

Oct. 21 update: NCDOT works to reopen hundreds of roads in Western NC

October 1, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Richard Stradling, News & Observer | Section: north carolina | 833 Words OpenURL Link

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More than three weeks after the remnants of Hurricane Helene slammed Western North Carolina with historic wind and rain, hundreds of roads remain closed or impassable.

The N.C. Department of Transportation has found more than 7,200 sites where roads and bridges need fixing and estimates the storm caused "several billion dollars" in damages, Transportation Secretary Joey Hopkins said.

"The damage to our roads and bridges is like nothing we've ever seen after any storm, and this will be a long-term recovery operation," Hopkins said in a statement. "But we will be here until Western North Carolina can get back on its feet."

NCDOT says it has reopened about 800 roads since the storm. The department has more than 2,000 employees from across the state and dozens of contracting companies working to clear debris and make repairs. Other states, notably Florida and Kentucky, have also sent crews and equipment to help, Hopkins said.

"They're making good progress, but it's a heavy lift," he said Thursday. "Every day more roads are getting opened up."

As of Monday morning, the department's travel alert page, drivenc.gov, listed 583 roads fully or partially closed by Helene. Most are secondary roads, but they include parts of busy state and federal highways, including U.S. 221 north of Marion and U.S. 64 between Hendersonville and Chimney Rock.

The strategy for NCDOT and local departments is to do enough to make roads passable for residents, utility crews and recovery workers. The countless trees that fell across the pavement are cut and shoved just enough to let cars pass. Washed-out roads are restored with temporary bridges and causeways that will need to be replaced in the months and years ahead.

"We've worked it down to a very small number of communities that still have limited access," Tim Anderson, who leads NCDOT's Division 13, which covers Buncombe and six other mountain counties, said Oct. 9. "We're trying to get them at least a one-lane road."

Damaged sites that don't impede traffic are marked off with cones or barrels to be addressed another day.

The department is housing up to 250 out-of-town employees in the Hendersonville campus of the Biltmore Church, which donated the space off Interstate 26. The men sleep on cots, while a contractor from Texas provides meals, water, portable showers and toilets and laundry services.

"Normally during disaster response, NCDOT would arrange for staff to stay in hotels or motels near the site," said NCDOT spokesman Jamie Kritzer. "But due to the severity of the storm there are not enough available rooms nearby."

Major highways initially blocked after the storm were reopened within days, including Interstates 26 and 40 to Asheville and U.S. 421 to Boone. But NCDOT still says roads in areas hardest hit by the storm should be considered closed to people who don't live in the region or aren't helping with storm recovery.

"Non-essential traffic continues to hinder our efforts to reopen roads," Hopkins said. "Many of our crews are having to stop work to allow traffic through damaged areas. We're working as hard as we can, but we need most of these travelers to use alternate routes outside of the impacted areas to get through and around Western North Carolina."

IMG_2980.jpgThis is one of about 10 places where the swollen Pigeon River washed away pavement along the eastbound lanes of Interstate 40 after Hurricane Helene. About 7,000 linear feet of pavement will need to be replaced along a four-mile stretch of I-40 near the Tennessee line.

The most challenging repair will be to I-40 in the Pigeon River Gorge, where the eastbound lanes collapsed into the river in several places near the Tennessee line. An alternative route west, I-26, is also closed at the state line because of flooding and washed-out bridges near the town of Erwin, Tennessee.

NCDOT has hired contractors to stabilize the surviving westbound lanes of I-40 through the Pigeon River Gorge but says there's still no timetable for reopening the highway that connects North Carolina with Tennessee.

List of roads closed in North Carolina

Here is a searchable database of roads still impacted by Hurricane Helene, using data from NCDOT. The Blue Ridge Parkway is also closed throughout North Carolina for the foreseeable future.

NCDOT is warning drivers of trucks longer than 30 feet to avoid two-lane roads through the mountains. Google Maps, Waze or Apple Maps had sent truckers on these routes, and some were getting stuck on tight curves. Truckers are being directed to use I-81 or U.S. 74 to get to and from Tennessee.

NCDOT_WesternNCClosed_Map.jpgA map showing areas where travel is limited to people who live in the area or are helping with storm recovery. It also shows detours around two long-term closures of Interstates 40 and 26

NCDOT now uses Oct. 31 as its default date for reopening. Exceptions are noted here.

