plans to retire by the end of the current academic year. By the time he leaves the university, he will have been chancellor for 15 years.

Although Woodson's expected departure is still at least eight months away, the search to find his successor is already well underway.

So, when could the new chancellor be named?

Welcome to Dean's List, a roundup of higher education news in the Triangle and across North Carolina from The News & Observer and me, Korie Dean.

In this week's edition, I'll get you up-to-speed on the search for NC State's next chancellor and a decision Wake Forest University leaders made to cancel an on-campus event that was scheduled to feature a pro-Palestinian speaker.

Here we go.

NC State chancellor search updates

UNC System President <person value="APIN:3105283091">Peter Hans wasted no time getting the search started, naming the committee tasked with finding the next chancellor the day after Woodson made his announcement this summer.

Hans, as outlined in UNC System policy, will serve on the committee and is also tasked with selecting the final nominee to submit to the system Board of Governors for approval.

Ed Stack III, an NC State alumnus and vice chair of the university's Board of Trustees, is serving as chair of the committee.

The additional members of the committee, chosen in accordance with UNC System policy, are:

Ed Weisiger Jr., NC State Board of Trustees chairTimothy Humphrey, NC State alumnus and Board of Trustees secretaryGhazale Johnston, NC State alumna and Board of Trustees memberDavid Powers, NC State alumnus and Board of Trustees memberWendy Floyd Murphy, Board of Governors chairJ. Alex Mitchell, NC State alumnus and Board of Governors memberHarold Martin, chancellor emeritus of North Carolina A&T State UniversityCharles Hall, NC State Staff Senate chairHerle McGowan, NC State Faculty Senate chairAllison Markert, NC State student body presidentDewayne Washington, NC State alumnus

The search committee is tasked with gathering feedback from the campus community about the traits they feel are important in the next chancellor, recruiting and interviewing candidates and selecting an unranked slate of at least three finalists to submit to the university's Board of Trustees.

The Board of Trustees then forwards three finalists to Hans, who makes the final selection and submits the

preferred candidate to the Board of Governors.

Chancellor searches in the UNC System are confidential, so only those on the committee and directly involved with the search process will officially know the identities of the candidates not selected for the job - even after the search concludes. The vote to hire chancellors must take place in a public, open meeting.

The search committee met for the first time Sept. 10, during which Hans delivered his charge to the group and outlined the timeline and process for the search. During those remarks, he said he hopes a new chancellor will be named by the end of the academic year in May.

"We're fortunate that Chancellor Woodson has given us a generous runway to complete this search and ensure a new leader is ready to pick up the baton without missing a step," Hans said.

Students, faculty, staff, alumni and other members of the NC State community can give their input on the search and the next chancellor by completing an anonymous online survey.

Hans said Sept. 10 that the survey had already received more than 4,000 responses - which he believed "must be a system record."

The search committee will also host listening sessions with various groups on campus. The first sessions will be held:

Tuesday, Oct. 1, from 3:30-5 p.m. at D.H. Hill Jr. Library (for faculty)Wednesday, Oct. 2, from 11 a.m.-noon at Talley Student Union, Mountains Ballroom (for staff)

Hans has previously said that chancellor searches take between six and nine months, though the recent search UNC-Chapel Hill moved much quicker.

To keep up with the latest information on the search at NC State, visit: chancellor.ncsu.edu/search-process.

071824-RANDY-WOODSON-KLM-06.jpgN.C. State Chancellor <person value="APIN:3819634368">Randy Woodson shares a laugh with UNC System President <person value="APIN:3105283091">Peter Hans following a meeting of the N.C. State Board of Trustees on Thursday, July 18, 2024, in Raleigh, N.C. during which Woodson announced that he will retire next summer after a 15-year tenure leading the Wolfpack.

Wake Forest cancels event with pro-Palestinian speaker

Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem will no longer allow a pro-Palestinian scholar to speak on campus next Monday, the one-year anniversary of Hamas' surprise attack on Israel, The Old Gold & Black, Wake Forest's student newspaper, reports.

A handful of campus departments were set to host an event Oct. 7 titled "One Year Since al-Aqsa Flood: Reflections on a Year of Genocide and Resistance" with San Francisco State University professor Rabab Abdulhadi as the speaker.

