

# It does take a village: A tale of resiliency in the mountains

October 11, 2024 | Mountaineer, The (Waynesville, NC) Author: Ken Dempsey| Section: Columns | 640 Words OpenURL Link

As Hurricane Helene left a swath of destruction through Gulf Coast Florida, it headed up through Georgia and North Carolina — hitting Haywood County hard.

As the flooding and landslides continued, there was a spontaneous outpouring of support and assistance on all levels — next-door neighbors, immediate neighborhood, locality, county and state.

For some, this storm of the century added insult to injury, as Canton and other areas reeled with newflooding in already devastated areas. Immediately, our neighbors on Maggie Overlook were checking on neighbors in real time, whether by cell phone when possible, texting, ring cameras, walking over to houses, or utilizing ATVs when roads were not passable.

Those who had chainsaws cut up trees felled by wind and landslides, opening the roads for others.

Washed out roads in Upper Summit and Dove stranded folks like Kris, who were in real fear for their lives as gentle mountain streams became raging rivers in some areas, destroying cars and properties, and everything in its path.

Nevertheless, they gave us all inspiration and kept the communication flowing.

As phone reception was spotty at best, neighbors reached out to neighbors — and visitors — making sure all were accounted for. Those below us in the valley were being inundated by flood waters.

Friends reported four feet of water in their shop on Moody Farm Road. We offered sanctuary in the higher elevations; even though we had lost power and water, we were still relatively dry (at least in the house.)

Neighbors carried food and water to others. Some were able to drive down the mountain and find a route to a place where they could get reception. Others brought water and food up to others, as many folks have special needs.

Providing inspiration in the midst of chaos, seasoned Canton Mayor Zeb Smathers perhaps summed it up best when he urged all to pick up shovels, stating "...I know the character of our people...we are going to stay, and we are going to survive."

Likewise the people in our village. It would be difficult to name all, but some names such as Lisa Bradley, resident and board member of both Maggie Overlook and Hemlock Forest, stand out. Lisa added "we have a community Whatsapp that allowed communication, where people would go down to the valley and search for a signal. It's a vital part of keeping everyone engaged, even without a storm."

This enabled those even out of town to keep track of who is where, and who is safe.

For a beautiful moment, we were all united — no politics, no pronouns, just people of all stripes helping each other survive. There was and is a great outpouring of helpers, as volunteerism continues in the aftermath and cleanup. Supply trains and trucks arrive with supplies and reinforcements daily.

National Guard Troops arrived from North Carolina, Florida, Georgia, and other states. Soldiers from Fort Bragg are assisting as well.

Some had fled Florida for higher ground, only to find that mother nature had other plans. Even now, a new

hurricane, Milton, bears down on the Florida Peninsula. Unprecedented abilities exist to stay in touch, as long as cell towers are up and running.

I am grateful for our local and county civil servants, police, first responders, government officials, charities, assistance agencies, and especially the regular citizens who were, are, and will be there for each other.

Critics will inevitably appear, but we know something about a community coming together. I hope we keep this bond, and carry this spirit of teamwork vs. blaming forward.

Thank you to The Mountaineer for their wonderful and comprehensive coverage which helped us all remain informed and hopeful! Hats off to our friends and family in Maggie, Summit, Hemlock, Moody Farms, Lake Junaluska, and Waynesville, and all the areas affected. Thanks to the folks who deliver meals-on-wheels and the home healthcare personnel. It really does take a village.

#### Ken Dempsey lives in Maggie Valley.

Copyright, 2024, Mountaineer, The, All Rights Reserved.

#### • Citation (aglc Style)

Ken Dempsey, 'It does take a village: A tale of resiliency in the mountains', *Mountaineer, The* (online), 11 Oct 2024 <a href="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C341D50506F4F0">https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C341D50506F4F0</a>



# Raging waters undermine bridge in Frog Level, prompting closure

October 11, 2024 | Mountaineer, The (Waynesville, NC) Author: Becky Johnson | Section: News | 383 Words OpenURL Link

The bridge over Richland Creek in Frog Level — an important artery between downtown Waynesville and Russ Avenue — is closed indefinitely after flooding that eroded the structural support.

"The velocity of the river just took the foundation out from under the base and the abutments," said Jeff Stines, Waynesville public services director.

There's a center pier that runs the width of the bridge in the middle. But instead of the pier holding up the bridge, the bridge is now holding up the pier.

The creekbed beneath the pier was washed out, so it's now sitting on nothing at all.

The town enlisted the engineering firm Mattern and Craig to do an assessment of 11 town bridges following Helene.

"They were johnny-on-the-spot willing to help us," Stines said. "They look at the supports. They look for spalling in the concrete. They look for separation of the riverbed from the bridge."

When they got to the Depot Street bridge, they discovered a gap between the riverbed and the supports. That was Tuesday of this week, and traffic had been going over the bridge for 10 days since the flood. But Stines, who was on site for the inspection, sprung into action after learning of the issue.

"I told the guys 'Go get the barricades and shut it down,'" he said.

Luckily, a fix is possible to shore up the bridge without totally rebuilding it.

"A structural concrete foundation will be bored underneath it down to a good base," Stines said.

A timeline isn't yet known, however.

Getting into town

Traffic coming from Russ Avenue hits a detour when reaching Frog Level, but the detour weaves through narrow neighborhood streets to Sulphur Springs. So it would behoove drivers to get to town another way all together.

The town has put a message board on Russ Avenue to alert drivers before heading into Frog Level.

Meanwhile, however, the Russ Avenue bridge over Richland Creek is down to one lane in each direction for unrelated construction. That created a bottleneck on the Russ Avenue approach to downtown even before the Depot Street bridge closure was added to the mix.

The sudden closure of the Depot Street bridge created traffic backups at first. But that should lessen once locals modify their patterns and get to town via the Old Asheville Highway, through Hazelwood or along Howell Mill Road through the rec park.

Copyright, 2024, Mountaineer, The, All Rights Reserved.

Becky Johnson, 'Raging waters undermine bridge in Frog Level, prompting closure', *Mountaineer, The* (online), 11 Oct 2024 <a href="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C2B051F958C170">https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C2B051F958C170</a>



# City offering free curbside pickups from Helene

October 11, 2024 | Mt. Airy News, The (NC) Author: Tom Joyce tjoyce@mtairynews.com| Section: News | 444 Words OpenURL Link

Slowly, but steadily, the cleanup from Hurricane Helene continues, and municipal officials have taken action to aid the clearing process via city pick-up services.

"The city of Mount Airy has waived our brush fees until Oct. 31 to help citizens out," Public Works Director Mitch Williams says in a local video announcement.

"Through Oct. 31 we will get all brush for free."

This includes logs. "But we will not take stumps," the public works director added.

Williams said Thursday that citizens can do their part by trying to separate brush from logs and placing the items in an orderly manner by the roadside.

"Just stack it as neatly as possible," he urged, while mentioning that "everybody's been very cooperative" in this regard.

The waived fees Williams was referring to include new charges and other changes targeting larger brush hauls at residences, which were approved by the city commissioners and went into effect on July 1 of last year.

This move was aimed at discouraging situations in which commercial crews were being paid to cut down trees and larger brush on private property, leaving the debris from the land clearing to be picked up by city workers.

That was a free service before the 2023 fees emerged, which for example now include charging \$150 for a full truckload.

Williams said earlier this week via the video announcement that municipal crews had hauled away about 150 tons of brush during the previous seven-day period. "Which is 25 percent of what we collect in a single year."

He reported Thursday that another 50 tons has been picked up since.

Northern area hit hard

Over a two-day period in late September, about 6.5 inches of rain fell locally in conjunction with Hurricane Helene slamming the area.

"Our biggest problem was wind," Williams said of the dawning of Friday, Sept. 27. "Friday morning we started getting calls all over the city about trees down."

While this was a problem citywide, the greatest concentration was in the northern part of town, including the Smith Woods neighborhood, Woodbury Lane, Oaklawn Road, Knollwood Drive and the Mount Airy Country Club section, among others.

Williams says problems stemmed from large, 18 inches or more in diameter, hardwoods such as maples and oaks on private property falling into the public rights of way and onto power lines.

Job One was just getting roadways open to allow access by emergency vehicles and utility crews to restore

electricity, basically pushing the downed trees and limbs to the side.

Over the next couple of weeks and possibly months, city crews will be focused on clearing the rights of way including cutting logs and clearing away brush, according to Williams.

"It's going to take awhile, but we're working on it," the public works director said.

© 2024 The Mt. Airy News. All Rights Reserved.

# • Citation (aglc Style)

Tom Joyce tjoyce@mtairynews.com, 'City offering free curbside pickups from Helene', *Mt. Airy News, The* (online), 11 Oct 2024 <a href="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C25C3A2707DA10">https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C25C3A2707DA10</a>



# Helene presents leaders with a choice on western NC schools

October 11, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Bryan Proffitt | Section: Editorial/Opinion | 668 Words

Page: 13B OpenURL Link

As the tragedy facing Western North Carolina continues to unfold, our state faces a critical choice about its future. As public school educators, we know that challenging life events like divorce or the loss of a loved one can stunt a student's learning, growth and happiness. Young people living in the wake of Hurricane Helene's havoc will face immeasurable stress, as will the public school staff who love and serve them. In the coming months, our state's elected leaders have the ability to relieve a great deal of that stress.

For years, members of the North Carolina Association of Educators have advocated for resources to remediate crumbling infrastructure in our schools across the state. From sweaty trailers, freezing classrooms, and libraries with mold, we have asked for those resources because our students deserve better. Our public schools are the centers of our communities.

Beyond the bonds we build at Friday night games and Saturday performances, our public schools serve as sites of refuge when things go wrong. Throughout our mountain region, we have seen neighbors gathering at public schools for showers, water and cell service. Educators have called through class rosters, offering support and love to students and their families. Public schools in counties around the state have already started to welcome displaced families into their communities. Schools keep more of us connected on a regular basis than any other institution in our community. A storm won't change that.

This storm will, however, create a moment of choice for our elected leaders. We can keep neglecting our constitutionally-guaranteed public schools, or we can prioritize safe and stable public schools as we rebuild for the future.

We can start by protecting our public school employees. They need their pay, leave and benefits until it is safe to go back to work. They should be able to focus on rebuilding and supporting their families through this trauma, not stress over finances.

School districts should have what they need too. As we did during COVID, we can keep funding schools as their student populations fluctuate. Thousands of students will be displaced, and some will bounce from county to county as their families seek stability. Public schools, as the most stable institutions in our communities, need resources for the long haul. They need to be ready to welcome our kids home.

We also need the resources to help them thrive. Too many students and staff have been dealing with substandard schools. To serve as stable centers of our communities, we need modern, safe and sturdy schools that can withstand the kinds of disasters that Eastern North Carolina families have been accustomed to. Rebuilding schools with updated infrastructure, in and out of the current disaster area, keeps our kids and communities safer and invests in the future of our state. Legislative action can also provide free student meals.

Before Helene, the General Assembly was considering giving away more than \$400 million of public tax dollars this year, and more than \$4 billion over the decade, to private school vouchers. Those vouchers cannot be the priority right now. Instead, let's allocate those same resources to relief, rebuilding and resourcing safe and stable public schools as the center of Western North Carolina communities.

Every day, our students and staff accomplish incredible things in public schools across the state. In the coming months, many public school communities will accomplish more than they ever imagined. Not only will they serve every student, regardless of background, ability, or income, public schools will also keep our communities safe, our

families fed, and all of our lives a little more stable. Our kids deserve a strong and resilient state-let's rebuild Western North Carolina with a recognition that our public schools are at the heart of what makes that possible.

Bryan Proffitt is a high school history teacher in Durham and the North Carolina Association of Educators vice president.

Copyright (c) 2024 The News and Observer

#### • Citation (aglc Style)

Bryan Proffitt, 'Helene presents leaders with a choice on western NC schools', *News & Observer, The* (online), 11 Oct 2024 13B <a href="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C274CAB62FF2C0">https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C274CAB62FF2C0</a>



#### Helene rattles the faith of some while others vow to rebuild

October 11, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Adam Wagner; Staff Writer | Section: News | 1158 Words

Page: 1A OpenURL Link

SALUDA Margie Derwort's friends told her to flee her home during Tropical Storm Helene, worried that the two-story red house the 81-year-old has lived in for almost five decades would be inundated by the heavy rains.