Hurricane helene road closures table embed

See drone footage of flood-damaged western NC townsNews & Observer visual journalist Travis Long shows the damage fromHelene in the towns of Clyde and Canton in Haywood County, out in the western part of North Carolina.

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Need supplies? Burke County sets up distribution site for those in need after Hurricane Helene

October 1, 2024 | News Herald, The (Morganton, NC) Author: Sharon McBrayer| Section: Government Politics| 1319 Words OpenURL Link

Burke County hit the ground running Monday collecting and distributing items to residents in need after the remnants of Hurricane Helene impacted the area. A supplies collection and distribution center has been set up at Foothills Higher Education Center in Morganton. After some problems early in the week, the hospital system is fully operational as of Monday afternoon.

Burke County government

Burke County has set up a donation and distribution location at Foothills Higher Education Center in Morganton. The center is located at 2128 S Sterling St., Morganton. County officials said there has been an outpouring of donations.

Burke County Manager Brian Epley said two tractor-trailer loads of donations were handed out by Monday afternoon. Some of the donations included food, diapers, clothes, dog food and drinking water.

A dedicated team organized to manage all donation-related activity, from drop-offs to distribution for those in need.

Epley said donations are coming from across the country. He said donations are being accepted from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. every day and will be distributing needed items from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. every day.

"We are deeply appreciative of the continued generosity and support from our community as we work together in the recovery from Hurricane Helene," a release from the county said.

One tractor-trailer was dropped off by Person County Sheriff Jason Wilborn and several volunteers on Monday.

Wilborn started taking supplies to areas damaged by hurricanes in 2016, and the community in Person County, in eastern North Carolina, threw its support into the mission, he said.

"I know they would return the favor if I ever needed help," Wilborn said.

The supplies were carried over in a trailer owned by Dewey Jones, a retired sheriff of Person County.

"I've done 35 years in law enforcement, been a fireman for 43 years," Jones said. "It's just in my blood to help people when they need help. That's what its all about, is helping one another, helping your neighbors. We don't get in the job for money, we get in it to help people."

Wilborn first contacted Burke County Sheriff Banks Hinceman shortly after the storm hit on Friday.

"We've seen damage that we've never seen before," Hinceman said. "Both flooding and just damage to structures, infrastructure, highways, bridges. We've just never seen this."

For any questions or to reach the Donation Team, call 828-764-3204.

If you are in need of volunteer services or would like to volunteer to assist, contact the volunteer hotline at 828-764-7068. Phone lines will be open from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. daily to ensure timely support for those requesting or offering help, the release from the county said.

Volunteer services include property cleanup, animal care and food assistance for those affected by the hurricane.

Storm debris cleanup

Burke County asked residents to not take storm debris to the county landfill. The county has contracted with a hauler to manage debris collection directly from residential areas. The county said in a release that the contracted hauler will make two to three passes through affected areas throughout the county to ensure all debris is collected. Residents do not need to be present for pickup.

Residents are asked to separate the debris into three categories, which are:

VegetationWhite goods (appliances such as refrigerators, washers, dryers, etc.)Building materials (construction debris, wood, drywall)

That debris should be moved to the right-of-way on the road.

For help moving debris to the right-of-way, call 828-764-7068.

"Please be patient as the county works to manage the cleanup," a release from the county said. "While we are making every effort to remove debris as quickly as possible, the large volume of material may cause some delays."

Meeting, event canceled

The Burke County Board of Commissioners announced Monday that its pre-agenda meeting originally set for Tuesday has been canceled, along with the groundbreaking ceremonies for the EMS base headquarters and the animal shelter on Friday.

The commissioners regular meeting on Oct. 15 will go ahead as planned.

The Valdese Town Council also canceled its pre-agenda meeting that was set for Monday. Town officials said the council will hold its regular meeting on Oct. 7.

Town of Valdese

Valdese Mayor Charlie Watts said the water plant is back up running, and the boil advisory for Valdese customers remained in place Monday. Watts said that advisory should end Tuesday. The boil advisory remains in place for the rest of Burke County, according to alerts from the county on Monday.

Watts said people still need to be conservative with their water use because there is only one pump working at the water plant.

Watts is asking residents to be patient in getting their power restored. He said Valdese Public Works and Duke Energy are working to get power restored to the town.

