

Surry County cares: collection efforts for Helene relief abound

October 3, 2024 | Mt. Airy News, The (NC) Author: Ryan Kelly | Section: News | 816 Words OpenURL Link

This week Surry County announced they would be operating a trio of collection sites for food, water, first aid supplies, clothing, and hygiene items to residents in the hardest hit areas of Western North Carolina. The county sites will be collecting between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. through Friday at the Surry County Farmers Market in Dobson, the Surry County Resource Center in Mount Airy, and the Elkin Center in Elkin.

Thursday afternoon at the Mount Airy collection site, located at the Surry County Resource Center on U.S. Highway 601 at State Street, a pickup truck was just arriving with cases of bottled water, paper towels, and other items to be added to the growing trailer full of items.

County employees at the collection site said they had only just begun their shift manning the donation site but had seen nearly 20 vehicles with all manner of different supplies being dropped off. Inside the trailer there were already several shrink-wrapped pallets full of nonperishable food, hygiene items, diapers, and case upon case of bottled water.

At Temple Baptist Church off U.S. Highway 601 in the White Plains community, there was a small squad of volunteers in the parking lot receiving donations and loading what will be their fourth trailer full of goods to be sent to groups they are coordinating with in Asheville including Hearts with Hands and Ralph Sexton of Trinity Baptist Church.

They were informed by their pastor, who had been in to see the damage for himself, that the situation "was much worse than what people have seen. He said the news can't get in there to take any pictures... He said there was a huge need to help."

Two truckloads of supplies and one of water were already sent West with the fourth trailer filling up as the day went by. A recurring theme at collection sites was to bring whatever one could donate whether that be water, supplies, clothes, blankets, or a financial donation and the groups organizing and sending the supplies to the mountains can filter out items that are not appropriate.

Down at the Surry County Farmers Market in Dobson, 903 E. Atkins Street, the song remained the same. It was evident with just a glance inside the trailer that locals heard the call to action and have taken it seriously. Next to the trailer sat a second trailer, currently empty, that the county has on standby should there be a need for it.

Surry County Commissioner Mark Marion was on hand volunteering his time and noted that another collection truck was parked just a few blocks down toward the downtown area. Both collection sites would pool their efforts, he said, and the collected items were being sent to Lincoln County where they would then be airlifted into the disaster zone.

Joanna Radford of the N.C. Cooperative Extension said a flight was taking off from Lincoln County once every eight minutes to airlift in donated goods. Marion said there were over two dozen pilots in helicopters and planes flying supplies to North Carolina residents in the mountains who were ravaged by the months' worth of rain that fell as a result of Hurricane Helene.

Meteorologists said that an astounding 40 trillion gallons of rain fell on the Southeast during Helene. State officials said the highest rainfall total in the state was found in the mountain town of Busick, Yancey County, where they received 31.33 inches of rain. Boone saw 20.12 inches and closer to home in Alleghany County, Sparta was soaked by 14.35 inches.

"That's an astronomical amount of precipitation," said Ed Clark, head of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Water Center in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. "I have not seen something in my 25 years of working at the weather service that is this geographically large of an extent and the sheer volume of water that fell from the sky.'

As of 3 p.m. Thursday there were still 283,332 total reported power outages across the state with many in the Yadkin Valley still affected. ReadyNC.gov reported that in Alleghany County there were 1,008 reported outages, Wilkes County had 680, while Surry, Stokes, and Yakin Counties no longer had any reported outages as per the state website.

However, residents in the worst impacted regions cannot say the same and the largest number of North Carolinians still in the dark are found in Buncombe County, home of Asheville, where 87,480 outages were still being reported. Henderson County reported over 47,300 outages, Rutherford County had 17,320, and Watauga County still had 10.606 outages of their own to deal with.

Appalachian Power, which serves Southern Virginia, reported they found 583,000 feet of fallen wire and damaged equipment, including 885 poles and 285 transformers. "More than 1,500 unique locations across Southern Virginia and Southern West Virginia need repairs," they shared online.

They reported 21,941 outages in the state of Virginia with over 2,500 of those outages are in neighboring Carroll County and 3,873 in Grayson County.

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Fake, misleading images of Helene spread on social media. Here's how to spot them

October 3, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC)

Author: Emily Vespa and Caitlyn Yaede, correspondents | Section: News | 627 Words

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Amid the fallout from Hurricane Helene, deceptive images claiming to show the storm are circulating on social media.

One video on Facebook that claimed to show footage of Helene in North Carolina spliced a series of flood videos with the sound of screams and gunshots. But many clips are outdated and from other locations, a reverse Google image search of several frames shows: One seems to be of flooding in Sioux Falls, South Dakota; another shows a bus operated by a city in Ontario, Canada; and one is July footage of Aguascalientes, Mexico.

Another image, widely shared on X, Threads and right-wing social media site Gab, shows a herd of cows following four dogs swimming through a river.

"Farm dogs leading away from flood waters in NC," one user captioned the photo in a post that garnered nearly 10.000 likes.

The photo, which is at least seven years old, isn't of Helene. It was posted after several hurricanes, but it appears to have first surfaced online after Hurricane Irma swept across Florida in 2017.

Other photos are generated using artificial intelligence. Many seem designed to evoke an emotional reaction and depict dogs or other animals stranded in floodwaters or being rescued by humans.

In one fake image posted on Facebook, a man lifts a dog from a roof as he stands in torso-deep water. The man has six fingers and a disfigured face, both signs of an Al-generated image. Even so, the post fooled some.

"This man is my hero," wrote one commenter.

How to spot misleading images

If you suspect an image is deceptive, link or upload it to Google's reverse image search to trace its origin. If you want to search for a video, take a screenshot of a frame and upload it.

Similar to Google's tool is TinEye, a free website that allows you to search an image and sort results by "most changed" to identify manipulated images.

How to spot Al-generated images

Josephine Lukito, an assistant professor at the University of Texas at Austin's School of Journalism and Media, said being able to detect artificial intelligence is becoming an important part of media literacy. "But," she added, "it is also something that will become increasingly challenging."

Al-generated images may appear too perfect, yet they tend to poorly depict details. In fact, Lukito said details can be the biggest hint that an image or video is artificially generated.

"Several giveaways tend to be if you look around kind of the edge of the individual, or you look at kind of nuanced details, things like fingers or patterns," she said. Text in photos and videos may also appear misspelled or incomprehensible.

A set of Al-generated images postedon Facebook ostensibly showed boaters conducting "deer rescue operations" in floodwater. In one, a deer's antlers appear unnaturally thick, almost like a tree branch. A man's arm blends into a deer's torso in another.

People in Al-generated photos may have:

Unlikely body proportions

Extra or missing fingers or limbs

Overly shiny eyes

Waxy skin

Also look for implausible situations, like a photoshared on Facebook of a dog wearing sunglasses and floating through floodwater in an inner tube. A closer look at the image reveals that a glass appears to be hovering on top of the float, violating the laws of physics - another indication of an Al-generated image.

Also, consider the account that posted the photo. If it frequently shares Al-generated images, be wary.

"I do think that these sorts of cases are becoming increasingly common, especially in video and audio form," Lukito said of artificially generated content.

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Classes at UNC Asheville to remain canceled for almost a month due to Helene's impacts

October 3, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Korie Dean; Staff Writer | Section: News | 443 Words Page: 5A

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As Western North Carolina continues to grapple with the destruction and devastation left by Hurricane Helene, classes at one of the region's universities won't resume for almost a month.

UNC Asheville Chancellor Kimberly van Noort announced Tuesday that classes will be suspended at least until Oct. 28 as a result of the storm and its lingering impacts.

The university first canceled classes on the morning of Thursday, Sept. 26, as Helene approached the area, and the university has remained closed since then. The university had initially planned to remain closed until Oct. 9, but the closure will now last weeks longer.

The university will remain in Condition 3, or closed, until at least Oct. 14. Under Condition 3, campus operations are suspended and only essential employees are permitted on campus. If the university moves to another, less-severe condition level after Oct. 14, some operations may resume and additional employees may be permitted on campus, but classes will remain canceled until Oct. 28.

The campus "sustained minimal structural damage" from the storm, but has been without power, running water or internet since Friday, Sept. 27, van Noort said.

"Communication with our campus and the broader community has been extremely limited due to impaired communications infrastructure, but slowly, we are gradually regaining our ability to connect," she said.

