

Helene damage to North Carolina, by the numbers

September 30, 2024 | Herald-Sun, The (Durham, NC)

Author: Joe Marusak and Drew Jackson; Staff Writer | Section: News | 235 Words

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North Carolina is still adding up the damage done by the powerful tropical storm that started as Hurricane Helene.

The day after the extreme rain and winds stopped, the full tally was unknown. But even the partial count is eyepopping.

Deaths: 11, at least.

Landslides: 11.

Roads closed: 280 state-maintained roads, mostly due to flooding, including Interstate 40 and dozens of closures along several other U.S. and N.C. highway routes.

Flood water rescues: More than 200 people.

Homes with no power: More than 300,000.

State of emergency declarations: 29 counties, 52 towns.

Search and rescue teams from other states: 19.

Federal search and rescue teams: 3.

Top wind gust: 106 mph, Mt. Mitchell State Park.

NCDOT employees and contractors dispatched: More than 1,600.

Flight disruptions: Over 2,000 at Charlotte Douglas International Airport since Wednesday.

Shelters opened: 16.

People sheltered Friday night: at least 1,100.

Most rainfall: 29.5 inches, Busick Raws, Yancey County. (Many mountain locations saw at least 10 inches.)

Rocky Mount EF-3 tornado: 140 mph, 100 yards wide, quarter-mile-long path near Rocky Mount's Tiffany Boulevard.

Major disaster declaration request counties: 38, plus the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians.

Major disaster declaration approval counties: 25, plus the Eastern Band. President Joe Biden approved the declaration Saturday.

Sources: Gov. Roy Cooper's office; Duke Energy; North Carolina Department of Public Safety; North Carolina Department of Transportation; National Hurricane Center; National Weather Service, Greer, South Carolina, and Raleigh offices; Flight Aware.com; North Carolina State Highway Patrol; North Carolina Emergency Management.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Joe Marusak and Drew Jackson, Staff Writer, 'Helene damage to North Carolina, by the numbers', *Herald-Sun, The* (online), 30 Sep 2024 1A https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BED2C710876260



At least 11 dead; western NC gets disaster declaration

September 30, 2024 | Herald-Sun, The (Durham, NC) Author: Ames Alexander and Drew Jackson; Staff Writer | Section: News | 748 Words

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President Joe Biden has agreed to provide immediate federal help to 25 western North Carolina counties battered by Tropical Storm Helene, the White House announced Saturday night.

Gov. Roy Cooper said Sunday that at least 11 people have died in the storm.

"Tragically, we know there will be more," he said at a news conference Sunday afternoon.

"Many people are cut off because roads are impassable. They don't have power or communications."

The "major disaster" declaration, approved at Cooper's request, means FEMA will be able to provide quicker additional help to those who need it. The federal government says it will also reimburse local governments, state agencies and nonprofits for repairing facilities, roads and other infrastructure.

The counties in the declaration 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 Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians is also included.

Cooper had requested a disaster declaration for 38 North Carolina counties. It was not immediately clear why 13 of those counties weren't included, but Cooper's office said more counties may be added.

The tropical storm that was once Category 4 Hurricane Helene made it to North Carolina Friday and touched all parts of the state. It led to flash flooding in the Triangle, a tornado in Rocky Mount and historic levels of devastation throughout the Western North Carolina mountains.

The full extent of the damage in Western North Carolina continues to unfold. By Sunday morning, more than 300,000 homes in North Carolina - and more than 500,000 in South Carolina - remained without power.

On Sunday morning, Duke Energy said that nearly all of its customers outside of western North Carolina should have their power restored by midnight. Many will have power before then, Duke said.

Floodwaters on Friday wiped out bridges, remote highways and sections of interstates - not only cutting off travel to and through the region, but isolating those sheltering in place during the storm.

In Asheville, residents were stunned to see houses and businesses swept into the Swannanoa River.

"The people in western North Carolina are hurting from this devastating storm and we are all working to get resources to people as fast as we can," Cooper said in a news release Sunday. "We have deployed rescue teams, transportation crews, water, mobile kitchens and more. This is going to be a long-term recovery and this federal declaration will help us respond."

Many in Western North Carolina remained without fresh water, internet or cell service. Seven water plants in Avery, Burke, Haywood, Jackson, Rutherford, Watauga and Yancey counties are closed, according to a news release issued by Cooper's office Saturday night. That affects nearly 70,000 households.

A total of 17 water plants have reported having no power, while 23 more are operating on backup power. Many

Western North Carolina communities have been advised to boil water before using it.

Stay clear of western NC roads, officials say

More than 200 people were rescued from flood waters, Cooper's office said. The governor has deployed the North Carolina National Guard - with 410 troops and 146 vehicles, including high-water vehicles - to help with rescues, transport patients to medical care, and deliver personnel and equipment to where they're needed.

State transportation officials urged people to avoid travel anywhere in Western North Carolina. About 280 roads and dozens of main highways remained closed Sunday due to flooding, downed trees, landslides or storm damage. Parts of Interstate 40, a major thoroughfare into and out of the region, were closed Sunday, though a closed section of Interstate 26 was reopened. One section of the eastbound lanes of I-40, three miles from the Tennessee border, washed out and fell into the Pigeon River.

Images from newsrooms and social media showed submerged cars, houses floating down a muddled French Broad River, and the town of Chimney Rock seemingly erased by a mudslide.

Many mountain locations were drenched with more than 10 inches of rain, and some got as much as 29 inches. That brought catastrophic flooding, Cooper's office said. Adding to the devastation: winds that gusted up to hurricane strength.

At the Asheville station, the French Broad peaked at 24.67 feet Friday evening, a level surpassing the Great Flood of 1916, which the city says crested at 21 feet and killed 80 people.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Ames Alexander and Drew Jackson, Staff Writer, 'At least 11 dead; western NC gets disaster declaration', *Herald-Sun, The* (online), 30 Sep 2024 1A https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BED2C72672C218



Last week's Catawba County high school football games canceled, stuck in limbo

September 30, 2024 | Hickory Daily Record (NC) Author: Jason Koon | Section: High School | 200 Words OpenURL Link

Most area football games last week were rescheduled to Saturday in advance of Hurricane Helene and then again to Monday once it became clear there would be a long recovery process.

Now, with one exception, those games have been postponed indefinitely with schools still out and some area residents still without power.

