

## Despite false claims, no technology exists to create massive hurricanes, experts say

October 14, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Mary Helen Moore; Staff Writer | Section: News | 743 Words

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You may have read the falsehoods spread on social media suggesting people, not nature, created Hurricane Helene.

Though people do have the means to encourage rainfall on a small scale, no technology exists that would allow anyone to create a hurricane, experts say.

That's because hurricanes require massive amounts of energy to form, explained Chip Konrad, a University of North Carolina professor whose research focuses on the science of extreme weather.

"They're very strong, and they occur over a very broad area, and there's just a tremendous amount of energy that's required to create them and also to maintain them," Konrad said.

Helene originated from a thunderstorm in the western Caribbean first observed on Sept. 23, according to NASA. Its first recorded coordinates are around 1,500 miles from North Carolina, and the National Hurricane Center tracked the storm continuously.

When Helene made landfall Sept. 26, tropical storm-force winds extended more than 300 miles from its center. That's approximately the distance from Raleigh to Cherokee.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's research division says no weather modification technology could produce or steer such a storm.

"Hurricanes Helene and Milton, like all hurricanes, formed on their own due to the right conditions of sea surface temperature and upper atmospheric winds," NOAA spokesperson Monica Allen said in an email.

It takes months of heat over spring and summer to warm the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico enough to create powerful hurricanes, said Konrad, who also directs NOAA's Southeast Regional Climate Center.

"That energy gradually builds up, and that's what it requires to get a hurricane," he said. "Think about how big the oceans are. And it takes a long time in the natural world."

Conspiracy theories spread after Hurricane Helene

U.S. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, a Republican from Georgia, has amplified conspiracy theories on social media that suggest the hurricanes that have hit the Southeast this year are tools of voter suppression ahead of the 2024 election.

"Yes they can control the weather. It's ridiculous for anyone to lie and say it can't be done," Greene wrote Oct. 3.

Democratic President Joe Biden dismissed the idea Oct. 9 as "beyond ridiculous."

Greene followed up Oct. 8 with a link to NOAA's records of attempts at weather modification. The agency has tracked 1,026 such attempts since 1972.

The most common reasons listed on the site are increasing rain and snowfall by cloud seeding, "usually for the purpose of increasing the local water supply," according to NOAA.

That's typically done out west, not in the less drought-prone Southeast, Konrad said, and could never produce rainfall on the scale brought by Helene.

"The thing about cloud seeding is it can only be effective at a local scale. So, you could make it rain, maybe, a little bit more in one place, but you can't make it rain over a broad area," Konrad said.

Helene brought more than 10 inches of rain to much of Western North Carolina, but large areas saw 18 inches from the tropical storm and the rain that fell the two days before. The N.C. State Climate Office's highest measurement for Sept. 25 to Sept. 27 was more than 31 inches at Busick, in Yancey County.

The U.S. government did experiments decades ago that aimed to weaken hurricanes, not strengthen or create them, according to NOAA records.

In 1947, military scientists working with General Electric on Project Cirrus dumped crushed dry ice into a hurricane after it had passed over Florida into the Atlantic, according to NOAA. Instead of weakening, the storm strengthened and veered into southern Georgia. Experts were unsure if the swerve was caused by the scientists, but the public was outraged and the efforts were abandoned.

From 1962 to 1983, the government used silver iodide to weaken storms further from land under Project Stormfury. The results were inconclusive, according to an account published in the American Meteorological Society in 1985.

"Since then NOAA has done no weather modification," Allen said. "The primary concern about altering weather is that you could make things worse, such as the case of using nuclear bombs on hurricanes - a common recommendation NOAA receives from the public."

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## 'Still reeling.' Challenges are just beginning for some Western NC schools after Helene

October 14, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Rebecca Noel; Staff Writer | Section: News | 1292 Words Page: 4A OpenURL Link

Michael Luplow stood in front of FernLeaf Community Charter School two weeks ago, feeling optimistic. He thought the school had been spared the worst of Hurricane Helene.

But in less than 24 hours, the school - and his life's work - would be swept clean off its foundation.

"It was absolutely heartbreaking," he said of the school he launched in 2016 in Fletcher. "The Creek campus has been a big part of our identity from the beginning."

The campus in Henderson County sits surrounded by Cane Creek, where students in kindergarten through fourth grade would go for outdoor learning during the week. It's flooded before - but nothing like this. Outdoor learning spaces and athletic fields were washed away, and each of the campus's three buildings became unusable as 5 feet of water crept up the walls.

"The shared experience of watching the loss of this space is creating real, intense feelings for all of us," Luplow said.

FernLeaf is slated to begin classes again Oct. 16, but other nearby school districts will need more time. They're racing to get access to running water and get kids back in the classroom. And parents can't help but wonder whether this break from school might be as devastating for student learning as COVID.

Immediately after the storm, Luplow began trying to contact staff - a tall task when few people in the region had cell phone or internet service. They reached out via email, text, phone calls and, eventually, contacting neighbors and friends until they confirmed all staff and students were safe and accounted for.

"The two happiest days were when they told us that every staff member had been accounted for and then the day when they told us every student had been accounted for," said Lisa Spalding, a third grade teacher at FernLeaf.

Spalding says most staff members, including herself, still lack running water.

But not all is lost. The school has a second campus for middle and high school that 430 elementary school students will now share.

"We've been able to put together a really solid plan to allow for the least amount of disruption," Luplow said. "We are incredibly fortunate that we have been building our facilities to accommodate growth, so we have some flexibility."

Luplow still feels a personal connection to the Creek campus, but after Helene, he's hesitant to rebuild there.

"I would love to see us rebuild the Creek campus because it is such an integral part of who we are, but we're conscious that storms of this magnitude are on the rise," he said. "We know that what makes us who we are are the people."

What's the damage

Buncombe County Schools, the largest public district in the region and 13th largest in the state, aims to reopen its

campuses "as quickly as possible," but only 40 out of 45 schools had power as of Wednesday afternoon. Only 13 had running water.

"We've looked at every viable option we could imagine for the safest and quickest solution to get students back in school," Buncombe County Schools Superintendent Rob Jackson said at a community briefing Wednesday. "We've looked into sharing buildings that do have power and water, looked into partial day schedules and bussing students across the county."

The district, along with Asheville City Schools, is even considering assembling "flush brigades" of community volunteers to carry non-potable water to schools throughout the day to supply and flush their toilets. Both districts said they're ordering portable toilet trailers, though delivery dates have not been announced.

None of Buncombe County's campuses sustained catastrophic structural damage. Some classrooms need carpet replaced and one school saw flooding in its boiler room. Maintenance and facilities crews started repairs and removing downed tree limbs and debris blocking entrances, Chief Communications Officer Ken Ulmer told The Charlotte Observer.

Once some internet and cell service started returning, teachers, administrators and other staff teamed up to try to contact families and educators. As of Wednesday, the district had made contact with 100% of its staff and 98% of families.

"Communication continues to be challenging, but we're connecting with students everyday," Ulmer said. "I was able to connect to a student while I was at a water distribution site. We had several schools where teachers found spots where they had cell service and started calling."

Asheville City Schools initially announced it would close indefinitely, but Superintendent Maggie Furman said Wednesday the district wants to bring students back Oct. 28. It's drilling wells at each of its schools.

"While the city continues to make progress with the municipal water system, we can't wait until it is fully repaired to open our schools," Furman said Wednesday. "Yesterday, we began drilling a well at Hall Fletcher Elementary School and were able to hit groundwater."

She cautioned that it will still take two to three weeks before the district can start using that water in its buildings.

"I felt immense relief that there is some kind of timeline being announced because, at first, there was messaging that suggested we could be out for weeks and weeks," said Liz Tallent, a parent to two second-graders and one sixth-grader in Asheville City Schools. "There was basically a 100% communication blackout. It was really like we were transported to another era."

Tallent says she worries for teachers, most of whom still don't have water in their homes.

"I would almost call teachers first responders in this situation because they're having to make these huge sacrifices and get back to work for the sake of the rest of us," she said. "It really highlights the importance of schools. When there's no school, the whole community is at a standstill."

'Déjà Vu'

North Carolina has strict laws in place for when the school year can start and end as well as how many remote learning days are permitted. State Superintendent of Public Instruction Catherine Truitt announced she's requesting more flexibility for school districts after Helene from the General Assembly, including the ability to continue the school year past mid-June.

Tallent's sixth-grader was in first grade when the pandemic hit in 2020. She said Helene's damage feels similar - life grinding to a halt yet again in the face of a disaster.

"It really feels like déjà vu," she said. "I'm putting some of those lessons that I learned during the pandemic into practice now, which is not something I really thought I'd have to do again. I think I'm kind of in shock."

She's concerned about learning loss like kids saw during the pandemic, which schools are still recovering from. She's finding opportunities for her kids to do lessons with teachers. But she's worried for people who don't have those opportunities.

"This kind of thing, just like the pandemic, exacerbates the difference between those who have the resources and the bandwidth and those who don't," Tallent said. "It just widens the inequities that Asheville already struggles with."

Luplow said parents at his school are echoing some of Tallent's concerns.

"Parents are still reeling from some of the experiences from COVID," Luplow said. "They're concerned about learning loss."

# Pulling together

Luplow and Tallent said their communities have sprung into action, volunteering to clear away road blockages, clean rivers and get resources to people who need them most.

"With that heartbreak, also there's immediately been a sense of hope and optimism and opportunities to rebuild," said Luplow. "It's been astounding to watch."

Luplow said schools across the country have sent loads of school supplies to FernLeaf. Tallent said parents in her community have set up a GoFundMe for teachers in her area who may need help covering the cost of home repairs.

Still, they say, it will take years to fully recover.

"I think it's important for our community and the broader community to understand the true impact of this storm," Luplow said. "We need all the help we can get."

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## NC facility for migrant children freed up for FEMA's use in Helene relief

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OpenURL Link

A facility in Greensboro intended to be used to house unaccompanied migrant children will instead be made available to help with hurricane relief.

Sen. Thom Tillis and Rep. Richard Hudson led the nine Republican members of the North Carolina congressional delegation in asking the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to sign over a care facility in Greensboro to the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

On Wednesday, FEMA announced that transfer is taking place.

"This already controversial migrant facility has gone unused for years, which is why Rep. Hudson and I have been pushing the Biden administration to use it instead for Helene recovery efforts," Tillis said in a written statement to McClatchy on Wednesday. "I'm glad they've listened and this facility can now be put to better use by helping North Carolinians in their moment of need."