All on-campus students were relocated within 72 hours of the storm hitting Asheville, van Noort said. The university assisted students in finding safe travel routes off campus and providing them with gas for their cars, she said. "A very small number of students" were relocated to another UNC System campus.

The university was housing about 1,600 students on-campus prior to the storm, and about 1,300 students remained during the storm, a total that was confirmed "through a coordinated door-to-door and room-to-room effort" led by the university's student affairs division. Students that remained during the storm "were provided daily with drinking water, three meals and support services" until they relocated.

"Throughout the last few days, we've worked diligently to ensure we knew where every student was on campus and to meet their needs," van Noort said.

Though students are not on the Asheville campus, they can continue to access mental health care through all other UNC System schools.

"Bulldogs, you are resilient and we look forward to when we can welcome you home," van Noort said.

Disaster relief, additional updates

The university has established a disaster relief fund, available online at giving.unca.edu.

Further updates from UNC Asheville regarding Helene's impacts are available at new.unca.edu/bulldogalert.

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Helene damage creates election challenges in NC

October 3, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Mary Ramsey; Staff Writer | Section: News | 894 Words

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Western North Carolina damage from Hurricane Helene may shake up the presidential election in the critical battleground state, which could have national implications, state politics experts say.

State officials have confirmed more than 50 deaths in North Carolina, a number that's expected to rise, and President Joe Biden declared a major disaster in 25 counties. Hundreds of thousands were still without power as of Tuesday as power crews, the North Carolina National Guard and other relief workers tried to reach areas cut off by impassable roads.

The general public is more focused on helping others and surviving in Helene-devastated communities than a race where state polls show Republican former President Donald Trump leading Democratic Vice President Kamala Harris by less than one percentage point, experts say.

"It's just not a priority right now," said Susan Roberts, a political science professor at Davidson College.

But a drop in turnout due to the storm could swing the presidential race.

"It affects so many people that it will certainly have an effect on the election," said Eric Heberlig, a political science professor at UNC Charlotte. "... Those small changes in turnout could very much make a difference in who wins and who loses."

Voter demographics in Western NC

Trump in 2020 won 23 of the 25 counties now included in the federal disaster declaration for Helene, most of them by double digits, on his way to a narrow victory in North Carolina. Biden carried just two - Buncombe County, home to Asheville, and Watauga County, which includes the town of Boone.

The heavy Republican lean in the western portion of the state is a cause for concern for the Trump campaign, Heberlig said.

"If this damage significantly depresses turnout in most areas out there, that's more likely to have an impact on the Republicans than the Democrats," he said.

The population differences between many of those rural, red counties and more liberal population centers such as Asheville complicates the electoral math, Heberlig added.

"You can have a 10% drop in turnout in many of the rural counties, but a 10% drop in Asheville has a lot larger numerical impact, just because it has many more people," Heberlig said.

Roberts said the situation probably doesn't give Harris a chance to pick up many votes in the affected areas, but she could benefit from lower turnout in rural areas.

"The rural vote has been decidedly for former President Trump ... Should Trump lose North Carolina by 1% or less than 1%, then it's all going to come back to, were there free and fair elections in Western North Carolina?" she said.

Shaking up campaigning and election planning

The devastation in Western North Carolina is so severe people may struggle to cast their ballots, even if state officials give voters and election boards flexibility, Roberts predicted.

"It's not all going to be solved by making exceptions for absentee ballots," she said.

Election officials face a short window, with Election Day on Nov. 5 and early voting scheduled to start even sooner, to address disruptions to the postal service, destruction of polling places and voters with missing or damaged IDs.

"It's a huge logistical feat to put on an election under normal conditions, let alone under these," Heberlig said.

The campaigns will also have to adjust their strategies, he added.

"Any kind of grassroots door-knocking or mobilization activities that were planned in those counties, those plans are severely disrupted," Heberlig said.

A likely point of emphasis for both campaigns, according to Heberlig: finding ways to reach affected voters and educate them about their options for casting ballots.

Both campaigns also have to be careful to avoid creating a backlash by appearing insensitive to the loss of life and property in their next moves, Roberts said. That means not getting in the way of emergency response and avoiding a lot of negative messaging, she said.

"The last several weeks prior to an election is when you see more of a deluge, if you will, of negative ads. Would that be the wise choice for the Asheville media market now? I'm not sure that it would," she said.

Will Helene impact NC election results?

In addition to Republicans and Democrats' turning out their respective bases in Western North Carolina, there's also the question of how unaffiliated voters - North Carolina's largest affiliation - will react to the storm, Roberts said.

"The natural disaster may mean that those people just won't show up to the polls ... It might be too inconvenient," Roberts said.

In a state where unaffiliated voters are critical to winning elections, a natural disaster can be a real blow to turnout, Heberlig said.

"People who are marginally interested in politics anyway are hard to turn out, but when you have a home and family to worry about, that's obviously going to take precedence," he said. "So for lots of people, worrying about the election is going to be No. 47 on the list of things that they want to worry about."

More could happen to change the dynamics of the presidential race in the last month of the campaign, but Heberlig predicts Helene's aftermath "is big enough" to "certainly affect turnout."

"Our statewide races tend to be so close that just about anything can swing it one way or another," he said.

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Stephen Colbert asks 'Late Show' viewers to help NC and Southeast after Helene

October 3, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Renee Umsted; Staff Writer | Section: News | 228 Words Page: 5A OpenURL Link

Late-night show host Stephen Colbert asked "The Late Show" viewers Monday night to consider donating to help the communities affected by Helene, specifically calling out the destruction in North Carolina.

Colbert, a South Carolina native, asked his bandleader Louis Cato how friends and family in Cato's home state of North Carolina were doing following the storm during an episode that aired Monday, Sept. 30. Cato grew up in Albemarle and has been a member of the band since 2015 and its leader since 2022, Charlotte Magazine previously reported.

"I'm really grateful. My immediate family is all well and OK," Cato said. "I've got a lot of friends in Asheville who we're still waiting to hear from. They got hit really hard."

During the show, which aired on Sept. 30, an emotional Colbert described the aftermath of the storm, including challenges with power outages, food and water availability and lack of cell service.

He also showed footage of flooding in Asheville. Buncombe County is one of a couple of dozen counties in Western North Carolina affected by Helene.

"The situation in that entire region is dire," Colbert said.

Colbert directed viewers to colbertlateshow.com/hurricanehelene for a list of charities.

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Helene damage, survivors, aftermath in Avery County

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Banner Elk The long climb to Banner Elk follows switchbacks tangled with power lines, blocked by tree trunks and complicated by a two-lane highway reduced to a pile of boulders, and when you reach the top, you find a town living without running water for the last five days.

The police lieutenant saw his house float away, so he's been sleeping on the couch at Town Hall.

For days, food, water and diapers have arrived by helicopter.

Some parts of town may go without water for months because Hurricane Helene took the pipes.

"How are we holding up?" asked Town Manger Rick Owen. "You can ask me when I'm tearing up or when I'm feeling strong."

And yet on Tuesday, a convoy of volunteers loaded Banner Elk's supplies and headed down the mountain in a 30-truck convoy.

Because down in Avery County, people fared far worse.

People missing in Avery County, NC

Driving in Avery County, known for its ski resorts, gets tricky on a normal day.

But post-Helene, the roads lay scattered with rocks and river mud, cratered with sinkholes and sudden dropoffs - all passing through landscapes marked by pulverized houses and cars floating upside-down.

The convoy made its first stop in the tiny community of Frank, population 158, just down the road from tinier Minneapolis, where fire Capt. Kacey Hughes pointed out two houses that slid down a hillside and smashed into tall oak trunks. They remained there in a thousand dangling pieces.

"We have one person missing from that," he said. "It's just devastating. We have people who can't get their insulin. We have people who can't get their inhalers. Welcome to the Metropolis of Frank."

To these far-flung communities, bigger and more tourist-friendly cities like Asheville take all the attention.

Around Frank and Minneapolis, churches set up folding tables on the side of the road, handing out donated water. Signs get tacked to trees, saying, "Food here."

In Banner Elk, chain saws, generators and the need for toilets

In Banner Elk, Lowe's opened its doors to all takers, handing out chain-saws, generators and batteries.

They fear the attention will fade.

This catastrophe will last months, if not years. Meanwhile, the town needs trash bins for spoiling food.