The exception took place on Saturday night in Iredell County. St. Stephens High School dropped to 1-4 with a 14-7 loss to North Iredell.

Local athletic directors are looking to the North Carolina High School Athletic Association for guidance. They are also in conversations with the state association about extending fall sports by an extra week to make up canceled games.

In a statement, Hickory High School Athletic Director David Craft said the school would be making up the canceled game with North Lincoln at some point during the season. He said he didn't know when that would be except to say that it would not be this week. As of Monday morning, all week seven games in Catawba County are still scheduled to take place this Friday at there originally scheduled times.

For all other sports, games and practices are canceled for Monday. Beyond that, it will depend on school schedules.

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Jason Koon, 'Last week's Catawba County high school football games canceled, stuck in limbo', *Hickory Daily Record* (online), 30 Sep 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BEC186F006D878



Lenoir-Rhyne football stays undefeated with Sunday win over Tusculum

September 30, 2024 | Hickory Daily Record (NC) Author: Lenoir-Rhyne University Office of Athletic Communications | Section: Football | 205 Words OpenURL Link

Playing in a rare Sunday contest due to the effects of Hurricane Helene, the No. 6 Bears took down Tusculum University 37-23 at Shuford Stadium in Salisbury.

With the win, Lenoir-Rhyne moves to 4-0 (2-0 SAC), while Tusculum drops to 0-3 (0-2 SAC).

After falling behind 3-0 in the first quarter, Lenoir-Rhyne scored 21 unanswered points in the second to go into the locker room with a commanding lead. DeAree Rogers notched a receiving touchdown in the decisive period, Alex Boyd scored on the ground and Christian Santana added a pick six.

Tusculum struck first in the third, but LR answered with a Jake Brown field goal and another Boyd touchdown before Tye Roberson iced the game with a 32-yard touchdown run in the fourth.

Quarterback Jalen Ferguson went 23-for-34 with 351 yards and a touchdown. He is second in the South Atlantic Conference, averaging 268.3 passing yards per game.

Boyd set a career high with 77 rushing yards and two scores. Andre Jefferson finished with seven tackles, two tackles for loss and a sack. He now has 33.5 sacks in his career.

The undefeated Bears will visit Emory & Henry University on Saturday. The Wasps are coming off a 37-24 loss to Limestone. Kickoff is scheduled for 1 p.m.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Lenoir-Rhyne University Office of Athletic Communications, 'Lenoir-Rhyne football stays undefeated with Sunday win over Tusculum', *Hickory Daily Record* (online), 30 Sep 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BEC186ED041FC8>



Update: Maiden, Hickory football to play Wednesday, rest of last week's football games still in limbo

September 30, 2024 | Hickory Daily Record (NC) Author: Jason Koon | Section: High School | 292 Words OpenURL Link

The Maiden High School football game against West Lincoln originally schedule for last Friday is now on for Wednesday evening at 7 p.m., according to Maiden Athletic Director Caine Houser.

Hickory will also play North Lincoln on Wednesday at 7 p.m. and Newton-Conover will travel to Lincolnton, but most of the rest of the area's football games from last week are still up in the air. After being rescheduled to Saturday and then Monday because of Hurricane Helene and its aftermath, the games are now postponed indefinitely with schools still out and many residents still without power.

The only other exception took place on Saturday night in Iredell County. The St. Stephens Indians dropped to 1-4 with a 14-7 loss to North Iredell.

At the rest of the Catawba County's high schools, athletic directors are looking to the North Carolina High School Athletic Association for guidance. ADs are also in conversation with the state association about extending fall sports by an extra week to make up cancelled games.

Hickory's game against St. Stephens, originally scheduled for this Friday, has also been moved to Saturday at 6 p.m. As of Monday afternoon, all other week seven games in Catawba County are still scheduled to take place this Friday at their originally scheduled times.

The extra week may also apply to other fall sports which have been upended by the storm. All other sports, games and practices were canceled for Monday, but plans beyond that will depend on school schedules.

As of Monday afternoon, the Catawba County Cross Country Championship is still planned for Wednesday at 5 p.m. at Murrays Mill, according to Bunker Hill cross country coach Alan Sigmon. Sigmon said race officials would reevaluate the situation Wednesday morning and issue a statement if the race is postponed.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Jason Koon, 'Update: Maiden, Hickory football to play Wednesday, rest of last week's football games still in limbo', *Hickory Daily Record* (online), 30 Sep 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?
p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BEFE1F76E5E4E0>



Five Catawba County schools serving grab-and-go breakfast and lunch for kids

September 30, 2024 | Hickory Daily Record (NC) Author: Miya Banks | Section: Education | 62 Words OpenURL Link

Catawba County Schools will be serving grab-and-go breakfast and lunch at five locations today for ages 18 and younger.

Breakfast will be served between 8:30 a.m. and 9:30 a.m. Lunch will be served from noon to 1 p.m.

Food will be served at the following locations:

St. Stephens ElementaryMountain View ElementaryBandys HighMaiden HighBunker Hill High

Catawba County Schools are closed Monday after Tropical Storm Helene.

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Miya Banks, 'Five Catawba County schools serving grab-and-go breakfast and lunch for kids', *Hickory Daily Record* (online), 30 Sep 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BEC186EA179AB0>



Local crews help in storm aftermath

September 30, 2024 | High Point Enterprise (NC) Author: Paul B. Johnson ENTERPRISE STAFF WRITER | Section: News | 508 Words OpenURL Link

HIGH POINT — Firefighters and electric utility workers from High Point have answered the call to help their counterparts in the Southeast contending with catastrophic conditions in the aftermath of Tropical Storm Helene.

Ten High Point Fire Department firefighters are assisting in the greater Asheville area, where the flooding of the French Broad River exceeded the devastating 1916 flood. One crew of five High Point Fire Department firefighters has set up in the community of Swannanoa east of Asheville while another crew of five left Monday to assist in Asheville.

The crew in Swannanoa, who departed Saturday, has been assisting with emergency response and welfare checks at residences in the community, High Point Deputy Fire Chief Jayson Valade said.

"They are helping man that fire station serving Swannanoa," he said.

The crew in Swannanoa will remain at least through this Friday but could have their time extended.

The crew in Asheville will work from a ladder truck on emergency calls, Valade told The High Point Enterprise.

"The firefighters in the Asheville area are just burned out," he said.

The crew in Asheville will serve at least through this Sunday but could have their time extended.