The facility in northwest Greensboro sits on 100 acres of what used to be the American Hebrew Academy. The school closed in 2019 after 18 years as an international boarding school.

Officials with the Department of Health and Human Services leased the facility to use for unaccompanied migrants who crossed the southern border.

Lawmakers like Tillis and Hudson questioned HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra on how he planned to keep both the community and the children housed there safe. These types of facilities have a long history of abuse allegations. Without definitive answers from Becerra or other HHS employees, Tillis and Hudson have loudly spoken out against the facility's use.

Despite that, the facility became operational to house minors in March.

But that never happened.

On June 23, HHS announced it was ramping down its operation of facility upkeep, though it would have to be ready within eight weeks of being notified that children would need to be housed there. It remains under that classification.

Tillis and Hudson reminded HHS of this when they asked the agency to transfer the facility to FEMA for use.

In a letter to Becerra and FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell, the lawmakers noted that the Greensboro facility has hundreds of beds and facilities for medical care, meals and education. It was created to hold up to 1,100 beds if needed.

"We believe that this ICF (Influx Care Facility) could be repurposed to support the state's rescue and recovery efforts," the letter stated.

They suggested using the facility for the thousands of people displaced by the storm, or as a staging area for aid workers.

The letter was signed by Sen. Ted Budd and Reps. Chuck Edwards, Virginia Foxx, Patrick McHenry, Greg Murphy, David Rouzer and Dan Bishop.

In a written statement, a FEMA spokesperson said transferring the Greensboro facility to FEMA is part of a "comprehensive, whole-of-government approach" to help those affected by the storm.

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# Harris packs supplies for Western NC in Raleigh before heading to rally in Greenville

October 14, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Tammy Grubb and Avi Bajpai; Staff Writer | Section: News | 641 Words Page: 2A

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RALEIGH Vice President Kamala Harris landed in Raleigh on Saturday to meet supporters and pack hurricane relief supplies as her presidential campaign resumed following Helene's devastating impact on Western North Carolina.

She was expected to spend Saturday night in Raleigh before heading east Sunday for a campaign rally. Harris is expected to speak at 4:40 p.m. Sunday in Greenville before returning to Washington later in the evening.

Harris arrived at Raleigh-Durham International Airport at around 5:45 p.m. Saturday and traveled by motorcade to The Pit Authentic Barbecue in downtown Raleigh. There, she meet with members of the Black community, politicians and faith leaders before helping box up several care packages of diapers, hand sanitizers and other supplies for Western North Carolina.

Last weekend she was in Charlotte on a similar visit.

Greg Hatem, owner of The Pit and founder of Empire Properties, said he worked with Harris' campaign to organize the relief effort. The campaign pulled together the group of supporters they wanted to meet with and have a conversation, he said.

"We took (a truck) earlier, mostly water and gas and basic supplies," Hatem said. "We're going to be taking a second truck, and we're working with the governor's office about what they need and where, so we put those two together - the campaign, Vice President Harris - we put those together to pack this, along with Empire Properties."

The collection drive will continue for a few weeks before the supplies are delivered to the N.C. mountains, he said. After that, they will start planning for how to provide mobile kitchens and construction labor, he said. They're also reaching out to chefs and other restaurant workers in Western North Carolina about how to set up temporary jobs, he said.

"It's such a community of people in the restaurant industry. Everybody knows everybody," he said.

North Carolina a battleground state

North Carolina is one of seven major battleground states that Harris and former President Donald Trump have been crisscrossing in recent weeks. The Harris rally Sunday comes ahead of the start of early voting here, which begins Thursday and runs through Nov. 2.

As part of her outreach in Eastern North Carolina, Harris is also tapping former President Bill Clinton to stump for her. Clinton will embark on a bus tour of the region targeting "hard-to-reach" rural voters between Oct. 17 and 20.

He's expected to appear at small-scale events like "local fairs and porch rallies," and will focus on the economy, CNN reported earlier this week.

Election Day is just 24 days away.

Trump, the Republican nominee for president, held a town hall in Fayetteville on Oct. 4, where he blasted the Biden administration's response to the storm.

As of Friday, the RealClearPolitics polling average showed that Trump has a very slim lead over Harris in North Carolina. The state has only supported Democratic presidential candidates twice in the last 50 years - former President Jimmy Carter in 1976 and for former President Barack Obama in 2008.

Harris and Trump, and their vice presidential picks - Democratic Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz and Republican Ohio Sen. JD Vance - have included the Tar Heel state in multiple campaign stops this year.

Those visits have been ramping up in the last few weeks, with Vance holding a town hall Thursday with voters in Greensboro. He is also expected to attend the Bank of America ROVAL 400 race at the Charlotte Motor Speedway on Sunday, according to WCNC Charlotte. This will be Vance's third visit to Charlotte in less than a month.

On Saturday, the Trump campaign announced that Vance will hold a rally in Wilmington on Wednesday.

Walz has not returned to North Carolina since Helene.

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## Helene, Milton show us how real climate change is. Let's fight it.

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I was mowing my lawn in Myrtle Beach as Hurricane Milton's outer bands and the tornadoes it brought with it began to lash Florida on Wednesday. Though the lawnmowing was trivial compared to the lashing, a slight inconvenience alongside a pending catastrophe, I couldn't help linking the two because of climate change.

In all my years as a homeowner, I don't remember mowing my lawn this consistently this late in the season. I took out the lawnmower, edger and clippers a couple of weeks ago as well. The hedges had regrown to heights they usually reach at the end of spring.

All it cost me was a few dollars of gas money and a sweaty T-shirt. No biggie. But a change in the climate, even a modest one, could dearly cost Myrtle Beach. Despite the draw of Broadway at the Beach, the SkyWheel and Ripley's Believe it or Not!, weather remains the top reason some 20 million people flock to the area every year. Sitting on the beach taking in the beauty of the Atlantic becomes less palatable without mild, stable weather.

The good news is that the fight to persuade people we are undergoing change is over. NASA says there is "no question that increased greenhouse gas levels warm Earth in response," even if scientists may not be able to say definitively that my lawn is changing or Milton's historic strength was directly caused by climate change because climate is more than just individual weather events. Now, nearly 80% of South Carolinians believe climate change is real, according to Winthrop University polling. That's higher than the national average of about 72%.

The bad news is that fewer of us are in agreement about its causes, what should be done, or if climate change is an urgent matter at all. While 55% of North Carolina residents believe recent extreme weather events are related to climate change, only 47% believe it's an emergency, according to High Point University polling. That's even while knowing rural areas are most vulnerable, which Hurricane Helene has unfortunately just illustrated in devastating ways.

In Florida, the gap is starker. While 90% of Floridians believe climate change is real, less than half would be willing to pay \$10 a month to strengthen that state's infrastructure to weather hazards.

In Congress, when Democrats talk about climate change or "green" projects, many Republicans criticize them. Only 13 House GOP members voted for the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, which represents the country's biggest investment in the climate change fight. More needs to be done, but President Joe Biden signed it into law just a couple of years after President Donald Trump spent his time in office rolling back such efforts.

It's akin to knowing an out-of-control freight train is screaming down the track. Instead of working to either try and stop it or get people out of the way, we're stuck arguing if it's really an emergency worth the sacrifice of short-term political wins or a few extra dollars to equip those who can mitigate the damage with the tools they need.

The truth is we've been forking over extra dollars anyway. Some of it has been in the form of having to mow the lawn and cut the hedges a few extra times, the kind of thing that feels small but will add up over time. We've even accepted the occasional house on the North Carolina coast falling into the Atlantic because of rising seas as a curiosity rather than calamity.

In other ways, it is easier to see that the freight train that is climate change has already arrived. In recent years, a variety of storms and other natural disasters around the nation have caused damage that is approaching nearly \$100 billion annually - the highest it's ever been.

While there is no way to say with absolute certainty the damage from Helene and Milton is a direct cause of climate change, we'd be fools to believe it isn't, and bigger fools to let partisanship stop us from committing to doing something serious and sustained about it.

Issac Bailey is a McClatchy Opinion writer in North and South Carolina.

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## With schools still closed, NC fifth grader's spirits lifted by teacher's special call

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BANNER ELK An eager fifth-grader, Molly Bloemendaal had already missed two weeks of school, huddling in her Banner Elk house without power, water or a good-work sticker.

From her front porch, she could see where the Elk River roared through town at 10 times its height, carrying off the town's water and sewer lines, ripping out bridges and roads.

School seemed out for good.

Then on Monday, Molly's mom handed her a cell phone, where her teacher Libby Gragg smiled from the screen.

"I miss you so much," she said.

Molly's face lit up inside her pink hoodie.

"Is your house OK?" she asked.

The wreckage from Hurricane Helene has canceled class across western North Carolina as the schools themselves were heavily damaged by rising water and sliding debris, and many of the remote mountain towns are still enduring power and water supply outages that could take months to repair - at least.

In Banner Elk, high above Boone in Avery County, the elementary school escaped heavy damage, but the town's 1,000 residents are surviving on bottled water, portable showers and toilets flushed with buckets carried from the Elk River.

At Banner Elk Presbyterian Preschool, a wall of water pushed through the walls and flooded the building. A Noah's Ark carpet hung ironically to dry over a ruined table.

"All my cubbies are gone," said teacher Jarrett Koski, better known as Mr. K. "One of my parents called and said, "Can you FaceTime with him, so he doesn't think Jesus came and got you?' "

'I love you. You take care.'

Molly's mother Nola Bloemendaal spends her day ferrying supplies around town, and when she stopped at the Best Western, a hub for meals and showers, one Avery County child told her, "I'm afraid all my friends are dead."

At Banner Elk Elementary, Gragg checked on every fifth-grader - talking to dozens like Molly.

"We have power but no water," the 10-year-old said.

"OK," Gragg said, "well, you tell your mom to get you over to our house."

At this point, Molly's mother jumped on the call to say her daughter was still wearing the crescent moon necklace the principal gave her before the storm.

"The electricity turned out for a second and then I could see it glowed in the dark," she told her teacher.

| "How neat!" Gragg raved. | "Well, I hear you are just making us all so proud. You've got that river spirit. The | he dreamer. |
|--------------------------|--|-------------|
| Way to go, girl."        |  |             |

"Where are you?"

"I am actually at Banner Elk Elementary. I was just checking in to see how you were because I miss you and love you and I want to see you soon."

"OK."

"OK, girlfriend. I love you. You take care."

"OK."