"Portable toilets would be phenomenal," said Police Chief Kevin Hodges.

"Let's be honest," said Fire Chief Tyler Burr. "We're the stepchild of the nation. If Taylor Swift gets engaged tomorrow, we're an afterthought."

After losing their homes to Helene, they helped others

On its second stop, the convoy pulled into the even tinier community of Spear, where trucks donating food and clothing formed a rural traffic jam.

Erin and Derek Buchanan have five employees at their country store who lost their houses in Helene, and all five were helping gather donations.

"One of them is living in a tent," she said.

Asked if that person was available to talk, she said, "He's on a grading crew right now, working in the roads."

Her sister is the local mail carrier, though Helene's flooding tore through the nearby post office in Plumtree, reducing it to studs and insulation

She knows everyone on her route, and she made her rounds making a tally of who was still there.

How many?

"Most of them," Buchanan said.

Smashed cars in corn fields, live wires on roads

For their last stop, the convoy pushed on to Spruce Pine, past smashed cars in corn fields, past a Dollar General shoveling out from under two feet of mud.

They passed country lanes few ever travel - Licklog Road and Tatertown Lane - knowing many people now missing will not be turning up with a story to tell.

Then a few miles from Spruce Pine, the convoy stopped dead. Nobody moved for 30 minutes. Finally, a patrol car flew past with blue lights flashing.

Live wire on the road.

Everybody turned around, back into the ruins they passed.

They dropped what canned goods and condensed milk they had with a church and its folding tables, and they drove back to Banner Elk, which now seemed like civilization.

"Nobody's talking politics," said Mike Dunn, a town councilman and one among 100 volunteers working 14 hours a day.

"Nobody's talking religion. Nobody's talking anything else," Burr, the fire chief, chimed in.

"A week ago," he said, "I was worried about my credit score. Now we've got to save the town."

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Jordan, other NASCAR owners join Helene relief

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Author: Shane Connuck; Staff Writer | Section: Sports | 702 Words

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Prominent NASCAR figures around the Charlotte area have been joining Hurricane Helene relief efforts.

Michael Jordan and his 23XI Racing team have made a \$1 million donation, which will be evenly split between Second Harvest of Metrolina and the North Carolina Disaster Relief Fund.

The campgrounds at Charlotte Motor Speedway in Concord have been open for evacuees seeking refuge. Duke Energy has been using its property to stage lift trucks and crews from multiple states to dispatch where needed to restore power.

"Our hearts go out to everyone suffering from Hurricane Helene's devastation," Jordan said in a statement. "23XI Racing and I are honored to support the NC Disaster Relief Fund and Second Harvest of Metrolina as they help rebuild lives, restore hope and ensure that those affected receive the assistance they need.

"While the process of recovery will take a long time, as a proud North Carolinian, I know firsthand the strength and resilience of the people in this state we call home. ... We will get through this together."

Greg Biffle, NASCAR teams fly helicopters to western NC

As he's been posting on social media, Greg Biffle has been using his personal helicopter to get supplies to western North Carolina.

Biffle, now 54 and regarded as one of NASCAR's top 75 drivers of all time, posted on X that three pallets of Starlink satellite systems and multiple generators were donated to people in the region who remained without wireless service.

"This is huge," Biffle wrote in a post on X. "I've seen the impact first hand for 3 minutes of WiFi and I'm so thankful for the connections of friends to be able to get this done."

Hendrick Motorsports and Joe Gibbs Racing have also been flying their helicopters to areas in western North Carolina.

JGR collected water and non-perishable food items at its race shop in Huntersville, and they were loaded onto one of the team's haulers and delivered to the Asheville area on Tuesday afternoon. JGR posted on social media that it is continuing to accept financial donations online, which should be titled as "Hurricane Relief."

NASCAR teams are still accepting donations at shops

Several NASCAR teams will continue accepting donations to take to western North Carolina throughout the week.

23XI Racing is accepting hurricane relief donations at Airspeed, the team's new facility on nine acres of land in Huntersville, through Friday. Donations can be dropped off between 7:30 a.m. and 5 p.m. in the lobby. Its address is 12311 Airspeed Drive, Huntersville.

The team is accepting the following items: baby formula, baby wipes, sanitation wipes, water, Pedialyte, electrolyte powder and tablets, feminine products, sunscreen, bug spray, first-aid kits, toothbrushes, toothpaste, batteries and

deodorant.

JR Motorsports, the NASCAR team in Mooresville owned by Dale Earnhardt Jr. that competes in the Xfinity Series, will match all donations.

Supplies can be dropped off in the front lobby of the race shop or retail store by end of day on Wednesday, and the team says it will match all supply donations. The shop's address is 349 Cayuga Drive, Mooresville, NC, 28117.

Kaulig Racing, the Cup and Xfinity Series team based in Welcome, is also accepting donations. The team encourages anyone who lives nearby - the shop's address is 105 Austin Lane, Welcome, NC 27374 - to stop by with water, boxed non-perishable food items, tarps and other supplies.

Modified race at North Wilkesboro postponed

The NASCAR Whelen Modified Tour race initially scheduled for this weekend at North Wilkesboro Speedway has been postponed.

In further support of recovery efforts amid the hurricane, the track in Wilkes County will host a hurricane relief drive and serve as a collection site for the following: Non-perishable food items, cleaning supplies, disinfecting wipes, paper towels, mops, buckets, gloves, bottled water, batteries, portable chargers, hygiene items, diapers and wipes, baby formula.

Donations can be dropped off at North Wilkesboro Speedway (381 Speedway Lane, North Wilkesboro, N.C. 28659) between the hours of 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. every day this week, through Sunday. Items will be distributed through Wilkes County Emergency Management and Samaritan's Purse to communities in need.

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President Biden orders Fort Liberty troops to Western NC as part of Helene response

October 3, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Adam Wagner; Staff Writer | Section: News | 434 Words Page: 7A OpenURL Link

A thousand soldiers from Fort Liberty will "immediately" be deployed to Western North Carolina as part of the response to Tropical Storm Helene, President Joe Biden announced Wednesday morning.

"These soldiers will speed up the delivery of life-saving supplies of food, water and medicine to isolated communities in North Carolina - they have the manpower and logistical capabilities to get this vital job done, and fast. They will join hundreds of North Carolina National Guard members deployed under State authorities in support of the response," Biden said in a statement.

The soldiers headed to Western North Carolina are part of an infantry battalion task force, the White House said in a statement. Their unit includes a forward support company that can station key resources like fuel, water and mechanics in areas that are still without power or water nearly a week after the storm.

Soldiers will help with the delivery of key commodities like food and water, according to the White House. They will also help FEMA and other agencies participating in the response reach hard-hit areas that remain inaccessible due to catastrophic damage to the region's roads and bridges from flooding and landslides.

Additionally, the Department of Defense will send 22 helicopters to help with search-and-rescue operations and "dozens" of high-water clearance vehicles.

The National Guard has activated more than 700 members to work on the delivery of supplies and to conduct search and rescue missions in the region. There were 15 aircraft and 275 vehicles involved in that mission as of Tuesday morning, according to a press release from Gov. Roy Cooper's office.

At a Tuesday press conference, Cooper said he and Biden had recently discussed deploying troops to Western North Carolina to help with the relief effort, saying there was a particular focus on aircraft to help deliver supplies.

"I want to make sure we get every single resource that we possibly can into North Carolina for what may be a long haul to make sure that we're continuing to get water and supplies all across Western North Carolina," Cooper said.

Biden is scheduled to visit South Carolina and North Carolina on Wednesday, with the president expected to view storm-battered Western North Carolina from the air before receiving a briefing in Raleigh.

"Hurricane Helene has been a storm of historic proportion. My heart goes out to everyone who has experienced unthinkable loss. We are here for you - and we will stay here for as long as it takes," Biden said in a statement.

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Triangle businesses and organizations collecting donations for Helene storm victims in NC

October 3, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Chyna Blackmon; Staff Writer | Section: News | 943 Words Page: 6A OpenURL Link

As local, state and federal agencies continue recovery efforts after Hurricane Helene hit North Carolina, communities across the state are also stepping up to help those heavily affected by the storm.

In addition to the state's North Carolina Disaster Relief Fund to support nonprofits working to collect emergency supplies for victims, many local businesses and organizations have also set up fundraisers for those desperately in need of help, including several in the Triangle area.

