

Asheville wellness providers upended - Those who came to offer healing are now reeling

October 2, 2024 | Star, The (Shelby, NC) Author: Charles Trepany; USA TODAY | Section: News | 965 Words Page: A4 OpenURL Link

Taylor Houchens moved to Asheville about four years ago for healing.

The mountains, the forests, the lakes – they all called to the licensed professional counselor, as they have to countless others who've journeyed to the North Carolina city looking to relax, reset and rejuvenate. As a result, Asheville has drawn a thriving local wellness community, one that includes all manner of mental health practitioners, holistic coaches and healers.

Now, in the wake of Hurricane Helene, that community has been devastated — and Houchens says he isn't sure where to go from here.

"It's devastation. It's apocalyptic. It's tragic," Houchens, who specializes in trauma therapy, says on a phone call while driving to stay with his family in Savannah, Georgia, after flood waters threatened his apartment. "Honestly, I'm still in shock. There's different stages of trauma, and shock is the first one. Even my neighbors, we were kind of talking about it, and she was like, 'I still need a good cry, but I'm just not there yet.'"

'There's something in this land'

Tucked away in the mountains of North Carolina, Asheville's wellness roots run deep.

Throughout the early 20th century, the city grew as a hub for people looking to heal from tuberculosis. In addition to its hospitals, Asheville drew TB patients because of its mountainous climate — something locals thought aided in healing.

That same atmosphere continues to attract health and wellness enthusiasts today.

"There's something in this land," Houchens says, adding he was also drawn to Asheville for its wide range of healing modalities, including craniosacral, massage and somatic therapies. "There's something in these mountains. There's a beauty. There's a power. There's an essence that is its own kind of essence. And that can't be taken away by the hurricane or by the disaster."

Holistic health coach Brynn Barale moved to the Asheville area in 2006 from Florida. She actually relocated to escape the hurricanes.

But the healing community is what drew her in.

"The wellness community here in Asheville is part of the reason why I've lived here so long, to be honest," she says. "We trust one another, and it's a very robust wellness community here for the size of the town."

Settled in Arden, a small town about 10 minutes from the city, Barale says she and her family, which consists of her husband and their two young kids, haven't been as severely impacted as others. Sure, they lost water and power, but they still have a roof over their heads.

Many of her colleagues can't say the same.

"Everybody's closed indefinitely. Some people are like, 'I don't know how I'm going to rebuild from this,' because

the floodwater in some of the communities was just so much," she says on a phone call. "Even if you are able to have a remote business right now, there's nothing you can do. I mean, this phone call is a miracle to be happening, to be truthful."

Houchens says he went into fight-or-flight mode as flood waters rose around his apartment building. His mind immediately went to the worst-case scenario, wondering if he'd be able to swim to safety if it came down to it.

"I panicked," he says. "Just seeing devastation everywhere and hearing about people who have died and watching, looking at homes that have been flipped over, it's just too much. We're not designed to be able to take that kind of disaster in."

When healers need healing

Rachael Chatham, a licensed clinical mental health counselor in Asheville, says the wellness community, like the rest of the city, is still in disarray.

Like many others, she's waiting in dread to see what the aftermath will be once the hurricane damage is fully visible.

"It's a very disorienting time in Asheville right now," she says. "There's so much uncertainty, and there's no communication. I think they're really trying to restore that, but without the communication, it's just so hard to know what's going on and where can we get help and who needs help and who needs what."

When natural disasters strike, people's priorities get streamlined quickly according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, says Stephanie Sarkis, a psychotherapist in Florida, whose neighborhood also flooded due to the hurricane.

First come the essentials: food, water and shelter. Once those get sorted, other needs start to come to the fore, particularly ones stemming from trauma and grief. Sarkis says it can take months — even years — before people who've been through a tragedy like a major hurricane can process what they've been through.

Chatham says it's strange being a therapist living through a traumatic situation. She plans to open office hours for clients who need extra mental health support following the hurricane, but she understands she needs help and support, too.

"You have this kind of surreal feeling moving through the world," she says. "On the plus side, I've seen really beautiful extensions of community and people reaching out and trying to help one another, even in their own state of really struggling."

In the coming weeks and months, mental health treatment and wellness may prove more crucial than ever for the people of Asheville. Houchens says you don't need to be a licensed professional to help someone struggling either.

"There's something really simple but powerful around just holding space for someone," he says. "We don't have to always provide something or have an intervention or have a therapeutic technique. It's just as simple as someone being seen and being heard and being listened to. That is sometimes all we need."

As Asheville recuperates, Barale believes its wellness community will thrive once again. It may take time to rebuild, but they will.

"I see it just getting even stronger," she says. "I feel like times like these make the community stronger. ... I just see it being even more robust."

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As a hearing looms, here's where talks over a massive 99% coastal insurance rate hike stand

October 2, 2024 | StarNews (Wilmington, NC) Author: Gareth McGrath NETWORK | Section: News | 1001 Words OpenURL Link

Negotiations between state regulators and insurance companies over a potentially massive rate increases for North Carolina homeowners are going down to the wire.

In January the N.C. Rate Bureau, a 14-member board that represents the industry, submitted a proposal to raise homeowner insurance premiums by 42% statewide and an eyewatering 99% in beach and coastal areas around Wilmington.

The proposal, after a public hearing, was swiftly and vocally rejected by N.C. Insurance Commissioner Mike Causey.

"I heard from more people on this rate filing than any other while I've been commissioner," Causey, who has been in office since 2017, said on Thursday, adding his agency received more than 25,000 comments - almost all of which were against it. "And I agreed with them."

The commissioner's action triggered a judicial hearing, which is scheduled for Oct. 7.

As that hearing grows closer, here's where things stand.

STICKER SHOCK: NC's insurance companies want to raise rates for coastal homeowners by 99%

Why do the insurance companies want such a big rate increase?

In short, because they aren't making money and are worried about the future.

The N.C. Rate Bureau cited two main factors for the surprisingly large rate increase proposal. First, is the rising cost of pretty much everything, including labor and potential repairs, driven by inflation and the lingering impacts of labor and material shortages tied to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The other is climate change, which is causing more frequent and widespread property destruction, particularly tied to bigger and stronger hurricanes, as the warming climate fuels more severe weather events. Damages in North Carolina tied to 2018's Hurricane Florence, for example, were estimated to top \$22 billion, with much of that hitting inland areas.

Other factors that are playing a role in the proposed substantial increase include the moratorium that was put into place during the pandemic on any rate increases and the cost of reinsurance - basically insurance for the insurance companies themselves in case a large-scale disaster stretches their financial ability to respond.

"It will be four years in November since we last requested a homeowners rate increase, and even the approved change was only a small percentage of what was requested," said Jarred Chappell, chief operating officers with the rate bureau, in an email. "That has been the case over multiple rate filings, which has contributed to the ongoing rate need."

Why can't the insurance companies just raise rates?

North Carolina operates a regulated insurance market. That means that companies have to receive approval from state regulators to raise most rates, including those for homeowner and auto insurance.

While some in the industry have said that limits competition in a somewhat closed market and doesn't make North Carolina an attractive market for insurance companies, Causey disagrees.

He said the current system, which attempts to balance the needs of consumers and industry, offers some security for both sides and somewhat ring fences North Carolina from seeing the problems other coastal states, like Florida and Louisiana, are experiencing. In those states, many insurance companies are pulling out in the wake of repeated natural disasters and an inability to charge rates they believe reflect their liability and ability to turn a profit.

That, in turn, is forcing the state to create government-run insurance companies of last resort for folks who otherwise can't get coverage, which generally offer higher premiums and less coverage to balance their books.

Do proposed rate increases always end up in a hearing?

Generally no, because that costs both the state and industry time and money that they'd rather not spend.

Causey, a Republican who is running for re-election this November against Democrat Natasha Marcus, said in most rate disputes his department and the rate bureau have been able to negotiate before a hearing date and reach a mutually acceptable agreement.

"We have done that very successfully in the past and get settlements that are mostly favorable to consumers," he said.

That hasn't happened in this case.

"We are at an impasse," Causey said. "We're going to court."

What happens at the Oct. 7 hearing?

State law gives the insurance commissioner 45 days to issue an order once a hearing concludes, and the insurance industry always has the option of taking the issue to the courts if they reject the commissioner's findings.

Causey said he understands that the industry needs a rate increase, not having seen one since the start of the decade.