"Bye, Molly."

"Bye."

She clicked off the phone, revived for the moment by a 2-minute outreach.

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# Here are the new rides coming to the 2024 NC State Fair (+ what to know about tickets)

October 14, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Evan Moore; Staff Writer | Section: News | 529 Words Page: 6A OpenURL Link

The North Carolina State Fair is approaching, and fairgoers can expect to see some new rides and attractions this year.

The fair, scheduled for Oct. 17-27 in Raleigh, will feature nearly 100 rides. New attractions include a traveling musician and a spot to enjoy adult beverages made right here in the Tar Heel State.

Here's what to know about new fair rides and attractions in 2024.

What new rides will be at the NC State Fair this year?

There will be two new rides at the state fair:

State Fair Slide: A 210-foot slide

Candyland Adventure: A 130-foot long funhouse

What else is new at the NC State Fair this year?

The Strolling Piano one of the new attractions that will be at the state fair this year. The motorized piano will travel around the fairgrounds as a piano player takes request to play and sing popular songs. The Strolling Piano can be found near Gate 2 behind Dorton Arena near the SkyGazer Ferris Wheel.

Another new attraction comes courtesy of the N.C. Distillers Association, where fairgoers 21 and older can purchase North Carolina-made spirits and cocktails at the new Stillhouse Building located down from the Gate 7 entrance near Heritage Circle. Drinks will be \$15 and capped at two per person.

How can I buy ride tickets cards?

You can purchase ride ticket cards at the NC State Fair website (ncagr.gov/divisions/ncstatefair).

Ride tickets can be purchased at a discounted rate (\$10 for 18 ride tickets) until Oct. 17. Tickets will be \$1 each beginning Oct. 18. One-day unlimited ride wristbands can also be purchased for \$30.

You can also support Hurricane Helene disaster relief efforts while purchasing your tickets. All money collected will go to the MANNA FoodBank of Asheville, which lost its distribution warehouse in the hurricane. When purchasing fair tickets online, a "State Fair Cares" boxed link will pop up on the shopping cart page before you check out.

NC State Fair Ferris wheel and sky lift tickets

There are two rides that are not included with ride ticket cards or wristbands: the State Fair Flyer and the State Fair SkyGazer.

\* The State Fair Flyer is a permanent ride at the fairgrounds that offers a 14-minute round trip ride over the midway. One-way trip tickets are \$6 and round-trip tickets are \$9.

\* The State Fair Skygazer is a 155-foot Ferris wheel that offers sight lines of up to 15 miles at the top. Tickets are \$6.

How can I check the height requirements for each ride?

You can check the height requirements for each ride online at powersgreatamericanmidways.com.

Note: Wristbands are not recommended for children under 36 inches tall, as there are a limited amount of rides they can safely ride. Parents with children under 48 inches tall should check the height requirements before purchasing to determine if wristbands offer the best value for their children.

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## Lt. Gov. Robinson's scandal: No action taken, no answers given

October 14, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC)

Author: Paige Masten; Staff Writer | Section: Editorial/Opinion | 661 Words

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It's been approximately three weeks since news of Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson's disturbing online behavior surfaced in a CNN report. That's three weeks since Robinson vigorously denied the allegations, and since Republicans used Robinson's denial to avoid criticizing him.

According to CNN, Robinson posted lewd and racist comments on a pornography website more than a decade ago comments in which he called himself a "Black Nazi" and expressed support for reinstating slavery.

Republicans hedged by saying Robinson owed the people of North Carolina "answers" and called on him to provide concrete evidence that CNN's report was untrue. U.S. Sen. Thom Tillis, for example, called on Robinson to disprove the allegations and take legal action against CNN to clear his name. Hal Weatherman, the Republican nominee for lieutenant governor whose face is plastered alongside Robinson's on campaign signs across the state, also called on Robinson to prove his innocence.

Robinson says he has hired a legal team - led by a lawyer who represented Donald Trump in his attempts to overturn the 2020 election as well as in more recent legal battles - and vowed to go after CNN for spreading "salacious tabloid lies." Both Robinson and his attorney promised to move "quickly" in order to resolve the matter before the upcoming election. But that was nearly two weeks ago. Robinson has yet to provide any evidence or take any official legal action.

Robinson's campaign has not provided any further information about the matter, despite inquiries from various media outlets. WUNC reported that Robinson's campaign did not respond when asked for updates and a timeline on when the law firm might release its findings. A spokesperson for Robinson's campaign did not respond to my request for comment, either.

But Robinson and his campaign aren't the only ones who have remained silent on the matter. When the reports surfaced, Tillis even went so far as to issue an ultimatum: disprove the allegations by Friday, or the party needs to "move on." But it's been two weeks since that deadline expired, and Tillis has shown no sign of taking action on it. Tillis' office did not respond to a request for comment.

Weatherman, who said at the time that Robinson's "entire campaign strategy should be focused on proving the allegations false," did not respond to a request for comment, either. House Speaker Tim Moore has said he stands by his endorsement of Robinson, but Senate leader Phil Berger hedged when speaking to reporters last week.

Of course, other serious events have replaced Robinson's scandal in the news cycle. And, twisted as it may be, Robinson has seemingly tried to reap the benefits of those events. He has taken full advantage of the devastation in Western North Carolina caused by Hurricane Helene through photo ops and social media posts, even going as far as to improperly criticize the state's response and run Facebook ads with pictures of himself comforting flood victims.

Asked at a recent campaign event if he's filed a lawsuit against CNN, Robinson appeared to resort to more stalling tactics.

"Not yet, but that is coming and that's one of the things we plan on doing. We have a law firm handling that while we continue to campaign and help the people of western North Carolina," Robinson said, according to CBS 17.

Robinson may be trying to run away from his scandal, but that doesn't mean his fellow Republicans should let him.

Because as much as Robinson is stalling, they're stalling, too. It's far easier to deflect and delay than it is to take the more difficult step of criticizing one of their party's top candidates, let alone call for him to step down. If they dodge the matter altogether, they don't have to say what they actually think. It's the easier choice - and the cowardly one.

Paige Masten: 704-358-5027, paigemasten

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Paige Masten, Staff Writer, 'Lt. Gov. Robinson's scandal: No action taken, no answers given', *News & Observer, The* (online), 14 Oct 2024 11B <a href="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C37235D94102F8">https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C37235D94102F8</a>



## UNC relocated scrimmage takes somber turn after Davis injury

October 14, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC)

Author: Shelby Swanson; Correspondent | Section: Sports | 918 Words

Page: 1B OpenURL Link

Chapel Hill What should've been a celebration of the upcoming men's basketball season took a brief turn when returning All-American RJ Davis hit the floor after a heavily-contested shot at North Carolina's Blue-White Scrimmage on Saturday afternoon.

The reigning ACC Player of the Year was attacking the rim early in the second half when, following some contact, his body came crashing down to the hardwood.

After the game, UNC Athletics Communications clarified Davis suffered a lower-back contusion - essentially a bruise. Davis was not made available for comment following the scrimmage.

"Basketball play," freshman guard Ian Jackson said. "He got bumped, he fell down, lower-back I believe. He'll be fine. Number four is tough. He'll be good."

Overall, the Blue-White Scrimmage took on a somber, but uplifting, tone.

The Tar Heels wore warm-up shirts to honor Tylee Craft, a North Carolina wide receiver who died Saturday morning following a lengthy battle with cancer.

Originally set for Oct. 13 at Harrah's Cherokee Hotel & Casino Resort, the event was relocated to the Smith Center due to logistical issues following Hurricane Helene. The scrimmage became a fundraiser for hurricane relief efforts, raising more than \$121,230 in donations between ticket sales and the basketball programs' own contributions.

"It was super fun," Belmont University transfer Cade Tyson said. "Glad we got to go out there and compete against each other and get a first taste of what it's like in the Smith Center... the energy was definitely a little different but I enjoyed it and I think all my teammates enjoyed it."

Here are three takeaways from UNC's scrimmage:

Freshman duo continues to impress

Jackson and fellow freshman Drake Powell showed off their growing chemistry on Saturday.

In the final two minutes of the scrimmage, Powell used his length to corral an offensive rebound and quickly found Jackson in motion outside the perimeter.

Before Jackson's defender could close out, the former 5-star recruit had released his jumper.

Swish.

There were certainly more highlight-worthy plays. Jackson's strip of Elliot Cadeau and transition dunk - a flashy, two hand slam - late in the first half comes to mind.

But these routine connections between the freshmen are a more fruitful sign of cohesive play to come as the two hoopers, wildly different in personality, work to learn each others' nuances.

"It was a little bit awkward at first because, I don't know if you guys can tell, but I'm a pretty quiet type of person," Powell said with a laugh. "We gel pretty well together. We'll play 2K sometimes, the NCAA games, and that really translates to the court. We're still learning each other's spots - like where we can be the most successful. I think we can be a pretty good duo this upcoming season."

Cadeau said the team is on a "different level of athleticism this year because of the freshmen."

"I feel like they bring a lot of grit, toughness - and basically everything we need as a team this year," Cadeau said. "They're bringing it all."

Keep an eye on Seth Trimble

Jackson wasn't the only player showing off his hops on Saturday. Perhaps the most eye-popping play came from Trimble, who caught a body midway through the second half.

The dunk, a one-hand stuff over the outstretched arms of graduate forward Ty Claude, brought a number of fans to their feet. Cadeau, meanwhile, became so excited at the sight he slipped and fell. The point guard then got up ran back on defense - but not before throwing his hands on his head in an incredulous celebration. Trimble tossed his head back, yelled and flexed before locking back in on defense.

Trimble led all scorers with 19 points at a 53% clip. He added five rebounds and three assists and was the only Tar Heel to play the entire scrimmage.

The junior guard didn't speak to the media following the game, but his teammates - like Cadeau - did the talking for him.

"It don't surprise me at all," Cadeau said. "I feel like he does that every day in practice so it's kind of just letting the world see it and it's just fun watching it."

Cadeau said the biggest difference between Trimble this season versus last is his confidence.

"He's always been this skilled, he's always been very talented," Cadeau said. "I felt like his confidence is on another level and I feel like this year he's playing a much bigger role and he knows that. He's filling those shoes pretty well."

Cade Tyson isn't just a shooter

Tyson didn't make a single 3-pointer on Saturday, despite three attempts. While the performance didn't exactly reinforce his identity as a sharpshooter, it gave Tyson the opportunity to show off other aspects of his game.