Here is a list of local groups, restaurants, sports teams and more that you can contribute or make donations to for families struggling after the storm.

Bull City Burger and Brewery and Bull City Solera and Taproom

Location:107 E Parrish St, Durham, NC 27701

Location:4120 University Dr, Durham, NC 27707

Bull City Burger and Brewery and its sister restaurant, Bull City Solera and Taproom, have set up donation bins to utilize beer trucks to deliver products for storm victims in Western North Carolina. You can drop off bottled water, personal wipes, canned foods, baby formula, feminine products, first aid items, diapers and more at both locations.

Carolina Hurricanes

Location: Lenovo Center, 1400 Edwards Mill Rd, Raleigh, NC 27607

To help those impacted by the storm, all ticket revenue from the Carolina Hurricanes game Oct. 2 will be donated to relief efforts in Western North Carolina. General admission tickets for the game against the Nashville Predators start at \$10.

Carolina Junior Hurricanes

Location: Invisalign Arena, 111-100 Competition Ctr Dr, Morrisville, NC 27560

The Carolina Junior Hurricanes have set up donation bins at Invisalign Arena for items to be collected through Oct. 4. Non-perishable food, cleaning supplies, plastic tarps, toiletries, baby formula and more will be accepted.

Catering Works

Location:2319 Laurelbrook St, Raleigh, NC 27604

Catering Works, Bloom Works and Ella's Popcorn are accepting donations through Oct. 5 to be delivered to Operation Airdrop. Non-perishable foods, cleaning supplies, toiletries, pet food and other essential items can be dropped off at the catering company anytime from 8 a.m.-3 p.m.

Dingo Dog Brewing Company

Location:410 N Greensboro St # 150, Carrboro, NC 27510

Dingo Dog Brewing Company is collecting donations to give to animal rescue groups in the mountain areas recovering from the storm. The nonprofit craft brewery and cidery is accepting pet food, litter, clean water, blankets, towels, cleaning supplies, soap and unopened veterinary supplies.

Duke University Football

Location: Scott Family Athletics Performance Center, 110 Whitford Dr, Durham, NC 27705

Duke University's football team is running a donation drive through Oct. 11 at the Duke athletics ticket office from 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m. The team will be accepting non-perishable food, bottled water, contractor-size trash bags, blankets, first aid supplies and more.

Eastcut Sandwich Bar

Location: 3211 Old Chapel Hill Rd, Durham, NC 27707

Location: 1101 E Whitaker Mill Rd Suite 126, Raleigh, NC 27604

Eastcut Sandwich Bar will be donating 10% of all sales through Oct. 4 from both of its locations to the NC Disaster Relief Fund. The Triangle restaurants will also be allowing customers to round up orders to the nearest dollar for additional donations for the state's relief fund.

MoJoe's Burger Joint

Location:620 Glenwood Ave, Raleigh, NC 27603

MoJoe's Burger Joint is donating all restaurant sales on Oct. 2 to local organizations providing aid to storm victims in Western North Carolina.

N.C. State Football

Location: Close-King Indoor Practice Facility, 4550 Trinity Rd, Raleigh, NC 27607

The N.C. State football team is collecting supplies to help provide relief for those in Western North Carolina. The team has set up a donation bin on the east side of Close-King Indoor Practice Facility, across from Carter-Finley Stadium to deliver items on Oct. 3.

Southern Sugar Bakery

Location: 4517 Lead Mine Rd Suite B, Raleigh, NC 27612

Southern Sugar Bakery is offering special "Our Hearts Are With Western NC" cookies with all proceeds going towards relief efforts with Samaritan's Purse. The sweet treats are available for purchase online with shipment or pick-up from the Raleigh bakery.

Triangle Young Professional Civitan

Location: Multiple

Triangle Young Professional Civitan has set up donation bins at various businesses around the Triangle area to be transported to Operation AirDrop. Essential items can be dropped off at the following locations:

Beer Tooth Taproom: 105 NC-54 Suite 263, Durham, NC 27713

Bond Brothers Beer Company: 202 E Cedar St, Cary, NC 27511

Burial Beer Co.: 500 E Davie St #170, Raleigh, NC 27601

Cocoa Cinnamon: 2627 Hillsborough Rd, Durham, NC 27705; 2013 Chapel Hill Rd Suite A, Durham, NC 27707; 420

W Geer St, Durham, NC 27701

East Bower Cider Company: 2020 Progress Ct Suite 160, Raleigh, NC 27608

Fullstream at Boxyard RTP: 900 Park Offices Dr Suite 125, Durham, NC 27703

The Glass Jug Beer Lab-RTP: 5410 NC-55 V, Durham, NC 27713

The Glass Jug Beer Lab- Downtown: 545 Foster St Suite 10, Durham, NC 27701

Raleigh Brewing Company: 3709 Neil St, Raleigh, NC 27607

Raleigh Brewing at The Arboretum: 2036 Renaissance Park Pl, Cary, NC 27513

Trophy Brewing

Location: 207 Bickett Blvd, Raleigh, NC 27608

Trophy Brewing is collecting supplies at its future Five Points location through Oct. 4 for Operation Airdrop to deliver to victims in Western North Carolina. Non-perishable foods, cleaning supplies, toiletries, diapers, hand sanitizer and more will be accepted.

Union Special

Location: 2409 Crabtree Blvd #102, Raleigh, NC 27604

This week, Union Special is donating a portion of all sales to World Central Kitchen's efforts in Western NC to help those impacted by Helene. In addition to contributing a percentage of sales, the bakery is also giving all funds from its pay-it-forward loaves to World Central Kitchen.

Did we miss a local organization or business collecting items for Helene storm victims in North Carolina? Let us know.

Chyna Blackmon: @chynablackmon

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Chyna Blackmon, Staff Writer, 'Triangle businesses and organizations collecting donations for Helene storm victims in NC', *News & Observer, The* (online), 3 Oct 2024 6A https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BFD24F44E4AF80>



Why Helene storm damage may leave York County short of federal help - again

October 3, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Andrew Dys and John Marks; Staff Writer | Section: News | 837 Words Page: 6A OpenURL Link

York County SC After Helene, York County may end up short of what it takes to qualify for federal help - again.

As of Tuesday York County did not have enough reported damage or destroyed homes to qualify for Federal Emergency Management Agency assistance under federal guidelines, county emergency management director Chuck Haynes said in a video message released by the county on its social media.

The county has to prove dollar amounts for FEMA help after a disaster, Haynes said. That would include government costs from the storm, and individual damages for people and businesses. Those numbers typically reach into the millions of dollars, with numbers of buildings destroyed part of the equation, too.

"Right now we are not seeing enough numbers for that to happen," Haynes said.

The county finds itself in a similar situation to earlier this year after an April hailstorm ripped through southern Rock Hill. That storm caused several million dollars in damage to houses and businesses, but it didn't meet the threshold the Federal Emergency Management Agency requires.

County officials are still seeking Helene property damage reports from the public and assessing damage in hopes York County would meet thresholds for both government and individual aid, county spokesman Greg Suskin said.

Federal money could help people to pay for damages to homes or businesses - if there is enough damage to personal property. Federal aid to local governments could help recoup costs of overtime, equipment and others costs, if there is enough cost associated with the storm, Haynes said.

Report Helene damage

York County Emergency Management has set up a website for damage reports. The public can report property damage and post pictures from the storm, which will help the county in continued cleanup and recovery efforts. The public can also call emergency management at 803-326-2300 to ask for officials to look at damaged property.

"It helps us track and create the request to FEMA for that individual assistance," Haynes said.

S.C. Rep. Brandon Guffey, R-Rock Hill, said many western South Carolina counties had enough damage that qualified for the FEMA aid to South Carolina. Guffey said he was in contact with the governor's office and urged the public to report and damage it has to York County officials.

"Reporting the damage is crucial if we are to qualify," Guffey said.

On Tuesday, the Small Business Administration approved low-interest loans for York County businesses, homeowners, and renters, Haynes said. It is still unclear when SBA will announce details about when those loans will be available.

Winds reached over 50 miles per hour Friday and some areas in York County had as much as seven inches of rain. A Clover woman died over the weekend when she was hit by a truck while clearing a road, officials said. A Rock Hill man had to be pulled from his home by emergency crews after a tree fell into his home.

The Catawba River flooded in places, including Catawba Park in Tega Cay and parts of Riverwalk in Rock Hill.