"And like consumers and every industry, they're getting hit by inflation," he said. "It's no different than any other industry or business."

But Causey said an average statewide increase of more than 40%, and double that at the coast, just isn't fair to North Carolina consumers.

"North Carolina consumers deserve a more thorough review of this proposal," Causey said in a statement in February announcing his rejection of the proposed rate hike. "I intend to make sure they get that review."

But whatever happens with this rate hike, that's not likely to be the end of the financial pain for coastal homeowners.

Causey said this request is mostly tied to the industry's costs and payouts associated with the spate of natural disasters, including 2018's Hurricane Florence, North Carolina saw several years ago. He added that his office is still dealing with claims tied to Florence, having recently paid one out to the University of North Carolina Wilmington (UNCW) tied to that devastating storm.

"It takes years from the time a storm hits for the rates to catch up," Causey said.

That means damage from this month's unnamed storm, which dropped historic amounts of rain on parts of the Cape

Fear region, and losses associated with Tropical Storm Debby and any from Hurricane Helene aren't taken into account with this rate filing.

"If we could get Mother Nature to cooperate, we wouldn't have many of these problems," he said of the natural disasters, many tied to climate change, that have hit the state in recent years. "But that's just not the case."

Reporter Gareth McGrath can be reached at GMcGrath@Gannett.com or @GarethMcGrathSN on X/Twitter. This story was produced with financial support from the Green South Foundation and the Prentice Foundation. The USA TODAY Network maintains full editorial control of the work.

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Baxter plant in Marion closed because of Helene flooding; 2,500+ workers affected

October 2, 2024 | Statesville Record & Landmark (NC) Author: RICHARD CRAVER Winston-Salem Journal | Section: Business | 536 Words OpenURL Link

The North Cove manufacturing plant of Baxter International Inc. has experienced significant flooding damage from the remnants of Hurricane Helene, the company said Tuesday.

The Marion campus is closed for production. It is Baxter's largest manufacturing facility with more than 2,500 employees.

Production primarily involves making intravenous and peritoneal dialysis solutions. Baxter is the largest U.S. manufacturer of these solutions.

"Our hearts and thoughts are with all those affected by Hurricane Helene," said José Almeida, Baxter's chair, president and chief executive.

"The safety of our employees, their families and the communities in which we operate remains our utmost concern, and we are committed to helping ensure reliable supply of products to patients.

The company said "it is working around the clock in close coordination with local, state and federal officials to assess the extent of the damage and implement a plan to bring the plant back online as quickly as possible to help mitigate supply disruption to patients."

"Remediation efforts are already under way, and we will spare no resource -- human or financial -- to resume production and help ensure patients and providers have the products they need," Almeida said.

The damage occurred in spite of Baxter's preparation efforts, which included evacuation plans for workers, moving products to higher ground or secure storage where feasible.

However, the company said the heavy rain and storm surge triggered a levee breach, which led to water permeating the site. The bridges accessing the site have been damaged.

The Baxter International Foundation has committed \$1.5 million in donations to help address recovery needs, including allocating additional funds to its Employee Disaster Relief Fund, and is matching employee donations \$2 for \$1 toward relief efforts.

Baster said the temporary closing of the Baxter plant is expected to "negatively impact the company's financial results."

"Once the company can more fully assess the damage, it will be in a better position to estimate any expected impact and plans to provide an update in its third-quarter earnings announcement."

On Tuesday, the N.C. Division of Employment Security listed McDowell County among 25 counties in northwest and western N.C. whose citizens have been declared eligible for federal disaster unemployment assistance benefits.

The eligibility is a byproduct of the Biden administration's declaration of a state of emergency in North Carolina.

The assistance covers individuals who are unemployed as a direct result of Hurricane Helene. Business owners and self-employed individuals affected by the storm also may qualify for benefits.

Benefits would be made retroactive to Sept. 29 and may last for up to 26 weeks.

The other counties, along with the Cherokee Indians of N.C., are: Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Clay, Cleveland, Gaston, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Lincoln, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes and Yancey.

The division said additional counties may be added at a later date.

Eligible individuals have until Dec. 2 to file an application for disaster unemployment assistance at des.nc.gov or the DUA Hotline at 919-629-3857.

Individuals must first apply for state unemployment benefits. For those determined to be ineligible for or have exhausted regular state benefits, they may be eligible to make a federal disaster unemployment assistance claim.

Eligibility is determined weekly, and individuals must continue to be out of work as a direct result of the disaster each week to get unemployment benefits.

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Searches underway as Helene deaths pass 165

October 2, 2024 | Statesville Record & Landmark (NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: Mapping | 136 Words OpenURL Link

SWANNANOA, N.C. — Cadaver dogs and search crews trudged through knee-deep muck and debris Tuesday looking in the mountains of western North Carolina for victims of Hurricane Helene, days after the storm carved a destructive path through the Southeast.

With Helene's death toll passing 165, searchers used helicopters and hiked through wilderness to reach isolated homes. The storm knocked out power and cellular service in some towns and cities, leaving people frustrated, hot and increasingly worried. Some cooked food on charcoal grills or hiked to high ground in the hopes of finding a signal to contact loved ones.

"Communities were wiped off the map," North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper said Tuesday at a news conference. Devastation was especially bad in the Blue Ridge Mountains, where at least 57 people died in and around Asheville, a tourism haven.

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WANT TO HELP?

October 2, 2024 | Statesville Record & Landmark (NC) Author: SARAH C. JOHNSON Hickory Daily Record | Section: Mapping | 1091 Words OpenURL Link

WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA | HELENE AFTERMATH

The remnants of Hurricane Helene hit western North Carolina Friday, bringing significant flooding and damage. The storm left many residents without power, water or cell service.

In the days since, federal, state and local governments have worked to help the area recover. Also helping are numerous private companies and individuals.

Here is information about food, shelter, power and donation sites in McDowell, Burke, Catawba and Iredell counties and surrounding areas.

Meals, shelters for flood victims in western NC

Grace Community Church will be providing hot meals at 5182 U.S. 70 West in Marion. Lunch will be served from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Dinner will be served from 4-5:30 p.m.

Local emergency shelters are listed below:

- Glenwood Baptist Church 155 Glenwood Church Road in Marion
- Marion Senior Center 100 Spauling Road in Marion
- YMCA of Marion 438 Grace Corpening Drive in Marion
- Oak Hill Methodist Church 2239 N.C. 181 in Morganton
- West Caldwell High School 300 West Caldwell Drive in Lenoir

Food, water, supplies in McDowell County

Numerous agencies from all across McDowell County continue to assist McDowell County Emergency Management with points of distribution. These places will operate daily from 10 a.m. to noon and 4-6 p.m., depending on available supplies. The locations are as follows:

- Hicks Chapel Church 6008 U.S. Hwy. 221 N. in Marion
- Former TJ's Discount 8153 U.S. Hwy. 221 N. in Marion
- Old Fort Town Hall 38 Catawba Ave. in Old Fort
- New Manna Baptist Church 225 E. Court St. in Marion
- Solid Rock Free Will Baptist Church 7860 N.C. Hwy. 226 S. in Nebo

Food, water and ice in Burke County

Burke County has set up a donation and distribution location at Foothills Higher Education Center in Morganton.

The center is at 2128 S. Sterling St., Morganton.

Donations are being accepted from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. every day and will be distributing needed items from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. every day.

The county is offering free bags of ice at four locations:

- Old Kmart parking lot 110 Bost Road, Morganton
- Fiddlers Run Shopping Center 160 Fidler Run Blvd., Morganton
- Brentwood Water Corporation 1911 Jamestown Road, Morganton
- Foothills Thrift Store 2886 U.S. Hwy. 17, Morganton

Where to donate for flood relief in western NC

Looking to donate food, clothes or toiletries to flood victims in western North Carolina? Here are donation sites in Catawba, Caldwell, Burke, Iredell and McDowell counties.