Watts said he saw at least 15 power trucks in the town on Monday morning.

"They're working all over town trying to clear debris out of the lines and restore power," Watts said. "I'm just asking people to be patient because them guys and our town employees are all working as fast and as hard as they can."

Watts said when he saw the trucks, they were awaiting orders from Duke Energy.

The town recreation center and the Old Rock School are closed because of a lack of power. Valdese Town Hall is open after power was restored on Monday. Lakeside Park is closed until further notice due to downed trees, Watts said.

The Old Rock School was set up Monday as a landing point for federal helicopters to get supplies further west.

It is not, however, a drop-point for donations from the community, Watts said.

Hospitals in Burke

Danette Brackett, a spokesperson and executive director of business development for UNC Health Blue Ridge, said the health system wants to reassure the community that the hospital remains fully operational and well-prepared to care for patients.

To address the impacts of Hurricane Helene, UNC Health Blue Ridge has established an incident command center at the Morganton hospital campus, Brackett said.

"Although we initially lost power at both our Morganton and Valdese campuses, our generators immediately took over, and power has since been restored," Brackett said. "We also experienced a temporary water outage at Morganton, but thanks to a contractual agreement, we are transporting potable water from Catawba County until the city of Morganton fully restores service. Importantly, this has not affected patient care."

For the safety of the community, Brackett said the hospital system has temporarily canceled non-emergency surgeries until it's safe to resume normal operations and staff can safely return to work.

She said the hospital is also assessing outpatient clinics for any damage or utility outages. The clinics will reopen as soon as possible.

On Monday, Valdese Express Care, Cajun Mountain Express Care and McDowell Express Care reopened.

"Thanks to the support of UNC Health, which has provided additional personnel and resources, our staffing has remained stable despite some team members being unable to work due to damage to their homes," Brackett said.

"We have not encountered any shortages of food or supplies. We are incredibly grateful for the way our community has come together during this challenging time. Please continue to check our website and social media for regular updates if you have internet access."

The hospital system also says adult residents 18 years old and older of western North Carolina can see a UNC Health primary care provider for mild symptoms without an appointment through UNC Health Virtual Care Now free of charge for those impacted by Hurricane Helene.

You can get in line for Virtual Care Now through My UNC Chart. Virtual services are available 6 a.m. – 10 p.m. seven days a week.

How to apply for FEMA assistance

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

To apply, go online to DisasterAssistance.gov, use the FEMA app for mobile devices or call 800-621-3362.

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Town Tavern destroyed by Hurricane Helene flooding from Catawba River

October 1, 2024 | News Herald, The (Morganton, NC) Author: Sharon McBrayer | Section: Business | 335 Words OpenURL Link

Justin Davis summed the damage caused by Tropical Storm Helene to his Morganton restaurant in one word Monday afternoon: "Heartbreaking."

Davis is one of the owners of Town Tavern in the River Village shopping center on Sanford Drive in Morganton. He said flooding from the adjacent Catawba River rose about 5 feet into the restaurant.

"It's devastating. It's pretty sad to see," Davis said.

He said the damage to the restaurant is substantial.

"I guess they call it a hundred-year flood," Davis said. "I hope I never see nothing like it again in my lifetime."

He said he hopes to rebuild, but the owners, like everyone else, are taking it day by day. He said the restaurant will have to be gutted and renovated from scratch.

"Build back bigger, better," Davis said of starting over.

The restaurant opened in its River Village location in March 2021, Davis said.

He said it was a beautiful restaurant that people seemed to enjoy. Other locations of Town Tavern are in Blowing Rock and Banner Elk. Even though those two towns suffered devastating destruction, the Town Taverns in those locations faired much better than the Morganton location, Davis said.

"We were real fortunate that all of our locations are good, but all around us is just so much destruction everywhere," Davis said. "Roads washed out, trees, roads, homes destroyed and flooding. It's just so much to process. All the office buildings in that strip (in Morganton) all washed out, all destroyed."

He said he is thankful none of the employees were hurt and said things can be replaced.

"It is sad for the staff," Davis said. "We have so many key employees. Great and wonderful employees."

He hopes there are some programs they can get in place for the restaurant's staff to help them out until the restaurant can rebuild.