The Belmont transfer came alive in the second half, recording 10 points by battling down low and getting out in transition.

Tyson also displayed his defensive versatility. He routinely matched up with, and held his own, against both guards and forwards on Saturday.

"I feel like my competitive nature and growing up with my brother [Denver Nuggests forward Hunter Tyson]," Tyson said. "I feel like that feeds into it a lot."

His teammates had high praise for the transfer and how he'll slot into Hubert Davis' system this season.

"He's been playing really well at the four position," Cadeau said. "He's been guarding, literally the one through four, every day in practice and he's been doing a really good job holding his own."

# • Citation (aglc Style)

Shelby Swanson, Correspondent, 'UNC relocated scrimmage takes somber turn after Davis injury', *News & Observer, The* (online), 14 Oct 2024 1B <a href="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C37235BB40F5E8">https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C37235BB40F5E8</a>



## Armed NC man charged with threatening FEMA officials working in aftermath of Helene

October 14, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Josh Shaffer and Lexi Solomon, News & Observer Section: weather news | 540 Words OpenURL Link

Sheriff's deputies near Lake Lure and Chimney Rock have arrested a 44-year-old man for threatening FEMA officials working in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene.

In a Monday news release, officials in Rutherford County said initial reports described truckloads of militia in the area, as was reported in several national media outlets.

They now believe William Jacob Parsons of Bostic, N.C., acted alone.

Speaking in Caldwell County Monday, FEMA Administrator Deanna Criswell confirmed there had been a "credible threat" to workers in Western North Carolina since Helene.

That team was pulled out of the area because of the threat, but Criswell said it only affected "one part of our mission" and would resume soon.

"There's been a lot of misinformation, and it's just not OK, right?" Criswell said. "The misinformation is just not OK, and any threats to anybody, and especially when we're faced with a situation where people have such great need, is really hurtful, and it just detracts from the ability to make sure we are meeting people where we are.

"It's heartbreaking to see people want to spread lies and hatred that impacts their ability to recover," she continued. "We are here to support the people of North Carolina. We are going to continue to be here to support the people of North Carolina. But we will take anything we deem a credible threat seriously, and I just appreciate the ongoing partnership with Gov. Cooper and local law enforcement to make sure that we understand all the facts as well."

A man with a rifle talking about harming FEMA agents

On Saturday, deputies said, an emergency call came into Rutherford County saying a man with an assault rifle was talking about harming FEMA agents.

Deputies and police tracked the threat to nearby Polk County, where they got a description of the suspect's car and later his license tag number.

Parsons, carrying a rifle and handgun, was charged with going armed to the terror of the public, a misdemeanor. He was released after posting a \$10,000 bond.

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

FEMA's response in NC after Helene

Chimney Rock suffered some of the worst damage from Helene after a wall of water took out most of Main Street. Debris filled Lake Lure, much of it destroyed buildings.

Since then, the town has also fought false rumors that government officials had seized it to obtain lithium - one of

many bits of misinformation surrounding the storm.

"What we are doing here in North Carolina is working," Criswell said. "We are getting people the assistance that they need to help with their recovery process, and as of today, FEMA has provided more than \$96 million to individuals across Western North Carolina.

"Just because you don't see somebody in a FEMA shirt does not mean FEMA has not been on the ground supporting," she continued. "We are just one part of the team, and we bring in the full federal team to help support."

This is a developing story. Check back for updates.

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Josh Shaffer and Lexi Solomon, News & Observer, 'Armed NC man charged with threatening FEMA officials working in aftermath of Helene', *News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles* (online), 14 Oct 2024 <a href="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C6027D6E18CFD0">https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C6027D6E18CFD0</a>



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

October 14, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Renee Umsted, News & Observer | Section: local | 313 Words OpenURL Link

Crabtree Valley Mall in Raleigh has several events planned this year to support communities in Western North Carolina that were affected by Helene.

The initiatives are part of the "M-All Hands on Deck" campaign, which was started by Pacific Retail Capital Partners, the group that manages Crabtree and other retail properties across the country.

Through the campaign, Pacific Retail Capital Partners hopes to raise funds throughout the holiday season for communities affected by hurricanes Helene and Milton. The company will also make a corporate-level donation to support recovery efforts.

"The devastation left by Hurricane Helene, and now Milton, is indescribable," Debora Overholt, general manager for Crabtree, said in a news release. "Our hearts are broken as we think about the lives lost and the catastrophic damage to our beautiful state and elsewhere. We are doing everything in our power to help those affected."

This campaign is one of many fundraising events benefiting Western North Carolina. The News & Observer is maintaining a list of ways to support communities impacted by Helene.

What is Crabtree doing to support Western NC?

Events and programming at Crabtree are targeted at raising money and awareness for the communities affected by the storm.

A portion of proceeds from a concert and silent auction will go to relief efforts following Helene. Details on the time and date of these events have not yet been announced. An "M-All Hands" art walk fundraiser, where local artists paint a piece that will be auctioned A giving wall that shows information about how to get involved Donation-based character meet-and-greets and guest appearances A portion of proceeds from holiday photos with Santa will go to relief efforts. Photos with Santa are available Friday, Nov. 8, through Tuesday, Dec. 24.

Ask NC service journalism team EMBED

Want to support Western NC? Check out these fundraisers, drives & other ways to help

Musician Ben Folds to hold concert benefiting Western NC. Here's when & where

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#### • Citation (aglc Style)

Renee Umsted, News & Observer, 'Raleigh's Crabtree mall will hold fundraising events to support Western NC. How to help', *News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles* (online), 14 Oct 2024 <a href="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?">https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?</a> p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C6027D68FA4F88>



# Dean's List: An inside look at UNC Chancellor Roberts' installation amid protests

October 14, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Korie Dean, News & Observer | Section: raleigh deanslist newsletter | 1722 Words OpenURL Link

Last Friday was a day of celebration at UNC-Chapel Hill. But, as has frequently been the case over the past year, it was also a day of protest.

The university celebrated its 231st birthday on Friday, during the annual celebration known as University Day. The day marks the anniversary of construction beginning at Old East, the university's first building, in 1793.

As has been tradition since 1957, University Day also serves as day new chancellors are installed to their position. With Lee Roberts being named the university's 13th chancellor in August, this University Day - the first of his tenure - marked the occasion for him to take his oath of office.

Inside Memorial Hall, the event offered a who's who of elected officials and higher education leaders from across North Carolina and the country, including former Republican Gov. Pat McCrory (for whom Roberts previously served as state budget director), state lawmakers, members of the UNC-Chapel Hill Board of Trustees and UNC System Board of Governors and several current and former university presidents and chancellors. Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper appeared in a video message offering his congratulations to Roberts.

The ceremony remained mostly calm, even as about 20 pro-Palestinian demonstrators silently stood up and raised their hands, which were painted red, in protest of the ongoing Israel-Hamas war and what they called "UNC's complicity in genocide."

Outside, though, the protests were much louder.

Welcome to Dean's List, a higher education newsletter from The News & Observer and me, Korie Dean.

In this week's edition, I'll recap what happened at UNC on University Day, share updates about recovery efforts at Western North Carolina colleges and universities and fill you in on a rezoning approval at Duke University.

Let's dive in.

Dispatches from University Day

Before Friday's ceremony even began, it was clear this University Day would be unlike others in recent memory.

While the ceremony typically begins with a processional of the chancellor and other university leaders from South Building into the Memorial Hall auditorium, this year there was no such walk. Guests arriving to the venue were instead greeted by metal fences creating a barrier between the sidewalk and the entrance to Memorial Hall, with several police from UNC and other universities, including UNC Wilmington and NC State University, standing nearby and around the building.

The campus chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine, which has routinely held protests and demonstrations on campus over the past year, had announced earlier in the week that it planned to picket the ceremony as part of a "week of resistance" to mark the one-year anniversary of the Oct. 7 Hamas attack on Israel.

The first picketers arrived outside the venue shortly before the ceremony was set to begin at 11 a.m., while other protesters inside filled seats in the middle section of the auditorium.

Before the ceremony began, an announcement played several times in the auditorium reminding attendees of university policy and state law on free speech, with a warning that those violating the mandates would be asked to leave.

toned1.jpgUNC system president <person value="APIN:3105283091">Peter Hans (right) installs new UNC Chapel Hill chancellor Lee Roberts during a ceremony on campus, Friday, October 11, 2024.

The protesters left the auditorium as Roberts began to give his speech. They joined the picketers outside, with the full group marching and chanting around Memorial Hall and surrounding buildings.

As the ceremony continued inside, Roberts used the campus landscape as a metaphor for how the university will grow and change, but remain true to its roots, under his leadership. Like the centuries-old trees that fill campus, the university cannot grow without its firm roots that "are anchored firmly in the rich North Carolina soil," Roberts said.

"The future of the university is found in the branches, reaching outward and upward, stretching toward new ideas, new fields and new communities," he said. "Yet the stronger the roots, the further the branches can reach, allowing us to touch more lives and create a canopy of opportunity across the state and beyond."

Roberts committed that he will "tirelessly protect and champion" the university's legacy as it enters a "new chapter."

After the ceremony, some attendees exited out of side or back entrances of Memorial Hall, as protesters remained in front of the venue. As guests, including Roberts, walked to neighboring Gerrard Hall for a reception, police used bicycles to block the brick pathways around the building to keep protesters out of the area, instructing students on their way to class that they would need to find a new route.

If you're looking for a longer read: Prior to University Day, I interviewed Roberts in his office and wrote this story about how he's building trust on campus - and why it remains a work in progress.

toned2.jpgPalestinian supporters rally outside the installation ceremony for new UNC Chapel Hill chancellor Lee Roberts on the campus in Chapel Hill, Friday, October 11, 2024.

Community colleges get \$2 million in Helene relief

The John M. Belk Endowment has committed \$2 million in funding to support the students, staff and faculty of community colleges in Western North Carolina impacted by Hurricane Helene, the North Carolina Community College System announced Friday.

The money will be divided into two buckets:

Nearly \$300,000 will be allocated for direct support of the 14 community colleges impacted by the storm. Each college will receive \$20,000 in the next two weeks "to help meet urgent local needs." The remaining \$1.7 million will be allocated for flexible support, funding "a variety of needs as identified by the system and colleges." Such needs could include transportation, childcare, food assistance, mental health support and "strategic consulting for emergency response." The flexible funding will be available in 2025 and 2026 "for continued recovery and rebuilding efforts."