Several sites around the Catawba Valley are collecting donations:

- N.C. State Highway Patrol station 3265 U.S. Highway 70 SE in Conover
- Catawba County United Way office 2760 Tate Blvd. SE in Hickory
- WHKY office 526 Main Ave. SE in Hickory
- Conover Fire Department, Station No. 3 1776 Village Square NW in Conover
- Hickory Motor Speedway 3130 U.S. Highway 70 SE in Newton
- Klingspor Abrasives 2566 Third Ave. NW in Hickory
- Brookford Police Department lobby 1700 S. Center St. in Hickory
- Long View Town Hall 2404 First Ave. SW in Long View (Until Oct. 7)
- Adrian L. Shuford Jr. YMCA 1104 Conover Blvd. E. in Conover
- Hickory Foundation YMCA 701 First St. NW in Hickory
- ullet Lincoln County Family YMCA 1402 Gaston St. in Lincolnton
- Sally's YMCA 1601 Forney Creek Parkway in Denver
- Phifer Family YMCA 2165 S. Sterling St. in Morganton
- Lower Creek Baptist Church 633 Lower Creek Drive in Lenoir (10 a.m. to 4 p.m.)
- Statesville Regional Airport 238 Airport Road in Statesville (8 a.m. to 4 p.m.)

- Statesville Fire Department Station No. 1 822 Fifth St. in Statesville Statesville Fire Department Station No. 2 110 Security Drive in Statesville Statesville Fire Department Station No. 3 779 Eastside Drive in Statesville
 - ullet Statesville Fire Department Station No. 4 115 Martin Lane in Statesville
 - Universal Advanced Manufacturing Center 634 College Drive in Marion
 - Foothills Higher Education Center 2128 S. Sterling St. in Morganton

Items needed for flood victims

Don't know what to donate? Here is a list of items that local donations sites are requesting.

- · Powdered drink mix packets
- Bottled water
- Baby formula/baby food
- Nonperishable food items
- Plastic utensils
- Paper plates/cups
- Manual can openers
- Toiletries
- Toothbrushes/tooth-paste
- Hand sanitizer
- Baby wipes
- Diapers for adults/children
- Sanitizing wipes
- Feminine hygiene products
- Bug spray
- Sunscreen
- Dog/cat food
- Cat litter
- New clothes

 Blankets · Heavy-duty work gloves Plastic tarps Cleaning supplies • Trash bags 13-gallon or bigger Batteries Flashlights • Chain saws (Brookford Police Department only) Statesville Fire Departments are not accepting used clothes, water, fuel or flammable items, most chemicals including bleach, or hazardous materials. Other sites are not accepting glass items. North Carolina Helene disaster relief funds Want to donate money to help Hurricane Helene victims? Here are two official relief funds for North Carolina. Monetary donations can be made to the N.C. Department of Public Safety's disaster relief fund at nc.gov/ donate. The North Carolina United Way is also accepting monetary donations through NC 211 at unitedwaync.org. Power outages in Catawba Valley Nearly 65% of McDowell County was without power on Tuesday at 10:45 a.m. There were 19,562 customers out of 30,262 with no power, according to PowerOutages.us. Half of Burke County residents still had no power as of Tuesday. As of 10:45 a.m., 21,853 out of 43,519 customers were without power, according to PowerOutages.us. Nearly 40% of Caldwell County remained without power as of 10:45 a.m. on Tuesday. Out of 42,228 customers, 16,134 still did not have power, according to PowerOutages.us. On Tuesday, 9,836 customers out of 82,391 in Catawba County were still without power, according to

On Tuesday, 1,643 customers out of 19,481 in Alexander County were still without power, according to

Report missing people in McDowell County

PowerOutages.us.

PowerOutages.us.

Unopened socks of all sizes

If you or someone you know is in need of assistance, call the Helene Hotline at 828-652-3241.

The 24/7 volunteer operators are standing by to help. The hotline can be used for the following:

1. Report missing or stranded persons

- 2. Request transportation to a shelter
- 3. Report urgent medical equipment needs (oxygen, life-saving medication)
- 4. Any other questions or concerns

How to apply for FEMA assistance

Did you experience damage from Tropical Storm Helene? If you live in Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Clay, Cleveland, Gaston, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Lincoln, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes or Yancey counties or are a tribal member of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, FEMA may be able to help with serious needs, displacement, home repair or other expenses.

To apply, go online to DisasterAssistance.gov, use the FEMA app for mobile devices or call 800-6213362.

Sarah Johnson is the courts and breaking news reporter for the Hickory Daily Record.

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People in 4 northwest NC counties eligible for federal disaster unemployment benefits

October 2, 2024 | Statesville Record & Landmark (NC) Author: RICHARD CRAVER Winston-Salem Journal | Section: Government Politics | 379 Words OpenURL Link

Residents in four northwest North Carolina counties — Alleghany, Ashe, Watauga and Wilkes — have been declared eligible for federal disaster unemployment assistance benefits, the N.C. Division of Employment Security said Tuesday.

The eligibility is a byproduct of the Biden administration's declaration of a state of emergency in North Carolina from the devastating rainfall and flooding caused by the remnants of Hurricane Helene.

The disaster unemployment assistance covers individuals who are unemployed as a direct result of Hurricane Helene. Business owners and self-employed individuals affected by the storm also may qualify for benefits.

Benefits would be made retroactive to Sept. 29 and may last for up to 26 weeks.

There are 21 other counties, along with the Cherokee Indians of N.C., that have been approved: Alexander, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Clay, Cleveland, Gaston, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Lincoln, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Transylvania and Yancey.

The division said additional counties may be added at a later date.

Eligible individuals have until Dec. 2 to file an application for disaster unemployment assistance at des.nc.gov or the DUA Hotline at 919-629-3857.

Individuals must first apply for state unemployment benefits. For those determined to be ineligible for or have exhausted regular state benefits, they may be eligible to make a federal disaster unemployment assistance claim.

Eligibility is determined weekly, and individuals must continue to be out of work as a direct result of the disaster each week to get unemployment benefits.

Those eligible include:

No longer have the job that provided their primary source of income; Are unable to reach their place of unemployment; Cannot work because of an injury caused by the storm; Were unable to begin employment or self-employment due to the storm; and Have become the major supplier of household income due to a storm-related death of the previous major supplier of household income.

Documentation required includes: name and address of all employers you worked with within the last 24 months; county of residence; county of employment; mailing address and ZIP code; valid telephone number; Social Security number or Alien Registration number; proof of employment and income if you're self-employed, a farmer or a commercial fisher.

All required documentation must be submitted within 21 days from the day the application is filed.

DES said it will work with people who cannot provide all documentation to ensure that their unemployment benefits are not delayed.

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'Compassion in action' — Forsyth Humane Society rescues dozens of animals from Asheville

October 2, 2024 | Statesville Record & Landmark (NC) Author: CONNOR MCNEELY Winston-Salem Journal | Section: Pets | 726 Words OpenURL Link

Julie Long felt relieved when she saw a pack of hounds running down the plane's boarding ramp, barking and wagging their tails.

She had seen the Asheville Humane Society and knew that there was no way any animals could stay in the shelter after the devastation of Hurricane Helene. So the sight of cats and dogs excitedly arriving at a safe place in Forsyth County was a blessing beyond words.

On Monday, the Bissell Pet Foundation delivered 40 dogs and 57 cats from the Asheville Humane Society to the Forsyth Humane Society. Forsyth's Humane Society had also loaded up 1,000 pounds of donated supplies to send for distribution in Asheville.

"Being able to go on the transport last night was really cathartic for me, because having a child there and knowing how bad it is there, it was helpful for me to make a little difference of helping, knowing I can't be there," said Long, a volunteer at the Forsyth Humane Society.

Without electricity and running water, animal shelters in the western part of North Carolina are nearly helpless to care for any dogs, cats, or other small animals.

The flood of water completely swallowed Asheville's Brother Wolf Animal Rescue building after the shelter successfully evacuated its animals into temporary foster homes. At the Asheville Humane Society's headquarters, staff loaded up their animals into crates and sent them to Forsyth County.

The majority of the animals are healthy, but their stress and anxiety are through the roof, said Forsyth Humane Society President Mark Neff. Some of the animals came with a broken leg, hip, or eye infections.

For Neff and his 33-person staff, workdays in the aftermath of Helene now begin early in the morning and end late at night. The Humane Society currently has 210 animals in its care and is expecting hundreds more to arrive by the end of the week.

But despite the heavy workload, Neff believes the Forsyth Humane Society is shouldering the burden of those who have lost everything.

"This is compassion in action. And this isn't just about the animals. It really is about people," Neff said. "The people in these shelters, they're so focused on those animals, all they need to be focused on is themselves and their family and all of their losses."

Residents of Forsyth County have met the Humane Society with their help. The organization has now received over 500 applications for foster care, which helps free up space in the shelter and provide temporary care for animals who have already been flown across the state.