"It's just going to take some time," Davis said. "But we look forward to getting back open and seeing all of our family and friends and people in the community come back in and pick up right where we left off.

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How damage from Hurricane Helene could affect NC high school playoff schedule

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Eight years ago, the N.C. High School Athletic Association pushed back the start of its football playoffs due to Hurricane Matthew.

NCHSAA commissioner Que Tucker said that could be a possibility again this year after the devastation brought to the western part of the state by Hurricane Helene.

Tucker said any decisions about the playoffs would come from the NCHSAA Board of Directors, which she expects will meet via Zoom sometime later this week.

"With the devastation they have had," Tucker said Monday. "I'm not sure one week would do it. But that's a decision that has to be made by our board members. As a staff we want to huddle up and look at what we have found and see what we can come up with to present to the board, but we want to make sure our board members (from the regions most affected) can be on the Zoom with us because they have boots-on-the-ground knowledge, and we need to get their perspective."

Tucker said in her talks with coaches and athletic officials in the mountains that the damage is excessive and that schools in all four of the NCHSAA's classes have been affected.

So the association will not be able to delay one or two classifications in the playoffs, she said.

Tucker also doesn't expect that many football games, or any sports, will be played in that region this week. She noted she saw a photograph of the football field at Morganton's Freedom High School showing it almost completely submerged.

"Even if we thought one school could play, well, who would they be playing?" Tucker asked. "How can they get there? That's the crazy part. We talked to a coach at Mountain Heritage and he had been out with a chainsaw trying to help. He stopped long enough and found a spot with cell service and said it may be two months before they can get back to school; that they are using the school building to house the workers and everybody."

The NCHSAA playoffs are scheduled to begin in about two weeks, with girls' tennis (Oct. 14), volleyball (Oct. 19), girls' golf (Oct. 21) and cross-country (Oct. 26) up first.

Football playoffs are scheduled to begin Nov. 8.

"Until we can get a true assessment to when schools can return to play, and just be able to open up school, we can't make decisions at this point," Tucker said. "But I do know our board will be as far as equitable as when they were dealing with situations (brought on by past weather events) in eastern North Carolina."

Tucker said she is worried about how to get the playoffs going, knowing they are important so many schools and athletes and families. But seeing the images of the damage done, she said, is heartbreaking.

"It's a lot to think about," Tucker said. "Some people don't have drinking water. But you have to have hope, and hope brings about renewed excitement to push through. We know when we get to the other side, we'll play again, and we don't want to act like we don't have hope. But we have to be patient and try to keep it all in perspective as we try to do things that are in the best interest of everyone."

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HELENE'S IMPACT

October 1, 2024 | News Herald, The (Morganton, NC) Author: CHRISSY MURPHY cmurphy@morganton.com| Section: Helenes Impact | 479 Words OpenURL Link

THE AFTERMATH

The skies may have cleared, but Hurricane Helene's presence still can be seen around Burke County, including for anyone who uses city water.

A boil water advisory was issued Sunday afternoon for all public water in Burke County, according to an alert from Burke County 911.

Jonelle Sigmon, public information officer for the city of Morganton, said Saturday the city's pump station was underwater and would not be operable until fl oodwaters receded and repairs were made.

In a new statement Sunday, Sigmon said some temporary repairs had been made to the pump station, and the distribution system was slowly filling with water.

"It is important for the system to be completely full before normal service can be restored," said the statement from Sigmon. "Therefore, patience is requested during the process. Once the direction is (given) to begin gradual usage, customers are reminded that our system remains under a boil water advisory."

In a separate statement Saturday, Sigmon said it could be three to five days before some Morganton residents have their power restored.

Burke County 911 Assistant Director Chris White said Friday that 911 dispatchers were busy dispatching calls for swift water rescues, structural collapses, mudslides, wrecks and more.

North Green Street was flooded Friday and Saturday, with the Catawba River spilling from its banks and covering the bridge at the corner of North Green and Sanford Drive. Bost Road was covered in water at the Burke County Fairgrounds on Friday afternoon and Saturday but finally cleared up Saturday night.

The flooding was what several said reminded them of Hurricane Frances, which happened a little more than 20 years ago.

"This storm is different than Frances," said Morganton Public Safety Chief Jason Whisnant. "We have widespread damage on electric, utility lines unlike anything I've ever seen."