"With many hands working tirelessly to address the immediate needs of organizations across western North Carolina, we are fortunate to have this partnership and funding in place," Jeff Cox, president of the NC Community College System, said in a news release. "It ensures our students and staff receive swift, flexible support to maintain the delivery of quality education throughout the recovery period."

How to help: If you're interested in supporting Western North Carolina community colleges on their road to recovery, the North Carolina Community College System continues to accept donations to its statewide Hurricane Helene Relief Fund.

App State Helene 1.jpgAppalachian State University was one of several campuses in Western North Carolina to sustain damages from Hurricane Helene.

App State heads back to class this week

Appalachian State University will be the first public university in Western North Carolina to return to classes after Helene, with instruction resuming Wednesday.

The university, in Boone, reopened Friday after being closed for two weeks in the wake of the storm.

"This is a significant event in our 125-year history, marking just how devastating the effects of Hurricane Helene have been on our community," interim Chancellor <person value="APIN:3135797922">Heather Norris wrote in a message Friday.

The two-week cancellation means that faculty and students lost 15% of instruction time for the semester, Norris said.

"Our job of education and student success is the core of our mission - we will do everything we can to meet the learning outcomes of each course this semester, to help our students reach graduation, and to ensure they have the knowledge, skills and abilities to be successful," Norris wrote.

For some members of the campus community, the loss of instruction is "compounded by being displaced from their homes," Norris wrote.

To help those who have lost their homes or need any other assistance as classes resume, the university has opened a Disaster Relief Hub on campus. The hub, located in the Plemmons Student Union and also available through an online option, aims to "help those displaced find housing and to connect people with resources - from FEMA assistance, financial aid and insurance guidance, to counseling and academic advising." The university has also distributed more than \$1.1 million in relief funds to members of the university community, thanks to donations to the App State Disaster Relief Fund.

"Our university and our mountains have a long road of recovery ahead, but we must remember that we have a long, 125-year history of perseverance and resilience," Norris said. "We have demonstrated - and we continue to demonstrate in the face of the most difficult of adversities - that we can and will move forward together."

As for other UNC System colleges in Western North Carolina:

Western Carolina University will resume classes next Monday, Oct. 21. The university will also fully reopen and resume normal operations at that time.UNC Asheville announced last week that classes will move online for the remainder of the fall semester, with instruction resuming Oct. 28.

Around the newsroom: Duke's Central Campus rezoned

The Durham City Council last week rezoned Duke University's 155-acre Central Campus, setting up a major redevelopment of the area in the coming years, my N&O colleague Mary Helen Moore reports.

Central Campus, near the Duke University Medical Center, will now be zoned as University and College, or "UC," which would allow the university "to build nearly anything that could conceivably serve a college campus, from dormitories to utilities to hotels to stadiums."

The university says nothing is planned for the area yet. Its development plan said it may include "all uses under the zoning district," but promises not to build structures above 90 feet, or roughly eight stories.

You can read more about the rezoning in Mary Helen's report here.

Screenshot 2024-10-08 141254.pngDuke's 155-acre Central Campus was rezoned on Monday, Oct. 7, 2024. The university says it doesn't yet have plans for the property.

Higher ed news I'm reading

Like many other colleges around the country, public universities in North Carolina are required by policy and law to remain neutral on political and social issues. Inside Higher Ed has a helpful explainer on "institutional neutrality" - and what's behind the major push for colleges to adopt it.

See you next week

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

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# Under the Dome podcast: What NC lawmakers said about Helene response, relief and helping

October 14, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Dawn Baumgartner Vaughan, News & Observer | Section: politics government | 240 Words OpenURL Link

Start your week in North Carolina politics with our latest Under the Dome podcast, for the week of Oct. 14, 2024. Dawn Vaughan here, your podcast host and The News & Observer's Capitol bureau chief. On this episode, I'm joined by my politics team colleagues at the General Assembly, Kyle Ingram and Avi Bajpai.

There was a lot of action in a short amount of time this past week as lawmakers unanimously passed the first wave of Hurricane Helene disaster relief.

We share what it was like on the floor of the Senate and House as lawmakers put the focus on the people of Western North Carolina. That includes some lawmakers who live there, and the vibe was almost entirely one of being grateful and helpful to others.

Plus, listen to a clip from Senate leader Phil Berger talking about things being done right in the aftermath of the storm outweighing any problems.

We also bring you up to speed on the latest in lawsuits.

Headliner of the Week

Stay tuned to the end for our picks for Headliner of the Week. Bajpai and Ingram return to their favorite type of Headliner: movies. I talk about recent goings-on with the Capitol Press Corps, including the NC Insider's recent event and the departure of CBS-17's Michael Hyland.

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

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## Here's every step in NC's absentee process, from requesting your ballot to counting votes

October 14, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Kyle Ingram, News & Observer | Section: voter guide | 1162 Words OpenURL Link

Absentee voting has been a feature of North Carolina elections for decades. This year, however, it may be even more important as voters displaced or otherwise affected by Hurricane Helene seek to cast their ballot amid the destruction.

In recent years (and especially in the last few weeks since Helene hit), misinformation has spread about the safety and integrity of absentee voting.

To get a closer look at the process, The News & Observer watched the absentee ballot mailing and receipt process at the Wake County Board of Elections office on Oct. 8.

While processes can vary slightly between counties, state law broadly requires that all absentee ballots be dealt with the same way throughout the state.

Here's every step of the absentee process, from requesting the ballot, to having your vote counted on Election Day. BOE04-100824-EDH.jpgAbsentee ballots are ready to be sent out at the Wake County Board of Elections Operations Center in Raleigh, N.C., Tuesday, Oct. 8, 2024.

#### 1. Voter requests an absentee ballot

Absentee ballots are only sent to registered voters in North Carolina who request them.

Some states, like California, automatically send absentee ballots in the mail to all registered voters. Here, however, voters must request an absentee ballot through the state's online request form or by filling out an official paper request form.

Voters requesting an absentee ballot must sign their request and include their date of birth and either a driver's license number or the last four digits of their Social Security number.

Election workers will check and validate a voter's registration before mailing them an absentee ballot.

A voter's near relative or legal guardian may also submit the request on the voter's behalf.BOE06-100824-EDH.jpgAbsentee ballots are prepared to be sent out at the Wake County Board of Elections Operations Center in Raleigh, N.C., Tuesday, Oct. 8, 2024.

#### 2. Poll workers pack and mail envelope

Poll workers pack envelopes to send to voters containing their ballot and instructions on how to fill it out.

Using a voter's address, poll workers determine which of the over 2,300 ballot styles they will use to vote.

Each packet includes a container envelope which voters will use to include their ballot and a photocopy of their ID. If voters don't have an ID, they can fill out an ID exception form, which is also included in the packet.

The completed packets are then mailed to voters across the state.

BOE03-100824-EDH.jpgAbsentee ballots are prepared to be sent out at the Wake County Board of Elections

Operations Center in Raleigh, N.C., Tuesday, Oct. 8, 2024.

#### 3. Voter fills out absentee ballot

Once they receive their absentee ballot in the mail, a voter marks their preferences just as they would if they were voting in-person.

However, state law requires absentee voters to have two witnesses or a notary present when they fill out their ballot. Those witnesses will also need to sign the envelope.

As mentioned earlier, voters will also need to include a photocopy of an acceptable form of voter ID in their ballot envelope or fill out an ID exception form.

BOE01-100824-EDH.jpgAbsentee ballots are prepared to be sent out at the Wake County Board of Elections Operations Center in Raleigh, N.C., Tuesday, Oct. 8, 2024.

#### 4. Voter delivers absentee ballot to county elections board

Voters using an absentee ballot can either deliver it by mail or in-person at their county board of elections office.

All absentee ballots must be received by 7:30 p.m. on Election Day, Nov. 5. State election officials recommend sending absentee ballots at least a week before the deadline to ensure the postal service delivers them in time.

Voters from the 25 counties in the federally declared disaster area from Hurricane Helene can deliver their absentee ballots to any county board of election office in the state - not just the one in their home county.

All voters who vote absentee can track their ballot using an online service called BallotTrax.

#### 5. Election workers conduct initial audit of absentee ballots

Once ballots are received, election workers check for any immediate deficiencies in the envelope. If there are any rips, signs of tampering or loose or unsealed ballots in the envelope, staff can present the packet to the county board for inspection.

Correctly returned envelopes are then checked for ID documentation. If none is provided, staff will reach out to the voter to request more information.

Staff also check that voters have signed their container envelope and included two witnesses or a notary. If any of that information is missing or filled out in the wrong section, it would be presented to the board.

If the voter's signature is the only thing missing, staff can send a cure certification letter to the voter and present that ballot to the board once they receive the completed letter.

#### 6. Bipartisan county board members check and approve absentee ballots

After the staff audit, bipartisan county board of election members check and approve absentee ballots at weekly public meetings.

County boards of elections are currently structured to have three Democrats and two Republicans.

Individual board members check once again that each ballot includes an ID, signature and witnesses. Any special cases must be considered by the full board before they're approved.

For example, any voter who completed an ID exception form will have their ballot considered by the full board.

Those ballots can only be rejected if the board unanimously decides that the voter provided false information on the form.

BOE07-100824-EDH.jpgWake County Board of Elections members Keith Weatherly, left, and Gerry Cohen inspect an absentee ballot during a board meeting at the Wake County Board of Elections Operations Center in Raleigh, N.C., Tuesday, Oct. 8, 2024.

7. Election workers open envelopes and prepare ballots for processing

The approved ballots are taken to election workers, who unseal the container envelopes and straighten the ballots so they can be

entered into the counting machine.

BOE10-100824-EDH.jpgBoard of Elections workers open, straighten and flatten approved absentee ballots at the Wake County Board of Elections Operations Center in Raleigh, N.C., Tuesday, Oct. 8, 2024.

8. Bipartisan board members deliver ballots to counting machine

Board members from each party then deliver the ballots to a high-speed counter, where they are scanned.

However, votes are not actually tabulated until Election Day.

BOE09-100824-EDH.jpgWake County Board of Elections member Gerry Cohen inspects an absentee ballot during a board meeting at the Wake County Board of Elections Operations Center in Raleigh, N.C., Tuesday, Oct. 8, 2024.

9. Ballots are sealed in boxes

The voted ballots are sealed in boxes, with seals signed by each board member. Those boxes are then stored in a ballot cage, which is under 24-hour video surveillance and requires employee badge access and an alarm code.