Neff often thinks about the upper limit that his organization can support. He knows that his medical staff can care for about 500 animals, and is thankful for the Forsyth County community, which he says is always ready to embrace animals without homes.

"The thing about animals is they're the innocent victims of this," Neff said. "Animals are completely, 100 percent dependent upon people."

As the animals arrive at the Humane Society, the organization's medical staff check their condition to understand whether they are spayed, neutered, vaccinated and healthy.

After that check, they are ready for adoption and foster care. Neff said that foster care usually entails a 2-4 week period of care for the animal, with variations if it is sick, injured, pregnant or nursing.

While the cats and dogs wait for a new home, volunteers keep them company in their crates and attempt to ease their worries after the chaos of the storm and a bumpy plane ride. Behind the Humane Society building, the organization has a large outdoor garden area with plenty of green space for dogs to run around and play.

Long, who has volunteered with the Humane Society for two years, said that her daughter and son-in-law went back to Asheville so she could work her job at a hospital.

"We had a lot of tears and a lot of 'OK, stop, take a breath,'" Long said.

Long decided to take in her daughters' two dogs, a German shepherd named Kratos, and a Pitbull mix named Luna, after the devastation of the hurricane.

At work, she cares for a number of hounds in the back of the Humane Society building. When she steps into their kennels, a mixed-breed dog named Crouton jumps onto her in a long embrace.

"What a relief," Long said. "We are literally saving that dog or that cat because they can't stay there. There is nowhere for them to stay."

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CONNOR MCNEELY Winston-Salem Journal, "Compassion in action" — Forsyth Humane Society rescues dozens of animals from Asheville', *Statesville Record & Landmark* (online), 2 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BFA5279A172B30>



Helene: Like nothing we have ever seen in WNC

October 2, 2024 | Sylva Herald & Ruralite, The (NC) Author: Staff Writer| Section: Top Stories | 1012 Words OpenURL Link

By Aidan Menickelli

The catastrophic effects of Hurricane Helene can be seen in communities everywhere across Western North Carolina. Dillsboro is underwater. Cullowhee is underwater. Webster is underwater. Asheville is underwater. Lake Lure is underwater. Hendersonville is underwater. All of Western North Carolina is underwater. The flooding was tragic. The damage was heartbreaking. The impact is still being discovered.

While many people stayed home to keep the roads clear, survey the damage close to home, and remove debris from their homes battered with high winds and supersaturating rains, those out and about were witnesses to unbelievable scenes. Standing at the edge of East LaPorte River Access Park, one would not even recognize where they were.

Also unrecognizable, were the sounds of emergency vehicles whirring by. One after the other, ambulances, police cars, fire trucks, and emergency trucks passed with rafts on the back. Fear and curiosity were felt in the air and could be measured on a scale of "What the heck?", to "What's that floating by?", to "Oh My Goodness!" to "I just cannot believe this!"

Friends, check in with your friends and family members because those who have not heard from you are worried. To indicate that you are safe, call 1(800)ED-CROSS or call 911 to report life-threatening emergencies.

These communities will continue to be devastated in the aftermath of the storm and many families will struggle to move on from this tragedy. While driving around Cullowhee and Caney Fork towards the end of the hurricane, I witnessed the destruction from Helene with shock and horror. Several community roads were flooded or destroyed, trees had fallen everywhere, and worst of all, homes had been damaged or destroyed.

I saw dozens of mobile homes completely inundated by the Tuckaseigee River. I'd never seen anything like it in my 17 years of life. A gentleman looking out of the East LaPorte River Access Park, pictured below, said, "I've grown up here and I've never seen anything like this. My wife's mother grew up on Caney Fork over there and she's seen the water come out of the banks before, but she's never seen anything like this ever in her life."

Driving along the Tuck further south than East LaPorte, remnants of Helene presented concern and chaos. In one mobile home park in Tuckasegee, feelings of despair set in when looking towards the Tuckaseigee River, seeing the homes swallowed by the Tuck which had jumped out of its banks and onto the farming fields, rising to N.C. 107 in some places. Concern and community drove people to be helpers, to respond and to reach out. In one mobile home park about 75 percent of the homes were flooded with large objects, like refrigerators being carried off in the storm. To witness the impact on this community and others was something truly heartbreaking.

People were trudging through swampy river water, carrying trash bags full of belongings from their flooded homes. Passersby offered help in the moment but help from the community will continue to be needed in the days, weeks and months to come. I checked with the rest of her family to make sure they were alright and urged them to reach out or to call the school if they needed any help or supplies. Most communities in WNC are under a boil advisory. Gasoline is in short supply and being reserved for emergency workers, so try to stay off the roads.

People in flooded neighborhoods walked around checking on neighbors, dropping food to others and carrying belongings to cars that, luckily, had been moved to higher ground. One girl shared through tears the traumatic morning when she was awakened abruptly by the waters banging on her doors and windows and slipping in through

the seams of the walls and the crevices of the floors.

Her family was safe, and while that's all that matters, they will need strength and resilience in the days, weeks and time to come. To help JCPS families impacted by the disaster, consider donating to www.jcpsef.org. Please check on your neighbors.

Chaos could be felt everywhere, and even though the storm was over, it was like Helene was still lashing out. With visibility down, a cyclist was hit by a car close to campus. Afraid to take responders away from important work of storm management, the cyclist tried to save the medical team from coming out.

Ordinarily, a 911 call would have gotten EMS on the scene before anyone could blink an eye, but 911 calls were not going out with widespread cell and internet outages.

Meanwhile, behind WCU, a swift water rescue and rising waters near the Cullowhee Dam had Old Cullowhee Road closed off, filled with EMS, fire rescue and police on the edge of the river banks, where community members were looking and saying prayers.

A man stopped me and said, "Remember this. It's unbelievable. This is one you'll be telling your grandkids about."

The sights and scenes in Cullowhee, Tuckasegee, Dillsboro, Canton, Asheville, Hendersonville, Lake Lure and all over WNC were truly unbelievable and will be etched in our memories forever.

With information being frozen from the downed internet and cell access, footage is just starting to become visible in the days after the storm. Rewatching the horrors of this storm brings to light the helplessness one feels when faced with a natural disaster. Seeing people call around, wondering if their loved ones who they are unable to contact makes even the most faithful feel anxious.

Seeing people support one another and work through Helene's impact brings hope through despair.

If you can help and bring support to others in need, please consider donating items to places that are community centers and reach out to those in need. Donations/ supplies/Items to help victims and emergency workers: water, non-perishables, personal items, sanitary items, new clothes, baby items, new bedding, cooking items, disinfectants, etc. Schools are coordinating efforts to get supplies to families in the community. Other ways you can help can be found at https://bit.ly/47MTR1H.

Aidan Menickelli is a senior at Smoky Mountain High School. He is the National Honor Society President and would like to coordinate a drive for supplies and donations.

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Officials determined not to let Helene interfere with the election

October 2, 2024 | Sylva Herald & Ruralite, The (NC) Author: Staff Writer| Section: News| 969 Words OpenURL Link

By Dave Russell

As rescue and recovery efforts continue after Hurricane Helene, North Carolina election officials are working to ensure voters affected by the storm can still cast their ballot in the 2024 general election.

State Board staff have contacted election officials in the affected counties in Western North Carolina to make sure they are safe, to gather information on damage to election and voting facilities and to assess potential effects on absentee and in-person voting, the board said in a release.

"When disasters strike elections, we use this mantra: 'We do not stop an election; we figure out how to proceed,'" said Karen Brinson Bell, executive director of the State Board of Elections. "Natural disasters have affected elections here in the recent past. As we did at those times, we will conduct a safe, secure, and successful election in 2024."

County office

According to the board, many county elections offices had no phone or internet service.

The State Board will provide special emergency kits to counties without internet service. The kits, basically "election offices in a box," will allow county elections workers to continue election preparations, including registering voters and processing absentee ballot requests, as crews work to get power, phone and internet services restored.

The Jackson County Board of Elections was open Monday but had no internet.

"Our office is safe, we've had no loss of equipment or ballots, and our office is open," Elections Director Amanda Allen said. "We're experiencing the same challenges as many local folks - internet and phone outages. We're working on solutions to get systems that require internet up and running, but that may take time to perfect.

"The office is open, but calls aren't necessarily working and we have no internet at the Skyland Dr. location. We encourage folks to try to call and send emails, but be patient with response time. Elections must go on and we're doing everything we can to adapt."