Abdulhadi, who is Palestinian American and serves as the director and senior scholar of the Arab and Muslim ethnicities and diasporas studies program at SFSU, has been denounced by the Anti-Defamation League and other groups. In 2020, Zoom canceled an event Abdulhadi planned to host with Leila Khaled as a speaker. In 1969, as a member of the U.S.-designated terrorist group Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Khaled participated in the hijacking of a commercial airplane.

The Old Gold & Black reported that a group of faculty who research "genocide and memory studies" proposed the event and received approval from the university's Humanities Institute.

But after the event was announced, a petition calling for it to be canceled quickly gained attention and support - with more than 8,500 signatures in five days.

Then, last Thursday, Wake Forest President Susan Wente and Provost Michele Gillespie announced in a campus message that the event would be canceled and that no other "events on this day that are inherently contentious and stand to stoke division in our campus community" would be allowed, either.

Instead, the university will host an interfaith prayer service and a community reflection event.

"As a university community, there are many ways that we could choose to recognize this day," Wente and Gillespie wrote. "At Wake Forest, we will emphasize our ability to come together to support one another, holding space for our many different perspectives and experiences. As such, we invite you to join us for several university-sponsored events."

Wake Forest ranked No. 144 out of roughly 250 universities for its "tolerance for speakers" in the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE) College Free Speech Rankings, released earlier this month.

You can read more of The Old Gold & Black's coverage of this story on its website.

WNC universities closed after Helene

As you probably know, Hurricane Helene devastated much of Western North Carolina late last week.

The destruction spread to several of the region's colleges and universities, most of which will be closed for at least a week as they work to repair and rebuild. That includes:

UNC Asheville, where classes are canceled until Wednesday, Oct. 9.Appalachian State University, which is closed until Friday, Oct. 4.Western Carolina University, which is also closed until Oct. 4.Warren Wilson College, where classes are canceled until Oct. 14.Lees-McRae College, which is closed until Oct. 4.Montreat College, which is closed until Sunday, Oct. 6.

Classes resume at Lenoir-Rhyne University Tuesday.

Campuses across the UNC System have stepped up to help the public universities impacted by the storm. Among other efforts, NC A&T State University and Winston-Salem State University sent emergency management personnel to UNC Asheville, while East Carolina University sent food trucks and NC State sent student affairs and facilities staff.

"Our emergency response was underway even before the storm hit," Hans said in a Monday news release. "I want to especially thank the campuses across our state that have provided mutual aid and much-needed support to their sister universities in the mountains. The scale of this disaster is tremendous, and the recovery is going to be long and difficult."

You can read more about the damage caused to these campuses here.

Higher ed news I'm reading

UNC-Chapel Hill police served a student with a search warrant for the contents of her phone at her on-campus apartment, The Daily Tar Heel reports. Police sought the warrant in connection with a protest during which pro-Palestinian demonstrators vandalized campus buildings.

See you next week

Thanks for reading this week's Dean's List. I hope to see you right back here next week.

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Under the Dome podcast: Polls, policy and politics with Elon University pollster Jason Husser

September 30, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Dawn Baumgartner Vaughan, News & Observer | Section: politics government | 351 Words OpenURL Link

Start your week in North Carolina politics with our latest Under the Dome podcast, for the week of Sept. 30, 2024. Dawn Vaughan here, your podcast host and The News & Observer's Capitol bureau chief. On this episode, I'm joined by Jason Husser of the Elon University Poll.

He is assistant provost for academic excellence and integrity at Elon University, as well as a professor of political science and policy studies and longtime director of the Elon University Poll.

We talk about the latest polls in North Carolina on the governor's race and presidential race, plus what issues are important to people being polled. And we also break down what is involved in doing a serious poll.

Some polls can take months, especially face-to-face polling, Husser said, which are the "highest quality" polls.

"What we're in the cycle of right now is horse-race polling, because that's where consumer demand is. I have a lot of reservations about horse race polling, in terms of its intellectual value and its value to society, but people want a sense of what's happening," Husser said.

He said about 20 polls have been done in the past six weeks in North Carolina.

"North Carolina is a very heavily polled state," he said, similar to Pennsylvania. Husser notes that the Elon Poll does surveys year round, especially in the off-cycle about issues at the General Assembly and other topics.

Husser said "right now the key issue for most voters across the country is the economy. The economy is perpetually that big issue."

Because society is so polarized, he said, conversations have moved from issues to personality.