Valade said the High Point Fire Department welcomes the opportunity to assist during an unprecedented crisis.

"When a community is hurting the way they are and they reach out for people to assist, we have always been willing to step up and help out by answering the call," Valade said.

Meanwhile, three crews with the High Point Electric Utilities Department went to help restore power in North Carolina and in two other states, Electric Utilities Department Director Tyler Berrier said. One crew of five workers has helped in Tallahassee, Florida, and Easley, South Carolina, while two crews of nine workers have worked in Cherryville and Shelby.

The three crews should bee away at least through the middle of this week, Berrier said.

The Electric Utilities Department has a track record dating back decades of providing mutual aid power restoration assistance to communities as far away as the Northeast U.S.

"We are really blessed to be able to help," Berrier said.

On Monday the United Way of North Carolina and the American Red Cross announced a collaborative campaign to raise donations for Helene relief. The effort involves the United Way of Greater High Point.

"This is a moment for our community to come together and provide the resources necessary for the long road to recovery," said Jane Liebscher, president of the local chapter of United Way.

Also on Monday, the High Point Rockers and Truist Point announced the core city baseball stadium will serve as a drop-off location for donations that will be distributed to Hurricane Helene victims in western North Carolina.

The relief efforts are being coordinated by the Cover the City Project in High Point.

Flood victims are in need of towels, tarps, nonperishable food items, feminine hygiene products, toiletries, water, cleaning supplies, baby formula and baby and adult diapers.

The Rockers will accept donations from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday at the front office location at 303 Gatewood Ave.

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Donating for Helene victims

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Paul B. Johnson ENTERPRISE STAFF WRITER, 'Local crews help in storm aftermath', *High Point Enterprise* (online), 30 Sep 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BEFDD7BB3931A0



Helene takes toll on trucking routes

September 30, 2024 | High Point Enterprise (NC) Author: Paul B. Johnson ENTERPRISE STAFF WRITER | Section: News | 210 Words OpenURL Link

TRIAD — Old Dominion Freight Line Inc. leaders are studying ways to cope with the loss of a major east-west trucking route as Tropical Storm Helene's wrath collapsed a section of Interstate 40 at the North Carolina-Tennessee line.

I-40 is closed in both directions for 43 miles between Exit 432 at U.S. 25-70-411 in Tennessee and Exit 20 at U.S. 276 in North Carolina, according to the N.C. Department of Transportation. Current estimates are that it will take a year to repair and reopen the section of expressway.

"We're still working through a plan at the moment to reroute freight that typically moves through that area," said Patrick Budd, manager of communications for the Thomasville-based national trucking company.

The tropical storm has directly affected Old Dominion because the company has a service center in Arden in the Asheville area.

"Right now, we're thinking of our neighbors, employees and customers in the impacted areas," Budd told The High Point Enterprise.

One alternative route for Old Dominion, other trucking companies and motorists is to take Interstate 81 to Interstate 26 and then back to I-40 in Asheville. Another alternative route is I-81 to Interstate 77 and then to I-40 north of Statesville. But either route would add several hours to the trip.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Paul B. Johnson ENTERPRISE STAFF WRITER, 'Helene takes toll on trucking routes', *High Point Enterprise* (online), 30 Sep 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BEFDD7B1CE9858



'Apocalyptic' damage seen across NC mountains

September 30, 2024 | High Point Enterprise (NC) Author: ENTERPRISE WIRE SERVICES | Section: Archives | 826 Words OpenURL Link

In the Western North Carolina town of Canton, Mayor Zeb Smathers has never seen anything like it.

"It is truly the worst storm we have faced, and not just us, but our friends across the mountains," Smathers said.

"The word I keep coming back to ... is apocalyptic."

The damage wrought by Tropical Storm Helene has left thousands without power, safe roads, cellphone service or potable water.

At least 35 people have died in Buncombe County alone.

Images from newsrooms and social media showed submerged cars, houses floating down a muddled French Broad River, and the village of Chimney Rock seemingly erased.

"I've never seen concentrated damage like we've seen here," said Chris Murray, an emergency manager from Pamlico County who came to help lead teams of rescuers. "There's nothing left. The village? There's just nothing left."

Desperate residents isolated by washed-out roads and the lack of power and cellular service in western North Carolina lined up Monday for fresh water and a chance to message loved ones that they were alive, days after Hurricane Helene tore through the Southeast and killed at least 121 people.

Government officials and aid groups were working to bring basic supplies by airlift, truck and even mule to reach the stranded.

Many main routes into Asheville were washed away or blocked by mudslides, including Interstate 40, and the city's water system was severely damaged, forcing residents to scoop creek water into buckets so they could flush toilets.

President Joe Biden has agreed to provide immediate federal help to 25 western North Carolina counties. The "major disaster" declaration, approved at Cooper's request, means FEMA will be able to provide quicker additional help to those who need it. The federal government says it will also reimburse local governments, state agencies and nonprofits for repairing facilities, roads and other infrastructure.

FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell was surveying damage with North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper on Monday and will remain on the ground in North Carolina until the situation has stabilized, as directed by President Biden, according to a FEMA news release.

Ten federal search and rescue teams were on the ground and another nine teams were on their way, for a total of more than 900 personnel supporting rescue efforts, the release said.

FEMA deployed 25 trailer-loads of meals and 60 trailers-loads of water to North Carolina and a C-17 cargo plane full of food, water and other commodities arrived in Asheville with a daily flow of commodities established via air bridge. Another 18 helicopters were on standby to help deliver additional commodities.

The tropical storm that was once Category 4 Hurricane Helene made it to North Carolina Friday and touched all parts of the state, but it caused historic levels of devastation throughout the mountains.

Floodwaters wiped out bridges, remote highways and sections of interstates — not only cutting off travel to and through the region, but isolating those sheltering in place during the storm.

In Asheville, residents were stunned to see houses and businesses swept into the Swannanoa River.

More than 200 people were rescued from flood waters, Cooper's office said. The governor has deployed the North Carolina National Guard — with about 550 troops, more than 100 vehicles and 11 aircraft — to help with rescues, transport patients to medical care, and deliver personnel and equipment to where they're needed.

Twenty-four shelters, with room for 1,000 people, have also opened. Information about shelters, road conditions, power outages and evacuation routes can be found at readync.gov.