But Derwort and her son, Michael, stayed. They watched as muddy water ran down the steep slope behind the house, running around both sides of it into the front yard.

Then came the knock at the door. It was one of their neighbors, Michael Derwort recalled, clad only in sweatpants. The man was soaking wet and distraught, saying he couldn't reach his wife.

It quickly became clear that the home next door, set some ways back from the road, had collapsed in a landslide. The man, who had been downstairs, had somehow been bounced out of a window. After drying off and being given a hoodie, Margie Derwort said, the man quickly moved on to check in on other neighbors.

His wife, who had been upstairs, was killed. A Polk County spokeswoman confirmed the woman's death to The News & Observer but did not identify her.

Everyone in Western North Carolina has a story about how they fared during Helene, which wreaked devastation across the region almost two weeks ago.

In the wake of that storm, some have decided that if they could weather Helene, they can weather anything. Others are shifting the other way, rattled by Helene's torrential rains and the flooding and hundreds of landslides that followed, leaving wide swaths of the region without basic services like cell signal, electricity and water for days.

Margie Derwort is in the latter camp, keenly interested in selling her home on U.S. 176 about four miles east of Saluda's downtown after Helene's impacts came so close.

"I am scared now. I need to leave if I can sell it. I need to do that," Derwort told The News & Observer on Monday.

Derwort's age is part of her thinking, as is her son's health. Michael is still coping with the effects from a battle with colon cancer.

'A mess' outside of Saluda

When a reporter approached, Derwort and Michael were sitting on their front porch with a friend.

They had just returned home after six days in a nearby inn, taken into downtown Saluda by the National Guard after the worst of Helene passed through. The yard around the slightly raised porch was still squishy to the step, and the power wasn't back on inside the house yet.

Margie Derwort said the home has a "bad history" and described how her husband had been killed about 20 years ago when a tree fell on his car nearby.

As badly as she wants to leave, the Derworts can't afford to just pick up and go. She needs somebody to buy her current house first

"You don't know what to do or which way to turn. Finances aren't where you can just go out and make a change, I'd have to sell the house. Now, how long will it take me to sell it? I can't move without money," Derwort said.

About 400 feet to the west, where the home had collapsed, a gate was pulled shut. A hand-written sign was laced through the iron bars, black letters traced with orange highlighter reading, "DANGER No Trespassing!! Mudslide in Progress." Large chunks of debris had collected in a stream bed along that home's property line.

"This is a mess," Michael Derwort said.

U.S. 176 is closed just to the east of the Derworts' home. The road is damaged in several places by landslides from above, while shelves of asphalt dangle over the North Pacolet River in other places, the earth that was supporting them washed away.

Rapid response in a mountain retreat

About a mile down that road is a long, steep driveway that wends past two waterfalls before ending at a home overlooking U.S. 176 and the river below.

Michael Bell has lived at the top of that driveway for about nine months. He moved there from Los Angeles, seeking to escape the chaos and crowds of the city.

Like many others in the region, Bell admits that he did not expect that Helene would be so severe.

"I wasn't prepared for this. I didn't think that the rain was going to hit as hard as it did," Bell said Monday While one work crew dug in the soil around his front door and another spread gravel at the base of his 1,900-foot driveway.

As Helene passed over the 30-acre property on Sept. 27, Bell walked down to the uppermost waterfall, one short hill down from his house. There, he saw the normally relaxing falls gushing, black water flying off the mountain side to meet water flying off the mountain in two other places just to the east.

"I never saw something more disgusting in my life," Bell said.

Debris carried in that water clogged a culvert at the bottom of Bell's driveway. That led to significant erosion of the driveway, which along with downed trees would leave Bell stranded at the top of the hill for days after the storm.

Bell returned to the house and noticed that the wind was starting to roar. Trees in the forest around the house were tilting in the gusts, some toppling over.

Then, Bell said, a red oak toppled over and slammed into the roof. The mature tree miraculously did not break through, but its weight was braced against the roof.

Bell scrambled as soon as the storm passed over, taking his chainsaw and cutting an A-shaped notch into the log to ease the weight that was resting on the roof.

Asked if he was worried about his safety at any point, Bell said, "I was so caught up with just trying to save the structure and everything else, there wasn't really time for that."

The tree cracked an eave inside, but it didn't cause any leaks or more significant damage.

In the days that followed, Bell rewired his well so he could power it with his generator and draw water from it. It would take nine days for power to be restored.

As the sound of the work crews' heavy machinery buzzed around him, Bell sounded a defiant note. Having made it through Helene, he said, his confidence in his new home was bolstered, his ability to live through any disaster there

upheld.

"I don't care what it takes. I'm going to rebuild and I can bounce back," Bell said. "I can get through anything."

This story was produced with financial support from the Hartfield Foundation and Green South Foundation, in partnership with Journalism Funding Partners, as part of an independent journalism fellowship program. The N&O maintains full editorial control of the work. If you would like to help support local journalism, please consider signing up for a digital subscription.

Adam Wagner: 919-829-4669, @byadamwagner

Copyright (c) 2024 The News and Observer

#### • Citation (aglc Style)

Adam Wagner, Staff Writer, 'Helene rattles the faith of some while others vow to rebuild', *News & Observer, The* (online), 11 Oct 2024 1A <a href="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C274CA9899BAC0">https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C274CA9899BAC0</a>



# Cooper describes - 'all hands - on deck' Helene response

October 11, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Adam Wagner; Staff Writer | Section: News | 783 Words

Page: 1A OpenURL Link

Gov. Roy Cooper vowed Wednesday that the state government will continue to provide the resources Western North Carolina communities need to recover from Tropical Storm Helene.

"This is a true all-hands-on deck moment," Cooper said.

In a wide-ranging briefing, officials touched on a number of topics related to the Helene response.

Notably, Cooper called out the effects of wide-reaching disinformation that has been spreading in Helene's wake; FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell vowed to keep significant assets in North Carolina even as the agency responds to Hurricane Milton's impending landfall in Florida; and Cooper called for direct assistance for small businesses impacted by the storm.

"This is a historic disaster, the magnitude of which we have never experienced before in our state. The road to recovery will be long, but North Carolinians are strong and resilient and together we will recover," said NC Emergency Management Director Will Ray.

Ray described the response to Helene - including other states, the federal government, the private sector, nonprofits and volunteers - as "the largest whole-of-community response in North Carolina history."

Cooper said there are fewer than 81,000 power outages remaining, down from hundreds of thousands after the storm passed through. He said 80% of AT&T and Verizon outages have been repaired; and FEMA has approved about 126,000 Individual Assistance applications with more than \$60 million in aid paid.

The state has confirmed 88 storm-related deaths.

Additionally, there are about 2,600 people staying in hotels through FEMA's Transitional Sheltering Assistance program.

"It's clear that we're still at the beginning of this recovery and much more work remains ahead for Western North Carolina to recover stronger than ever, and it will," Cooper said.

FEMA head: No resources leaving NC

FEMA has more than 900 staff members on the ground in Western North Carolina assisting with the response to Helene.

That staff will stay in North Carolina even after Hurricane Milton makes landfall, Criswell said Wednesday.

"I want to assure the people of North Carolina that while we watch Hurricane Milton approach the coast of Florida, you can be assured that no resources are going to be taken from North Carolina," Criswell said.

While Criswell is headed to Florida to coordinate the Milton response, she vowed she would return to North Carolina and said FEMA's regional administrator would remain in North Carolina.

There are already 1,000 FEMA employees in Florida working on Helene and other disasters, Criswell said, with

additional search-and-rescue teams headed south. Some people are leaving the Helene response in Georgia, South Carolina and Tennessee to head toward the Milton response, Criswell added.

"We are not moving resources that are actively engaged in the priorities that the governor has set here in North Carolina," Criswell said.

'Onslaught of lies and misinformation'

Cooper made a point to call out the rampant rumors about the Helene response that are spreading on social media.

Those rumors have resulted in FEMA and N.C. Emergency Management each creating rumor response web pages, while U.S. Rep. Chuck Edwards, a Republican who represents Western North Carolina, has also sent a press release debunking myths about the Helene response. The News & Observer and Charlotte Observer have also been gathering and fact-checking rumors and disinformation.

"It's important to point out the onslaught of lies and misinformation that are impacting people there on the ground. This misinformation is confusing to people trying to get help. It's demoralizing and dangerous for people working so hard to deliver that help," Cooper said.

Cooper urged people to verify information they have been sent with "respected news sources" or to reach out directly to FEMA or state responders.

Stay off WNC roads

More than 460 roads have reopened, NC Department of Transportation Secretary Joey Hopkins said Wednesday, but more than 600 remain closed due to storm damage.

"This number's still changing daily as communications improve and we reach more sites," Hopkins said.

There are 5,800 sites that have sustained damage, Hopkins said, including 500 bridges and 600 culverts. Of those, DOT anticipates that at least 100 bridges will need to be replaced.

DOT's response include 2,100 employees, 1,700 of them working in Western North Carolina. There are also hundreds of contract employees, N.C. National Guard and U.S. Army forces helping DOT.

"Non-essential traffic is hindering our efforts to get roads opened back up. Crews are having to stop work to allow traffic to pass through damaged areas. To hep us get roads open, cleared and open as fast as possible, we again ask that traffic use alternative routes," Hopkins said.

This story was produced with financial support from the Hartfield Foundation and Green South Foundation, in partnership with Journalism Funding Partners, as part of an independent journalism fellowship program. The N&O maintains full editorial control of the work. If you would like to help support local journalism, please consider signing up for a digital subscription.

Adam Wagner: 919-829-4669, @byadamwagner

Copyright (c) 2024 The News and Observer

#### • Citation (aglc Style)

Adam Wagner, Staff Writer, 'Cooper describes 'all hands on deck' Helene response', *News & Observer, The* (online), 11 Oct 2024 1A <a href="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C274CA929FAF58">https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C274CA929FAF58>



# Helene devastated two iconic hiking trails in Western NC. When will they reopen?

October 11, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Richard Stradling; Staff Writer | Section: News | 970 Words Page: 3A OpenURL Link

Among the places that will have to be rebuilt after Hurricane Helene are two long-distance hiking trails that traverse and symbolize the rugged mountains of Western North Carolina.

The Appalachian Trail and the Mountains-to-Sea Trail were both heavily damaged by Helene. Downed trees, landslides and washed out paths and bridges have made the trails impassable in many places, and they will likely remain that way for a while.

"We know it's bad," said Les Love of Weaverville, who heads the Carolina Mountain Club, which supports hiking in Western North Carolina. "When you've got both wind and water, it's just catastrophic to the trails."

No natural disaster has affected as much of the Appalachian Trail in its 100-year history as Helene, according to the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, the nonprofit that manages and protects the 2,200-mile trail from Georgia to Maine.

The trail is officially closed on U.S. Forest Service land in North Carolina, Tennessee and Southwest Virginia. Many of the roads normally used to access the A.T. are closed as well, and the towns that normally welcome hikers with a meal and a place to rest are struggling to recover from the storm and not equipped to handle visitors.

Sandi Marra, the conservancy's president and CEO, said roads, electricity and other infrastructure must be restored before the trail's condition can be assessed.

"While we are eager and anxious to tackle the work necessary to restore sections of the A.T. impacted by Helene, we ask for patience," Marra said in a message to supporters. "Once we can safely access the A.T., we will identify the sections and features that need immediate attention and put a call out for volunteers to help restore the trail."

Fixing the trails is a low priority compared to the humanitarian crisis still unfolding in Western North Carolina, says Brent Laurenz, executive director of the Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail. The mountain portion of the trail parallels the Blue Ridge Parkway, which was severely damaged and remains closed.