So many roads were in states of disrepair, the North Carolina Department of Transportation said all roads in western North Carolina should be considered closed unless you are traveling for an emergency or to escape danger.

Morganton saw 9.79 inches of rainfall from Wednesday through Friday, said Doug Outlaw, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service.

Wind speeds were as high as 51 mph in Hickory. In Asheville, Outlaw said wind speeds were as high as 46 mph.

"This will be one of the most significant weather events that happened in the modern eras," Outlaw said. "The flooding was compared to Tropical Storm Fred in August of 2021. It's certainly one of the most historically significant storm events that we've ever had."

With the ground still saturated, Outlaw said the risk of trees falling in the coming days is high. He said it wouldn't take much to topple a tall tree.

Burke County Public Schools Superintendent Mike Swan announced in an alert from Burke County 911 that schools would be closed in Burke County at least through Wednesday, Oct. 2.

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Half of Burke County Public Schools are still without power Tuesday

October 1, 2024 | News Herald, The (Morganton, NC) Author: Sharon McBrayer | Section: Education | 562 Words OpenURL Link

About half of the schools in Burke County are still without power after the remnants of Hurricane Helene severely impacted the county. Food had to be thrown away at all Burke County Public Schools after power outages.

All school was canceled in Burke County through Oct. 4.

The Burke County Board of Education held an emergency meeting on Tuesday afternoon to talk about some of the issues facing the school system before classes can be resumed after Helene cut a swath of destruction through western North Carolina.

As of the meeting, these schools did not have power: Patton High School, Forest Hill, WA Young, Drexel, Hillcrest, Mull, Oak Hill, Salem and Valdese elementary schools and Table Rock, Heritage and Walter Johnson middle schools.

The other schools got power back in recent days, but some still have no internet, Superintendent Mike Swan said.

The football field at Freedom High School was flooded and only the roof of the field house could be seen during the worst of the storm. The school is still waiting for Duke Energy to come in and cut the lines to the field house, Swan said.

He told board members that food had to be thrown away at every school. Officials have not been able to get any food for the system or have had a place to store food. Swan said the school system might be able to recover some of the cost of the food lost based on the county's state of emergency declaration.

"So we're working through that as a leadership team," Swan said.

He said there are 11 school campuses that can store food now but the 12 without power cannot.

Swan said the school system can get a food shipment in on Thursday, and the nutrition team will store that food at the sites that currently have power.

Swan said schools can do a simple menu if school were to open on Monday, but that's a big "if," depending on what happens with power restoration and much of the county's water systems being under boil water advisories.

Swan said there are a lot of unknowns as to starting school up again. It all hinges on food service and drinkable water, he said. Swan said he would like to get to 85% of the schools with power before the school system returns to class.

He said the school system's leadership team will meet on Thursday to assess which schools have power.

In addition, Swan said Catawba Valley YMCA has reached out to the school system about setting up emergency day care for essential workers such as hospital, law enforcement and first responders because they are struggling to find childcare currently. He said that will be set up at Liberty Middle School, which has power, internet and AC.

As for the school calendar, Swan said Thursday and Friday are optional work days for staff, but closed for students.

School Board Chair Seth Hunt said neighboring school districts have reached out offering to help Burke County Public Schools, including Lincoln County. Swan said he has had school superintendents from other areas also reach out offering help.

Other items school board members discussed was the state potentially extending the number of remote days allowed due to the emergency, as well as services such as counseling for returning students who may have lost a lot during the storm.

Swan will update the board again on Thursday. The school board will meet again on Oct. 7.

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SPORTS ON PAUSE

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COMMENTARY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Freedom High School dealing with flashbacks of 2004

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

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

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

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

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

Athletics may play a role in the healing process

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

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

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'How blessed are we?' — Black's Tire Service trucking donations to western N.C.

October 1, 2024 | News Reporter, The (Whiteville, NC) Author: NR Staff news@nrcolumbus.com| Section: Business| 504 Words OpenURL Link

A multi-state business with local roots is doing its part to help survivors of Hurricane Helene, which battered western North Carolina late last week.

Founded and headquartered in Whiteville, Black's Tire and Auto Service is accepting donations and driving them to the mountains in BTS trucks.