State transportation officials urged people to avoid travel anywhere in Western North Carolina. About 280 roads and dozens of main highways had been closed due to flooding, downed trees, landslides or storm damage. One section of the eastbound lanes of I-40, three miles from the Tennessee border, washed out and fell into the Pigeon River.

"It will take a long time to fix that," Transportation Secretary Joey Hopkins said Sunday. "We're probably talking months at best."

More than 30 inches of rain fell in parts of Western North Carolina. Adding to the devastation: winds that gusted up to hurricane strength.

In Asheville, the French Broad River peaked at 24.67 feet Friday evening, a level surpassing the Great Flood of 1916, which the city says crested at 21 feet and killed 80 people.

However, the Lake Lure Dam, which was feared doomed to collapse on Friday, is stable and emergency repairs are set to begin.

At the peak of Helene's rains, a warning went out that the Lake Lure Dam was at imminent risk of failing, as water spilled over the top of its 124-foot tall structure. An evacuation order was issued for residents below, but the dam held. On Friday, an engineer assessed the dam and found the water level receding.

By Sunday, the water level was lowered an additional 3 and a half feet so emergency repairs could be made, according to Josh Kastrinsky, spokesman for the NC Department of Environmental Quality.

"The structure remained intact following the storm," Kastrinsky said in an email. "Water caused erosion on both sides of the dam abutments, but it was not undermined."

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• Citation (aglc Style)

ENTERPRISE WIRE SERVICES, "Apocalyptic' damage seen across NC mountains', *High Point Enterprise* (online), 30 Sep 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BEFDD7A7CBA328



Sports editor: Local sports feel the wrath of Helene but can help in the healing process

September 30, 2024 | McDowell News, The (Marion, NC) Author: Dan Crawley | Section: Football | 642 Words

OpenURL Link

All of western North Carolina continues to deal with the catastrophic flooding and loss of infrastructure associated with the remnants of Hurricane Helene that moved in.

The local sports scene is no different as many facilities from local recreational leagues to high school fields also have taken significant damage from the flooding with Helene. Burke and McDowell counties were hit very hard over a three-day period with rain in excess of 20 inches that fell along the area, according to the National Weather Service. The rain led to rapid rises of water all along the Catawba River.

In McDowell County, the most significant sports damage is focused on ball fields operated by the McDowell County Parks and Recreation. As of Sunday afternoon, more of the damage is becoming realized. The North Fork of the Catawba River widened as the storm peaked on Friday and brought a lot of damage into the valley in the Ashford and North Cove communities.

Sandy Andrews Park is one of the locations in North Cove that received extensive damage from the rapids that developed as the North Fork reached major flood stage on Friday. Other facilities owned by McDowell Parks and Recreation that may have been damaged include Lindley Park in Old Fort, which lies a matter of yards from the Catawba River. As the recovery efforts continue over the next few days, additional issues will likely be realized as we learn more about the true scope of the flooding.

Another area that was heavily impacted includes the practice and baseball fields at West McDowell Middle School due to the Catawba River's expansive reach.

According to U.S. Geological Survey data, the Catawba River at Pleasant Gardens had a record high crest of 21.66 feet Friday afternoon, nearly four feet above the previous record crest that occurred in 2004. That all results in several feet of water covering the practice football field and baseball field for the school. With the water now gone, all the debris and a muddy mess is left behind.

McDowell High School's athletic facilities as of Sunday has appeared to fare in better shape. The school, which is located on a ridge, was well away from the floodwaters. More will be known about the status of the high school fields once members of the school and athletic department can safely get out and inspect things.

Freedom High School dealing with flashbacks of 2004

In western Burke County, the flood damage associated with Helene brings back memories of 2004, but worse.

Lake James water levels peaked at 10 feet above full pond, according to Duke Energy, which forced an immense amount of water and debris down to the Morganton area.

Freedom High School was one of the areas hit hard. The Catawba River overtook both the football stadium and baseball field on Friday, sending water levels that may have exceeded the amounts witnessed during the September 2004 floods.

Other local school fields and recreational areas along the Catawba and Silver Creek areas in Morganton include Catawba Meadows, Catawba River Greenway, Catawba River Soccer Complex and Shuey Park.

Much like what we are seeing across McDowell County, the full scope of the tragedy will be known across Burke in

upcoming days and weeks.

Athletics may play a role in the healing process

The result is that sports across a large part of western North Carolina will be taking an extended hiatus until more pressing matters such as restoring infrastructure can be done. The priority right now is getting through this unprecedented disaster that has impacted everyone in a safe manner.

I do believe once we can get back to a resemblance of normalcy, local sports will do what it can do best and that's to galvanize the community again. Regardless as to whether you are a Titan, Patriot, Panther, Bear, Dragon, Wildcat or Cavalier, we will all get through this together and hopefully become a better community because of it.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Dan Crawley, 'Sports editor: Local sports feel the wrath of Helene but can help in the healing process', *McDowell News, The* (online), 30 Sep 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BEA6E901D87150>



Hurricane Helene hammers High Country

September 30, 2024 | Mountain Times, The (Boone, NC) Author: Staff Reports | Section: Mountaintimes | 56 Words OpenURL Link

Watauga County and the rest of North Carolina's Blue Ridge Mountaineers were devastated by the flooding that was caused by Hurricane Helene at the end of last week. Volunteers have come together to find as many ways as possible to help those in need.

Following are photos of some of the damage done by the storm:

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Staff Reports, 'Hurricane Helene hammers High Country', *Mountain Times, The* (online), 30 Sep 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BF6A88311673B8



Worst flooding in two centuries: Helene beats all records

September 30, 2024 | Mountaineer, The (Waynesville, NC) Author: Becky Johnson | Section: News | 218 Words OpenURL Link

The peak crest of the Pigeon River during Hurricane Helene flooding was the highest water level ever recorded in more than century.

The flooding that swelled the Pigeon River last Friday was worse than the floods of 2021 and 2004. Anyone who was around for those floods knows this — simply because how high the water reached during those floods is emblazened in their memory.

But river levels captured in real time during Hurricane Helene confirm just how much worse it was.

The Pigeon River crested at 25.8 feet at noon Friday, Sept. 28, 2024. This is compared to 19.6 feet in 2021 and 22.8 feet in 2004, according to the gauge on the Pigeon River just upstream of downtown Canton.