Power outages

Most people in the Rock Hill region had power restored by Tuesday after some went without for days.

Around 750 customers from Duke Energy and York Electric Cooperative remained without power Tuesday after noon, with most of them in rural areas, according to outage maps from the utilities and Poweroutage.us, an aggregator of utility outages. Rock Hill Utilities had only a handful of outages Tuesday.

The cooperative was down to fewer than 600 outages after a high of almost 30,000 during the brunt of the storm on Friday.

"We can see light at the end of the tunnel," said Marc Howie, York cooperative vice president.

It remains unclear when all customers will have power restored.

There were just a few pockets of outages remaining Tuesday in Lancaster and Chester counties, according to the outage maps.

Schools

All area school districts re-opened Monday or Tuesday except for the York school district, which canceled classes and events again Tuesday because two school buildings and a significant number of students and staff were without power Monday night.

The district said in a statement around 1 p.m. Tuesday school will resume Wednesday after power was restored to all campuses.

Lancaster and Chester damage

The Lancaster County appears to have been spared major damage but assessment is ongoing, according to Stephanie Snowden, deputy county administrator.

Ander Vincent Road in the Indian Land panhandle area had a culvert destroyed in the storm that has blocked the road at a creek crossing, said Jeff Catoe, public service administrator. Access is still available on both sides of the damage to S.C. 75 or into North Carolina in Union County, Catoe said. No residents are cut off from homes, Catoe said.

The road will remain closed at the creek until repairs can be made, Catoe said.

Chester County also is in the midst of damage assessment but avoided major damage, said Ed Darby, emergency management director. Two houses had trees on roofs but the houses were not destroyed, Darby said.

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Helicopter pilot flies supplies to Helene flood victims

October 3, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Julia Coin; Staff Writer | Section: News | 1008 Words

Page: 1A OpenURL Link

Help.

Hickory Right now in North Carolina, an index card could save a life.

Blue-lined, 3-by-5-inch papers sit in a grid on a plastic folding table inside Hickory Regional Airport, listing coordinates and what those stranded in Hurricane Helene's aftermath need:

Baby formula.		
Insulin.		

A patchwork group of pilots inside the two-room airport grab three or four cards at a time, head to their helicopters and fly west. Fuel is expensive. If they end up unable to land on the rickety terrain in the mangled Appalachian Mountains, they need more cards, more options before turning back. Organizers realized that halfway through their second day of missions.

But Andy Petree, a retired NASCAR analyst for ESPN, takes just one card at 5:56 p.m. Monday. The sun will set in about two hours. This is his sixth and last trip of the day. His first was 12 hours ago, when he flew his son out of their hometown, Hendersonville, and dropped him at Petree's Lake Norman house, one with its own helipad, near Charlotte.

For his second to last trip, Petree flew out to Black Mountain, where he rescued a family of three and their dogs.

Now, Petree loads Pampers diapers, Similac baby formula, his wife's PB&J sandwiches and a Charlotte Observer reporter into his private helicopter and lifts off from the landing strip that's about three football fields long.

The 66-year-old is one of 37 pilots offering their private aircraft to Operation Airdrop, a nonprofit that sends volunteer pilots and their aircraft with essential supplies after disaster.

In Asheville, Swannanoa, Lake Lure, Marshall, and many parts of western North Carolina, people are only reachable by air. Roads, shredded by the floods, have turned into narrow dirt paths, riverbeds or cliffs into the orange, murky water below.

Hickory, a North Carolina town of about 44,000 known as a furniture manufacturing capital of the United States, is about an hour drive from Charlotte, Asheville and Boone. That's about 30 minutes in Petree's helicopter.

We head to Lake Lure in his Robinson 44 Raven 2 - a four-person helicopter he bought to get from his Hendersonville home in western North Carolina to the NASCAR tracks in the middle of the state, close to Concord and the Lake Norman home where his son now sits with 200 pounds of supplies.

Three days ago, as Helene passed over his home state Friday, Petree was in Port Canaveral, Florida, canceling plans to travel from where he and his wife were about to get onto a cruise ship.

He had to help, he said.

The rest of the volunteers, some dropping supplies and clothes and airlifting people out, have similar stories. Some are in matching black pants, black shoes and black shirts that say "Academy of Aviation," some are in military camo, and some are in jeans and T-shirts that show their neck tattoos.

Hodgepodge helicopters help Helene's victims

Pockets of destruction rest between Hickory and the Appalachian Mountains. Some areas seem fine, with outdoor furniture unmoved or at least reset. Then a smear of downed trees that will die before their leaves turn into a cluster of colors this year.

Then a river. Then a lake. Then a whole town tattered into pieces.

"That hurricane basically picked up the whole Gulf of Mexico and dropped it right there," Petree says, pointing to the thick layer of branches, roofs, umbrellas and siding sitting where Chimney Rock used to be.

I tell him this summer, on a trip back to Charlotte from Topton, a town further out west that escaped total ruin Friday, I considered stopping at the quaint lake town. I didn't.

"Now you'll never see it," he says.

Those with homes still intact won't be able to get to them, he says. Those with their homes and belongings whisked away won't see it rebuilt. Those dead in the ruin won't be found for a few more days, months, maybe years, he says.

As of Monday, officials said more than 100 Americans had died in the 10 states hit by Helene. By Tuesday afternoon, there were 57 people confirmed dead from the storm in just Buncombe County in North Carolina, according to Sheriff Quentin Miller. Hundreds are still missing.

Petree, who was in the rubble talking to people earlier Monday, said the people there are just awestruck. The devastation is unimaginable. And for those who don't have to imagine - those who heard the freight-train-sounding rush of water and woke up to their neighbor's homes in the water - it's incomprehensible.

At 6:45 p.m., after circling above the coordinates listed on Petree's index card, finding no place to land and seeing no people waving us down, we land on a bridge next to Bat Cave Volunteer Fire Department between the demolished Chimney Rock and Gerton, the next unincorporated community west. The makeshift landing pad is marked with two orange Xs. The next bridge over is marked with black, capitalized words: DO NOT LAND.

The people who asked for diapers and baby food aren't there, but one bleary-eyed volunteer firefighter with muddy camo boots and a gun in his waistband is. He's with a few others.

Their eyes are all the same. Wide open, glazed, processing the monster storm that hit their town - one once dubbed a "climate haven" by some for its long distance from the coast and relatively high elevation.

"Everyone is gone," says Marie O'Neill, a butterfly-booted woman who lives on a slope above the fire department. "The people, the animals."

We don't have time to stay long.

She waves as we take off, the setting sun shielded by clouds - remnants of the storm that's passed and plagued the state.

We fly back over the ruin and land back in Hickory at 7:27 p.m. Inside one of the airport's rooms, 50 volunteers - pilots, runway golf cart drivers, regular people - eat pizza and hot dogs when a director comes in.

Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson's niece is out there, somewhere. She asks who is certified to fly at night. One person is. Two people are needed.

Julia Coin: 7042189350, @juliamcoin

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A cart of flowers lifts spirits and brings color back to Western NC's dire landscape

October 3, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Martha Quillin; Staff Writer | Section: News | 337 Words Page: 7A OpenURL Link

Asheville Leslee Serdar came to work at the Whole Foods Market on Tuesday and saw one more thing going bad in a place where too much already was rotten, and decided to turn it into something good.

Downtown, dozens of people were standing in line with 5-gallon buckets and YETI cups to gather drinking water from a tanker truck because their spigots are dry, because the remnants of Hurricane Helene wrecked the city's water system.

Across Asheville, residents have been told not to flush their toilets.

Electricity was slowly being restored, but many were expecting to spend another night - or more - in the dark.

"We had these flowers, and they were just going to wilt," Serdar said, reaching into a grocery buggy full of bundled daisies and roses that had sat in the store for a few days while everything was closed.

"And I thought, here's something we can do to try to keep people's spirits up."

Serdar loaded the flowers into the buggy and pushed it toward the front of the Merrimon Avenue store, where she offered them free to people coming in for bottled water and organic hummus.

"Some of them cry," said Emmaleigh Argonauta, who took a turn with the flower cart Tuesday afternoon.

Nerves are frayed in this corner of the state as residents confront the scope of the damage from Helene and begin to guess at how long recovery is going to take. Power restoration is a top priority, along with running water. Without those, most schools will remain closed and many businesses can't operate.