"Our team — our BTS family as we call it — we have resources, and we don't mind asking for people to help," said Amy Noble of BTS. She was coordinating a hub of activity midday Tuesday at the new BTS location on S. Madison Street. About a dozen employees were sorting through donated items, including food, beverages and cleaning supplies. BTS Owner Ricky Benton helped wrap a pallet of water in plastic so it could be loaded onto a flatbed truck as his wife Dianne packed a box of food bound for the mountains.

'Loaded to the gills'

In addition to accepting donations directly from the public, BTS will transport and deliver donations collected from other organizations, including some local fire and rescue departments, according to Noble.

She said the company felt it could serve as a "channel" between mountain communities that need relief and the residents living to the east who want to offer assistance.

BTS sent out its first 26-foot box truck "loaded to the gills" with supplies shortly before noon Tuesday. Most of the items in that truck "came from donations from people within Columbus County and Whiteville," Noble said.

As soon as the box truck left, workers started loading a flatbed truck with water, Powerade and Gatorade.

BTS is working with relief groups like Baptists on Mission and pastors in the mountains to direct the donations to communities in need, Noble said. The truck that left just before noon was bound for Maggie Valley, Canton and Dellwood.

"We're trying very hard to reach out to organizations that are allowed into those areas and that know the people because some of our federal programs are not even there yet," Noble said. "The National Guard is restricting who they allow and what they allow. So, we're trying to use organizations that have already been given the permits and have the knowledge of the areas."

How to donate

According to the BTS Facebook page, immediate needs include:cases of water/sports drinks;non-perishable food items;baby formula, wipes and diapers;heavy duty work gloves;13-gallon trash bags or contractor bags;cleaning supplies, toiletries and other sanitation items;flash lights and batteries; and pet food.

BTS will collect donations for Hurricane Helene survivors until further notice.

Those who choose to donate can ship supplies to BTS' warehouse, located at 30 Bitmore Rd., Whiteville, NC 28472. The recipient's name should be listed as BTS Distribution (Hurricane Relief). Donations can also be dropped off at any BTS location, according to the Facebook flier.

Noble said that any questions about donations can be directed to BTS corporate offices. Call 910-642-4123 for more information.

"Thank you so much to all of those who have already given — all of the team members, family members and community members who have volunteered their time and their efforts," Noble said. "I mean, how blessed are we?" Copyright 2024, The News Reporter, All Rights Reserved.

• Citation (aglc Style)

NR Staff news@nrcolumbus.com, "How blessed are we?' — Black's Tire Service trucking donations to western N.C.', *News Reporter, The* (online), 1 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BF5123E1EBC2F8>



Caldwell County continues to recover from Helene

October 1, 2024 | News-Topic, The (Lenoir, NC) Author: SHELBY POWELL spowell@newstopicnews.com| Section: Archives | 711 Words OpenURL Link

Here is an Oct. 1 update on Caldwell County recovery efforts from the damage of Tropical Storm Helene.

Power

According to FindEnergy.com, 14,263 of Caldwell' 41,100 energy customers remain without power as of 2:30 p.m. on Oct. 1, dropping from 19,251 at the same time yesterday. Over the past 24 hours, Duke Energy went from 13,459 to 9,287 reported outages and Blue Ridge Energy dropped from 5,792 to 4,863.

Caldwell CountyThe county has begun to receive responses from its assessment surveys that describe varying damages countywide. Caldwell County public information officer Paige Counts encourages residents fill out the survey even if they have experienced minimal damage to help the county get an accurate picture of the storm's impact. The form can be accessed through caldwellcountync.org/494/Helene, which also includes information on available resources and donation instructions.

The West Caldwell High School shelter will be closing as it is consolidated with an American Red Cross shelter at Oak Hill Methodist Church, 2239 NC Highway 181 in Morganton. Accommodations for the present shelter inhabitants have been or are being arranged.

Caldwell County Schools

The Caldwell school system extended school closure for students thru Oct. 4, with optional workdays for teachers.

Gamewell Elementary School, Hudson Middle School and William Lenoir Middle School will be opened as feeding sites on Wednesday, Oct. 2. Hot meals will be served from 12 to 2 p.m. for anyone 18 or younger.

Lenoir

Joshua Harris from the City of Lenoir has said that almost every neighborhood in Lenoir has some way of getting in and out if necessary, but police and fire department are still clearing limbs to get around 40 impacted streets cleared. Once all roads are cleared and power access is restored, crews will enter to begin debris removal.