"So we do not have much direct knowledge of the trail's condition," Laurenz wrote in an email. "The very little we have heard would indicate that the trail has suffered significant damage from downed trees and running water, but we are holding off on any active work on the trail while rescue and recovery efforts and critical infrastructure work are underway."

The Mountains-to-Sea Trail covers nearly 1,200 miles across the state from Great Smoky Mountains National Park to Jockey's Ridge State Park in Nags Head. The trail should be considered "closed and highly dangerous" from Kuwohi (the peak once known as Clingmans Dome) through Stone Mountain State Park in Wilkes County.

When the time is right, Laurenz said, crews will get out on the trail and get a clearer picture of the needed cleanup and repair work. But the group's website warns hikers "it is likely that sections of the trail will remain closed for a significant length of time."

'Everybody's itching to get out'

Much of the maintenance work on both long-distance trails is done by volunteers. Love said about a third of the more than 1,200 members of the Carolina Mountain Club regularly work on the trails to keep them in shape and

well marked.

Love said volunteers have been told to stay away from trails for the time being.

"Everybody's itching to get out and do what they can for the trails," he said. "But right now the word is, 'Concentrate on your neighborhood and help each other.' That's the best thing we can do right now."

Volunteers often adopt sections of the trail and go out every week or two to maintain it, says Franklin Tate, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy's associate regional director based in Asheville.

"It makes them a little anxious to not be about to get out and assess their section," Tate said. "They love the A.T. They love the work that they do. So to be in a temporary stand-down mode is challenging for a lot of them."

Thru-hikers get a Helene dispensation

The Georgia section of the Appalachian Trail has reopened. People are also free to use the trail north of Bland, Virginia, except where it crosses the Blue Ridge Parkway, which remains closed.

Tate said the trail is also in better shape in the Nantahala National Forest in far southwestern North Carolina and in Great Smoky Mountains National Park, though the National Park Service warns of limited emergency services and closures elsewhere in the park.

The worst damage is north and west of Asheville, in Pisgah National Forest in North Carolina and Cherokee National Forest in Tennessee, Tate said.

Hurricane Helene has thwarted the ambitions of an unknown number of people who attempt to walk the entire length of the Appalachian Trail in a single year. Known as thru-hikers, most begin in Georgia and try to reach Mt. Katahdin in Maine before the snow flies.

But some begin in Maine and head south. The A.T. Conservancy says those who must skip around the closed sections are still eligible for "2,000-miler status" if they later pick up where they left off and finish the trail within 12 months of when they restart.

As for people planning to hike the entire trail in 2025, the group says it's too soon to say if and when the trail will be ready. Tate said it depends on the extent of the damage and other factors, such as the severity of winter weather and the supply of experienced sawyers to cut the tangle of trees blocking the trail.

"If I had to guess, I think that large sections of the trail will be open and there will be multiple detours around some of the most problematic areas and some of the bridges that have washed out," he said. "I hope we have a thru-hiker season in 2025. But I think it's going to be a season where the hikers have to exercise more patience than usual."

Richard Stradling: 919-829-4739, @RStradling

Copyright (c) 2024 The News and Observer

# • Citation (aglc Style)

Richard Stradling, Staff Writer, 'Helene devastated two iconic hiking trails in Western NC. When will they reopen?', *News & Observer, The* (online), 11 Oct 2024 3A <a href="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?">https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?</a> p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C274CA9D40C500>



# NC Republicans suddenly are OK with easing voting rules

October 11, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: The Editorial Board | Section: Editorial/Opinion | 644 Words

Page: 13B OpenURL Link

As Hurricane Helene's devastation complicates voting in Republican-heavy western North Carolina, the GOP is showing an uncharacteristic approach to elections.

Suddenly, the party that made voting harder in the name of "election integrity" is in favor of making voting easier in western counties where accessibility to polling places and mail service remain disrupted. Two Republican members of the State Board of Elections joined the board's three Democratic members in voting to make the changes.

No Republicans appear to be complaining about these changes, unlike their complaints then and now about midelection changes made in 2020 because of COVID. Indeed, on Wednesday Republican legislative leaders rolled out legislation that will expand the changes in election procedures from the 13 counties named by the State Board of Elections to 25 counties included in the original disaster designation.

The GOP's softening on voting rules may be out of respect for the right to vote. Certainly it is correct to adjust election rules after the loss of polling places, the displacement of many people and a shortage of poll workers.

But Republicans may also be open to the changes because western North Carolina is their party's base. Two of the affected counties, Mitchell and Avery, have the first and second highest concentration of Republican voters in the state.

Former President Donald Trump, who carried North Carolina by only 1.3 percent of the vote in 2020, will need to win big in the western counties to carry the state in November. The GOP's statewide candidates for governor, attorney general and other offices and judicial seats also can't afford a falloff of votes from rural western counties.

Under changes approved Monday by the State Board of Elections, local election boards in the 13 counties can by a bipartisan majority vote change voting sites and when sites will be open during early voting days. Absentee ballots will be accepted at any county board of elections office - not just the one in the voter's home county. The deadline for requesting absentee ballots is extended to the day before Election Day, rather than a week before.

The legislation, according to a Republican Senate news release, also "Establishes procedures for spoiling and reissuing absentee ballots and for curing deficiencies to accommodate voters who have been displaced by the hurricane."

These and other changes will help voters affected by Helene's flooding. But some Republican lawmakers may wish they hadn't done so much to restrict voting in the first place.

They may regret the new requirement for voters to present an authorized photo ID because some Republican voters may have lost their driver's license along with other possessions in the flood.

Given Helene's effect on mail delivery, Republican lawmakers may wish that they hadn't eliminated the three-day grace period for the receipt of absentee ballots postmarked on or before Election Day.

Sen. Warren Daniel, a Burke County Republican who co-sponsored the legislation that ended the grace period, said at the time of the bill's passage in 2023 that "Every day that passes after Election Day with votes still coming in creates the possibility of distrust in the process." What will create distrust in the process is a stream of mail-in ballots going uncounted because closed roads and other obstacles delayed their delivery.

Republican lawmakers may also be sorry they empowered partisan observers at polling places. That could lead to an increase in challenged votes in western counties as voters show up at new locations and some vote from outside their home county.

Finally, Republican lawmakers may wish they had given the State Board of Elections all the funding the board said it needed to run an ordinary election, let alone one complicated by a natural disaster.

There is no problem with voter fraud in North Carolina. There is a problem with voter suppression.

Now, only temporarily and only in certain counties, Republicans are willing to make the voting process what it should always be for everyone: Easy to do.

Copyright (c) 2024 The News and Observer

#### • Citation (aglc Style)

The Editorial Board, 'NC Republicans suddenly are OK with easing voting rules', *News & Observer, The* (online), 11 Oct 2024 13B <a href="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C274CAE4866720">https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C274CAE4866720</a>



# Work begins to restore I-40 through Pigeon River Gorge

October 11, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Richard Stradling; Staff Writer | Section: News | 631 Words

Page: 1A OpenURL Link

The N.C. Department of Transportation has hired contractors to stabilize the surviving two lanes of Interstate 40 through the Pigeon River Gorge but says no decision has been made about what to do with them.

It also says there's still no timetable for reopening the highway that connects North Carolina with Tennessee.

The eastbound lanes of I-40 washed out in several places on both sides of the state line. During a visit to the gorge on Monday, Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee told reporters that work had begun to convert the westbound lanes to two-way traffic while long-term repairs are made.

"We'll have the road moving in another week or so," Lee said.

But NCDOT says the North Carolina side isn't ready. Contractors arrived Tuesday to begin a process called "soil nailing," essentially driving reinforced steel bars up to 20 feet long into the side of the gorge under the road to keep it from eroding further.

That work will take a few months, said NCDOT spokesman David Uchiyama. In the meantime, NCDOT and the Federal Highway Administration will determine the best use of the westbound lanes as plans for major repairs come together, Uchiyama said.

"This temporary shoring operation will save the remainder of westbound lanes in sections where eastbound lanes slid into the river gorge," he said. "Around the time this operation concludes, plans for a larger complex and complete repair will be in progress."

The \$10 million shoring contract has incentives if the contractors - Wright Brothers Construction of Charleston, Tennessee, and Colorado-based GeoStabilization International - can finish the work by Jan. 4.

Engineers are still trying to figure out how to restore the land that once supported the eastbound lanes of I-40.

Historic rain from the remnants of Hurricane Helene turned the Pigeon River into a torrent that wore away the earth below the highway. The guardrail and shoulder along the eastbound lanes fell into the river in several places. In some spots, the travel lanes themselves also disappeared.

The westbound lanes remain intact. But in at least one place, all that separates them from the river is the median barrier.

Options for travel between the two states

In North Carolina, I-40 is open as far as Exit 20, the Maggie Valley interchange with U.S. 276. On the Tennessee side, westbound I-40 opens at Exit 447, while eastbound traffic must get off at Exit 440, U.S. 321.

Tennessee DOT has begun converting the westbound lanes of I-40 to two-way traffic around its damaged section of the highway, between the North Carolina line and Exit 447, a distance of about 4 miles, according to spokesman Mark Nagi.

TDOT hopes to finish the conversion by the end of next week, though drivers won't be able to go beyond the North

Carolina state line.

Speaking with reporters, Gov. Lee called the Pigeon River Gorge section of I-40 "incredibly important." More than 26,000 drivers a day normally use what is the busiest route between the two states.

Meanwhile, an alternate route, Interstate 26, remains closed after floodwaters knocked down twin spans that carried the highway over the Nolichucky River in Erwin, about 40 miles from the North Carolina line. Nagi says there's no timeline set for rebuilding the bridges and reopening the highway.

For now, NCDOT advises drivers wishing to go west toward Tennessee to take either I-77 north to I-81 near Wytheville, Virginia, toward Knoxville or take U.S. 74 west toward Chattanooga.

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

Richard Stradling: 919-829-4739, @RStradling

Copyright (c) 2024 The News and Observer

#### • Citation (aglc Style)

Richard Stradling, Staff Writer, 'Work begins to restore I-40 through Pigeon River Gorge', *News & Observer, The* (online), 11 Oct 2024 1A <a href="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C274CA90426638">https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C274CA90426638</a>>



# Vice President Kamala Harris returning to NC with campaign trip to Greenville

October 11, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Danielle Battaglia; Staff Writer | Section: News | 244 Words Page: 2A OpenURL Link

Vice President Kamala Harris plans to return to North Carolina to campaign in Greenville on Sunday, the Harris-Walz campaign told McClatchy exclusively Wednesday.

The news comes as Hurricane Milton was expected to make landfall as a Category 5 storm in Florida, and the campaign added that the vice president was continuing to monitor the storm and taking her travel day-by-day.

This marks the Democrat's 19th visit to North Carolina this election cycle. The campaign didn't provide details of what Harris would do in Greenville or whether the public could attend her event.

She last visited the state on Saturday as part of an official trip to tour areas impacted by Hurricane Helene, a storm that made landfall in Florida on Sept. 26 as a Category 4 storm before traveling up the East Coast, killing at least 230 people and causing devastation in its wake.

Harris has spent a lot of time campaigning in North Carolina but has cut back on campaign appearances in the state since Helene, having last visited Greensboro and Charlotte on Sept. 12.

North Carolina is considered a battleground, and both Trump and Harris' campaigns believe the path to the White House runs through the state.

Trump has inched up in the polls in recent weeks, with FiveThirtyEight showing him ahead of Harris by 1 point, well within most polls' margin of error.

Early voting by mail has started in North Carolina. The election is less than a month away, on Nov. 5.

Danielle Battaglia: @dani battaglia

Copyright (c) 2024 The News and Observer

# • Citation (aglc Style)

Danielle Battaglia, Staff Writer, 'Vice President Kamala Harris returning to NC with campaign trip to Greenville', *News & Observer, The* (online), 11 Oct 2024 2A <a href="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?">https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?</a> p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C274CAE2C36618>



# State treasurer candidates lay out their financial visions

October 11, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC)

Author: Luciana Perez Uribe Guinassi; Staff Writer | Section: News | 1402 Words

Page: 1A OpenURL Link

The two candidates vying to become North Carolina's next state treasurer debated Tuesday night at Greensboro College, laying out their vision on how the state's health plan, pension plan and billions in state taxpayer funds should be managed and invested.