Meanwhile, in communities across Western North Carolina nearly broken by flood damage, people are making do with what they have and sharing if there's enough: sandwiches here, Mexican dinners there, a bouquet of slightly past-their-prime blooms.

"It just brings a little color," Argonauta said.

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Martha Quillin, Staff Writer, 'A cart of flowers lifts spirits and brings color back to Western NC's dire landscape', *News & Observer, The* (online), 3 Oct 2024 7A https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?
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'Gone.' The main route through the NC mountains will take a long time to rebuild

October 3, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Richard Stradling; Staff Writer| Section: News| 532 Words Page: 4A OpenURL Link

Of all the roads that need fixing in Western North Carolina, none will pose a bigger challenge than Interstate 40 in the Pigeon River Gorge.

The swollen river scoured the earth below the four-lane highway, washing away the eastbound lanes in several places. The largest section, about 4 miles from the Tennessee line, gave way around noon on Friday.

Remarkably, no one has reported any cars or trucks tumbling into the river, according to the State Highway Patrol.

But the highway is closed in both directions, severing the busiest connection between North Carolina and Tennessee, used by some 26,000 drivers a day. An alternate route, Interstate 26, is also closed because of severe flooding on the Tennessee side near the town of Erwin.

Both are likely to remain closed for a long time.

N.C. Department of Transportation engineers visited the damaged sections of I-40 on Monday, with officials from the Federal Highway Administration and the Tennessee Department of Transportation. They returned Tuesday to begin to determine how they will shore up and stabilize the eroded sections so they don't get any worse, according to NCDOT spokesman David Uchiyama.

"Those operations should begin within a week," Uchiyama wrote in an email.

But NCDOT engineers are only beginning to try to figure out how to rebuild I-40, Uchiyama said. Over a four-mile stretch near the Tennessee line, the two eastbound lanes are "either gone or partially gone," he said, and there are three other damaged places spread over the next 11 miles.

It's not clear yet if the westbound lanes will be usable while the eastbound lanes are rebuilt, Uchiyama said.

A road difficult to build and maintain

It took 15 years to build the section of I-40 that connects North Carolina and Tennessee. The highway snakes alongside the Pigeon River, perched on a shelf blasted from the side of the mountains. When the road opened in 1968, N.C. Gov. Dan Moore is reported to have said, "The genius of modern man has shown itself to be superior to the adversities of nature."

But nature has never conceded, and I-40's path through the Pigeon River Gorge has always been precarious.

Usually the threat comes from above, as rocks slide down the walls of the gorge onto the highway on both sides of the state line. A slide on the North Carolina side in October 2009 closed the interstate in both directions for six months, as crews cleared debris and stabilized with rock face.

During that closure, westbound drivers were encouraged to take I-26 north from Asheville to I-81 at Johnston City, Tennessee.

But that's not an option now. Floodwaters knocked down twin spans that carried I-26 over the Nolichucky River in Erwin, about 40 miles from the North Carolina line. Tennessee DOT spokesman Mark Nagi says there's no timeline

set for rebuilding them and reopening the highway.

For now, traffic apps are advising drivers wishing to go west toward Knoxville and Nashville from the Triangle to take I-77 north to I-81 near Wytheville, Virginia.

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There's new storm activity in the Atlantic and Gulf. Could any of them affect NC?

October 3, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Renee Umsted; Staff Writer | Section: News | 371 Words

Page: 7A OpenURL Link

Recovery efforts are underway across the Southeast days after Helene swept through the region, but two months remain for Atlantic hurricane season, and more storms could be on the way.

Storms are moving and developing in the Atlantic Ocean, and there's a system that may be coming together in the Caribbean Sea. Here's the latest.

Storm system building in the Gulf of Mexico

There's allow pressure system producing a large area of disorganized showers and thunderstorms from the southwestern Caribbean sea into the southern Gulf of Mexico, according to the National Hurricane Center.

Conditions could lead the system to develop into a tropical depression. As of Wednesday, Oct. 2, there's a 40% chance that a depression will form over the next seven days.

Current models are showing that the system will likely not develop into something strong, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service's Forecast Office in Raleigh told The News & Observer.

"This really looks like a threat of heavy rain and possibly a wind and surge threat, depending on storm strength, for Florida later next week," AccuWeather meteorologist Bernie Rayno said in a report.

Which storms are in the Atlantic now? What about Hurricane Kirk?

* Hurricane Kirk is about 1,200 miles west of the Cabo Verde Islands off the coast of west Africa and 1,280 miles east of the Lesser Antilles. It is expected to move northwest before turning and heading northeast.

While the NHC expects Kirk to strengthen and become a major hurricane by Thursday, Oct. 3, it is not near land. No coastal watches or warnings are in effect.

* There is another system developing in the eastern Atlantic, a few hundred miles southwest of the Cabo Verde Islands. The system has a 90% chance of developing into a tropical depression within 48 hours as of Oct. 2, according to the NHC. It is expected to move northwest and then north, the NWS Raleigh meteorologist said.

Will any of the storms affect NC?

Hurricane Kirk and the other system developing in the Atlantic are not expected to impact land at all.

The system in the Caribbean is expected to stay well to the south of North Carolina, the NWS Raleigh meteorologist said.

What will the next named storm be?

The next named storm would be Leslie.

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Walz and Vance use VP debate to rev up supporters

October 3, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: John T. Bennett; CQ-Roll Call | Section: News | 741 Words Page: 4A OpenURL Link

Sen. JD Vance of Ohio and Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz clashed during a frenetic Tuesday evening debate over a number of hot-button issues, again making clear voters soon will choose between widely diverging visions for the future of the country.

The Republican nominee called for policies to make the country "more pro-baby and pro-family," while the Democratic nominee said reproductive decisions should be up to women and their doctors. But it was Donald Trump, the GOP presidential nominee, who made the most news on the issue Tuesday night.

In an all-capital letters social media post, he declared: "EVERYONE KNOWS I WOULD NOT SUPPORT A FEDERAL ABORTION BAN, UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES, AND WOULD, IN FACT, VETO IT, BECAUSE IT IS UP TO THE STATES TO DECIDE BASED ON THE WILL OF THEIR VOTERS (THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE!)."

Vance defended Republicans' support for the end of federal abortion protections by touting that the matter should be up to each state, while Walz shared stories of women he said died because of conservative justices - three picked by then-President Trump.

Walz and Vance met for their lone planned verbal sparring session as several Southeast states - including battlegrounds Georgia and North Carolina - were still reeling from Hurricane Helene. Earlier Tuesday, Iran launched its second missile attack on Israel in several months, this one in retaliation for several Israeli air strikes inside Lebanon that killed several top Hezbollah leaders and civilians.

Walz and Vance spent ample time during their debate trying to rev up their respective bases. Here are some top takeaways.

Israel-Iran tensions

The debate began with a flub by a seemingly nervous Walz and a shaky premise underlying the first question. The nominees were asked whether they would support Israel carrying out a "preemptive strike" on Iran.

Both candidates said they fully support the Jewish state and its right to defend itself. Walz went even further, but made a gaffe, alluding to "Israel and its proxies." One major challenge for decades for Israel has been dealing with all of Iran's proxies, including Hamas, Hezbollah and other groups in the region.

But the question seemed to miss a key point: Iran has twice fired hundreds of missiles and drones at population centers inside Israel. So a major Israeli attack on Iran would no longer meet widely held definitions of a preemptive strike.

Vance had some name troubles of his own, twice referring to CBS moderator Norah O'Donnell as "Laura."

Mass deportations

The nominees clashed over Trump's proposal to carry out what the ticket has boasted would be the largest mass deportation program of individuals in the U.S. illegally.

Walz appeared to suggest his biggest gripe with the idea of rounding up perhaps millions of people and returning

them to their native countries would be simply that the plan is "unworkable."

But he also knocked Trump for pushing Senate Republicans to earlier this year block a bipartisan border and immigration package. Without new policies in place, "it gives him a campaign issue," Walz said of Trump. "What would Donald Trump talk about if we did these things?"

The Democratic nominee also contended, while Trump was president, "less than 2% of that wall got built - and Mexico didn't pay a dime."

For his part, Vance proposed starting the deportation program by rounding up illegal migrants who have criminal records. "We have to stop the bleeding," the Ohio senator said, contending the Biden-Harris administration has allowed "massively increasing asylum fraud" and accused the vice president of "letting in fentanyl" across the Southern border.