Listen to the podcast to hear about shifts in how people talk about policy and politics.

Headliner of the Week

Stay tuned to the end for our picks for Headliner of the Week. Both are timely: Hurricane Helene, which was approaching as we recorded the podcast, and the last year the World of Bluegrass festival is in Raleigh.

Listen to our latest episode below and catch up on previous episodes. You can also listen on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Google Podcasts, Audible, iHeart, Pandora, Amazon Music and Stitcher.

Under The Dome embed (2022)

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College football in North Carolina is struggling. What are the reasonable expectations?

September 30, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Andrew Carter, News & Observer | Section: acc | 2304 Words OpenURL Link

Anyone who's a fan of a North Carolina college football team had to have a couple of thoughts Saturday night, if they were watching the Alabama-Georgia game. And it's not hard to imagine what those thoughts were.

Thought No. 1: Wow - this is an incredible college football game.

Thought No. 2: The team I root for (North Carolina, N.C. State, Duke, Wake Forest, ECU, etc., etc., etc.) has no shot, ever, of competing at this level.

And you know what? It's true, on both counts.

Indeed, the Crimson Tide's victory made for incredible theater. Alabama raced out to a huge lead. Georgia came back and took a late lead, itself. The Tide went back ahead on a dramatic touchdown pass and reception that will be replayed forever. Georgia threatened. Alabama held on.

Amazing. What a game. Big-time college football at its best.

But also: something of a reality check, if your rooting interests lie with any school in North Carolina (or, really, if your rooting interests lie with a lot of schools that aren't, say, among the half dozen or so with a real chance of competing for a national championship in any given year).

USATSI_24356392.jpgSep 28, 2024; Tuscaloosa, Alabama, USA; Alabama Crimson Tide defensive back Zabien Brown (2) and linebacker Que Robinson (34) celebrate after an interception against the Georgia Bulldogs in the fourth quarter at Bryant-Denny Stadium.

As great as the Alabama-Georgia game was, it also underscored the truth that a select few schools, at the very top, are simply playing a different sport than everyone else. The version of college football those teams played in Tuscaloosa was not the same as, say ... what UNC and Duke offered in Durham earlier in the day. Or what N.C. State and Northern Illinois offered in Raleigh.

Or Wake Forest-Louisiana. Or ECU-UTSA.

And the list goes on.

And yes, college football has always been this way, to a degree, with a few teams at the very top of the sport separating themselves. Miami of the 1980s. Florida State of the 1990s. Those Urban Meyer-led Florida teams of the mid-to-late 2000s. A lot of Nick Saban's Alabama teams. Clemson, at its peak, in the not-so distant past.

But doesn't it feel like the best teams are somehow even better than they used to be, relative to the rest of the sport? Doesn't it feel like the gap is somehow widening between the UNCs and N.C. States of college football, and those schools at the very top? Shoot, the Wolfpack thought it had put together a team capable of competing with the best of the best this season - and then lost by 41 against Tennessee, before suffering a similarly lopsided defeat at Clemson.

The question has to be what is the reasonable hope for a lot of schools playing FBS college football, because competing nationally at the highest level is out of the realm for the vast majority of them. It's just never going to happen for about 90% of these teams, and that might even be a generous estimate of the schools capable of

reaching that level.

A lot of the focus these days among fans and media is on that widening revenue gap, attributable to television money, between the Big Ten and SEC and everyone else. And undoubtedly, it's significant. It's why Florida State and Clemson are trying to sue their way out of the ACC. But here's another truth, too: No amount of TV revenue is transforming a lot of these schools into some kind of football power.

RAL_UNCDUKE-SP-092824-RTW_2 (2)North Carolina center Austin Blake (53) leaves the field following the Tar Heel' 21-20 loss to Duke on Saturday, September 28, 2024 at Wallace Wade Stadium in Durham, N.C.

UNC, which surrendered a 20-0 lead against Duke on Saturday, hasn't won the ACC since 1980. N.C. State hasn't won it since 1979. It does not look like that drought will end this season. Duke hasn't won it since 1989, when the Blue Devils finished in a tie with Virginia. Wake Forest last won it in 2006, which is downright recent compared to the rest of the ACC schools in this state.