Republican Brad Briner laid out a vision that was more narrowly focused on cutting liabilities and growing investments. Meanwhile, Democrat Wesley Harris also called for focusing on economic policy, in addition to the treasurer taking on a more active role advocating for state employees and laying out an economic vision for the state.

This race should matter to "every taxpayer," because "the treasurer's office consumes a large and growing share of our state budget every year, a number that continues to accelerate as we deal with the unfunded liabilities of our state pension plan and our state Health Plan," Briner said.

"If we elect an experienced investment professional, we will consume a smaller share of the state budget, which will allow us to invest in roads, salaries, tax reduction, all the above," he said.

Briner is a retired financial investor who previously managed the philanthropic assets of former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg. He also serves on the UNC-Chapel Hill Board of Trustees. He has a master's in business administration from Harvard University

Harris is a former economic consultant and has been a state representative from Mecklenburg County since 2019. He has a PhD in economics from Clemson University

Harris spoke on his background growing up in rural North Carolina, saying "we didn't have a lot, but I was so blessed that we had a state that invested in me, and I had great teachers, and I had a great public school system, and I had great treasurers that took care of them for my parents, so that I was able to have those opportunities."

This position "is about the future of North Carolina, making sure we're investing in our people and this knowledge," he said.

North Carolina's state treasurer manages the state's pension plan and the State Health Plan, which provides medical and pharmaceutical benefits to more than 750,000 current and retired public employees.

The debate, hosted by the NC Institute of Political Leadership in partnership with Spectrum News, lasted for an hour and spanned various topics. It was moderated by Spectrum News 1 political reporter and anchor Loretta Boniti.

Here are four highlights from the debate.

Local recovery efforts following Hurricane Helene

The Department of State Treasurer approves debt issuance for local governments and assists them with fiscal management via its Local Government Commission. The treasure heads that commission.

Asked how the treasurer's office would help local recovery efforts in Western North Carolina, Harris said local finances need to be solid.

Citing a bill in the General Assembly that would be released Wednesday morning providing \$273 million in state funding for recovery efforts, Harris said "that's just scratching the surface."

He said "we have to be serious about making sure that we're making the investments on the state level, because these counties in the western part of the state are going to take years to recover."

He said he thinks it's a responsibility of the treasurer's office to make sure people around the state understand local finances and that if a local government cannot make investments - such as for recovery efforts - "it's because the state is simply not doing their job."

Briner said Harris's answer "has nothing to do with what the state treasurer does" as the state treasurer is not "involved in economic development."

"We need to grow the assets of our state, deliver checks to our beneficiaries, make sure their health care is in place, and really stay in our lane to make sure that all the services the State Treasurer's Office are provided to all of the people in the western part of the state," he said.

Investment approach for the pension plan

North Carolina's state treasurer manages the state's pension plan.

The North Carolina Retirement Systems - which administer the pension plan, as well as the other supplemental retirement plans -returned a net 5.3% for the fiscal year that ended June 30, 2023. This was below the plan's benchmark's for a 6.5% return. The Retirement Systems returned a net 8.2% for the fiscal year that ended in June, according to a quarterly investment report.

The state's pension fund, which is among the largest public pensions in the country, was valued as of June 30 at \$123 billion. It has a 88.3% funded ratio, which means it can cover a large part of accrued benefits owed with assets.

Yet the current state treasurer, Republican Dale Folwell, who is not running for reelection, has been scrutinized for his investment approach, with some saying he is too averse to risk and keeps too many assets in cash. Both candidates honed in on this, but their suggested investment approach differed.

Folwell took office in January 2017 and was reelected in 2020. This year, he ran unsuccessfully for governor in the Republican primary, meaning he could not run again for treasurer, leaving the seat open.

Harris said "we have one of the best-funded pension plans in the country, but we also have the worst performing pension plan in the country," due to the plan being cash-heavy. He said the treasurer's office needed to take advantage of the "good times in the stock market" for investments and lower the cash balance to get higher returns. This would allow the state to give state employees a cost of living adjustment (COLA), he said.

Briner said the state needs to have a more "assertive" investment strategy to give COLAs to state employees without needing to increase taxes and crowding out other state funding priorities. To do this, the pension plan needed to hit a 6.5% return and investments would need to go not toward stocks but toward assets like mortgages, Briner said.

Sole fiduciary responsibility model

North Carolina is one of few states where the state treasurer has sole fiduciary responsibility for making investment decisions for the pension fund. Most other states delegate that authority to boards or investment experts.

Asked whether this should change, Briner said it should, and that "if we keep the current sole fiduciary governance

model, it matters entirely who the treasurer is. Everyone else is just an adviser."

Harris said he "fundamentally" disagreed with Briner and that the treasurer should remain the sole person accountable to North Carolinians.

"If you take that power away from the treasurer, you are giving it to the legislature," he said.

This power will go to the legislature by allowing it to appoint experts, who in fact will be political appointees who will be "doing the will of the political leadership," he said.

State Health Plan solvency issues

The State Health Plan is facing financial strains, according to Folwell, who has cited rising health care costs, inadequate state funding and more as reasons for this.

The plan is projected to have a cash balance at the end of the calendar year of \$591 million. But during the State Health Plan's most recent board of trustees meeting in July, the plan's staff forecasted the plan to be \$816 million in the red by calendar year 2027, with the plan "likely to be unable to pay bills in fall 2026."

Also facing strain are retiree health benefits, which are facing a \$26.65 billion liability, according to a June 2023 report from The Segal Group.

Both Harris and Briner said they would be able to fix the liability.

Harris said because the State Health Plan is "broke" the state is "having to cut benefits," such as cutting access to popular weight loss drugs like Wegovy and Saxenda.

"That's making us make short-term, financially necessary decisions" to stay solvent but will lead to higher expenses in the future, Harris said. Because of this "we have to pressure the General Assembly to fund this" and hold elected officials accountable, he said.

This would allow the state to improve compensation and benefits for state employees, which would help recruit more state employees, including younger employees who would improve the risk pool for the health plan, he said.

Briner said "we have to get creative" to make "our dollars go further - whether it's (investing) in preventative care," or another solution.

"We have to have a better method going forward than just going back to the legislature every year asking for more and more money," he said.

Throughout the debate, Harris also cited the importance of prioritizing preventative care measures.

Both Harris and Briner said they wanted to get GLP-1s, the popular weight loss drugs, covered again.

Luciana Perez Uribe Guinassi: @LucianaPerezUb

Copyright (c) 2024 The News and Observer

#### • Citation (aglc Style)

Luciana Perez Uribe Guinassi, Staff Writer, 'State treasurer candidates lay out their financial visions', *News & Observer, The* (online), 11 Oct 2024 1A <a href="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?">https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?</a> p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C274CA95DEADB8>



# More Helene relief expected to pass this month. How to tell NC lawmakers what you need

October 11, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Dawn Baumgartner Vaughan, News & Observer | Section: politics government | 690 Words OpenURL Link

The first wave of Hurricane Helene relief funding for Western North Carolina is now law. Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper quickly signed a \$273 million disaster relief bill on Thursday, the day after the Republican-controlled General Assembly sent him the legislation. The bill passed the House and Senate unanimously.

Lawmakers are already planning for the next round of relief. Senate leader Phil Berger and House Speaker Tim Moore announced Wednesday that the legislature would be back again soon - Oct. 24 - to pass another bill.

What will that look like?

They are still figuring it out. Here's what we know about where things stand and how you can contact the General Assembly about needs for Helene-devastated areas.

RAL\_SALUDAHELENE-NE-100724-RTW\_1.JPGProperty owner David Smyrl and his friend Derrick Greene use a tractor to navigate the devastated Green River Cove on Monday, October 7, 2024 near Saluda, N.C. Flooding from Hurricane Helene destroyed numerous homes and the road in the popular white water recreational area.

Apply to the NC General Assembly for relief

People in Western North Carolina can share their needs directly with the General Assembly. The legislative website has a form you can fill out at ncleg.gov/form/helenerelief that asks for what kinds of needs are being requested, what county you live in and which lawmaker represents you.

Billions in the state's rainy day fund

The rainy day fund, or Savings Reserve Fund, had \$4.75 billion in it before the Disaster Recovery Act became law on Thursday.

Republican Sen. Kevin Corbin of Macon County thanked God for the rainy day fund on Wednesday as the Senate was debating the relief bill.

"We have over \$4 billion in the rainy day fund, because in Western North Carolina, we had a rainy day. That's what it's for," Corbin said.

The Office of the State Controller releases a weekly Cash Watch that shows the state's money, including the balance of the Savings Reserve.

Moore told reporters after the House passed the first bill that the second bill is likely to be funded from the Savings Reserve, too. He noted that the state also has about \$700 million in a disaster response fund.

He said that in determining how much to fund, they want to make sure the state can get a match from FEMA so the state pays 10% to the federal government's 90% in relief.

RAL\_100524-HELENE-TEL-015.JPGA FEMA search and rescue team from Maryland search for human remains in debris from a structure in Swannanoa on Sunday, Oct. 6, 2024 after Tropical Storm Helene flooded the Swannanoa River. North Carolina officials have confirmed 76 deaths from Tropical Storm Helene.

What they're waiting for

Leaders didn't want to wait until an already scheduled November session to pass more relief.

"Whatever information we have, we have, and we'll act on it," Moore said.

"It's a new territory here," he said.

Berger said that between now and the Oct. 24 session, "we're going to be collecting suggestions from folks. There are some things that are out there that will not be reimbursed by FEMA. I think we're going to start getting some information about those sorts of things, and what we will need to do in terms of the state funding and state response."

In Helene's aftermath, rescue turns to grim recovery in the mountains of Western North CarolinaMore than 1,200 FEMA search-and-rescue personnel from across the country have converged on Western North Carolina in the wake of devastating flooding from Helene. Their work is transitioning into the grim task of recovery more than a week after the storm hit the mountains.

Berger said after 2018's Hurricane Florence, lawmakers came in and quickly appropriated money, then came back a month later with the "main appropriation." He said he didn't think the legislature would be ready for that in October.

Berger said lawmakers will need more advance notice, so it would be more likely for a larger bill to pass during the session that beings Nov. 19.

"I've encouraged the members (of the Senate), and I would encourage - we're reaching out to the executive branch as well - to get us your list, so that we have time to scrub the list, to make sure that it's something that we can build support for," Berger said.

Under The Dome embed (2022)

Copyright 2024 The News and Observer

#### • Citation (aglc Style)

Dawn Baumgartner Vaughan, News & Observer, 'More Helene relief expected to pass this month. How to tell NC lawmakers what you need', *News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles* (online), 11 Oct 2024 <a href="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C8A4FE6A2907A0">https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C8A4FE6A2907A0</a>



# Support these Western NC artisans + Helene storm victims at 2024 NC State Fair

October 11, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Chyna Blackmon, News & Observer | Section: local | 461 Words OpenURL Link

Communities across the Carolinas are stepping up to support those impacted by Hurricane Helene with donation drives, storm relief t-shirts from local businesses and even benefit concerts from big stars.

As relief efforts ramp up, you'll also be able to support storm victims at this year's N.C. State Fair.

The state's largest annual event returns to the capital Oct. 17-27.

Here's how you can show your support while there.

RAL\_FAIR06-102322-EDH.JPGThe North Carolina State Fair in Raleigh, N.C., attracted large crowds Sunday, Oct. 23, 2022.

N.C. State Fair Cares fundraiser

One week before the fairgrounds officially open for the 11-day event, the state fair team has launched the "N.C. State Fair Cares" donation tab in support of those in Western North Carolina..

"Many people have asked about doing something for Western North Carolina and this will give those who would like to donate an easy way to do that when they purchase their advance ticket," Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler said in a statement. "The need is great in Western North Carolina and MANNA FoodBank will continue to work to meet those needs despite the setback."