Information for Voters

Absentee voting is underway in North Carolina. In-person early voting begins Oct. 17 and ends Nov. 2. Election Day is Nov. 5.

The State Board has launched a special webpage, NCSBE.gov/Helene, as a source of information for voters affected by the hurricane. The webpage will include information on county board office closures, tips for voters affected by the storm, and basic information about voting in this election. It will be updated routinely.

Election officials also will work to provide printed materials to voters in the affected areas who may not have cell phone service or internet access.

Storm victims with questions or concerns about how they will be able to vote are encouraged to contact their county board of elections or the State Board of Elections via email at elections.sboe@ncsbe.gov or by calling 919-814-0700. Please recognize that many county board offices in the affected counties are unable to reopen until

utilities are restored, and therefore may be delayed in responding to calls, emails, and other requests.

The State Board will provide regular updates through media interviews, press releases, social media posts, and on our website at NCSBE.gov/Helene.

State Board emergency powers

Under state law, the five-member, bipartisan State Board "in an open meeting, may exercise emergency powers to conduct an election in a district where the normal schedule for the elections is disrupted" by a natural disaster.

At a meeting on Monday, the State Board passed a resolution allowing the 25 counties in the Helene federal disaster area flexibility to reschedule meetings required by law to consider returned absentee ballots. These meetings were expected to start Tuesday in all 100 counties, but it may be impossible for some county boards to meet on Tuesday. Additional State Board meetings may be called as necessary to consider other emergency measures.

Absentee voting

The U.S. Postal Service has informed election officials that mail delivery and operations are suspended at dozens of post offices in Western North Carolina. Also, many residential mailboxes likely have been washed away by the storm.

This, obviously, will have a significant impact on absentee voting in these parts of the state. Election officials will continue to monitor mail delivery and consider ways to make voting available in areas affected by Helene.

Here are tips and reminders for voters who planned to vote by mail in those locations:

A voter who has requested an absentee ballot does not have to vote that ballot. They may simply discard it and vote in-person during the in-person early voting period or on Election Day.

Voters displaced by the storm who plan to live elsewhere temporarily may request an absentee ballot and have it sent to their temporary address. The easiest way to request an absentee ballot is online through the North Carolina Absentee Ballot Portal.

A voter who has already requested a ballot but will not be able to receive it at the address where it was set to be delivered should contact their county board of elections to spoil the original ballot and have a new one sent to their temporary location.

Voter Photo ID

State law requires voters to show an acceptable form of photo ID when voting in person and to include a photocopy of their photo ID with their ballot when voting by mail. Most people will show their driver's license, but many other IDs are acceptable.

Under state law, a voter who cannot provide an acceptable form of ID when they vote may fill out a Photo ID Exception Form to explain why they cannot show ID.

One of the permitted exceptions is for voters who are unable to provide ID because of a natural disaster that occurred within 100 days of an election and that resulted in a disaster declaration by the President of the United States or the Governor of North Carolina.

This means that voters in or from the 25 counties under a disaster declaration may use this exception to the photo ID requirement, if they are unable to show ID when voting because of the natural disaster.

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Disasters bring out the fraudsters

October 2, 2024 | Sylva Herald & Ruralite, The (NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: News | 436 Words OpenURL Link

Dena King, U.S. Attorney for the Western District of North Carolina, reminds the public to watch out for scams and price gouging following Hurricane Helene, and to report suspected fraud and price gouging to the National Center for Disaster Fraud (NCDF) hotline at 1-866-720-5721, or online at www.justice.gov/DisasterComplaintForm.

"It is unfathomable that scammers will try to profit from the devastation caused by a natural disaster, but fraudsters will stop at nothing to fill their pockets," King said. "I urge the public to be extra vigilant about potential scams related to Hurricane Helene, and to report suspected fraud and price gouging to the National Center for Disaster Fraud hotline at 1-866-720-5721, or online at www.justice.gov/DisasterComplaintForm. Reporting scams and price gouging will help law enforcement identify, investigate, and prosecute those who are attempting to exploit the devastation caused by Hurricane Helene for their benefit, and warn others about emerging disaster fraud schemes."

Possible types of natural disaster scams include:

Fraudulent charities soliciting donations for disaster victims that often mimic the names of well-known organizations or appearing linked to the disaster.

Scammers impersonating government officials, offering disaster relief in exchange for personal information or money.

Fraudsters posing as insurance representatives to collect payments or personal data. Scammers promoting non-existent businesses or investment opportunities related to disaster recovery, such as rebuilding or flood-proofing.

Fraudsters promising expedient home repairs requiring upfront payment or downpayment. Price gouging for essential goods and services needed by disaster victims.

Theft from evacuated homes and businesses during or after the disaster.

How to protect yourself from disaster fraud scams:

Donate only to well-known charities after verifying them.

Do not respond to unsolicited requests for donations via email, phone, or text, and do not click on links in unsolicited messages.

Do not assume that online or social media charity solicitations are legitimate. Verify first! Use credit cards or checks for donations, instead of sending cash, via wire transfers, or via peer-to-peer mobile payment apps.

Always keep in mind that government agencies and legitimate organizations will not ask for money or personal information via phone or email. When in doubt, contact the agency directly using a verified phone number or website.

For storm related repairs, hire contractors that are reputable and always verify references. Beware of contractors who knock on your door or make unsolicited contact, and/or make promises that are too good to be true. Avoid making a large down payment or paying in full before the repairs are finished.

To report disaster-related fraud, contact the NCDF at (866) 720-5721, or online at

www.justice.gov/DisasterComplaintForm.

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Jackson County spared worst of Helene's horrors

October 2, 2024 | Sylva Herald & Ruralite, The (NC) Author: Staff Writer| Section: Top Stories | 1300 Words OpenURL Link

By Dave Russell

"This storm could be worse than '04," they said.

"No way," we said.

"Boom!" Mother Nature said.

"Ouch," we said. "Help!"

Last Wednesday saw Jackson County with overcast skies and bits of precipitation here and there, the first sprinkles recorded at about 11:45 a.m.

From there Hurricane Helene would drop some amount of rain, ranging from .01 inches per hour to almost a third of an inch, somewhere in Jackson County during 55 of the next 72 hours.

Estimates vary, but most reports suggest the Sylva area received about 11-14 inches of rain. Areas around the escarpment might have seen upwards of 17 inches, according to Meteorologist Doug Outlaw of the Greenville-Spartanburg office of the National Weather Service.

The county was still spared the worst, as folks in Buncombe and other counties closer to the storm's center took the brunt, and face a climbing death toll.

"I know for a fact we do not have any fatalities," Jackson County Fire Marshal Michael Forbis said Tuesday. "The 911 center was really busy and then there was a point where we lost communications. Currently we are receiving 911 calls from Onslow County because Swain is our backup and Swain went down, of course."

Callers from Jackson reach the Onslow County 911 center and from there relay information by radio to Jackson's dispatchers.

Trees fell all over the county, but southern Jackson got it the worst, Forbis said.

"The Caney Fork community and Little Canada and the south end of the county were where the saw crews primarily focused," he said. "The initial focus was just getting the roads open, but we had power lines everywhere. Once the power lines were cleared we had N.C. Department of Transportation crews and other assets that came from the eastern part of the state and other areas helping cut the trees down."

Swiftwater rescue teams came from Monroe and the N.C. Highway Patrol, along with two national Guard units with high-clearance vehicles.

The rescue teams were busy, Forbis said.

"There were some rescues, but I do not know any details," he said. "Most of them were in the southern end of the county and we had some in the Cullowhee area. Once the water got up around Ledbetter Road there was an evacuation of a trailer park and Bellamy Apartments and they did some rescues there."

Those folks were taken to a shelter at the Department on Aging, which held 46 people at its peak.

"At one point, the Tuckaseigee was rising a foot an hour," Forbis said. "I don't know if it set records, but some of its tributaries did."

Again, the generosity and can-do attitude of Jackson County amazed Forbis, even after all these years, he said.

"We could not have done it without the community," he said. "When we hit the panic button and need people, we have so much help. In the Emergency Operations Center we have people from public works, public health, all the agencies. For a lot of those people it was the first time dealing with a storm like this, first time setting up a shelter, and so on. We had people doing things that were not even remotely connected to their jobs. Everybody came together and we worked well together and had a common goal."