He also said a second Trump administration would "make it harder for migrants to undercut the wages of American workers."

Peaceful transfer?

Given the opportunity by the CBS moderators to clearly say he would vote to certify the coming election, Vance (who will still be a senator on Jan. 6 unless he resigns) opted against doing so.

Instead, he said the 2020 election allegations Trump pushed - and continues to push - should be debated "peacefully." Vance also took a jab at Harris' and Walz's - and Biden's - contention that Trump is a threat to Democracy by contending the actual one is "censorship" by big technology companies and Democrats.

Walz recounted the history of Jan. 6, 2021, the day of the Capitol riot, and said of Trump: "For the first time in history that a president ... tried to overturn the peaceful transfer of power. ... The winner has to be the winner. This has to stop."

Vance also did not answer Walz's question about whether Trump lost the 2020 election.

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Tropical Storm Helene closed the most famous road in Western North Carolina

October 3, 2024 \mid News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Richard Stradling, News & Observer \mid Section: north carolina \mid 450 Words OpenURL Link

The Blue Ridge Parkway remains closed throughout North Carolina and Virginia after Tropical Storm Helene tore through the mountains last week, and the National Park Service says it doesn't know when the road will reopen.

In North Carolina, the two-lane highway meanders 252 miles from the Virginia line to the entrance of Great Smoky Mountains National Park. All 252 miles are closed, as crews clear fallen trees and debris and assess damage to the roadway.

parkway 401.jpgDamage along the Blue Ridge Parkway near milepost 401 south of Asheville.

The park service has brought in outside help. As of last week, about 250 park service employees from 32 states and the District of Columbia were helping Blue Ridge Parkway staff with recovery, said spokesman Mike Litterst.

RAL_100524-HELENE-TEL-001 (1).JPGThe Blueridge Parkway remains closed on Saturday, October. 5, 2024 after the remnants of Hurricane Helene caused damage to the parkway.

Litterst said park service teams were still doing initial inspections of the roadway.

"Based on what the teams have seen so far, significant, and in some cases catastrophic, damage has occurred along the parkway," he wrote in an email.

Crews estimate tens of thousands of trees fell across the road in North Carolina, where they count nearly three dozen rock and mud slides, the park service said in an update Oct. 8. The slides occurred above and below the road and have severely damaged or swept away the roadbed in numerous places.

The worst damage, Litterst said, appears to be in a 189-mile stretch from near Grandfather Mountain to Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The damage includes places where buildings, such as the Linville Falls Visitor Center, were destroyed.

GY5C4TTXoAEmH0u.jpgCrews working to clear a section of the Blue Ridge Parkway on Sept. 30, 2024.

Litterst said it will take weeks for the park service to fully assess the damage and begin to estimate how long it will take to make repairs and how much they might cost. That means the road will remain closed through fall foliage season, when traffic is often bumper to bumper.

Completed in 1936, the parkway runs 469 miles between Shenandoah National Park in Virginia and Great Smoky Mountains National Park in North Carolina.

The parkway is both a local route for residents and a huge draw for visitors who take in the mountain air and views from numerous overlooks and hiking trails along its route. The park service estimates that nearly 16.8 million people visited the parkway last year, spending nearly \$1.4 billion in nearby communities.

The National Park Service has reopened U.S. 441, also known as Newfound Gap Road, which runs through Great Smoky Mountains National Park between Cherokee, North Carolina, and Gatlinburg, Tennessee. As on the parkway, commercial vehicles are prohibited on U.S. 441 through the park.

• Citation (aglc Style)

Richard Stradling, News & Observer, 'Tropical Storm Helene closed the most famous road in Western North Carolina', *News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles* (online), 3 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C6027CC26C29B8>



Here's a searchable database of NC roads closed and damaged by Tropical Storm Helene

October 3, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Richard Stradling and David Raynor, News & Observer Section: north carolina 78 Words OpenURL Link

The N.C. Department of Transportation lists hundreds of roads in Western North Carolina that are closed as a result of Tropical Storm Helene. The list changes daily, as some roads are cleared and repaired and as the department discovers other damaged places as it gets into remote areas of the mountains. Here is a searchable database to help you find the status of roads across Western North Carolina.

Extra wide graphic CSS

Hurricane helene road closures table embed

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Richard Stradling and David Raynor, News & Observer, 'Here's a searchable database of NC roads closed and damaged by Tropical Storm Helene', *News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles* (online), 3 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C6955A181183A8



Pensacola's battered lone road adds twists to Helene response in remote Western NC town

October 3, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Brian Gordon, News & Observer | Section: north carolina | 687 Words OpenURL Link

Stanchions of trees, embedded vehicles and mangled trailers line the only road through Pensacola, North Carolina, a week after Tropical Storm Helene crashed into the small Yancey County town. But the worst physical damage, locals say, isn't as evident.

"There are a lot of homes where you wouldn't know they were ever there if you hadn't lived here your whole life," said Noah Davis, a local handyman. "There's going to be a before-the-storm and after-the-storm Pensacola."

Consecutive days of heavy rains late last week overwhelmed the remote community of around 500 people in Pisgah National Forest - 22 miles and a world away from Asheville. Pensacola lays south of Burnsville in a holler between two hillsides. The Cattail Creek runs down one mountainside and the Cane River flows below.

RAL_PENSACOLA-NE-100324-RTW_20.JPGA Pensacola Fire Department truck, photographed on Thursday, October 3, 2024, truck fell victim to flood waters from Hurricane Helen that flooded the nearby Cane River. Firefighters stationed the truck at this end of the community, dividing their resources, to better serve the community in case the main fire station became inaccessible.

Early Friday, the creek flooded and sent a torrent toward the town while at the same time, the river swelled and encroached. "We were surrounded by water," said resident Joyce Maness. "Our floors were giving in."

After three days, Christa Robinson felt the creek had receded enough to leave her house in the Cattail Creek community, which sits above Pensacola. With her 7-year-old daughter Lilly, she walked - and at times slid - into Pensacola, where they spent the next night at the local fire station.

Robinson remembers the immense local flood of 1977. Unlike then, she felt the entire mountain move last week.

"The highway is gone," said Mark Harrison, medical officer for the Pensacola Fire Department. "Most of the homes are gone."

RAL_PENSACOLA-NE-100324-RTW_21.JPGClothes dry in the sunshine against a backdrop of storm debris from Hurricane Helene in the Yancey County village of Pensacola, N.C. on Thursday, October 3, 2024

Rescue and recovery began over the weekend as volunteers drove four-wheelers along rutted, muddy passageways. Pensacola Road is the town's only direct connection to the rest of Western North Carolina, and by Thursday, enough of the eroded blacktop had been cleared to allow trucks to narrowly inch through.

RAL_PENSACOLA-NE-100324-RTW_4.JPGNational Guard Troops from Southern Pines, N.C. deliver water to the hard hit village of Pensacola, N.C. in Yancey County on Thursday, October 3, 2024.

U.S. Army personnel arrived on the ground Thursday to hand out supplies as helicopters delivered medicine, appliances and food to hard-to-reach areas. Search-and-rescue teams from Charlotte, Pittsburgh, Kansas and elsewhere visited each standing home to document the destruction. Civilians pitched in further, offering neighbors their services as mechanics, movers and transporters.

RAL_PENSACOLA-NE-100324-RTW_1.JPGMark Harrison, Chief Medical Officer for the Pensacola Fire Department, center, unloads supplies from Helicopter pilot Brett James, with Willow Creek Aviation of Louisburg, N.C., on Thursday, October 3, 2024 in Pensacola, N.C.

"The lack of roads has been the biggest thing logistically," said Davis, who estimated he has evacuated at least 30 people on his four-wheeler.

Another major hurdle is accounting for everyone affected. The Cattail Creek community in particular has a sizable number of vacation homes. Were their owners out of town during the storm? Or are they now missing?

These are the questions people want answered.

"After COVID hit, a lot of people came in here, and we have no idea how many are residents," Harrison said. "We've evacuated all of the critical people that we could. Now, it's more or less preventative."

RAL_PENSACOLA-NE-100324-RTW_6.JPGSeven-year-old Amersyn Rutledge of Greenville TN, sorts donated supplies at the Pensacola Fire Department on Thursday, October 3, 2024 in Pensacola, N.C. Amersyn came with her father to volunteer on Thursday as the hard hit community, cut off by damaged roads from Hurricane Helene copes with limited resources and medical supplies.