Similar to a fundraiser following Hurricane Florence, all proceeds will be distributed to the MANNA FoodBank of Asheville. The food bank, which was also a former recipient of the Mountain State Fair's annual canned food drive, lost its distribution warehouse after Helene swept through the region as a tropical storm.

manna foodbank avl helene damage

Donations can be contributed online for those buying tickets on the state fair's website with the option to give to the fundraiser link before you check out with the option to give \$5-\$25.

The donation drive isn't the only way to support those affected by the storm at the state fair this year.

Social media videos capture devastating damage in NC after Hurricane Helene

Support for Western NC artists

One of the most popular attractions, the Village of Yesteryear, will return with dozens of artists and craftsmen creating handmade goods and crafts at the fairgrounds.

Of the more than 75 artisans coming out for fairgoers to see them in action, many are from Western North Carolina, and the State Fair has confirmed that they will still be able to attend.

Here's a list of some of the member crafters you can support as the cleanup continues in their communities:

village of yesteryear wnc artists at nc state fair

The Village of Yesteryear will be open at the N.C. State Fair from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. every day. On opening day, Oct. 17, it'll be open at noon. You can find more information online at ncstatefair.org.

Want to donate clothing to Western NC? Here's where & when to drop it off

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

Raleigh's Crabtree mall will hold fundraising events to support Western NC. How to help

Copyright 2024 The News and Observer

#### • Citation (aglc Style)

Chyna Blackmon, News & Observer, 'Support these Western NC artisans + Helene storm victims at 2024 NC State Fair', *News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles* (online), 11 Oct 2024 <a href="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?">https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?</a> p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C6027D4B4CDA50>



# Tweetsie Railroad theme park in Western NC to be closed longer than expected after Helene

October 11, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Chyna Blackmon, News & Observer | Section: north carolina | 483 Words OpenURL Link

While much of Western North Carolina continues to pick up the pieces from the damage left behind from Hurricane Helene, one of the state's most popular attractions will be shut down for the rest of the season.

Doubleheader EventAug. 30, historic engines No. 12 and N. 190 will work in tandem at Tweetsie Railroad, together pulling one train.

Two weeks after the storm swept through as a tropical storm, the team behind Tweetsie Railroad, North Carolina's first amusement park, announced it will remain closed through the fall for "staff and the surrounding area to prioritize rebuilding and restoring what was lost."

"This storm has touched the lives of so many in ways we never anticipated," Chris Robbins, President of Tweetsie Railroad, said in a statement. "Many of our team members and local families are facing tremendous challenges, and we want to ensure they have the time and resources they need to get back on their feet. Their safety and well-being are our top priority."

Before announcing its fall closure, a spokesperson for the Wild West theme park confirmed to The News & Observer that the park incurred some damage during the storm and flooding.

But the park team plans to reopen for the holiday season at the end of November.

ncarolina-train-6abe617e-efa2-11e5-89c3-a647fcce95e0Guests walk past the Number 12 steam engine at the Tweetsie Railroad. The North Carolina attraction opened in 1957 with a one-mile ride aboard the No. 12, the only surviving narrow-gauge engine from the East Tennessee and Western North Carolina Railroad.

Storm damage at Tweetsie Railroad, Biltmore and other Western NC landmarks after Helene

"Our hearts are with everyone affected by this disaster, and we remain committed to standing alongside our neighbors throughout this difficult period," Robbins said. "We look forward to welcoming everyone back when we reopen for Tweetsie Christmas on November 29, bringing the holiday spirit to life and sharing some much-needed cheer with our guests and staff."

Tweetsie's Helene relief fund

While Tweetsie Railroad remains closed, you can support relief efforts in the area through the #TweetsieMatchingChallenge. After making an initial \$10,000 donation to Samaritan's Purse, the park's team has made a pledge to match and even triple additional contributions.

"Although Tweetsie Railroad is known for being a place for family fun and beloved fall traditions, the immediate need is to focus on recovery and resilience, the release announcing the closure says.

"We encourage those who want to help from a distance to consider purchasing gift cards or certificates from local shops, restaurants and other businesses that rely heavily on seasonal tourism. Any small gesture of kindness can help these businesses recoup some of the revenue lost during what is typically a busy time."

You can find more information and updates on Tweetsie Railroad's closure and refunds for those who previously purchased tickets online at tweetsie.com.

13 state parks closed in Western NC after Hurricane Helene. Estimated reopening timeline

Biltmore Estate closed until further notice. A look at the damage there after Helene

Copyright 2024 The News and Observer

#### • Citation (aglc Style)

Chyna Blackmon, News & Observer, 'Tweetsie Railroad theme park in Western NC to be closed longer than expected after Helene', *News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles* (online), 11 Oct 2024 <a href="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C8A4FE77A21C78">https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C8A4FE77A21C78</a>



# Two weeks after Helene, NCDOT still working to connect Bat Cave with outside world

October 11, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Richard Stradling, News & Observer | Section: north carolina | 970 Words OpenURL Link

When Chelsea Atkins and her husband came down from the cabin where they had taken refuge during Hurricane Helene, they were shocked by what was left of their community.

The Rocky Broad River, normally knee-deep, had ripped away homes and businesses and the land on which they stood. Their own house was still standing, though the back deck was gone along with part of the wall closest to the river.

The roads in and out of Bat Cave were blocked by landslides, washouts and downed trees. Just beyond the Bat Cave post office toward Chimney Rock, U.S. 64 disappeared, pavement either washed away or covered by several feet of mud and debris. The bridge that carried the highway over the river was still standing, but with a wide gap on one side where water had washed out earth and riprap.

Atkins said they thought it might be months before anyone made it in to Bat Cave.

"I really didn't think anybody was coming for us," she said Thursday, two weeks after the storm. "The fact that people are here and care is just wild to me."

Among the people in Bat Cave now are contractors for the N.C. Department of Transportation, which is working to fill that gap between the U.S. 64 bridge and the river bank. Restoring use of the bridge is the best hope NCDOT has for rebuilding U.S. 64 and other roads into the community, said Michael Patton, resident engineer on the project.

"This bridge is very, very vital to getting men, equipment, materials, supplies, electricity, you name it, back into Bat Cave and then other areas beyond Bat Cave, including Chimney Rock," said Patton, standing a few feet from the gap that workers have begun to fill with dirt and fine gravel.

IMG\_2903.jpgU.S. 64 where it passed in front of Caulder Realty & Land Co. in Bat Cave, North Carolina. The pavement is either covered in several feet of mud and debris or, like most of the Caulder building, was washed away by the Rocky Broad River, right.

From Hendersonville, U.S. 64 crosses the Eastern Continental Divide, then follows Reedy Patch Creek down toward Bat Cave and Chimney Rock. When the wind and rain stopped on Sept. 27, the winding two-lane road was blocked by downed trees and power poles, mud from landslides and places where the creek had washed out the pavement.

From the cabin up the hill, Atkins said she watched the Rocky Broad gradually overwhelm buildings.

"We could see them falling in. It sounded like thunder crackling," she said. "We saw our neighbor's motor home. It was huge; I don't know how many feet. And it looked like a little kid's toy in a bathtub. It just swam away."

IMG\_2886.jpgSeveral homes and businesses in Bat Cave, North Carolina, were washed away by the Rocky Broad River during Hurricane Helene. This one was left standing.

First step: Get equipment to Rocky Broad bridge

On Thursday, NCDOT engineers took reporters down U.S. 64 from the continental divide to show what they had accomplished and how much work still lay ahead.

The road along Reedy Patch Creek is passable again and was lined with tree crews from Alabama and utility contractors from Canada and Indiana. The mudslides are clear and washouts filled, though guardrails hang down like spaghetti where the creek washed away the shoulder.

The road is good enough to bring in the earth-moving equipment and dump trucks needed to fix the bridge, which is as far as the NCDOT vans could go. Ben Williams, an NCDOT maintenance engineer based in nearby Fletcher who drove one of them, said he'd cleaned up after many storms in his 25 years with the department.

"I've never dreamed of anything like this," Williams said, walking past the shattered buildings hanging over the river. "I can't wrap my head around what I'm looking at."

The concrete span over the Rocky Broad River was built in 1958. The deluge from Helene pressed trees, pieces of buildings and a shipping container, now flattened by the force of the water, up against the steel pilings. Partly blocked by the debris, the rampaging water began scouring the riverbanks at either end of the bridge, creating the gap workers are now trying to fill.

IMG\_2888.jpgA flattened shipping container is among the debris driven against the pilings of the U.S. 64 bridge over the Rocky Broad River in Bat Cave, North Carolina.

The bridge is tilted slightly downstream. Early on, NCDOT wouldn't let anyone go underneath it for fear it would topple over. Concrete poured around the piles has helped stabilize it.

"We monitor it every day," Patton said. "It's found its happy spot right now."

When NCDOT crews first got to Bat Cave, they found that residents had jerry rigged a rickety walking bridge over the river. Thinking they could do better, NCDOT engineers found four pieces of scaffolding and bolted them together, creating something stable enough to roll a wheelbarrow over.

IMG\_2890.jpgWith the U.S. 64 bridge out, N.C. Department of Transportation engineers used scaffolding to make a footbridge over the Rocky Broad River in Bat Cave, North Carolina.

As of Friday, NCDOT still listed more than 700 roads in Western North Carolina as either closed or partially closed as a result of Helene. NCDOT's strategy has been to fix the roads just enough to restore connections, particularly to isolated communities like Bat Cave, and worry about long-term reconstruction later.

The bridge over the Rocky Broad River will need to be replaced. But Patton said contractors should be able to fill the gap and get it open to truck traffic in a week or two, allowing crews to begin rebuilding roads and power lines in the valley.

"We've gotten to here," he said. "Now we got to get across the river and we can do more."

IMG\_2933.jpgA house now hangs precariously over the Rocky Broad River just upstream of the U.S. 64 bridge in Bat Cave, North Carolina.

Copyright 2024 The News and Observer

#### • Citation (aglc Style)

Richard Stradling, News & Observer, 'Two weeks after Helene, NCDOT still working to connect Bat Cave with outside world', *News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles* (online), 11 Oct 2024 <a href="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?">https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?</a>
p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C6027D4F7BA368>



# Photos: Flush bucket brigades and airlifts; running water still not restored in much of flood-ravaged Western NC

October 11, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Travis Long, Robert Willett and Ethan Hyman, News & Observer Section: state | 966 Words OpenURL Link

Running water has yet to be restored in many cities and towns in Western North Carolina after devastating flooding from Helene ripped up water mains and shut down water-treatment plants across the region.

Previously simple tasks like flushing toilets in an apartment building require bucket brigades, often meaning carrying buckets of water up multiple flights of stairs, with volunteers filling in for those who need help.

Photos from the efforts across the mountains are here:

RAL\_100924-HELENE-TEL-015.JPGLeeza Regensburger with the grassroots group BeLoved Asheville, fills a large tank of drinking water for residents in low-income independent living facilities, with no running water on Wednesday, October. 8, 2024. About half of Asheville's water customers were still without running water this week because the remnants of Hurricane Helene ripped apart the city's distribution system.

RAL\_100924-HELENE-TEL-014.JPGVolunteers with the grassroots group BeLoved Asheville, fill bottles of drinking water for residents in low-income independent living facilities, with no running water on Wednesday, October. 8, 2024. About half of Asheville's water customers were still without running water this week because the remnants of Hurricane Helene ripped apart the city's distribution system.

RAL\_100924-HELENE-TEL-011.JPGVolunteers organized by grassroots group BeLoved Asheville haul buckets of gray water to help residents in low-income independent living facilities, with no running water, flush their toilets on Wednesday, Oct. 9, 2024. About half of Asheville's water customers were still without running water this week because the remnants of Hurricane Helene ripped apart the city's distribution system.

RAL\_100924-HELENE-TEL-013.JPGVolunteers with the grassroots group BeLoved Asheville, fill bottles of drinking water for residents in low-income independent living facilities, with no running water on Wednesday, October. 8, 2024. About half of Asheville's water customers were still without running water this week because the remnants of Hurricane Helene ripped apart the city's distribution system.