"If you are in or around anything water related, I would encourage you to consider going somewhere else. What we saw with Fred was creeks become streams, streams become rivers, and rivers become oceans," Canton Mayor Zeb Smathers warned Thursday evening.

The following data is for the river guage on the Pigeon River just upstread of downtown Canton.

2024: 25.8 feet Hurricane Helene

2021: 19.6 feet Tropical Storm Fred

2004: 22.8 feet Hurricane Ivan

2004: 20.7 feet Hurricane Frances

1940: 20.8 feet unnamed storm

1928: 16.4 feet Haiti Hurricane

1876: 18.3 feet unnamed storm
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• Citation (aglc Style)

Becky Johnson, 'Worst flooding in two centuries: Helene beats all records', *Mountaineer, The* (online), 30 Sep 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BEF735F46AE648



Worst flooding in two centuries: Helene beats all records

September 30, 2024 | Mountaineer, The (Waynesville, NC) Author: Becky Johnson | Section: On Premise | 42 Words OpenURL Link

The crest of the Pigeon River during Helene flooding was the highest ever recorded in more than century. The Pigeon River crested at 25.8 feet at noon Friday, Sept. 28 — compared to 19.6 feet in 2021 and 22.8 feet in 2004.

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Becky Johnson, 'Worst flooding in two centuries: Helene beats all records', *Mountaineer, The* (online), 30 Sep 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C048A337AA6590



Hundreds still without power locally

September 30, 2024 | Mt. Airy News, The (NC) Author: Ryan Kelly | Section: News | 1015 Words OpenURL Link

Hurricane Helene made her presence felt as she passed through North Carolina and dumped months' worth of rain across the region. In anticipation of the storm, schools had closed on Friday which alleviated one major headache that would have hampered emergency responses or worse, created more by having school busses on the road.

By Friday evening, many locales were seeing the sun but the storms impact on a normal Friday, to say nothing of Mayberry Days, was already complete.

Some of the most severe local impact from the storm was found in Elkin. Clean-up efforts there got underway quickly in downtown Elkin in the wake of flooding caused by heavy rains. Standard Street and Bridge Street had been closed on Friday as flood waters from the Yadkin River blocked access to the Gwyn McNeil Bridge.

On Saturday morning bridge access was reopened but Standard Street in front of the Heritage and Trails Center remained closed due to flooding. There were reports from local business owners of damage to buildings from the flooding and the Yadkin Valley Pumpkin Festival had to be cancelled.

Surry County Emergency Services Chief Eric Southern said Monday that the county stands by to assist neighbors in need to the west, "As the efforts in Western North Carolina continue, Surry County will continue to send resources and assets."

He shared data from N.C. Emergency Management's Monday morning update where officials reported 182 roads closed in Western North Carolina. "All- access to the area is closed to the public because of trees and washed-out roads." The report said that communication in the mountains is still limited in many areas and that no donations are being accepted at this time as there is not collection point available.

Crews from Mount Airy Rescue Squad and Elkin rescue squads were sent to assist in Ashe County, Surry County telecommunicators were sent to aid Avery County, and Surry County Emergency Manager Byron Isaacs was deployed to the area as well. On Monday, the Surry County morgue trailer was sent to the Black Mountain to assist.

Southern said he knows that people are looking for a way to help in any way they can but urges residents to heed the advisories from the department of transportation and resist the urge to just drive west looking for ways to pitch in. "Very grateful for the desire to help but the state has closed all roadways into Western North Carolina, and they will be turned away at the checkpoints. Search and recovery efforts are still on-going," he said.

The Surry County Emergency Services Department provided an update to residents before the storm had moved completed moving through the area. Surry EMS reported 332 calls related to the storm since Thursday night into Friday morning.

They reported there had been no injuries during Friday's extreme weather incident.

The most pressing issue for the majority of Surry County residents during the storm were a lack of power and downed trees and limbs blocking roadways.

Even Monday morning there were still calls being received by Surry County Central Communications about downed trees on power lines including in the 800 block of East Pine Street in Mount Airy. Resident Cindy Martin observed online that there had been limbs dangling above power lines in that area all weekend, "Just glad they didn't fall on anyone while driving."

The majority of local schools were closed to students for class on Monday but Surry County Schools and Mount Airy City Schools both announced meal service would be available. Some county schools even opened up access to locker rooms for those without power who may have needed access to a hot shower following the storm.

ReadyNC.gov reported Surry County still had 633 outages as of 11 a.m. Monday while Wilkes County was reporting 8,351. Stokes and Yadkin counties were both reported to have under 20 outages each.

Duke Energy said there were approximately 40 outages in Surry County keeping some 450 customers in the dark as of late Monday morning. The company's website gave an estimated time of restoration to services in Surry County as 7:30 p.m. Monday. Their data concurred with state info stating under 20 customers each in both Stokes and Yadkin counties were still affected.

Wilkes County still bore the brunt of the regional damage with over 5,600 customers still with power due to 1765 active outages. The estimated time to restoration for residents of Wilkes County is 11:45 p.m. Monday.

Surry-Yadkin Electric Membership Corporation reported 173 customers without power in Surry County and 783 in Wilkes County.

Blue Ridge Energy said in Alleghany County that 2,484 of their 9,835 served customers, or 25.25 percent, are waiting for their power to be restored following Helene.

Statewide there were still 463,087 outages reported across the state with Buncombe County, where hard hit Asheville is found, reporting the highest total of outages with 98,559. The website PowerOutage.us reported Monday that South Carolina still had over 760,000 customers without power, Georgia had 571,000, and Virginia had nearly 100,000.

Appalachian Power told its customers the utility is bringing in crews from outside the area to work to get service restored but as of 9 a.m. Monday, 117,500 customers remain without electric service.

Given the number of outages Appalachian Power is facing, they have released a rolling schedule of restoration estimates adding that as power is restored in their services areas, crews are moving over to the next area in need.

In Carroll County alone the company reported 227 outages affecting 11,154 customers including 2,093 in the area around Cana which has an estimated restoration time of 11 p.m. on Tuesday. Appalachian Power said, "Most customers without service will have power restored before the above estimates."

Nationally there have been over 100 deaths reported as a result of Hurricane Helene; 35 of those were reported in Buncombe County, home of Asheville. Areas of North Carolina's mountain communities saw record amounts of rainfall, some experts estimated that nearly four to five months of rain fell in some mountain communities in the 72 hours Helene's impact was felt.