But for different reasons, none of these schools really has all that much of a chance of ever reaching the sort of level we witnessed in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, on Saturday night. And that's perfectly OK. But in this football-mad era, in which school and conference administrators and practically everyone else seems to be going all-in on prioritizing the sport, it begs the question of why schools are throwing tons of money at something that's ultimately a losing enterprise (or, at least an enterprise that is going to end up causing a lot of frustration, the vast majority of the time).

And also, on a similar note: At what point do fans stop propping up a sport - through television viewership, booster contributions, NIL donations, buying tickets and everything else - that is so exclusive, and growing more so? The few schools at the very top of college football are simply playing a different game. And it can be wildly entertaining and compelling, as Alabama and Georgia proved. But it's a different game, nonetheless, and the gap between them and everyone else is only growing.

If the goal of college football is to become a two-conference version of the NFL then, well, good luck with that. Such a thing just doesn't seem sustainable. Part of the sport's draw has always been that your school - any school - might just have a shot at glory, regardless of how much of an illusion that's always been. But now, it's growing more and more impossible to believe that illusion. And the people running the sport seem to want it to become even more geared toward the elites.

092824-DUKE-UNC-KLM-05.jpgDuke's Wesley Williams and Al Wooten II celebrate with the Victory Bell after the Blue Devils' 21-20 win over North Carolina on Saturday, Sept. 28, 2024, at Wallace Wade Stadium in Durham, N.C.

ONE BIG THING

Meanwhile, the Blue Devils are partying like it's 1994 again. Bring back those puffy Starter jackets. The Zubaz pants. Call your friends on their home telephones, and ask whomever picks up if Johnny is there, because you've got some news to share: Duke is 5-0, with victory No. 5 coming in dramatic, come-from-behind fashion Saturday against UNC.

Indeed, this is the first time Duke has won its first five games since '94. Last time it happened, 30 years ago, Fred Goldsmith was head coach. Manny Diaz, Duke's current head coach, was a 20-year-old college student at Florida State. The schedule toughens from here, but the Blue Devils are owed their due, especially after that gutsy rally against a rival on Saturday.

THREE TO LIKE

1. The aforementioned Blue Devils, showing some grit.

An understandable thought manifested early Saturday evening at Wallace Wade Stadium, while Duke dug itself into

a 20-point hole against the Tar Heels. That thought: Well, looks like Duke's first four wins came against some pretty suspect teams. And that's probably true. Nonetheless, the Blue Devils came alive over the final quarter and a half, and rallied for a memorable 21-20 victory. The Victory Bell is back in Durham for the first time since 2018, and it's a darker shade of blue.

STATENI01-092824-EDH.jpgN.C. State head coach Dave Doeren encourages his team during warmups before during N.C. State's game against Northern Illinois at Carter-Finley Stadium in Raleigh, N.C., Saturday, Sept. 28, 2024.

2. Salty Dave is back.

Is there a coach anywhere who likes poking his fans more than N.C. State's Dave Doeren? It has to be something of a bit these days, with Doeren leaning into character. And, in fairness, he showed some modesty after those lopsided losses against Tennessee and Clemson. But after something of an uninspired victory against Northern Illinois Saturday, there he was, with a classic Dave-ism: "Don't be mad about winning," he said. And you know what: He's actually right. Would you have rather lost, State fans?

092824-DUKE-UNC-KLM-11.jpgDuke fans react during the second half of the Blue Devils' 21-20 win over North Carolina on Saturday, Sept. 28, 2024, at Wallace Wade Stadium in Durham, N.C.

3. The vibe of Duke's "Devil's Deck."

For a lot of folks around here (me included), Saturday offered a first-look, of sorts, for Duke's new fan-centric "Devil's Deck" - a space for spectators to gather, hang out, eat, drink, play cornhole and occasionally maybe even watch the game going on down on the field. The space replaced what normally had been swaths of empty or lightly-filled seats. The deck works. It looks fun. It adds to the environment. More and more schools will likely be adding amenities like it. This is the future.