RAL\_100924-HELENE-TEL-017.JPGVolunteers organized by grassroots group BeLoved Asheville haul gray water to help residents in low-income independent living facilities, with no running water, flush their toilets on Wednesday, Oct. 9, 2024. About half of Asheville's water customers were still without running water this week because the remnants of Hurricane Helene ripped apart the city's distribution system.

RAL\_100924-HELENE-TEL-028.JPGVolunteers organized by grassroots group BeLoved Asheville haul gray water to help residents in low-income independent living facilities, with no running water, flush their toilets on Wednesday, Oct. 9, 2024. About half of Asheville's water customers were still without running water this week because the remnants of Hurricane Helene ripped apart the city's distribution system.

RAL\_100924-HELENE-TEL-023.JPGVolunteers organized by grassroots group BeLoved Asheville haul gray water to help residents in low-income independent living facilities, with no running water, flush their toilets on Wednesday, Oct. 9, 2024. About half of Asheville's water customers were still without running water this week because the remnants of Hurricane Helene ripped apart the city's distribution system.

RAL\_100924-HELENE-TEL-005.JPGVolunteers organized by grassroots group BeLoved Asheville haul buckets of gray water to help residents in low-income independent living facilities, with no running water, flush their toilets on

Wednesday, Oct. 9, 2024. About half of Asheville's water customers were still without running water this week because the remnants of Hurricane Helene ripped apart the city's distribution system.

RAL\_100924-HELENE-TEL-021.JPGTristan Trechsel, a volunteer with grassroots group BeLoved Asheville, flushes a toilet with gray water in a iow-income independent living facility, with no running water on Wednesday, October. 8, 2024. About half of Asheville's water customers were still without running water this week because the remnants of Hurricane Helene ripped apart the city's distribution system.

RAL\_100824-HURRICANE-HELENE-TEL-79.JPGMateo Crane, with the grassroots group BeLoved Asheville, carries plungers to help residents in low-income independent living facilities, with no running water, flush their toilets on Wednesday, October. 8, 2024.. About half of Asheville's water customers were still without running water this week because the remnants of Hurricane Helene ripped apart the city's distribution system.

RAL\_100824-HURRICANE-HELENE-TEL-77.JPGHannah Huston, a volunteer with grassroots group BeLoved Asheville, unclogs a toilet for Jesse Cook who lives in a iow-income independent living facility, with no running water on Wednesday, October. 10, 2024. About half of Asheville's water customers were still without running water this week because the remnants of Hurricane Helene ripped apart the city's distribution system. Volunteers haul gray water in 5-gallon buckets to flush toilets to help reduce the risk of illness.

RAL\_WATERHELENE-100824-RTW\_3.JPGA volunteer run, Hurricane Helene relief distribution center has been set up at the Harley Davidson dealership on Tuesday, October 8, 2024 in Swannanoa, N.C. Helicopters shuttle supplies in and back out to remote regions in the area cut off by the storm.

RAL\_WATERHELENE-NE-100824-RTW\_14.JPGVolunteers fill water containers for residents of Black Mountain, N.C. at the Ingles store on NC 9 on Tuesday, October 8, 2024.

RAL\_BANNERELK03-100924-EDH.JPGPaul Bloemendaal, 13, washes utensils with water from a two gallon container in their home in Banner Elk, N.C., Wednesday, Oct. 9, 2024. The Bloemendaal's power has been restored but there is no estimate on when they will get water back.

RAL\_BANNERELK04-100924-EDH.JPGEvan Bloemendaal, 17, washes dishes with his brother Paul, 13, with water from a two gallon container in their home in Banner Elk, N.C., Wednesday, Oct. 9, 2024. The Bloemendaal's power has been restored but there is no estimate on when they will get water back.

RAL\_WATERHELENE-NE-100824-RTW\_14.JPGVolunteers fill water containers for residents of Black Mountain, N.C. at the Ingles store on NC 9 on Tuesday, October 8, 2024.

RAL\_WATERHELENE-NE-100824-RTW\_15.JPGVolunteers Melissa McElwee and Tisa Lewis fill a cooler of water for a family without running water in the wake of Hurricane Helene, at the Ingles store on NC 9 on Tuesday, October 8, 2024 in Black Mountain, N.C.

RAL\_WATERHELENE-NE-100824-RTW\_18.JPGA pallet with non-potable water, for flushing toilets, is positioned on Woodburn Drive, on Tuesday, October 8, 2024 in Swannanoa, N.C. for residents to use after Hurricane Helene disabled water service to the town.

RAL\_WATERHELENE-NE-100824-RTW\_2.JPGPiper Parker, of Old Fort, N.C., without power in her home since Hurricane Helene hit on September 27, uses a free, portable laundry unit at the First Baptist Church on Tuesday, October 8, 2024 in Old Fort, N.C.

Copyright 2024 The News and Observer

#### • Citation (aglc Style)

Travis Long, Robert Willett and Ethan Hyman, News & Observer, 'Photos: Flush bucket brigades and airlifts; running water still not restored in much of flood-ravaged Western NC', *News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles* (online), 11 Oct 2024 <a href="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C8A4FE66FD9140">https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C8A4FE66FD9140</a>



# Under the Dome: Harris enlists Bill Clinton for campaign bus tour through Eastern NC

October 11, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Avi Bajpai, News & Observer| Section: politics government| 926 Words OpenURL Link

Good morning and welcome to the Under the Dome newsletter. I'm Avi Bajpai.

Vice President Kamala Harris is ramping up her outreach to rural voters, and is enlisting former President Bill Clinton in the effort.

After Harris holds a rally in Greenville on Sunday, Clinton is expected to hit the campaign trail with a bus tour across Eastern North Carolina beginning on Thursday, Oct. 17, the first day of early voting. The tour will run through Sunday, Oct. 20. In an announcement, the Harris campaign said it was deploying Clinton to specifically target "hard-to-reach" rural voters across the region.

Instead of campaigning for her at large rallies, Clinton will focus on "local fairs and porch rallies, talking to at most a few hundred people at a time" during his campaign appearances next week, CNN reported.

Before starting the bus tour in Eastern North Carolina, Clinton will make stops in Georgia on Sunday and Monday, according to CNN.

In the final stretch before the 2016 presidential election, when he was campaigning on behalf of his wife Hillary, Clinton held a two-day bus tour of the eastern part of the state that began in Rocky Mount and included rallies and events in Goldsboro, Greenville, Pembroke, Wilmington and Fayetteville.

During that campaign, Democrats were going up against Donald Trump for the first time.

Clinton told voters in Rocky Mount at the time that the former president's foundational slogan "Make America Great Again" was familiar to him as a white southerner.

"I didn't fall off this truck yesterday, I've heard this song a long time," Clinton said. "It means first, I'll give you the economy you had 50 years ago, and second, I'll give you the society you had 50 years ago: I'll move you up and move somebody else down."

When he hits the trail next week, Clinton will focus on the economy, "convinced that this is the issue that the election will come down to for the voters on the fence," CNN reported.

The frequency of visits by Harris, Trump, and their running mates and top campaign surrogates has picked up in recent weeks. Trump held a town hall with supporters in Fayetteville a week ago, and GOP vice-presidential nominee JD Vance held his own town hall in Greensboro last night.

Vance is also expected to appear at a NASCAR playoff race at the Charlotte Motor Speedway this Sunday, according to the Charlotte Business Journal.

#### EARLY VOTING SITES CLOSED BY HELENE DESTRUCTION

The State Board of Elections announced Thursday that Western North Carolina would have just five fewer early voting sites than originally planned due to destruction from Hurricane Helene.

"This is absolutely outstanding that our county boards of elections have pulled this off in Western North Carolina given the devastation and destruction left by Helene," the board's executive director, Karen Brinson Bell, told

reporters.

The 25 counties included in the federal disaster area had originally planned on having a combined total of 80 early voting sites. Brinson Bell said that when early voting starts next week, 75 of those sites will open.

The state is still unsure of the scope of the damage to the 540 Election Day polling places in the 25-county disaster area.

"We will work with our state and federal partners to secure tents, trailers, portable bathrooms, generators and whatever else is needed to open as many polling places as possible on Election Day," Brinson Bell said.

- Kyle Ingram

#### MORE HELENE-RELATED FACT CHECKS

« Danielle Battaglia looks into the claim made by the Harris campaign that U.S. Sen. Ted Budd and U.S. Rep. Dan Bishop joined other Republicans in voting "against FEMA funding" when they voted against a stopgap funding bill last month.

The bill contained a \$20 billion replenishment of FEMA's budget, but also included "a host of other provisions that have absolutely nothing to do with emergency management or disaster relief," Western Carolina University political science professor Chris Cooper pointed out.

- « Emily Vespa breaks down the facts behind a number of false claims that have been made by Donald Trump, Elon Musk, and others about FEMA's funding and how it spends the money allocated to it by Congress.
- « Mary Helen Moore speaks with climate and meteorology experts at UNC-Chapel Hill and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration about the false claim by U.S. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene last week that weather could be controlled or artificially modified to create hurricanes.

These fact checks are the latest The News & Observer and Charlotte Observer have published since Helene barreled through the state. We're also maintaining a comprehensive list of Helene-related rumors and myths that have been spreading across social media.

If you see a Helene or #ncpol rumor you'd like us to check out, email realitycheck@newsobserver.com.

#### **VOTER GUIDE**

In the latest candidate questionnaires from our 2024 NC Voter Guide, see what candidates for U.S. House District 2 have to say about the issues, and learn more about their biographies.

Two candidates answered our questions:

**Democrat Deborah Ross** 

Green Party candidate Michael Dublin

Today's newsletter was by Avi Bajpai with contributions from Kyle Ingram. Check your inbox Sunday for our special newsletter on the governor's race.

You can sign up to receive the Under the Dome newsletter at newsobserver.com/newsletters. Want your friends to get our email, too? Forward them this newsletter so they can sign up. We want to know what you would like to see in the Under the Dome newsletter. Do you like highlights from the legislature? Political analysis? Do you have a question you'd like The News & Observer team to answer? Tell us here. You can also email us at

dome@newsobserver.comDon't forget to follow our tweets and listen to our Under the Dome podcast for more developments.

Copyright 2024 The News and Observer

# • Citation (aglc Style)

Avi Bajpai, News & Observer, 'Under the Dome: Harris enlists Bill Clinton for campaign bus tour through Eastern NC', *News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles* (online), 11 Oct 2024 <a href="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?">https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?</a> p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C8A4FF5F949458>



# Two weeks without running water: This is life in Western North Carolina after Helene

October 11, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Josh Shaffer and Martha Quillin, News & Observer Section: weather news | 2127 Words OpenURL Link

Around the mountain town of Banner Elk, neighbors have endured two weeks without running water - a harsh and dirty reality that has hundreds living in the 19th century, toting buckets to the river, collecting trickles from a spring, answering nature's call behind a bush.

Hurricane Helene carried off the town's water and sewer system, and since then volunteers established a relief station that rivals the local Walmart, stocking enough bottled water to fill a reservoir, drawing from a tanker truck parked behind Town Hall.

But that only covers thirst. Consider bathing.

"Wet Wipes are a great way to wash yourself," said Kimberly Tufts, a retired teacher who went a week without showering. "My husband's not a fan. He says they leave a residue."

Or flushing toilets.

"We carry buckets from a retention pond," said Tufts. "We get three flushes out of a bucket."

Or almost anything else.

"It's been hell," said Nancy Owen, the town's tourism director. "You can't brush your teeth. You can't wash your hands. I can't fill up the dog's bowl. I can't take a shower. I can't mop my floors.

"But it's fun. I don't need the basic comforts," she said sarcastically.

After two weeks, it's impossible to know how many people remain without water in North Carolina's 25 most western countries – the sprawling territory wrecked by Helene on Sept. 27.

But U.S. Rep. Chuck Edwards, who represents much of North Carolina's west, reported that Asheville, Black Mountain, Woodfin, Spruce Pine, and Burnsville water systems were unable to deliver water to some or all of their customers.

When they talk about a timetable for bringing it back, officials there use phrases like "yet to be determined," and residents brace for months without water at the least.