Anna Lippard, director of the health department, and former Sheriff Chip Hall were among the volunteers on Tuesday.

Hard work

Forbis and his colleagues have put in some long hours.

"We've been hitting 16, 18, hours a day," he said. "Leaving here between 10 p.m., 1 a.m. and getting back by 7 a.m."

It's the same for all the law enforcement and other agencies, he said.

"The fire chiefs did a great job handling everything in their communities and also supporting other areas because they sent stuff to Canada and Cashiers once they knew everything was good in their districts," he said.

A Sikorsky helicopter made three forays into the county before Tuesday.

"They brought MREs and water to Cashiers and they brought two loads of MREs and water to the airport for us to disseminate on the northern end of the county," he said. "Because although people down here might not have received the most damage, they still are without power so we are still trying to fill that need for water or food or oxygen or whatever."

The Sikorskys can be seen flying all over WNC and continue to make drops in Jackson.

Water safety update

A boil water advisory issued by Tuckaseigee Water & Sewer Authority for residents due to potential contamination in the water supply is still in effect. It is recommended that all tap water be boiled for at least one minute before consumption or use in cooking.

FEMA office opening

County Manager Kevin King was hanging out at the EOC on Tuesday.

"In the next week or so we are going to open up a FEMA office in the Western Builers building," King said. "FEMA will be able to take individual applications for assistance so that people and businesses affected can make direct applications to FEMA."

Everything is looking good in terms of life safety," he said Tuesday morning. "Right now we are just trying to get our communities stabilized. There are two points where people can go get stuff right now – First Baptist Church in Cashiers and Mark Watson Park."

Another distribution center is slated for the Canada community, he said.

The Jackson County Tourism Development Authority applied the brakes on advertising the county's assets to tourists. TDA paused all Google ads and any media buys they could place a hold on. They are also pausing and holding any media visits, pitching or press releases they'd typically be issuing about autumn, according to a release from the agency.

Sylva was largely spared storm damage. Town Manager Paige Dowling said the town survived and things were "kind of quiet" without communications.

"Not one single tree fell in town limits," Sylva Public Works Director Jake Scott said.

Power outages

As of Tuesday afternoon, about 3,000 Duke customers were without power, the majority in pockets around Lake Glenville and Cashiers.

Outage numbers peaked Saturday morning at about 8 a.m. when about half of Duke's 30,000 customers were in the dark.

According to Haywood EMC CEO Tom Batchelor, the company is facing "not just a repair effort, but a rebuild" in many places. It had about 18,100 members without power on Monday afternoon, down from 20,000 the day before. Only a handful of Jackson residents are on Haywood.

The N.C. Department of Transportation incident list for Jackson County showed a total of 25 road closures across the county beginning at about 9 a.m. Thursday.

Some of the road names explain their closure: South River Road, North River Road, Edge Water, Moses Creek, Caney Fork, Johns Creek Road and Trout Creek Road.

Others included Wayehutta Road, Old Settlement Road and Pumpkintown Road.

Cars lined U.S. 23/74 and other main arteries as residents enjoyed a data signal to text, call, check Facebook, etc. on their cellphones.

Notes from

various agencies

Cornbread and Roses, a MANNA partner at 1294 Savannah Drive, is a food pantry that requires zero identifying information. Hours are Wednesday 6-8 p.m., Thursday noon-2, and Sunday noon-2. They are also accepting donations

Jackson County Public Schools will continue to serve meals daily through Friday, Oct. 4 from 11:30-12:30 at Blue Ridge School, Smokey Mountain Elementary and Smoky Mountain High School

Jackson County officials are welcoming donations to support relief efforts. The most needed items include bottled water, cleaning supplies, non-perishable, prepackaged food, diapers, hygiene products, individually packaged dog/cat food items. Call 631-HELP to learn more.

Jackson County residents wanting to help can fill out a volunteer Google form at www.app.bitly.com/Boa1kiR9UH8/links/bit.ly/4eP79x3/details.

The Cherokee Indian Fair is a go, as is John C. Campbell's Fall Festival. Dillsboro's ColorFest has been called off.

Gateway WNC Church of God Campground Facility at 87 Vinewood Circle, Whittier is open from 7 a.m. until 8 p.m. for meals, showers and more.

Jackson County Public Schools, Southwestern Community College and Western Carolina University are closed through Friday.

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Dillsboro pulling together after a lashing from Helene

October 2, 2024 | Sylva Herald & Ruralite, The (NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: Top Stories | 694 Words OpenURL Link

By Dave Russell

Scotts Creek produced more water than the Tuckaseigee could add to its already full load and backed up into Back Street in Dillsboro. Monday morning saw a flock of business owners and town leaders scurrying around the area.

Talk of dehumidifiers and rags filled the air as damaged businesses at the low end of the road began taking steps to re-open.

"We've got damage, we've got businesses that are hurting right now," town Clerk Debbie Coffey said. "This is the livelihood of these people and they are worried if they are going to be able to open back up."

Visits from "The Train," as the Great Smoky Mountain Railroad is known in town, pay a lot of salaries in Dillsboro. Its immediate return has not been established.

"October is the month that keeps so many of our businesses open from January to March and we don't know what October is going to look like right now because we don't know what the train is going to do," Coffey said. "Right now we just know that we are all here and pulling together and we are going to do what we can to help each other out. We've had wonderful people coming in to help."

Dillsboro thought it was prepared, she said.

"Until you live through it and you are on this end of it, you don't know how to prepare," she said. "We're all hurting right now, but it could have been a lot worse. We're just thankful for that."

Community help

"We're all working together," Dillsboro Mayor Tim Parris said.

Volunteer help is coming from outside, too, as a group from Refuge Church cleaned up the low point in the road between the row of shops and railroad tracks.

"We had two young families come in here Saturday with their kids and you would not believe what a blessing that was," Parris said. "He had a tractor and a pressure washer. Those kids were pushing it around and they were having a ball. They were muddy from their toes to the tops of their heads."

The Tuckaseigee Water and Sewer Authority ask them to stop using water due to a shortage in their system, he said.

"We got hit," he said. "We've been hit before. It's a little worse this time but we are all working together, we're drying out and we're going to come back. They've got dehumidifiers and fans running and we're all working together to help these people."

The town hired a crew with a tractor to scoop and push the mud out of the area around Innovation Station and Forager's Canteen.

Dillsboro's Picnic Park beneath the U.S. 23/441 bridge looked like a war zone, he said. Parris has arranged for its

cleanup in the next three or four days, he said on Monday.

"But this," he said pointing down still-muddy Back Street, "is priority one."

A visit to the Picnic Park showed its parking lot full of debris and sand. Trees and other flotsam stacked up against the trees along the river. Part of the walking path beneath the bridge is ripped up.

Cleanup in the shops

Five or six businesses along Back Street suffered minor water damage.

Valerie Myer, a stylist at Visage Salon in Dillsboro, and her family on Monday worked to move the fixtures and other items out.

"We had a couple of inches come in the building," she said. "Everything got wet, and a lot of it will have to be sanitized. There's a lot of sand, a lot of gravel in there, mud. We cleaned mud all day yesterday."

Visage will be back, she said.

Abby Barnes, owner of the Carolina Southern Peddler, said the water came in underneath her shop.

"The water, as high as it was, flowed around the back door that accesses under the building, and it opened up," Barnes said. "It's so muddy I have not gone around there to look inside."

Jill Bray, of Haircuts by Jill, and her family loaded a trailer of damaged goods heading to the landfill.

"We're going to take everything out of the shop, take some to the dump and some to my house because we have to pull the carpet up, pull the flooring up, let it dry and then lay new flooring," she said.

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How long will it take for Washington to act on emergency aid for victims?

October 2, 2024 | Sylva Herald & Ruralite, The (NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: News | 989 Words OpenURL Link

By Jennifer Shutt

NCNEWSLINE

Congress may break from its six-week recess and return to D.C. in the last days before an extremely close election to approve emergency spending for Hurricane Helene recovery and response.

Lawmakers aren't set to return to Washington, D.C., until after Election Day on Nov. 5, but President Joe Biden indicated Monday during remarks on the storm that he may ask Congress to return sooner to take up an emergency spending request.

Whether to do so would be up to Speaker Mike Johnson, a Louisiana Republican, and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, a New York Democrat.

How much pressure those two feel to cut the recess short will likely depend on when the White House budget office sends Congress the emergency supplemental spending request, how soon federal agencies expect to run out of cash and how urgent the need appears.