The National Weather Service office based in Greenville-Spartanburg, South Carolina, offered a sobering assessment of the storm calling it, "the worst event in our office's history."

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Ryan Kelly, 'Hundreds still without power locally', *Mt. Airy News, The* (online), 30 Sep 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BEF949C807ADE8



Area groups offer residents chance to help those in Western North Carolina

September 30, 2024 | Mt. Airy News, The (NC) Author: Staff report | Section: News | 389 Words OpenURL Link

Area groups and residents are joining forces to help those in Western North Carolina devastated by damage from Hurricane Helene.

While many want to help, emergency officials ask that individuals do not head that direction, either to see the damage or on their own to deliver supplies. Most roads into the western portions of the state hardest-hit by the storm are either blocked by debris or washed out, and the few that are passable should be kept clear for emergency service workers.

Individuals wanting to help can best do so by donating money and items to legitimate organizations that can get help there. Locally, a number of groups are taking donations. Among those are:

- Northern Regional Hospital, in partnership with Bottomley Enterprises. The hospital has a drop-off location to collect water, canned food, and other non-perishable items for a local shelter. The location will be accepting items through 5 p.m.Tuesday, and is located in parking lot P-2 at the hospital, across from the Cardiac Rehab center of of South Street.
- The local REALTOR association is joining with other associations in the Triad area to collect items to send to the devastated area. The group is collecting water, non-perishable food, baby formula, diapers, towels, blankets, pillows, toilet paper, paper towels, soap, shampoo, dog and cat food, trash bags, cleaning supplies and feminine hygiene products. Area drop-off locations include Keller Williams Realty Elite at 108 S Davis St. in Pilot Mountain; Rogers Realty at 1310 EMS Dr. in Mount Airy; and Ann Chilton Realty, at 401 South Main St. in King.
- Mount Airy Wesleyan Church will be collecting similar items, along with bug spray, plastic sheeting and tarps, hand sanitizer and wipes, heavy duty work gloves, unopened socks, sunscreen, manual can openers, plastic utensils and sports drinks in powdered packets. The church will be collecting these items 9 a.m. Until 5 p.m daily through Friday at the church.
- Downtown Pilot Mountain will be collecting similar items, as well as new and good-condition used clothes in bags or boxes, contact solution, first aid items, laundry and dish detergent and similar items. The drop-off location is behind town hall, 124 W. Mai St. in Pilot Mountain.

If your group or organization is collecting items for Western North Carolina, send that information to John Peters at jpeters@mtairynews.com and the Mount Airy News will publish your group's work.

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Citation (aglc Style)

Staff report, 'Area groups offer residents chance to help those in Western North Carolina', *Mt. Airy News, The* (online), 30 Sep 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BEF949B9FE0DD8



Mayberry parade provides respite

September 30, 2024 | Mt. Airy News, The (NC) Author: Tom Joyce tjoyce@mtairynews.com| Section: News | 720 Words OpenURL Link

If ever folks needed an escape from reality, it was this past weekend in storm-battered Mount Airy — where the notion of retreating to the earlier, simpler time of Mayberry proved more than a tourism promotional pitch.

As makeshift signs posted outside downtown businesses communicated a common refrain of "Closed — no power," people sat in lawn chairs just feet away Saturday to enjoy a pleasant diversion: a parade of sights and characters associated with "The Andy Griffith Show."

It was a classic what-a-difference-a-day-makes situation. Just 24 hours before, this area was in the midst of a storm that produced heavy rains and high winds.

That combination was devastating to trees and utility lines, leaving an estimated three-fourths of the city without electrical service and parts of Surry County and Virginia equally battered.

Welcome weather

But the fabled new day dawned Saturday as the annual Mayberry Days Parade went on as scheduled to the delight of crowds certainly needing a break.

"You couldn't ask for a brighter day, I suppose," Trey Baucom of Chesterfield, South Carolina, said just before the event while making his way along North Main Street with wife Wendy as sunlight peeked through the clouds.

They were attending Mayberry Days for the first time although the couple had visited Mount Airy previously.

The two rode out the Hurricane Helene-induced storm in a camper while staying at a local campground.

Meanwhile, another couple, Jason and Betsy Helms of Abbottsburg, near Lumberton, had gotten up at 3:30 a.m. Saturday to drive to Mount Airy for the parade with their children Jason III and Staci.

"I'm surprised you can have it," the elder Jason commented in view of the bad weather.

But the annual procession of all things Mayberry always goes on despite whatever climatic conditions are hurled its way, including one year during a vicious rainstorm that drenched streets equally saturated with crowds.

Once here, the Helms family soaked up the Mayberry atmosphere.

"It's got good family values — it gives you that hometown feel," Jason observed. "We're from a small town, too."

Like many attendees, Jason and Betsy were wearing T-shirts paying homage to "The Andy Griffith Show." Jason's fashion choice was one bearing a phrase often emitted by Barney, "Nip it in the bud."

In addition to ones from the Carolinas and Virginia, license plates spotted on parked vehicles lining the central business district were from such states as Arkansas, Indiana, Ohio, West Virginia, Missouri, Illinois and more.

Comments from many locals positioned along the street seemed to be centered on continuing to be without power more than 24 hours after the brunt of the storm hit.

Plentiful parade

The Mayberry Days Parade offered a welcome diversion that was upbeat and full of good cheer, similar to that served up on the long-running television show.

Saturday's procession featured actors who had appeared on the 1960s-era program, along with those dressed as its various characters.

Ronnie Schell, better known as Duke Slater in the "Gomer Pyle.. U.S.M.C." sitcom that spun off from Griffith's show, was among those actors, with Schell occupying his usual perch in local resident Randy Moore's Army Jeep.

Also there were Margaret Teele, who played a character named Agnes Jean Parker, a member of a crime family Barney encounters while in Raleigh. Teele also has "Gomer Pyle" and "Batman" episodes to her credit.

Keith Thibodeaux (aka Richard Keith), who appeared as Opie's pal Johnny Paul in 12 episodes, was another Mayberry notable in the parade.

Daniel Roebuck, a regular on Griffith's later TV series "Matlock," also was a familiar face participating.

Others there were Dreama Denver, wife of Bob Denver, and Don Knotts' daughter Karen.

Those visitors occupied convertibles, generally older-model vehicles befitting the "Andy Griffith Show" period, who waved to admiring onlookers the length of North Main Street.