Gov. Roy Cooper visited the North Fork Reservoir, which provides water to Asheville, Thursday with Sen. Thom Tillis, Congressman Chuck Edwards, and Michael Regan, administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, along with state and local officials.

During a press conference with the murky lake as a backdrop, Asheville water resources director David Melton said the city will increase the amount of aluminum sulfate it uses in the reservoir. The chemical helps particulates clump together so they can drop to the bottom, making it possible for the water to pass through the plant's filtration system.

The group also announced that workers had finished repairing a 36-inch distribution line in the system around 1 a.m. Thursday, which they described as a critical repair, but said it still could be weeks before the water is flowing to all customers.

In Banner Elk, the town warns that washed-out water and sewer lines must be replaced, disinfected and thoroughly tested. NC Sen. Ralph Hise told WRAL this week that replacing Mitchell County's water plant is a "four-year process."

"If at any time you find that you have water for even a brief moment," wrote Town Manager Rick Owen in a townwide message, "it should not be considered safe to drink."

RAL\_WATERHELENE-100824-RTW\_3.JPGA volunteer run, Hurricane Helene relief distribution center has been set up at the Harley Davidson dealership on Tuesday, October 8, 2024 in Swannanoa, N.C. Helicopters shuttle supplies in and back out to remote regions in the area cut off by the storm.

In Asheville alone, that list represents tens of thousands of people - perhaps half of its nearly 40,000 households.

Workers there scramble to rebuild a distribution system blown apart by flooding that scoured out lines buried more than 20 feet underground, some encased in concrete engineers believed would protect them from devastating storms.

Before Helene, Asheville claimed some of the most pristine drinking water in the world. Now, city officials describe the North Fork Reservoir as looking like chocolate milk from silt churned off the bottom and now refusing to settle.

RAL\_WATERHELENE-100824-RTW\_15.JPGVolunteers Melissa McElwee and Tisa Lewis fill a cooler of water for a family without running water in the wake of Hurricane Helene, at the Ingles store on NC 9 on Tuesday, October 8, 2024 in Black Mountain, N.C.

Meanwhile, across all of the Western North Carolina region, including rural areas where people rely on well water but don't have power to the pumps that would deliver it, residents persist in a world more like 1824 than 2024.

"You kind of just have to get used to being unkempt," said Paige Carter, a 17-year-old senior at T.C. Roberson High School in Buncombe County, waiting for a turn at the shower in a YMCA.

RAL\_BANNERELK04-100924-EDH.JPGEvan Bloemendaal, 17, washes dishes with his brother Paul, 13, with water from a two gallon container in their home in Banner Elk, N.C., Wednesday, Oct. 9, 2024. The Bloemendaal's power has been restored but there is no estimate on when they will get water back.

'Eight days without a shower'

In Banner Elk, the city celebrated the arrival of laundry machines set up inside of a tractor-trailer, and the hundreds still remaining in town rejoiced that the Best Western opened its showers in four rooms to all comers.

"I went eight days without a shower," said Dylan Joslin, drying his hair with a towel outside room 108. "It was pretty miserable. I've been doing a lot of chain-saw work in the mud, with the dust flying everywhere. Wet Wipes are your friend."

Even more welcome in Banner Elk are the dozens of portable toilets set up at Town Hall, at the Lowe's hardware store or in bank parking lots. Still, the convenience only reaches so far.

"Everyone is trying to pee outside as much as they can," said Nola Bloemendaal, mother of four. "But not everybody is comfortable with that. My kid stepped in people poop. Those porta-potties took a while to get here."

RAL\_WATERHELENE-NE-100824-RTW\_2.JPGPiper Parker, of Old Fort, N.C., without power in her home since Hurricane Helene hit on September 27, uses a free, portable laundry unit at the First Baptist Church on Tuesday, October 8, 2024 in Old Fort, N.C.

Outside the town of 1,000, where the elevation reaches 4,000 feet and the woods crawl with wildlife, the line between human and nature is easily blurred.

"It's like camping inside your house," said Jarrett Koski, preschool teacher. "The novelty wears off when you go to use the potty and the deer is on one side and the bear is on the other."

With four kids, Bloemendaal initially found life without electricity to be hardest.

Her oldest son, Blake, has Down syndrome and uses a breathing machine that was impossible to charge. Her second-oldest, Evan, has both autism and epilepsy, and he became very agitated about dwindling battery levels.

But when the lights flicked back on, the water problems were waiting.

After two weeks of missed school, 5th grader gets call from her Banner Elk teacherMolly Bloemendaal, 10, a 5th grader at Banner Elk Elementary School, talks to her teacher, Libby Gragg, on Wednesday, Oct. 9, for the first time since Helene passed through Western North Carolina.

At first, her family lugged buckets up from the Elk River. Then they realized they could drive to the nearby mill pond and dip them into the surface, collecting water for toilet flushing and, once boiled, dishwashing and baths.

"I actually used rainwater to wash my hair," she said.

"One time I went out in the rain and got my hair wet," said her youngest daughter Molly, 10. "I didn't have any soap."

"Just don't take a shower," said her third-oldest, Paul, 13. "Third option. Never let anybody tell you what to do."

Mother rolled her eyes.

On Wednesday, the Bloemendaals had a new 5-gallon Igloo cooler perched on the bathroom sink for brushing teeth and washing faces, and their dog McEnroe had a case of bottled water waiting next to his bowl.

Even with two weeks of practice, the daily challenge of finding distilled water for Blake's breathing machine tests their humor and endurance.

Poop jokes only carry them so far.

"Our house has not washed away in a mudslide," Bloemendaal said. "This is OK."

RAL\_BANNERELK03-100924-EDH.JPGPaul Bloemendaal, 13, washes utensils with water from a two gallon container in their home in Banner Elk, N.C., Wednesday, Oct. 9, 2024. The Bloemendaal's power has been restored but there is no estimate on when they will get water back.

Finding water for toilets, drinking

In Asheville, some hotels that still had guests sent them to scoop water from the swimming pool for flushing. People who have fishing ponds or live near creeks fetched from those.

Residents of Aston Park Tower, a 1970s-era 11-story, 119-unit public housing apartment building near downtown Asheville, don't have a swimming pool or a fishing pond.

Immediately after the storm, they had to find ways to get enough water to live.

RAL\_WATERHELENE-NE-100824-RTW\_18.JPGA pallet with non-potable water, for flushing toilets, is positioned on

Woodburn Drive, on Tuesday, October 8, 2024 in Swannanoa, N.C. for residents to use after Hurricane Helene disabled water service to the town.

"I called it the zombie walk," said James Kesterson, 53, who has a one-bedroom apartment on the tower's top floor. Every day he would walk from one site to another and gather water: bottles given away here, a tanker truck filling containers there.

With no electricity in his building, he had to lug the water upstairs, stopping at each landing to rest. With a case of 16-ounce bottles weighing about 30 pounds, he wasn't about to flush that water down the toilet.

The power has returned so the elevators are working in the tower, and drinking water is easier to find. According to Edwards' updates, FEMA has delivered more than 6 million liters of water to Western North Carolina, and relief agencies and volunteers have delivered millions more.

BANNERELK06-100924-EDH.jpgEvan Bloemendaal, 17, washes dishes with water from a two gallon container in their home in Banner Elk, N.C., Wednesday, Oct. 9, 2024. The Bloemendaal's power has been restored but there is no estimate on when they will get water back.

In some places, bottled water is so plentiful it's used as temporary door stops so that stuffy buildings with no cooling can be open to fresh air.

There wasn't much fresh air in Aston Tower on Wednesday.

Though drinking water is more readily available, no one wants to use it to flush toilets, so the building has a fetid air.

Garbage that had piled up in the building has been cleared out now that collection trucks are running again, but that scent lingers, too.

RAL\_WATERHELENE-NE-100824-RTW\_17.JPGDiana Bunch gives her search and rescue dog Raven a bath with water from a Swannanoa Fire Department tanker on Tuesday, October 8, 2024 in Swannanoa, N.C.

A 'flush brigade' in Asheville

When volunteers from BeLoved Asheville knocked on Kesterson's door Wednesday and asked, "Do you need your toilet flushed?" he welcomed them in.

Leeza Regensburger and Erica Dowd had gathered with two dozen others in the parking lot of a Gold's Gym on the south side of town earlier that morning, part of what organizer Rebekah Todd called a "flush brigade."

RAL\_100824-HURRICANE-HELENE-TEL-72.JPGVolunteers organized by grassroots group BeLoved Asheville haul gray water to help residents in low-income independent living facilities, with no running water, flush their toilets on Wednesday, Oct. 9, 2024. About half of Asheville's water customers were still without running water this week because the remnants of Hurricane Helene ripped apart the city's distribution system.

"Todd's scouts went out ahead of the group to check on a list of low-income independent-living facilities whose residents likely don't have gray water to use for flushing or the strength to lift a 5-gallon bucket to their tank.

RAL\_100924-HELENE-TEL-021.JPGTristan Trechsel, a volunteer with grassroots group BeLoved Asheville, flushes a toilet with gray water in a iow-income independent living facility, with no running water on Wednesday, October. 8, 2024. About half of Asheville's water customers were still without running water this week because the remnants of Hurricane Helene ripped apart the city's distribution system.

BeLoved Asheville's flush brigade and others plan to do this work as long as it's needed to reduce the spread of

disease, improve quality of life and give volunteers a chance to do wellness checks on residents who may not be able to get help otherwise.

Asheville, Todd said, is not handling what comes out of the bottom of the city.

"It's a nightmare."

While the volunteers worked in his bathroom, Kesterson mused on how the water-system crash wrought by Helene has served as an equalizer in his community, where there is a strong contrast between wealthy retirees and the poor of the working class.

"We're getting back to basics," he said. "If you want to look for a silver lining, I think it's brought people together and brought them perspective.

"Waiting in line for water, I've run into people with a lot of money and people who were living in a tent. They're standing next to each other. Now we're all in the same boat."

RAL\_100924-HELENE-TEL-011.JPGVolunteers organized by grassroots group BeLoved Asheville haul buckets of gray water to help residents in low-income independent living facilities, with no running water, flush their toilets on Wednesday, Oct. 9, 2024. About half of Asheville's water customers were still without running water this week because the remnants of Hurricane Helene ripped apart the city's distribution system.

Copyright 2024 The News and Observer

#### • Citation (aglc Style)

Josh Shaffer and Martha Quillin, News & Observer, 'Two weeks without running water: This is life in Western North Carolina after Helene', *News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles* (online), 11 Oct 2024 <a href="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C6027D59927688">https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C6027D59927688>



### When Helene hit NC's Green River Gorge, woman's only escape route was over the mountain

October 11, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Adam Wagner, News & Observer | Section: north carolina | 1896 Words OpenURL Link

When the house across the street exploded, Susan Figetakis knew it was time to run from the rising Green River.

Figetakis stowed her three cats in the top floor of her three-story home, put her birth certificate and a few key belongings in a knapsack and started to climb the mountain that rises behind her home on Green River Cove Road. This scenic part of Polk County is nestled into a valley between several mountains, with the river that gives the road its name running through a gorge at the bottom.

But on Sept. 27, that river frothed as Helene's heavy rainfalls raised it. And the mountains that surround the road boomed with the sound of landslides from above and riverfront homes smashing below, Figetakis said.

Figetakis knew Helene was going to be bad. The area had flooded in 2018, damaging large portions of Green River Cove Road and flooding cars and property. Still, the water hadn't crossed the road onto Figetakis' property then.

Helene was different.

Days before the storm, the local fire department had come through to evacuate everyone on the northern edge of Green River Cove Road, which runs along the river. They didn't say anything to Figetakis or the other people living on the southern side of the road.

RAL\_SALUDAHELENE-NE-100724-RTW\_28.JPGGreen River Cove Road, along the Green River was destroyed by historic flooding in the wake of Hurricane Helene on Monday, October 7, 2024 near Saluda, N.C.

'One way out'

In the early hours of Friday morning, Figetakis watched as the water started to creep up the driveway to her house.

As the water was rising, Figetakis was making her escape plan. She didn't know who else was on the road or how high the water would go. She thought about trying to stay, trying to retreat higher and higher in the three-story home.