As for fatalities, Harrison declined to share a specific number but said "it's obvious" people have been killed. Donations in recent days have poured into the fire station, the community's makeshift recovery hub. Asked what Pensacola residents still need, Harrison listed medications, including antibiotics and methadone.

Photos: Surrounded by water, small NC community had to wait until rescue could safely travel Copyright 2024 The News and Observer

• Citation (aglc Style)

Brian Gordon, News & Observer, 'Pensacola's battered lone road adds twists to Helene response in remote Western NC town', News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (online), 3 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C6027CB2891E58>



'Civilization is pretty much gone' after Helene tears through Spruce Pine, NC

October 3, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Josh Shaffer, News & Observer | Section: weather news | 791 Words OpenURL Link

With the mud ankle-deep inside her music store, and the water stains climbing 8 feet high on the walls, Angie Buchanan said goodbye to 50 years of teaching music in Spruce Pine.

Then she walked through the stinking sludge of Lower Street and tossed her prized cello on a trash pile.

"My life is in there," she said. "It's hard. Very hard."

100324-HELENE-KLM-07.jpgHeather Bender, left, offers an embrace outside Spear Country Store & Hardware as community members gather on Thursday, Oct. 3, 2024, in Newland, N.C., days after Hurricane Helene brought heavy flooding to the region.

The Mitchell County town of 2,000 took a beating from the North Toe River, which destroyed its historic brick riverfront and left neighbors still enduring life without power, water or cell service a week after Hurricane Helene roared through.

"Our water treatment plant washed away," said Sonja Emmett, who was out walking her dog. "All the garbage trucks washed away. Everything civilization is pretty much gone."

100324-HELENE-KLM-03.jpgMarlin King, a volunteer from Pennsylvania, helps to clear mud and debris from Locust Street on Thursday, Oct. 3, 2024, in Spruce Pine, N.C. following damage from Hurricane Helene.

Tiny Plumtree's near-impassable roads

Nearby, the community store in tiny Plumtree still served as a Grand Central Station for side-by-sides carrying water, food, diapers and toilet paper up narrow, muddy, near-impassable roads where neighbors sat stranded.

And around midday Thursday, they learned one of their own had been found dead after a week. Nobody wanted to talk about it. They hugged and cried as the relief operation became an outdoor wake powered by generators.

Helicopters flew overhead, National Guard trucks rolled past and a community of 818 kept feverishly looking after each other, keeping a list of who is stuck where and who needs what, sending out side-by-sides like free DoorDash service.

"The main thing we don't want is people to think, 'These poor, old, ignorant Appalachian mountain people,' " said Libby Wise, running to check on her 90-year-old mother. "We have plenty of college-educated people here. We are so appreciative of all the outside people are doing for us. Please don't think you're sending food and water to a log cabin."

100324-HELENE-KLM-10.jpgSummer Crosby, right, serves lunch outside of Spear Country Store & Hardware on Thursday, Oct. 3, 2024, in Newland, N.C., days after Hurricane Helene brought heavy flooding to the region.

Those still 'unaccounted for'

Back in Spruce Pine, a makeshift relief station opened up outside L&L Furniture on the Upper Road, which barely escaped disaster, unlike its riverfront neighbor.

Many residents couldn't get out of their houses until Sunday, and an army of 100 volunteers has cut them free oneby-one. One of them on Lower Road Thursday said he'd gotten out 15 families since last weekend.

But fears persist of those still "unaccounted for," the term Spruce Pine uses rather than missing.

Much like Plumtree, neighbors keep a tally of who is where, sending volunteers out to check. But when the find empty houses, mostly intact, the communication blackout forces them to guess at whether their friends have taken up with family elsewhere or disappeared down the North Toe.

"I can sometimes get Facebook with a generator and a Starlink," said Shirley Singleton, whose daughter owns L&L. "Kind of that's how we're finding people."

100324-HELENE-KLM-11.jpgCraig Buchanan, right, fills up a gas can at Spear Country Store & Hardware on Thursday, Oct. 3, 2024, in Newland, N.C., days after Hurricane Helene brought severe flooding to the region.

Spruce Pine's living room washed away

Down on Lower Street, David Niven was shoveling the mud out of DT's Blue Ridge Java, also sunk under 8 feet of water.

"It's only \$2 million down the drain," he joked. "I've got 40 gallons of gas sitting at my house. I'm blessed."

He and his wife Tricia opened their coffee house 20 years ago, inside a building listed on the National Register.

100324-HELENE-KLM-01.jpgAndrew Zook, left, helps to clear instruments and other items from the mud inside Majestic Music in downtown Spruce Pine, N.C. on Thursday, Oct. 3, 2024, days after Hurricane Helene brought heavy flooding to the area.

"I wish you could have seen it," she said. "We were the living room of Spruce Pine. Every church group met here. Everyone and anyone met here. God has kept us for 20 years through fires, through pandemic. On the third day after the flood, God spoke to me and said, 'We're rebuilding.' "

On the day after the storm, before she even saw the ruined guitars, drums and dulcimers, someone broke into Buchanan's music store and stole a harp.

"Kids, probably," she said. "Probably just kids."

Somehow, she thought, in storm or fair weather, she will get Spruce Pine playing music again.

100324-HELENE-KLM-02.jpgSheet music sits on a mud-caked floor inside Majestic Music in downtown Spruce Pine, N.C. on Thursday, Oct. 3, 2024, days after Hurricane Helene brought heavy flooding to the area.

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When cell towers and internet fail, ham radio operators can still talk. How to get involved

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When Helene swept across the Southeast on Sept. 27, including Western North Carolina, cell phones and internet-based communication became unusable.

People still needed a way to talk - to check on friends and family or receive updates on the storm's aftermath - especially as roads and bridges were washed away, isolating communities.

But there's a way to communicate without cell signals or internet, and about 750,000 people across the country know how to use it: amateur radio.

Also known as ham radio, this old-school method of technology allows people separated by large distances to stay in touch.

"People might think that cell phones have made amateur radio obsolete," said Chuck Till, the vice president of the Raleigh Amateur Radio Society. "As you can see, that's far from the truth."

RARS, which has more than 450 members, is a nonprofit organization and one of many radio clubs across the country. While the club offers many services, helping the public during times of emergency is among its goals.

"It's a tireless activity, and these hams are so dedicated to it," said Fin Gold, the president of RARS. "And people don't realize that they're out there, and they're there to help."

How hams help during disasters

Across North Carolina, amateur radio operators have helped with search and rescue efforts and condition reports, Gold said.

Many of the repeaters, which are automated relay stations that have broad coverage, were offline because of Helene. But one repeater on Mount Mitchell, the highest peak in North Carolina, was still operational, and the hams on the mountain were able to help check on people and pass along radio messages, Gold said.

There's a program called AUXCOMM, developed by the Department of Homeland Security, in which certain hams work with government agencies including North Carolina Emergency Management, Till said. Other hams may assist with health and welfare messaging.

"The more people that join us, the more we can help," Gold said.

How to find a ham

Search for amateur radio operators in a given area on the Federal Communications Commission's website. Search online for a local radio club. Some operators may have a special license plate with their radio call sign.

How to get involved with ham radio

There are many reasons why people are drawn to radio, Till said. They may want to socialize, compete in contests, perform a public service or experiment with building the technology.

Anyone in Raleigh who is interested in becoming an amateur radio operator can contact RARS.

Hams are licensed by the Federal Communications Commission and must pass an exam to become licensed, said Till, who earned his first license in 1970. RARS and other radio clubs offer classes to prepare for exams, and people may also purchase study materials online.

Equipment costs vary depending on what a person wants to do with the radio.

"You can get into it for as little as \$50," Till said. "I know people who have spent tens of thousands of dollars on their station, but you don't have to do that."

Other ways to communicate without cell signal

Satellites such as Starlink systems can be used for communication. In Western North Carolina, counties reported that the systems allowed emergency responders to receive calls and members of the public to check on family, The News & Observer reported.

Satellite phones may also be used when there's no cell service.

Ask NC service journalism team EMBED

There's new storm activity in the Atlantic and Gulf. Could any of them affect NC?

Stephen Colbert asks 'Late Show' viewers to help NC & the Southeast after Helene

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