BOE08-100824-EDH.jpgWake County Board of Elections chair Erica Porter and Board of Elections member Keith Weatherly inspect absentee ballots during a board meeting at the Wake County Board of Elections Operations Center in Raleigh, N.C., Tuesday, Oct. 8, 2024.

10. Reports are tabulated and reported on Election Day

The county board will meet at 5 p.m. on Election Day, where it will tabulate the absentee votes. Those results will then be uploaded at 7:30 p.m. on the State Board of Elections' website.

Under The Dome embed (2022)

New Under the Dome newsletter subscriber embed (graybox)

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## • Citation (aglc Style)

Kyle Ingram, News & Observer, 'Here's every step in NC's absentee process, from requesting your ballot to counting votes', *News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles* (online), 14 Oct 2024 <a href="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?">https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?</a> p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C8A4FF004152A8>



## Here's the answer to every question you have about the 2024 NC State Fair

October 14, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: N&O Service Journalism Team, News & Observer | Section: things to do | 2799 Words OpenURL Link

Welcome to North Carolina State Fair season. Learn the basics and get familiar with the new stuff before heading to the fairgrounds this year.

You can get additional info about the fair at ncagr.gov/divisions/ncstatefair/2024.

When is the NC State Fair? What are the hours?

The fair begins Thursday, Oct. 17 and ends Sunday, Oct. 27.

Hours:

Thursday, Oct. 17: noon-11 p.m.Friday, Oct. 18 - Saturday, Oct. 19: 9 a.m.-midnightSunday, Oct. 20 - Thursday, Oct. 24: 9 a.m.-11 p.m.Friday, Oct. 25 - Saturday, Oct. 26: 9 a.m.-midnight Sunday, Oct. 27: 9 a.m.-11 p.m.

How much do NC State Fair tickets cost?

Tickets can be purchased online at a discount until Thursday, Oct. 17, and there are walk-up locations available from until Oct. 17 to purchase tickets at this rate. Gate prices are a bit higher, beginning Friday, Oct. 18.

Adult (ages 13 to 64): \$10 through Oct. 18, or \$13 at the gate beginning Oct. 18.Military adult (ages 13 to 64): \$8, but they can only be bought at the gate after Oct. 18.Youth (ages 6 to 12): \$5 through Oct. 18, \$7 at the gate after that.Child (ages 0 to 5): Free.Senior adult (ages 65+): \$5 anytime.

Groups can buy discounted tickets. Group adult tickets are \$8 each when bought in groups of 40 or more, while group youth tickets are \$4 each when bought in groups of 40 or more.

FAIR06-101223-EDH.jpgAaron Bumphus carries his son Kayden, 2, while they walk around the N.C. State Fair in Raleigh, N.C., Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023.

Are there any NC State Fair ticket discounts?

Adult or youth groups of 40 or more can get ticket discounts (see above).

These passes must be purchased online by Thursday, Oct. 17:

Dizzy Pass: \$38 includes a FastTrack gate admission ticket and an unlimited ride wristband, only valid for one day during the 2024 State Fair.Kegs & Corks Pass: \$17 includes a gate admissions ticket and an NC Public House Beer + Wine ticket, which provides your choice of a 16 oz. craft beer or a 6 oz. wine.State Fair Flyer Package: \$17 includes one gate admission ticket and one round-trip State Fair flyer ticket, which is not valid for carnival rides.State Fair SkyGazer: \$14 includes one FastTrack gate admission ticket and a SkyGazer (Ferris wheel) ticket, which is not valid for carnival rides.

And there are a couple of days when some folks can get into the fair for free:

Senior Citizens' Day (Tuesday, Oct. 22): Seniors aged 65+ get free admission. Bojangles biscuits and coffee will be served at 9 a.m. on the Dorton Arena Patio near the Waterfall.Smithfield Foods Hunger Relief Day (Thursday, Oct.

24): Bring six cans of food and get in free. Since Hunger Relief Day began at the State Fair in 1993, fairgoers have donated more than 6 million pounds of food to the Food Bank of Central & Eastern North Carolina.

We sampled the new foods at the 2024 NC State FairDrew Jackson, food reporter at The News & Observer, and Evan Moore, service journalism reporter at The Charlotte Observer, sample the new foods that will be available at the 2024 North Carolina State Fair.

Are rides or games included with my NC State Fair ticket?

Rides and games require separate purchases.

Games are cash-only, and you purchase tickets for the rides.

You can also purchase wristbands for rides (except for the SkyGazer Ferris wheel and Flyer). Wristbands can be bought online for \$30 in advance or for \$40 during the fair (online or in person).

• For ride tickets: Visit the ticket plazas (neon green tents with stars on top) near Gates 7, 8 and 9 or in front of Dorton Arena.

Ticket plazas are open daily 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. (minus Thursday Oct 17, when hours of operation differ slightly). Carnival ticket plazas, located in each Midway, will be open during Carnival operating hours.

How can I buy ride tickets for the NC State Fair?

You can purchase these tickets online (and at a discount) before the fair, or you can buy them in-person when you arrive for the fun.

• Ride ticket cards, which rolled out last year, take the place of the ride ticket sheets the fair has used for years.

Tickets will be placed on a chipped card, which needs to be presented at each ride and automatically debited the ticket count for that ride. These cards will now carry over from year to year, letting you use last year's unused tickets and even save some for next year.

Ride ticket cards are \$10 for 18 ride tickets bought online through Thursday, Oct. 17, then they're \$1 per ticket at Ride Ticket Plazas (or \$18 for 18 bought online) during the fair.

When the fair begins, ride ticket cards will be available online and in person at Ride Ticket Plazas. (More on those below.)

• Ride wristbands are \$30 per wristband when bought online by Oct. 17, then they're \$40 per wristband Oct. 18 and beyond, whether purchasing online or at carnival booths in person. Wristbands are valid only for one day during the Fair.

What's the NC State Fair lunch pass?

Here's how the Weekday Lunch Pass Program will work in 2024:

Enter through Gate 9 off Trinity Road or Gate 1 off Hillsborough Street between 11:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. on a weekday. Purchase a lunch card at the gate for \$20. Lunch cards are cash only (and previously \$10). Visit the food vendors for lunch (there are dozens of new offerings). Return the lunch card by 1:30 p.m. to the same gate used for entry on the same day it was purchased. Get a full \$20 refund for the lunch card.

Important reminders:

If you leave after 1:30 p.m., you forfeit your \$20. No food is included in the program. The cost only covers admission to the fair.

FAIR05-101223-EDH.jpgRicky Hinton cooks turkey legs at McBride's Giant Turkey Legs tent at the N.C. State Fair in Raleigh, N.C., Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023.

Which new foods are coming to the NC State Fair this year?

This year's list is studded with collisions from two great eating forces - fair food tradition and TikTok. You can thank those forces as you stroll through the fair sipping on pickle-flavored Dr. Pepper.

Other trends seem to include breaded bologna fries, pickles in just about every kind of situation and new plates of nachos. Somehow, this year's roster of fair foods even includes deep fried spaghetti.

For our run-down of new fair foods for 2024, visit newsobserver.com/living/food-drink.

Can you pay for food at the NC State Fair with a card, or is it cash only?

Many vendors take credit cards, but some only take cash. There are ATMs on the fairgrounds.

If you only brought a card, or if you only brought cash, there would be plenty of food options.

A tip: Having some cash on hand is always smart, because when the fair gets busy, the wireless network tends to slow down. ATM lines can get long too.

Can I park for free at the NC State Fair?

Yes. There are a number of parking lots that let you park for free, and some have a shuttle that will take you to the fairgrounds, so you won't have to walk.

Here are the free parking lots:

Dogwood Lot Cardinal Lot Carter-Finley Stadium Lenovo Center

Note: There may be exceptions if events are scheduled at Carter-Finley (no NC State home football games are on the schedule) or Lenovo Center (there are concerts scheduled for Oct. 18, 19, 25 and 26).

Can I take free shuttles to the NC State Fair?

Yes. The fair will offer several park-and-ride shuttle options from off-site parking lots to entry gates at the fair.

Shuttles will be offered to and from these lots, which will also have accessible shuttles available.

Dogwood Lot: The shuttle drops visitors off at Gate 8 of the fair. The address is 4501 Reedy Creek Rd. in Raleigh. Cardinal Lot: The shuttle drops visitors off at Gate 7 of the fair. The address is 5766 Chapel Hill Road Rd. in Raleigh.

Both lot hours are from 9 a.m. until one hour after gates close each day. (Hours slightly differ on Thursday, Oct. 17.)

Shuttles will not be offered at Carter-Finley Stadium or the Lenovo Center. Remember, there may be exceptions to daily free parking at these lots if there are events scheduled at these two sporting arenas.

101221-FAIR-INSPECTIONS-TEL-04.jpgWorkers assemble the Wacky Worm ride Tuesday, Oct. 12, 2021 at the NC State Fair in Raleigh. The North Carolina fair opens on Thursday and inspectors with the labor department must insure nearly 100 rides meet safety standards.

Can I pay for parking to be closer to the fairgrounds?

Yes. There are some privately operated options near the fairgrounds that charge for parking.

During the fair, residents near the fairgrounds often convert parts of their private property into small parking lots. These lots provide additional parking options, but you will have to pay.

Can I take a GoRaleigh bus to the State Fair?

Yes. GoRaleigh shuttles will carry passengers to the state fairgrounds from the Triangle Town Center Shopping Mall, 5959 Triangle Town Blvd. in Raleigh, near the Dillard's parking lot. The shuttles will run every 30 minutes daily from 8:30 a.m until the fair closes.

Here are the prices for the shuttle:

Round trip: \$50ne way: \$4 Seniors 65 and older and passengers with disabilities: \$2.50 round trip or \$2 one wayChildren under 40 inches tall: Free

You can pay with cash or by using the UMO app. The GoPass is not valid on State Fair routes.

Advanced sale passes are available through the UMO App or in-person and can be purchased at the GoRaleigh operations facility, 4104 Poole Rd. in Raleigh, or at GoRaleigh Station in downtown Raleigh.

When are the fireworks at the NC State Fair?

Nightly. Attendees can enjoy a firework show every evening at 9:45 p.m. over the Heritage Circle Pond.

RAL\_101218-FAIR-TEL-03.JPGShawn Rychcik and his son Ajay, 11, of Apex ride the State Fair Flyer on opening day of the NC State Fair Friday, Oct. 12, 2018 after Thursday's opening day was cancelled due to weather associated with Hurricane Michael.

What kinds of rides are at the NC State Fair?