The water spilled across Green River Cove Road and steadily crossed her yard.

About an hour later, the water was inside her walk-out basement, Figetakis said. The clock that had been in the basement was stopped at 9:30. Then, she said, the water was "just boiling up the stairs."

It would end up reaching the second-highest stair to the home's second floor.

"There's only one way (out)," Figetakis said - the mountain.

Around 10 a.m., she saw a house on stilts across the street explode, something Figetakis believes happened due to a propane tank. She stowed the cats, then threw her birth certificate, a change of clothes, a spare pair of shoes and her cell phone charger into a knapsack.

Clad in a rain suit, Figetakis went out a back window and started to climb.

As she walked uphill, Figetakis tried to stay away from large trees, afraid of what would happen if the ground

beneath them gave way in a landslide. Still, the ground underneath her feet was squishy, saturated from all of the rain that had fallen even before the storm arrived.

Figetakis described paying close attention to the ground, trying to walk where leaves from previous seasons seemed to still be clustered, because those were places where mudslides hadn't yet disturbed the ground. The storm was just passing overhead at that point, and Figetakis remembered the rain picking up.

Around her, waterfalls were forming where there hadn't been any before as the rain sought a path off the mountain she was trying to climb.

"It was actually quite beautiful," Figetakis said.

Even though she didn't have cell service, she texted her partner, Ernie Planck, who was driving home after a shift working as a helicopter pilot in Louisiana, evacuating workers from oil rigs as the storm churned through the Gulf of Mexico. Figetakis described what she was wearing and where she was walking, hoping he would be able to help someone find her or, in the worst case, her body.

"It was bad. I was just like, 'Don't give up. Keep going up, keep going up,'" Figetakis said.

As she told the story outside of her waterlogged home Monday afternoon, Figetakis stared into space, her gaze pointed in the direction of the debris-littered river but not focused on anything. Occasionally, Figetakis fidgeted with the N95 mask she was wearing, leaving smears of dark mud across the white mask.

She recalled how she felt like Bilbo Baggins walking through The Shire in "The Lord of the Rings." She marveled at the fact that she had been able to walk up the mountain. And she said she had felt a strange sense of calm throughout the ordeal.

Eventually, as Figetakis climbed, she flipped to Facebook on her phone and saw that a friend was marked as online. She sent a message describing where she was.

Then she stumbled across an orange marker on a tree, a sign that she was on a trail. Figetakis described generally following the trail for a while, trying to stay above it when it dipped downward.

After walking for about two hours, Figetakis came to what she described as a small shed, and a friend was able to find her there after a neighbor told him where the trailhead was located. By about 2 p.m., Figetakis was off of the mountain.

Days later, Figetakis seemed almost surprised at her escape.

"I just did it," she said. "I had to."

RAL\_SALUDAHELENE-NE-100724-RTW\_1.JPGProperty owner David Smyrl and his friend Derrick Greene use a tractor to navigate the devastated Green River Cove on Monday, October 7, 2024 near Saluda, N.C. Flooding from Hurricane Helene destroyed numerous homes and the road in the popular white water recreational area.

Landslides on Green River Cove Road

The descent to Green River Cove is tricky even in the best of times. There are 17 switchbacks on two miles of Green River Cove Road, with the steep grade earning a profile on DangerousRoads.org.

On a map, part of the road from Saluda into the valley looks like an EKG reading, with five remarkably consistent peaks, each with a switchback at the top and at the base.

Monday afternoon reddish dirt clearly marked where several landslides had occurred throughout the descent from

Holbert Cove Road. In some places, metal guardrails hung in thin air, the dirt their posts had been driven into washed onto the road below.

About halfway down the mountain the face above had given way, leaving a hill of dirt the size of a large house gradually descending off of the cliff. It was possible to walk up and over the hill or to take a jolting ride on an off-road vehicle, but the one-lane road had only recently become accessible to the bravest car drivers after the National Guard used a bulldozer to smooth out the dirt.

Helene's floodwaters destroyed 37 homes on Green River Cove Road, said Christina Hallingse, an acting spokeswoman for Polk County.

"They were essentially washed away. Those houses do not exist," Hallingse said Tuesday.

Monday, small clutches of supplies sat in front of the houses that remained. Donations of bottled water, plastic bags, Nabs and a spare set of shoes neatly gathered on plastic folding tables like offerings to whichever passerby needed them right that instant.

RAL\_SALUDAHELENE-NE-100724-RTW\_25.JPGSusan Figetakis recovers items from her home, flooded by Hurricane Helene, along Green River Cove Road on Monday, October 7, 2024, near Saluda, N.C

Cleaning up, trying to stay

Before Helene, the banks of the Green River were 250 feet away from Figetakis' house.

On a Google Streetview image taken in front of the home last December, it's impossible to see through the thick clumps of trees to the river. Several buildings are clearly visible.

Helene changed all that.

The buildings were nowhere to be seen, and even large areas of debris from fallen structures seemed to be mostly absent. The trees had gathered in clumps throughout the riverbed. A new southern branch of the river seemed to be flowing where there had been dry land a little more than a week before.

"It's just gone and now it's like there's a little Grand Canyon there," Figetakis said, pointing to a new cliff on the river's northern edge. "It's really weird."

RAL\_SALUDAHELENE-NE-100724-RTW\_19.JPGThe view of the Green River Valley from Susan Figetakis' property along Green River Cove Road on Monday, October 7, 2024, near Saluda, N.C. The view would normally include five buildings, all of which were destroyed by flood waters from Hurricane Helene.

Figetakis and Planck returned to their home shortly after the storm to retrieve the cats. They also started cleaning up the mess that Helene left behind.

The river had almost entirely flooded the home's finished basement and nearly reached the second floor. A twostory garage that had sat behind their house was toppled onto its front, its roof facing the jagged remains of the street on Monday.

Just west of the house, an ATV trail had been formed out of still-slushy mud. East of the house, what remained of the road was so muddy that it was difficult to discern that the narrow strip that was being traveled was the shoulder and a small bit of the eastbound lane.

Clad in a white hazmat suit that had turned brown from the shoulders down, Figetakis made trip after trip into the basement, pulling out the items that she and Planck had collected over decades.

Mud-splattered items from the basement were piled outside, books and a drum set and mirrors and a lamp still wet.

As she carried the books out, Figetakis said she was thinking, "Oh my God, I wish I'd never gotten these."

RAL\_SALUDAHELENE-NE-100724-RTW\_24.JPGRecovered items from Susan Figetakis and Ernie Planck's flooded home along Green River Cove Road on Monday, October 7, 2024, near Saluda, N.C

Two cars sat at odd angles in the front yard, where the river the had deposited them. An SUV sat askew, a mud splashed couch wedged up against it. A brand new ATV sat next to it - Figetakis and Planck's current transportation.

RAL\_SALUDAHELENE-NE-100724-RTW\_23.JPGSusan Figetakis and Ernie Planck's automobiles were tossed atop each other by Hurricane Helene which flooded the Green River on Monday, October 7, 2024 near Saluda, N.C.

The smell of mildew reached from the basement almost to the road, more than 50 feet away. Inside, an ankle-deep layer of mud still laid across the floor. The roar of a generator made it impossible to talk inside.

Back outside, Figetakis described the physical challenges of cleaning up, of lifting the heavy mud and moving all of her belongings.

But there's also a monetary side to recovery, and like so many in Western North Carolina, Figetakis and Planck did not carry flood insurance.

"We really felt like we didn't need it because of how high up we are. ... If we thought we had needed it or were even remotely close ...," Figetakis said, trailing off.

Still, she has been drawn to the natural beauty of Western North Carolina since moving to the region in 1989. She'd like to find a way to keep living in the area, maybe even in the same house on Green River Cove Road. But for now, she's not sure if it's inhabitable and is staying at a nearby inn.

"I'd like to stay here but we'll see what happens," Figetakis said.

RAL\_SALUDAHELENE-NE-100724-RTW\_18.JPGSusan Figetakis is covered with thick mud as he works to clean out her home, flooded by the Green River during Hurricane Helene, on Monday, October 7, 2024 near Saluda, N.C.

This story was produced with financial support from the Hartfield Foundation and Green South Foundation, in partnership with Journalism Funding Partners, as part of an independent journalism fellowship program. The N&O maintains full editorial control of the work. If you would like to help support local journalism, please consider signing up for a digital subscription, which you can do here.

Copyright 2024 The News and Observer

#### • Citation (aglc Style)

Adam Wagner, News & Observer, 'When Helene hit NC's Green River Gorge, woman's only escape route was over the mountain', *News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles* (online), 11 Oct 2024 <a href="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?">https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?</a> p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C8A4FF170DDEE8>



### Repair crews will play Whac-A-Mole as first water flows from Asheville reservoir

October 11, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Martha Quillin, News & Observer | Section: weather news | 613 Words OpenURL Link

The City of Asheville will start pressurizing parts of its water system served by the North Fork Reservoir this weekend, the next step in trying to rebuild the network of distribution lines ripped apart by flooding from the remnants of Hurricane Helene.

The process likely will reveal new breaks and leaks in the towns of Swannanoa and Black Mountain, which sustained some of the worst damage from flooding in the Swannanoa River.

It won't immediately provide those areas with drinkable water.

Clay Chandler, spokesman for Asheville's water resources department, said Friday that repair crews are on standby and will be "playing Whac-A-Mole" with the leaks, some of which are likely to shoot water straight into the air, he said. Chandler and Ben Woody, Asheville's assistant city manager, explained the plan Friday during Buncombe County's regular Helene recovery briefing, live-streamed through the county's Facebook page.

This week, crews finished repairs to a 36-inch bypass line that will allow water to start flowing from the reservoir located north of Black Mountain. The North Fork Reservoir is the largest of the city's three impoundments and serves some 70% of its customers, including those in Black Mountain and Swannanoa.

But the water that will start flowing into the system this weekend won't be of the pristine quality to which Asheville customers are accustomed.

Why the North Fork Reservoir is so murky

Gov. Roy Cooper visited the North Fork Reservoir Thursday with state and local officials and heard that normally, water in the lake is so clear it's possible to see fish swimming 10 feet down.

However, Helene "flipped" the reservoir, bringing silt up from the bottom and stirring it into the water like it was run through a blender.

The particulates became electrically charged and have continued to bounce off each other, keeping the water murky and gritty and limiting visibility to just a few inches. Cooler temperatures this week have slowed the process even more, the city says.

The water can't be processed by the nearby treatment plant because the particulates are so large they would quickly jam up the plant's filtration.

Getting Asheville's water supply running again

Friday, Woody described for the public the process that will be used to try to accelerate the process of settling the particulates back to the bottom of the reservoir. Crews will curtain off sections of the reservoir with underwater semi-circular partitions and treat each section with aluminum sulfate, a coagulant that's expected to clump the clay particles together and cause them to fall to the bottom.

Officials won't make a guess about how long that process might take.

Meanwhile, though, the city will start drawing water directly from the reservoir - suspended silt and all - into the

repaired 36-inch line and push it into the smaller feeder lines. That will allow them to find the breaks and leaks they haven't already located, all of which must be repaired before additional communities can be added back on.

Over the coming days or weeks, crews will continue to pressurize lines, find and fix leaks, and keep moving west until the system is repaired.

What to do if you see water flowing through your pipes

Woody said that customers in Black Mountain and Swannanoa might notice water flowing through their pipes this weekend, and told them it will contain lots of sediment. They should shut off intake lines to appliances, including water heaters, to prevent damage from silt buildup, he said. Power should be shut off to water heaters as well, he said, until the system is restored.

In Swannanoa, water that flows into the system through this process can be used if boiled, Woody said. But in Black Mountain, because of additional issues there, the water should not be used for drinking even if boiled.

Copyright 2024 The News and Observer

#### • Citation (aglc Style)

Martha Quillin, News & Observer, 'Repair crews will play Whac-A-Mole as first water flows from Asheville reservoir', *News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles* (online), 11 Oct 2024 <a href="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?">https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?</a> p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C6027D53BB3948>