The death toll by Monday afternoon topped 100 over six states — Alabama, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee — and White House advisers said that hundreds more are missing. Two million people are without power and many others are lacking water and mobile phone service.

Scott calls for return

Florida Republican Sen. Rick Scott released a statement calling on Schumer to bring that chamber back into session after the White House sends the emergency funding request.

"While I know from my experience with previous hurricanes that FEMA and SBA damage assessments take time, I am today urging Majority Leader Chuck Schumer to immediately reconvene the U.S. Senate when those assessments are completed so that we can pass the clean supplemental disaster funding bill and other disaster relief legislation, like my Federal Disaster Tax Relief Act, needed to ensure the full recovery of families in all impacted communities," Scott wrote.

That process of putting together a White House supplemental spending request includes determining which federal departments and agencies have enough money to handle their portion of the disaster response and which need additional funds. That can take weeks, especially after large-scale disasters like Helene.

It appeared more likely as of Monday that Congress would return to work on Capitol Hill on Nov. 12 as scheduled and consider the emergency spending then.

In the interim, staff on the House and Senate Appropriations committees as well as in leadership offices will likely begin negotiating the supplemental spending package, once the Office of Management and Budget actually sends the request.

Lawmakers can then pass the bill sometime during the lame-duck session in November or December, possibly attached to one or a package of the overdue full-year government funding bills.

Florida Republican Rep. Kat Cammack said on C-SPAN on Monday that she felt "exceptionally confident" Congress would approve emergency funding for disaster relief after members return to Washington, D.C.

"I'm absolutely certain there will be a supplemental," Cammack said. "My fear is that it turns into a political football.

And quite frankly things like this, there's no room for politics when it comes to disasters and emergencies."

The Disaster Relief Fund

FEMA can spend as much as it needs to on disaster recovery thanks to a provision Congress approved a few days ago and special caveats for emergencies.

The stopgap spending bill Congress approved last week, which keeps the federal government running through Dec. 20, included a provision allowing FEMA to spend money from its Disaster Relief Fund at a faster rate than would have otherwise been allowed.

FEMA's Disaster Relief Fund can operate on something called immediate needs funding, which the agency can use as a safety net when that account runs low on money.

Immediate needs funding allows FEMA to pause "funding for long-term recovery projects and hazard mitigation projects that FEMA does not have in its system," according to a Congressional Research Service report.

"These INF restrictions do not affect individual assistance, or public assistance programs that reimburse emergency response work and protective measures carried out by state and local authorities," according to CRS.

FEMA has used immediate needs several times, including in August 2017 after Hurricane Harvey made landfall in Texas as well as during fiscal years 2003 through 2006 and in fiscal 2010, according to CRS.

Earlier pleas for funding unheeded

The Biden administration sent Congress a supplemental spending request in October 2023 asking for additional funding for natural disaster response and recovery. A deeply divided Congress, with Republicans in control of the House and Democrats with a narrow majority in the Senate, did not approve the request.

Office of Management and Budget Director Shalanda Young sent Congress another letter this June, urging lawmakers to approve billions in additional funding for natural disasters.

Young wrote that she wanted to "reiterate the October request and submit revised estimates of an additional \$4 billion for certain disaster needs, including funding to help respond to the collapse of the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore, the devastating fires on Maui last summer, and tornado survivors in Iowa, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and throughout the Midwest."

"Particularly as we enter what the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is describing as an 'extraordinary' hurricane season, the Administration urges prompt congressional action on this request, including for the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Disaster Relief Fund (DRF), to ensure that we can uphold the Federal Government's responsibility to both rebuild from past disasters and respond to future events," Young wrote at the time.

The supplemental spending request the Biden administration sends to Congress in the coming weeks will likely build off those prior requests.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Monday during a briefing that the Biden administration is "disappointed" Congress hasn't yet approved the supplemental spending request.

"We are disappointed that that didn't go through," she said. "We're going to continue to have this conversation. As the president said, we're in constant communications with members in Congress, and we want to make sure that they move quickly on this."

Jennifer Shutt covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families. This story distributed by NCNewsline.com.

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Columbus responds to 'desperate situation' left by Helene

October 2, 2024 | Tabor-Loris Tribune (NC)

Author: Deuce Niven; tribdeuce@tabor-loris.com | Section: News | 401 Words

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A number of teams from Columbus County have responded to western North Carolina, a region in "a desperate situation" in the aftermath of flooding and landslides brought on by the remnants of Hurricane Helena on Friday, Sept. 27.

Others are gathering relief supplies that will begin rolling to the hard hit region later this week.

"It is a desperate situation here but I am hoping that things will improve in the coming days as we arrange better resources and as utilities are restored," Columbus County Manager Eddie Madden wrote in an early morning dispatch Monday.

Madden was one of nine Columbus County employees in western North Carolina this week, deploying Monday morning with plans to return later this week. They include Madison Priest, Stuart Carroll, Amanda Prince, Kay Stephens, Misty Jorgensen, Jody King, Jonathan Juhl, and Hannah Patrick.

Three Emergency Services employes are planning to respond later this week, Madden said, including director David Ransom, Fire Marshal Shannon Blackmon, and Teresa Smith.

Carrol, Prince and Jorgenson were in Black Mountain, working "with onboarding helicopters with supplies and extending their state of emergency to include the issuance of curfews," Madden said.

Juhl and King were in Polk County. "I do not have any updates from them because communications are mostly dark there," Madden said.

Response A federal "whole of government response" was ordered by President Joe Biden, a White House news release said, while local and state resources from a broad region were surging into the area, hampered by highways flooded out by the storm, power outages impacting hundreds of thousands, and sparce to non-existent cell phone service.

Firefighters and equipment from the Whiteville, Nakina and Leland fire departments were in the impacted area this week.

A four-man crew from the Nakina Fire Department deployed to Buncombe County on Friday, including Capt.

Bobby Nichols, Adam Voyales, Joey Santos and Chris Chinni.

Whiteville Fire Department members deployed to McDowell County Sunday, including Marquise Blanks, Rocky McPherson, Jacob Prease, and Jeremy Hooks. They were joined by a group from the Leland Fire Department that includes Columbus County resident Ronnie Hayes.

Cash donations are needed, Madden said. For details email Helenedonations@buncombecounty.org.

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Local groups, agencies collect some donations

October 2, 2024 | Tabor-Loris Tribune (NC) Author: Deuce Niven; tribdeuce@tabor-loris.com| Section: News| 320 Words Page: 1 OpenURL Link

Numerous groups and agencies are collecting donations of supplies needed in areas of western North Carolina hard hit by Hurricane Helene and her remnants, including the Tabor City Fire Department.

Needed items include:

- · Bottled water
- · Gatorade/Powerade
- · Non-perishable canned goods and foods
- · Toiletry items including toothpaste, toothbrush, deodorant, soap, toilet tissue, paper towels
- · Packaged clothing including T-shirts, boxers, underwear, socks.

Loose or used clothing will not be accepted.

- · Diapers for babies and adult protective garments
- · Baby bottles, formula, food and wipes TCFD Chief Jeff Fowler said he hoped to have a truck load delivered later this week, and plans to start working on a second truck load for next week.

Donations that will flow through the TCFD are also being accepted at Tabor City School, Williams Township School, and South Columbus High School, Fowler said.

Other drop off locations include:

- · Fair Bluff Fire and Rescue. 152 Main Street in Fair Bluff
- · Nakina Fire and Rescue, 214 Ramsey Ford Road, Nakina
- · Whiteville Fire Department, 120 East Columbus Street, Whiteville
- · Columbus County Sheriff's Office, 817 Washington Street in Whiteville.

Other agencies There are numerous groups accepting donations of materials for western North Carolina, including Synovus Bank at 3650 Main Street in Loris, Wild horse at Parker Farms in Longs, and the Dock Missionary Baptist Association.

Items for the Dock organization can be dropped off at Happy Home Baptist Church, 2670 Happy Home Road in Nakina, from noon to 7 p.m. on Oct. 3, and from 4:30 to 7 p.m. on Oct. 7.

For other drop-off locations call Pastor Devin Carroll at 843-877-9195, Clerk Stacy Ganus at 910-770-5543, or Sister Jordyn Denny at 843-421-2688.

"We have a great community and appreciate everyone's support during this tragic time," said Synovus Vice President Deanna Hammonds.