A group portraying the Darling family rode in a battered truck one might associate with the clan, while golf carts were the preferred means of travel for others.

Mayberry replica squad cars were spotted frequently Saturday.

The procession also was filled with costumed characters walking along the street impersonating Barney, Sheriff Andy, Ernest T. Bass, Floyd the barber, Otis the town drunk and others, who were duplicates in some cases.

Elements of humor further enhanced the much-needed joyous occasion, such as members of the crowd being asked by one of the costumed characters what Otis' favorite part of a baseball game is at one point during the parade.

The answer: The bottom of the fifth.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Tom Joyce tjoyce@mtairynews.com, 'Mayberry parade provides respite', *Mt. Airy News, The* (online), 30 Sep 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BEF949B5812C90



Storm causes some universities in state to close doors

September 30, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Korie Dean; Staff Writer | Section: News | 643 Words Page: 5A OpenURL Link

Some universities in western North Carolina will remain closed for at least a week due to the impacts of Helene, the storm that left much of the region devastated and destroyed.

UNC Asheville plans to remain closed until Wednesday, Oct. 9, Chancellor Kimberly van Noort announced in a statement posted to the UNC System's X account Saturday.

On Friday evening, a university emergency alert message said the storm "created multiple hazards on campus and significantly compromised university infrastructure." Van Noort said in her statement Saturday that "everyone is safe," but "parts of campus are inaccessible" and "cell and internet coverage is nonexistent at this point."

The university will provide "security, food, water and comfort" to students who remain on campus, van Noort said.

The city of Asheville remains under a curfew, in effect from 7:30 p.m. to 7:30 a.m. each night, until further notice. City officials are also advising residents to boil water used for human consumption, or to use bottled water.

More information is available on the university's Bulldog Alert website: new.unca.edu/bulldogalert.

The Appalachian State University campuses in Boone and Hickory will remain closed through 5 p.m. onFriday, Oct. 4, the university announced Saturday through an emergency alert message.

On the Boone campus, student residence halls remain open, with none of the buildings "structurally compromised." The central dining hall, campus markets, the student union, the student health center and the student recreation center also remain open.

Maintenance crews are roping off "dangerous areas" on campus, and those on campus are advised to not enter the areas once they are marked. Anyone doing so may face disciplinary action or possible arrest.

The university is asking those who remain on campus to conserve water by taking short showers, running dishwashers and washing machines only when they are full, and not leaving faucets to run.

The university also advises anyone who chooses to leave campus or the surrounding areas to "proceed with extreme caution, and keep the roads as clear as possible for emergency response vehicles."

Students, faculty and staff who live off-campus should not come to campus. Anyone in need of shelter should call 1-800-RED-CROSS.

More information is available on the university's App State Alert website: appstatealert.com.

Western Carolina University in Cullowhee will remain closed through Friday, Oct. 4, the university announced on social media Saturday. The closure also applies to remote students.

The university has power, water and food, according to a post the university made to X around noon Saturday.

Campus emergency services and student services will remain operational during the closure. Campus dining will also available with limited options.

The university advises students to not leave campus due to the closures of major roads and interstates in the area. The university also advises the parents and guardians of students to not attempt traveling to campus.

The campus University Center will be open from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. each day, where students may make landline phone calls as cellular and internet disruptions continue.

The university's website appeared to be down Saturday afternoon. The university will make additional updates through its social media channels, including on X (twitter.com/WCU) and Facebook (facebook.com/WesternCarolinaUniversity).

Lenoir-Rhyne University in Hickory will not hold classes on Monday, Sept. 30, the university announced Saturday. The closure applies to in-person and remote classes.

The university does not know when power will be restored to all of campus, and is thus advising students who are able to safely leave during the weekend to do so.

Minges Science Building, George Hall and the Rudisill Library will be open from 8 a.m. until midnight Saturday and Sunday, with power, internet and air conditioning available in each building. Rudisill Library will provide late-night programming, food and drink from 9 p.m. to midnight Saturday.

More information and further updates will be available at Ir.edu/news/hurricane-helene-storm-updates.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Korie Dean, Staff Writer, 'Storm causes some universities in state to close doors', *News & Observer, The* (online), 30 Sep 2024 5A https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BED40EF0770350



Western NC town of Clyde rebuilding - - again - after Helene

September 30, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Ryan Oehrli; Staff Writer | Section: News | 459 Words

Page: 1A OpenURL Link

CLYDE People in Clyde were rebuilding Saturday - again.

For many residents, it was their second time getting hit by a storm and having to start over. For some, it was the third. In 2021, Haywood County got hit by Tropical Storm Fred. Before that, Ivan in 2004.

But neither compared to what they saw after Helene, residents told The Charlotte Observer. Helene, which struck Florida as a Category 4 hurricane before dumping historic rain totals on western North Carolina as a tropical storm, washed out roads and brought untold damage to a swath of the state. Cellular networks and internet access remained limited.

The water line from flooding nearly reached the ceiling of a home on Broad Street in Clyde, where Brandon Patterson raked mud and trash out of his stepfather's home.

Patterson's stepfather, Tomas Quiroz, bought the house after Fred flooded it in 2021, hoping to fix it up.

Now he is back to square one, and his family says they will rebuild there.

Others on Broad Street were dealing with the same, familiar issues.

"We lost everything in the house just about," said Denise Dean, who lived just a few doors down from Quiroz, and who's lived on Broad Street for about eight years.

Unlike Quiroz, she's moving somewhere with higher ground. She's staying across the Pigeon River from her home after the storm. Her family has been in a hotel.

Nearby, husband and wife Lora and Mitch Nelson shoveled mud out of Lora's salon and barber shop, Superior Cuts, on Depot Street.

"That building never flooded before, if that tells you anything. They said FEMA and the National Guard are coming. But people've got livelihoods," said Mitch Nelson.

Lora Nelson's shop is plastered with mud. It's surrounded by buildings trashed by Helene. She's not sure how she'll be self-employed.

"It's devastating," she said.

There were some silver linings Saturday for people in Clyde.

Amy Russell and Lisa Monteith had about a dozen customers who, without any phone calls possible, just showed up to help.

Their pet food and dog training business flooded heavily - so much so that a bag of dog food found its way into someone's house on another street. They had the store for about three years, and already dealt with the "little flood," said Russell. There wasn't so much water then.