The fair will have nearly 100 rides ranging from thrill rides for adults to slow, small rides for children.

There will be two new rides this year:

State Fair Slide: A 210-foot slideCandyland Adventure: A 130-foot long funhouse

What is the Village of Yesteryear?

The Village of Yesteryear is an area set aside for artisans who preserve skills and crafts from past generations. Their slogan: "Preserving art of the past for generations of the future."

Crafters include glass blowers, jewelers, painters, basket weavers, potters and sculptors, wood carvers and much more.

More than 75 artists and crafters are featured. This year, seven crafters will be celebrated who have been in the Village for 35 years or more.

The majority of the crafters in the Village of Yesteryear are from North Carolina, and many are from the mountains. (See below on how you can support them after Hurricane Helene's devastation.)

The Village of Yesteryear is located near the Heritage Church and Folk Festival, close to the Midway. It's most easily accessible by Gates 6, 7 or 8.

(Note: On the other side of the fairgrounds - on the Hillsborough Street side behind Dorton Arena - the North Carolina Pottery Tent features pottery for sale made only by potters from the state.)

How can I support Western NC after Helene at the fair?

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

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

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

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

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

FAIR01-101223-EDH.jpgThe sun sets at the N.C. State Fair in Raleigh, N.C., on Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023.

Are dogs/pets allowed at the NC State Fair?

Pets are not allowed at the fair, but service dogs are welcome.

Can I buy alcohol at the NC State Fair?

Yes. North Carolina craft beer and wine are sold at the NC Public House, located on the south side of Dorton Arena.

There's a limit of one Beer+Wine ticket per person per visit to the Public House. One Beer+Wine ticket, which costs \$10, provides you with a choice of two servings of wine (3 oz. each), beer or cider (both 8 oz. each).

A Kegs & Corks Pass, which can be bought for \$17 online ahead of the fair, provides one Beer+Wine ticket and one gate admission ticket.

Note: You may bring your own food into the State Fair, but alcohol is prohibited.

State Fair Slide.jpgThe State Fair Slide will be 210 feet long.

Can I rent wheelchairs and strollers at the NC State Fair?

Yes. You can rent scooters, wheelchairs and strollers at the fair, but they cannot be reserved in advance.

Prices and details from Raleigh's Mobility Concepts LLC:

Electric scooters are \$60.Wheelchairs are \$20 and available in medium and large sizes. Children's transport devices are \$20. Strollers are available in single and double capacity. CuddleCars are only available in single capacity.

Reservations will not be accepted in advance. Instead, patrons can visit tents located around the fairground to pick up and/or drop off equipment. Devices will be issued in a first come, first served capacity.

These will be located inside ticket booths at Gates 1, 7, 8, 9 and 10.

(Note: The accessible parking lot is located near Gate 10.)

Patrons must give another item as collateral - such as car keys, a photo ID or a cash security deposit - when reserving an item. The collateral will be returned to the customer upon rental drop-off.

Attendees may also bring their own wheelchair, scooter, stroller or child's wagon. Golf carts are prohibited.

How accessible is the NC State Fair?

Buildings: All modern buildings at the Fairgrounds have been modified to standards set by the Americans with Disabilities Act. There are some historical buildings in Heritage Circle that are not up to ADA standards.

Bathrooms: There are changing tables in all bathrooms.

Universal changing tables are in the Scott Building and the Agri Supply Exposition Center. Family restrooms are in the Martin Building and Agri Supply Exposition Center. Mothers' rooms are in the Scott and Martin buildings and the Agri Supply Exposition Center.

Parking: Accessible parking is available near Gate 10.

Visitors with handicap permits should park in the paved parking lot at the corner of Blue Ridge Road and Trinity Road, near Gate 10 of the Fairgrounds. There are more than 100 parking spaces designated for use by visitors with disabilities in this lot, but a valid handicap permit is required. Visitors can access the Fair through Gates 9 and 10.

AccessABILITY Day will be held on Sunday, Oct. 20.

From 9 .m. to 1 p.m. this special event will include:

Rides and games will operate with no lights or music playing. Vendors will operate with no lights or music at their booths. Music stages will only play acoustic sets with light amplification. The public address system will only be used for lost visitor announcements.

Throughout the whole day:

An indoor "Chill Out Zone" in the Graham Building will have tables and chairs, low lighting and soft music. Noise canceling headphones will be available for checkout in the "Chill Out Zone." Inclusive and/or adaptive "on the spot" competitions will be held.

What is the NC State Fair's bag policy?

Clear bags are strongly encouraged. Here's what the fair's website says:

A modified clear bag policy will be in place in 2024. This policy is only in effect for the N.C. State Fair in October and does not extend to additional events held at the N.C. State Fairgrounds.

The N.C. State Fair will operate two security checkpoints at each gate. Those fairgoers who bring a clear bag will go through a much quicker inspection, while those with an opaque bag will go through our bag search line. In an effort to get you into the fun as quickly as possible, please bring your items in a clear bag. There is no size limit to the clear bag being accepted.

What are you allowed/not allowed to bring to the NC State Fair?

Allowed:

Food and drinkWater bottlesDiaper bags with baby/toddler suppliesYour own wheelchair, scooter, stroller or child's wagonMedications

Not allowed:

Alcoholic beveragesDrugsFirearms knives, brass knuckles, batons and/or weapons of any type Golf cartsPets (minus service dogs)

Can I bring my own food to the NC State Fair?

Yes, outside food and drink are allowed, with the exception of alcohol. All bags are subject to a search policy, the fair says.

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

Popular NC State Fair lunch pass program sees big price hike this year. What to expect

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## Catawba Falls trail closed again due to Hurricane Helene; one overlook washed away in storm

October 14, 2024 | News Herald, The (Morganton, NC) Author: MIKE CONLEY nconley@mcdowellnews.com| Section: Travel | 371 Words OpenURL Link

Catawba Falls trails near Old Fort reopened in late May after a two-year closure for improvements. Now, the trails are closed again after Hurricane Helene swept through as a tropical storm and devastated the area.

Despite the damage, the newly built stairs that take visitors to the waterfalls remain largely intact.

The U.S. Forest Service's Grandfather Ranger District manages the Pisgah and Nantahala national forests. In response to the widespread damage caused by Helene, all recreation sites on the Pisgah and Nantahala now remain closed until hazardous conditions improve and assessments can be completed, according to the website for the U.S. Forest Service.

That includes Catawba Falls near Old Fort. The trail leading to the falls had previously been closed for two years as it underwent major improvements to add retaining walls, boardwalks, staircases and overlooks to improve the trail and visitor safety. About 580 stairs, three overlooks and an observation tower were added. It reopened May 31 this year.

Lisa Jennings, the recreation manager with the Grandfather District, said the stairs that were built to Catawba Falls only suffered minor damage from Helene and are 90% intact.

The upper overlook was washed away by Helene but the staircase and the tower were untouched, Jennings said. The U.S. Forest Service will need to further inspect the stairs and the trails as the process of reopening moves forward, she said.

"There will need to be additional assessments and repairs and/or bypasses around damaged sections prior to opening," Jennings said. There is no timeline as to when the Pisgah National Forest and Catawba Falls could open again, she said.

"Visitors must heed those closures," Jennings said.

Jennings said Catawba Falls and the surrounding national forest will not reopen until the Old Fort community is ready to welcome back visitors.

Old Fort suffered heavy flooding and damage during the storm.

"We will be working with local officials and emergency managers to reopen Catawba Falls as soon as feasible so that the community can have the recreation support that drives much of its economy" Jennings said. "However, we know that will take time. Damage to infrastructure in this area was major. The fact that the majority of the new staircase and overlooks were not damaged is some good news in an otherwise tough time."

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MIKE CONLEY nconley@mcdowellnews.com, 'Catawba Falls trail closed again due to Hurricane Helene; one overlook washed away in storm', *News Herald, The* (online), 14 Oct 2024 <a href="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?">https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?</a> p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C342A3609BC740>



## Morganton farmer lost acres of crops, Burke County nursery damaged by Helene

October 14, 2024 | News Herald, The (Morganton, NC) Author: Chrissy Murphy| Section: Business| 611 Words OpenURL Link

Jeff Houk is a third-generation farmer. His family has lived on land around Morningstar Church Road in Morganton since his grandfather bought it in 1920.

In the 60 years Houk has farmed the land, he's never seen flooding like what came during Hurricane Helene's onslaught.

"The other day when I was down here, I was crying and stuff," Houk said.

Flooding carved wider banks for the nearby Silver Creek, taking a chunk out of the land where Houk plants his corn. Of the 7 acres planted, Houk thinks he lost about 2 acres of the crop. Some of his soybean crop was damaged, but not as much as the corn.

In his cow pastures, trees toppled onto the fencing. Houk had to put down one of his cows after he believed she broke her hip or back trying to get over a fallen log.

But looking at the damage Wednesday, nearly two weeks after the storm, Houk said he now feels grateful the damage to his farm was limited.

"Now that I've went other places and seen the loss, mine ain't nothing," Houk said.

Houk, president of the Burke County Farm Bureau, said he hasn't been able to make it out to many of the farms in the county to see how widespread damage is.

Mike Causey, NC Insurance Commissioner, said early estimates showed there could be about \$7 billion in crop losses.

In Burke, Caldwell and McDowell counties, damages for the agriculture industry are estimated to be about \$70 million in plant nurseries alone, NC Cooperative Extension Burke Center Director Spring Williams-Byrd said

At Fitzgerald Nursery, just north of Morganton on N.C. Highway 181, this is usually the busiest time of the year. Owner Mike Fitzgerald said workers are usually loading up three or four tractor trailers full of plants a day.

But since floods from Helene caused waterways like Upper Creek to rise, workers are spending time cleaning up the fields instead.

Flooding destroyed many of the nursery's 1-gallon plants that were ready to be sold. Other plants are littered with trash and debris that was swept downstream with the flooding. Some plants still have roots in the ground, but Fitzgerald said it could take a couple weeks before signs of damage show.

The impact of the flooding on the nursery could be seen for years, Fitzgerald said. Most of the plants the nursery grows take four to six years before bring harvested and sold.

He estimated property damages and lost revenue to be more than \$1 million. He said at least 50% of the nursery's farms were damaged.

"That's just us, and everybody else is in pretty much the same boat, or worse," Fitzgerald said. "We're lucky to have

some farms on higher ground."