- Includes reporting by Jenn Boyd

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Deuce Niven, tribdeuce@tabor-loris.com, 'Local groups, agencies collect some donations', *Tabor-Loris Tribune* (online), 2 Oct 2024 1 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C9A03200247FC0



Helene brings rain, wind, fallen trees and tornado warnings

October 2, 2024 | Tabor-Loris Tribune (NC) Author: Deuce Niven; tribdeuce@tabor-loris.com| Section: News| 179 Words Page: 2 OpenURL Link

Rain and wind associated with Tropical Storm Helene, which made landfall in Florida late Thursday and traversed through Georgia by mid-morning Friday, had relatively minor impacts in the Tabor-Loris Community.

Tabor City Fire Department and Town of Tabor Public Works' crews responded to multiple calls of trees and limbs down, some across power lines, for more than three hours starting about 7 a.m.

A town backhoe was called in to help remove debris from a large tree that completely covered Britt Street, a deadend lane just off of Williams Street.

There were no reports of buildings damaged in Tabor City.

Tornado warning

A radar indicated tornado prompted the National Weather Service to issue a tornado warning about 9:30 a.m. Friday. There were no reports of damage, and the warning that involved a broad area of southern and southeastern Columbus and included Tabor City, Clarendon and Sidney, was allowed to expire.

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Deuce Niven, tribdeuce@tabor-loris.com, 'Helene brings rain, wind, fallen trees and tornado warnings', *Tabor-Loris Tribune* (online), 2 Oct 2024 2 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C9A032033847A0>



'Inconceivable' damage: Jones

October 2, 2024 | Tabor-Loris Tribune (NC) Author: Jenn Boyd; tribjenn@tabor-loris.com| Section: News| 353 Words Page: 1

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State Rep. Brenden Jones, a Tabor City Republican, joined NC House of Representatives Speaker Tim Moore and state Sen. Tim Moffitt Monday on a helicopter tour of hard areas in western North Carolina hard hit by the remnants of Hurricane Helene Friday and into the weekend.

"Today I witnessed first-hand the total destruction and devastation of a section of our state," Jones said. "The damage is inconceivable until you witness it firsthand.

"It will take a lot of hard work, a lot of money, time, effort as well as prayers to get our friends out west taken care of. Myself and my colleagues are dedicated to do just such." With some 400 roads closed and bridge failures in western North Carolina, the helicopter tour was the only practical way to assess the damage, Jones said.

Jones shared photos from the tour, which was delayed. Weather concerns forced the helicopter pilot to turn back not long after the group took off Sunday morning.

"We waited for the fog to clear Sunday morning and got 150 feet in the air and my pilot said he wasn't going to take any chances due to unsafe weather conditions," Jones said.

Their tour Monday included Polk County, Asheville, Morganton and Rutherford County, with a re-fueling stop in Shelby on the way in, anticipating a lack of available fuel elsewhere.

Refueling was possible in Asheville, before the group returned.

Jones called the damage from Helene "one for the record books, because North Carolina hasn't seen anything like this before. We will be talking about this storm and its aftermath for years to come.

"It's devastating, but the folks of North Carolina are resilient, and you see the best of them in times like this. We will get through this together."

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Stallion football takes an early win at Pender

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An early road trip to Pender County gave South Columbus varsity football a 21-16 win over the Patriots Thursday, just hours ahead of Hurricane Helene's landfall in Florida, and a day ahead of her impacts here.

South Columbus scored with 6:11 on the first quarter clock, Oscar Valdez's point after kick gave the visitors a 7-0 lead.

Pender tried to put points on the board in their first possession of the game but ended up punting back to South.

There was a burst of flags on the next several plays by both teams. When the Stallions were four and seven one of Pender's jumped offsides and Logan Todd's run picked up the first down. Rush Blackwell then ran in on a 41-yard play straight up the middle for another six points on the board South kicked an onside kick following the touchdown to maintain possession of the ball. On this drive with the ball Rush Blackwell scored from the 3 yard line to give the Stallions a 21-0 lead.

Pender found success on two different plays to find paydirt to bring the score to 21-16 in the second half, ending scoring for the evening.

South Columbus hosts East Columbus for homecoming this Friday. Kickoff is at 7:30 p.m.

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'Helping neighbors is imperative': venue owner

October 2, 2024 | Tabor-Loris Tribune (NC) Author: Jenn Boyd; tribjenn@tabor-loris.com| Section: News| 304 Words Page: 1 OpenURL Link

Ace Parker, owner of Wildhorse at Parker Farms in Longs, knew he had to take action after hearing neighbors in western portions of the Carolinas had been decimated by Hurricane Helene.

This isn't the first time this former football player and Loris High School alum has stepped up to help others in need. It likely won't be the last.

Taking donations

Parker reached out on social media requesting non-perishables, bottled water, Gatorade, canned food, personal hygiene items, children's toys, clothing including new socks, toiletries, dog and cat food, horse feed and anything else needed to ease the pain from those recently devasted by this storm.

"I have a large box truck and will see that it gets to those who need it," Parker said. "You know what people may need, and I am asking you to help us help them." Donations can be dropped off under the barn at Wildhorse at Parker Farms this week, where they will be packed-up and ready for delivery to those in need.

"Please call me directly at 843-698-3505 if you need more information," Parker said.

Wedding venue

Wildhorse at Parker Farms is a Century Farm, meticulously and elegantly restored for weddings, social events, gatherings and celebrations.

Horses on the farm add to the backdrop for every special occasion, with catering, decorating and beverage options.

"Come check out our venue near the South Carolina and North Carolina state line," said Parker's sister, Crystal Ray.

"We also offer coordination and full venue draping service to all area venues, including beautiful silk flowers with every package." For details visit the Wildhorse at Parker Farms' Facebook page.

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Jenn Boyd, tribjenn@tabor-loris.com, "Helping neighbors is imperative": venue owner, *Tabor-Loris Tribune* (online), 2 Oct 2024 1 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C9A032013F32D8



Mountain devastation slows our divisive ways

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There was rumor to the falsehood that the extreme weather that has brought devastation to a large swath of the North Carolina mountains and beyond destroyed Montreat.

Home to Montreat College, the village up the mountain from Black Mountain is a Presbyterian retreat and holds many fond memories from my youth.

A social media post during the weekend said Montreat was gone.

With electricity and communications down in the wake of Hurricane Helene's power - she was a tropical storm in North Carolina's mountains after coming ashore in Florida as a Category 4 hurricane - getting any information from the devastation zone has been difficult.

We have family in Black Mountain, friends in Hendersonville, two areas among many especially hard hit. It took a few days to find out that they were unhurt, though in one case their lively hoods took a big hit, in the other it may be too soon to tell.

Pictures and video from the disaster zone, I'm sure, only begin to tell the story locals there are experiencing. We in Columbus County have some idea, especially those in Fair Bluff and along the Waccamaw River who have experienced significant loss from hurricanes, especially Matthew and Florence.

That's why the outpouring of support for our neighbors to the west is not so surprising, but all the more gratifying. We've seen that kind of support pouring in after our earlier hurricanes and other disasters. We believe that response will come again if and when we need it.

Our neighbors to the west are hurting.

"It was an awful site to see on our drive in where small towns and communities were decimated by landslides and flooding," Columbus County Manager Eddie Madden said in an early Monday morning dispatch from the disaster zone. "no electricity in most places, no fuel at gas stations and some of the municipalities are running low on their fuel supplies for emergency vehicles. Looting has occurred in downtown Asheville as people become more and more desperate." Columbus County's help, a nine-person team from county government so far with others planning to go later this week, includes valuable expertise some might not immediately realize is needed. That includes two lawyers who aided Black Mountain government in modifying a disaster declaration to include a curfew. That's important, and like their citizens, public safety workers are overwhelmed by the unprecedented situation.

"The workers in the EOC (Emergency Operations Center) are exhausted and distraught," Madden wrote. "They are frustrated with the lack of help they have received as they are seemingly 'building the airplane as they are flying it' because they have never seen such devastation and widespread loss." County government teams are in Buncombe and Polk counties this week. Rocky McPherson, a firefighter with a Whiteville Fire Department team that deployed Sunday, sent damage pictures from Old Fort on Monday.

There are other volunteers from our region, including Horry and other counties neighboring Columbus, in the disaster zone this week.

It's heartening, in a time that our people sometimes seem divided as evidenced by the misinformation about

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