"We weren't expecting this," she said. "It's so heartbreaking."

Russell said they're planning to reopen the smaller shop for dog grooming and training, just around the corner, and move the retail inside that location.

Her customers helped to clean out both locations.

"Lisa says that a customer becomes a friend before a friend becomes a customer," Russell said.

Ryan Oehrli: @oehrli

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Ryan Oehrli, Staff Writer, 'Western NC town of Clyde rebuilding - again - after Helene', *News & Observer, The* (online), 30 Sep 2024 1A https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BED40EE87CB348>



Helene damage to North Carolina, by the numbers

September 30, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Joe Marusak and Drew Jackson; Staff Writer | Section: News | 235 Words

Page: 1A OpenURL Link

North Carolina is still adding up the damage done by the powerful tropical storm that started as Hurricane Helene.

The day after the extreme rain and winds stopped, the full tally was unknown. But even the partial count is eyepopping.

Deaths: 11, at least.

Landslides: 11.

Roads closed: 280 state-maintained roads, mostly due to flooding, including Interstate 40 and dozens of closures along several other U.S. and N.C. highway routes.

Flood water rescues: More than 200 people.

Homes with no power: More than 300,000.

State of emergency declarations: 29 counties, 52 towns.

Search and rescue teams from other states: 19.

Federal search and rescue teams: 3.

Top wind gust: 106 mph, Mt. Mitchell State Park.

NCDOT employees and contractors dispatched: More than 1,600.

Flight disruptions: Over 2,000 at Charlotte Douglas International Airport since Wednesday.

Shelters opened: 16.

People sheltered Friday night: at least 1,100.

Most rainfall: 29.5 inches, Busick Raws, Yancey County. (Many mountain locations saw at least 10 inches.)

Rocky Mount EF-3 tornado: 140 mph, 100 yards wide, quarter-mile-long path near Rocky Mount's Tiffany Boulevard.

Major disaster declaration request counties: 38, plus the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians.

Major disaster declaration approval counties: 25, plus the Eastern Band. President Joe Biden approved the declaration Saturday.

Sources: Gov. Roy Cooper's office; Duke Energy; North Carolina Department of Public Safety; North Carolina Department of Transportation; National Hurricane Center; National Weather Service, Greer, South Carolina, and Raleigh offices; Flight Aware.com; North Carolina State Highway Patrol; North Carolina Emergency Management.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Joe Marusak and Drew Jackson, Staff Writer, 'Helene damage to North Carolina, by the numbers', *News & Observer, The*(online), 30 Sep 2024 1A https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BED40F01AA3948



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At least 11 dead; western NC gets disaster declaration

September 30, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Ames Alexander and Drew Jackson; Staff Writer | Section: News | 748 Words Page: 1A

President Joe Biden has agreed to provide immediate federal help to 25 western North Carolina counties battered by Tropical Storm Helene, the White House announced Saturday night.

Gov. Roy Cooper said Sunday that at least 11 people have died in the storm.

"Tragically, we know there will be more," he said at a news conference Sunday afternoon.

"Many people are cut off because roads are impassable. They don't have power or communications."

The "major disaster" declaration, approved at Cooper's request, means FEMA will be able to provide quicker additional help to those who need it. The federal government says it will also reimburse local governments, state agencies and nonprofits for repairing facilities, roads and other infrastructure.

The counties in the declaration 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 Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians is also included.

Cooper had requested a disaster declaration for 38 North Carolina counties. It was not immediately clear why 13 of those counties weren't included, but Cooper's office said more counties may be added.

The tropical storm that was once Category 4 Hurricane Helene made it to North Carolina Friday and touched all parts of the state. It led to flash flooding in the Triangle, a tornado in Rocky Mount and historic levels of devastation throughout the Western North Carolina mountains.

The full extent of the damage in Western North Carolina continues to unfold. By Sunday morning, more than 300,000 homes in North Carolina - and more than 500,000 in South Carolina - remained without power.

On Sunday morning, Duke Energy said that nearly all of its customers outside of western North Carolina should have their power restored by midnight. Many will have power before then, Duke said.

Floodwaters on Friday wiped out bridges, remote highways and sections of interstates - not only cutting off travel to and through the region, but isolating those sheltering in place during the storm.

In Asheville, residents were stunned to see houses and businesses swept into the Swannanoa River.

"The people in western North Carolina are hurting from this devastating storm and we are all working to get resources to people as fast as we can," Cooper said in a news release Sunday. "We have deployed rescue teams, transportation crews, water, mobile kitchens and more. This is going to be a long-term recovery and this federal declaration will help us respond."

Many in Western North Carolina remained without fresh water, internet or cell service. Seven water plants in Avery, Burke, Haywood, Jackson, Rutherford, Watauga and Yancey counties are closed, according to a news release issued by Cooper's office Saturday night. That affects nearly 70,000 households.

A total of 17 water plants have reported having no power, while 23 more are operating on backup power. Many

Western North Carolina communities have been advised to boil water before using it.

Stay clear of western NC roads, officials say

More than 200 people were rescued from flood waters, Cooper's office said. The governor has deployed the North Carolina National Guard - with 410 troops and 146 vehicles, including high-water vehicles - to help with rescues, transport patients to medical care, and deliver personnel and equipment to where they're needed.

State transportation officials urged people to avoid travel anywhere in Western North Carolina. About 280 roads and dozens of main highways remained closed Sunday due to flooding, downed trees, landslides or storm damage. Parts of Interstate 40, a major thoroughfare into and out of the region, were closed Sunday, though a closed section of Interstate 26 was reopened. One section of the eastbound lanes of I-40, three miles from the Tennessee border, washed out and fell into the Pigeon River.

Images from newsrooms and social media showed submerged cars, houses floating down a muddled French Broad River, and the town of Chimney Rock seemingly erased by a mudslide.

Many mountain locations were drenched with more than 10 inches of rain, and some got as much as 29 inches. That brought catastrophic flooding, Cooper's office said. Adding to the devastation: winds that gusted up to hurricane strength.

At the Asheville station, the French Broad peaked at 24.67 feet Friday evening, a level surpassing the Great Flood of 1916, which the city says crested at 21 feet and killed 80 people.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Ames Alexander and Drew Jackson, Staff Writer, 'At least 11 dead; western NC gets disaster declaration', *News & Observer, The* (online), 30 Sep 2024 1A https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view??
p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BED40EEA727C50>