THREE TO ... NOT LIKE AS MUCH

1. A meltdown of a different kind for UNC.

The debacle at home against James Madison was bad. Historically so. Blowing a 20-point second-half lead at Duke on Saturday somehow felt worse for the Tar Heels. Mack Brown is arguably the best coach in school history. He has done a lot for UNC. He brought stability and hope when he returned in late 2018. But the trends are not good here, and fair or not it's looking more and more like his second tenure at UNC will not end well.

cdf8c90f-eb01-4be8-a103-6135ac1782a6Florida head coach Billy Napier walks off the field after the first half against Texas A&M at Ben Hill Griffin Stadium on Sept. 14, 2024, in Gainesville, Florida. (James Gilbert/Getty Images/TNS)

2. Florida State: an ACC embarrassment.

So, to recap: The Seminoles are attempting to sue their way out of a conference its administration and fans claim to be beneath them, but now FSU is 1-4 after a 42-16 loss against SMU? Got it. There's some kind of irony here, or at least a hilarious juxtaposition: FSU is trying to leave the ACC because it thinks it deserves more money. SMU, meanwhile, agreed to take no share of conference revenue for seven years, just to be a part of the ACC. Maybe FSU should try asking for less.

3. Maybe Clemson shouldn't have played that game.

The first season of this new coast-to-coast ACC has actually gone better than anticipated. Cal has been an entertaining and good fit. SMU is proving worthy. But this weekend underscored the challenges of this cumbersome arrangement. For one thing, Stanford had a heck of time making it to Clemson, given the catastrophic effects of the remnants of Hurricane Helene.

But more than that, maybe Clemson shouldn't have played that game, anyway, with so many nearby communities under water, and devastated. It wasn't about whether the game could be played, remember - but about how many resources (in public safety, especially) hosting a game requires, that could have been diverted to places in need.

THIS WEEK'S BEST PROGRAM IN THE STATE

Look, this category is an inside joke about the uproar that resulted a couple of years ago when I wrote that Appalachian State had the best college football program in the state - but it's not going to work anymore if only one team (Duke) is actually worth mentioning. And yet ... that's what continues to happen. UNC can't get out of its own way. N.C. State has, um, not looked all that great. Wake Forest is going through it. ECU and App State and Charlotte are not standing out.

So Duke it is, again. Can anyone else in North Carolina rise to the occasion? (And yes, we see you, Pirates, with the nice victory against UTSA on Saturday.)

092824-DUKE-UNC-KLM-19.JPGDuke's Beau Lilly III (87) yells as he takes the field prior to the Blue Devils' 21-20 win over North Carolina on Saturday, Sept. 28, 2024, at Wallace Wade Stadium in Durham, N.C.

CAROLINAS RANKING

1. Clemson (don't look now, but the Tigers have done nothing but blow people out since that Week 1 loss against Georgia); 2. South Carolina (can't win during an off week but, even better - can't lose, either); 3. Duke (can the Blue Devils match that 7-0 start from '94); 4. N.C. State (maybe? Sure.); 5-9. Some combination, in any order, of UNC, Wake Forest, ECU, Coastal Carolina and App State, which has a lot more important things going on than football. 10. Charlotte (but the 49ers did get a nice win at historic Rice Stadium on Saturday).

FINAL THOUGHTS, IN NO PARTICULAR ORDER

« I think it's becoming something of a worst-case scenario for UNC and Mack Brown. It's like Florida State and Bobby Bowden all over again, except without the national championships. The important, well-monied boosters at UNC love Brown. It's why they brought him back. But it has now become a fair question of how ugly this gets.

RAL_UNCDUKE-SP-092824-RTW_1 (7)North Carolina Athletic Director Bubba Cunningham offer a handshake to coach Mack Brown following the Tar Heels' 21-20 loss to Duke on Saturday, September 28, 2024 at Wallace Wade Stadium in Durham, N.C.

- « I think to the question posed in the opening, about reasonable expectations: for Duke, State and UNC, it's probably to occasionally compete for a conference championship and win eight or nine games. In other words, what N.C. State has done for a while under Doeren and what UNC has mostly done under Brown. Breaking through to a higher level does not seem feasible.
- « I think you have to appreciate the Charlotte 49ers rolling into Rice and walking out with a 21-20 victory. Some trivia: Rice Stadium is where JFK in 1962 delivered one of his most important and memorable speeches, about how the United States would one day land on the moon. Can 49ers coach Biff Poggi take his program to the moon, in a metaphorical sense? Time will tell.
- « I think football will be the least of App State's concerns for a while, and rightfully so. We've not yet really started to get a sense of the devastation in Western North Carolina after the flooding from Helene. A lot of mountain cities, towns and communities will need a lot of help. The early images and reports of the destruction are heartbreaking.

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