Despite the losses here and to the west, Houk said he feels confident farmers will recover. He said he's passed truckloads of farming supplies like hay, gates and fencing materials headed west on Interstate 40 when he's transported supplies to towns that were hit hard by the hurricane.

"The farming community's going to come together and take care of each other," Houk said. "There's outreach all over. The farmers will stick together and help each other out, and the majority of the people will overcome."

At Houk's Green Hill Farm, he's hopeful he can salvage most of his crops and has faith things will be better next season.

"My daddy never got excited," Houk said. "He'd pick up the pieces to what was left and just rebuild and do whatever it takes to move back on. You can't quit. When you farm, you get in it to stay in it.

"If you're a true, dedicated farmer, you gotta get in it to stay. You've just got to take the good with the bad."
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## Burke seeking advice on FEMA reimbursement for Hurricane Helene expenses

October 14, 2024 | News Herald, The (Morganton, NC) Author: Sharon McBrayer | Section: Government Politics | 374 Words OpenURL Link

Since Hurricane Helene hit Burke County as a tropical storm, the county's bills have started to rack up.

The county hired a hauling service to pick up storm debris throughout the county. The estimated cost of debris removal is \$3 million to \$5 million, Burke County Manager Brian Epley said. The county will likely start getting billed for the service in the next month.

Another expense: County employees have worked overtime on storm-related issues. There are 156 county employees working on storm management who have been working 18 hours a day doing regular jobs in addition to storm management, Epley said. The team has worked at least 12 days straight without a day off.

The county also bought supplies such as ice and generators that failed because of flooding.

The county may get some of those expenses reimbursed by FEMA, Epley said. To get those reimbursements, the county is looking to contract with a firm to guide it through the process.

The county is seeking bids for comprehensive disaster recovery management services. The county would work with the service for up to three years, with two additional one-year optional renewal periods. The closing date for the bid requests is Oct. 24, according to county documents.

"The FEMA process for us may go on for two years," Epley said.

He said there are so many things to consider when it comes to getting reimbursed for storm damage, including tracking time county staff spend working on the storm, debris removal, all the emergency response and administrative work.

Epley said there are a variety of applications the county has to fill out on the FEMA website, be approved, and then go through a complicated process of submitting invoices for reimbursement. Many counties impacted by the storm will go through the process, Epley said.

"There are a tremendous amount of regulatory compliance metrics that have to be done appropriately to ensure that we govern, rebuild the right way and remain whole financially for what we do," Epley said. "And so this RFP will allow us to onboard (a firm) who's an expert in this industry, who can advise us on what's in our best interest, and then anything we pay to them contractually we also can file reimbursement for it. We expect to get that back."

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# Crews working on temporary bridge to Marion IV fluid plant; it is among 450 damaged in hurricane

October 14, 2024 | News Herald, The (Morganton, NC) Author: Chrissy Murphy | Section: Health Care | 839 Words OpenURL Link

Crews across western North Carolina are working to make communities accessible about two weeks after Hurricane Helene whipped through the state. One major project is reopening a bridge to Baxter International in McDowell County. The plant produces much of the country's IV solutions.

Nathan Moneyham, division construction engineer for the NC Department of Transportation's Division 13, said damage to roads in western North Carolina was significant, but crews are making improvements. Division 13 includes McDowell, Burke, Mitchell, Rutherford, Buncombe, Madison and Yancey counties.

"We're working every day to get as much open as we can," Moneyham said.

Tim Anderson, division engineer, said NCDOT has identified about 450 bridges or large pipes in the division that were damaged in the storm.

Anderson said the department's 2,100 employees along with contractors have been working to clear major state roads and make repairs to damaged roads and bridges, including in the North Cove area of Marion.

"We were able to open up several of our large primaries, including I-40 across Old Fort Mountain, early on," Anderson said. "We've got a whole lot left to do. It's going to take some time to pull together our contractors, get some of those larger repairs designed and get those executed and get folks to work."

On Wednesday, crews were working on a temporary bridge on Pitts Station Road off U.S. Highway 221 over the North Fork of the Catawba River to give residential community access to their homes and allow tractor-trailers to access the Baxter Healthcare facility that uses Pitts Station Road as its access point.

During Helene, flood waters washed out the foundation of the original bridge and toppled its supports, Moneyham said.

Baxter makes about 74% of the saline bags for hospitals in North America, Anderson said.

"When the bridge was compromised, they couldn't get their inventory out," Anderson said. "They sustained some damage inside they're working on, but they've got to be able to get that equipment and get those tractor-trailers out so they can serve the nation."

Baxter was forced to limit how much IV fluids hospitals can order in the wake of the storm, according to press releases from Baxter International.

Moneyham said Baxter worked with NCDOT and a contractor to build a temporary bridge to get into the business until a more permanent solution was built.

In a release Wednesday, Baxter said it has eased some allocation limits for products but is still limiting how much customers can buy at once. The company is monitoring stock levels and ramping up production at other facilities, the release said.

Baxter said it hopes to restart production at the North Cove facility in phases and get customers back to 100% allocation on some IV products by the end of the year. The company is already working to restore the

manufacturing plant.

On Oct. 7, Baxter said it had not found any structural damage to the North Cove facility, power and water was restored and cleanup was in progress. The company expects to have a production plan in the next two weeks, the release said.

"We will spare no resource — human or financial — to restart operations and help ensure patients and providers have the products they need," said Baxter CEO Joe Almeida.

NCDOT is working on a longer-term, temporary bridge until permanent repairs can be made, Moneyham said. He said the temporary structure would be in place for about a year to a year and a half while a permanent bridge is built. NCDOT hopes the temporary bridge on Pitts Station Road will be ready in about a month, he said.

Anderson said NCDOT employees have been adapting to the challenges throughout the storm. When the power went out, NCDOT offices had generators. When cell services went down, staff in Raleigh made it possible for western North Carolina employees to use satellite phones instead.

"It's just been a Herculean effort by our folks and the entire community," Anderson said. "Our staff in Raleigh all the way to the governor, they've been here since day one. Supporting us there, supporting us here in the field, and without that, we wouldn't be where we are at this moment. I just can't say enough about what they do for us."

He said NCDOT is making emergency repairs first, then moving to long-term, temporary repairs, and finally making permanent repairs. There isn't a timeline yet for how long repairs could take.

"It's a process, and it does take time," Anderson said.

While repairs are underway, Anderson said people should only travel when it's essential in the hard-hit areas of Burke, McDowell and other mountain counties.

"There's a lot of folks wanting to help and a lot of folks bringing help, and that's great to see the community outpouring from across the state and across the Southeast. It's nothing short of inspiring to see how much folks care," Anderson said. "But keeping that travel to essential travel only so that our dump trucks can go up and down the road and folks can get back to life. Especially on the one-lane roads, ... extra traffic is not very helpful."

Check www.drivenc.gov for updated road closures and traffic conditions.

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# FEMA opens recovery center in Lenoir

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The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) opened a Disaster Recovery Center (DRC) in Caldwell County on Saturday, Oct. 12. The center will serve as a point of contact for individuals seeking to apply for FEMA disaster recovery aid, according to the organization's media relations specialist Shirley Tracey.

The center is located on the third floor of the Health and Human Services building on Morganton Boulevard in Lenoir. It will remain open from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday thru Sunday until further notice.

"A Disaster Recovery Center is a one-stop-shop where survivors can meet face-to-face with FEMA representatives, apply for FEMA assistance, receive referrals to local assistance in their area, apply with the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) for low-interest disaster loans and much more.," said Tracey. "FEMA financial assistance may include money for basic home repairs, personal property losses or other uninsured, disaster-related needs, such as childcare, transportation, medical needs, funeral or dental expenses."

Tracey said that FEMA opens DRCs in every county that is affected by a disaster, with particularly large or adversely affected counties sometimes getting more than one. She the centers are a very valuable resource precisely because there are multiple agencies present to answer questions and receive important but complicated information that it may be difficult to parse online or alone.

"FEMA provides grants that don't have to be paid back," Tracey said. "For anything that FEMA can't cover — personal property that is lost or damages that can't be recovered — the SBA is active for homeowners and renters." Tracey also noted that, following disasters, SBA assistance is also available for individuals rather than only businesses.

Tracey said residents should take photos of damages, keep track of receipts, and apply for FEMA assistance at the same time that they contact homeowners and flood insurance.

"We encourage people to apply as soon as possible," Tracey said. "To help, we have to know who needs help. Don't feel like you're taking something that could benefit your neighbor more. That is not the case. If you're eligible for it, take it."

To help prevent the spread of bad rumors and misinformation, and to provide some protection from scams, Tracey shared some advice. People should watch for FEMA shirts and FEMA IDs — official, government photo IDs with "FEMA" written on them — on lanyards. Tracey said the emergency management office and local officials should be aware of the places where FEMA is in the field in order to verify. No FEMA official will ask for money or private information.

Tracy said that fema.gov has a rumor response page where the organization answers and debunks bad information to help ensure people get the care they need, and fema.gov/disaster/current/hurricane-helene contains up-to-date information on the Helene response.

In addition to applying at the DRC, according to FEMA documents accessible through the Caldwell County Helene page at caldwellcountync.org/495/Resources, the organization is offering assistance for housing, privately owned roads, bridges, docks, renting, hazard mitigation, damaged wells and septic systems, and other serious needs following the impact of a disaster.

Survivors in need of assistance are encouraged to visit DisasterAssistance.gov or download the FEMA app to apply.

Applicants may also call 800-621-3362 for help available in most languages.

FEMA administrator Deanne Criswell came to Caldwell County on Monday, Oct. 14, to tour the new Caldwell DRC as well as speak with residents and first responders affected by the storm. The administrator spoke to the press at the Collettsville Fire Department at 3:20 p.m. to discuss FEMA's actions in the county and the response thus far.

"What has happened across western North Carolina is truly tragic and heartbreaking," Criswell said. "It's important that we talk about it."

Criswell said FEMA was working on recovery in the county, distributing aid to households and working with local government officials and responders on the restoration efforts.

Discussing the spread of misinformation about FEMA and the resources available through its programs to those affected by the storms, Criswell said this happens in every disaster, that "there's all these people trying to take advantage." She said, when it doubt, ask FEMA representative for credentials and said that it was a "red flag" if someone asked for cash up front.

Caldwell County manger Donald Duncan echoed this sentiment, saying, "misinformation takes benefits away ... if you're doing this, you're causing harm to your neighbors."

"We are going to continue to support the people of North Carolina," Criswell said, "and as President Biden says, 'we'll be here as long as they need us to be.' "

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