Hudson

Jonathan Greer, town manager of Hudson, said Hudson is steadily improving. There are multiple areas that are still being cleared with power waiting to be restored, and at least one crew still working. The town has had to clear downed trees in town parks but has suffered minimal damage to town facilities. The next step, Greer said, is debris removal. No residents of Hudson are stranded in their homes at this time to the knowledge of the town.

Recovery Options, Donations and Resources

Caldwell County is receiving donations of food and supplies at Lower Creek Baptist Church on Lower Creek Drive. A list of requested items developed on the basis of community needs can be found here or through the Caldwell County Facebook page. Those with questions about donations can email donations@caldwellcountync.org. Those looking for information about volunteering can contact volunteers@caldwellcountync.org.

Shea Bolick of Caldwell County Schools has developed a list of resources offered by the community to ensure access

to food, power, showers, laundry, communications and other important resources. The information is being kept in a Google document here.

"A group of teachers and administrators at South Caldwell High School were discussing ways to reach out to our students and let them and their families know that their community is there for them," said Bolick. "We felt helpless with the destruction in our community and Western NC. We saw so many organizations doing so much good. I created the document with the help of Rob Bliss, Braley Speagle, Brian Speagle, Kim Clark and McKinley Johnson to be a quick guide to assistance, need, donations, meals and more in our community. Now many citizens in Caldwell County are sharing the document and sending me Information to add daily! I am so proud of our community of helpers who are selflessly giving and volunteering in our region's time of need."

The Town of Hudson has partnered with the Caldwell Arts Council and the HUB station to provide arts and crafts and free snacks to children. Parents can come and recharge devices and use internet as well. These events will take place from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, Oct. 2-4.

In a press release the evening of Sept. 30, Caldwell County noted:

Abington Road will be closed on Tuesday from Greasy Creek to Collettsville Road for Blue Ridge Energy to repair lines. Safety is important. Use precaution when burning and clearing debris. Be sure to wear protective gear when using chainsaws and other equipment. Avoid downed power lines.

For more information, visit www.caldwellcountync.org/494/Helene. The website is being updated as quickly as possible by county personnel.

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How to apply for FEMA assistance after Hurricane Helene

October 1, 2024 | News-Topic, The (Lenoir, NC) Author: STAFF REPORTS | Section: Archives | 360 Words OpenURL Link

North Carolina homeowners and renters in 25 counties and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians who had uninsured damage or losses caused by Hurricane Helene may be eligible for FEMA disaster assistance, according to a press release from the North Carolina Department of Public Safety.

FEMA may be able to help with serious needs, displacement, temporary lodging, basic home repair costs, personal property loss or other disaster-caused needs. Homeowners and renters in Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Clay, Cleveland, Gaston, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Lincoln, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes and Yancey counties and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians can apply, according to the press release.

There are several ways to apply: Go online to DisasterAssistance.gov, use the FEMA App or call 800-621-3362 from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. ET daily. The telephone line is open every day and help is available in most languages. If you use a relay service, such as Video Relay Service (VRS), captioned telephone or other service, give FEMA your number for that service, according to the press release.

To view an accessible video on how to apply, visit Three Ways to Apply for FEMA Disaster Assistance — YouTube.

FEMA's disaster assistance offers new benefits that provide flexible funding directly to survivors. In addition, a simplified process and expanded eligibility allows North Carolinians access to a wider range of assistance and funds for serious needs, according to the press release.

What You'll Need When You Apply:

A current phone number where you can be contacted.

Your address at the time of the disaster and the address where you are now staying. Your Social Security number. A general list of damage and losses. Banking information if you choose direct deposit. If insured, the policy number or the agent and/or the company name.

If you have homeowners, renters or flood insurance, you should file a claim as soon as possible. FEMA cannot duplicate benefits for losses covered by insurance. If your policy does not cover all your disaster expenses, you may be eligible for federal assistance, according to the press release.

For the latest information about North Carolina's recovery, visit fema.gov/disaster/4827. Follow FEMA on X at x.com/femaregion4 or on Facebook at facebook.com/fema.

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In Helene's wake, leadership is crucial

October 1, 2024 | News-Topic, The (Lenoir, NC) Author: John Hood Columnist| Section: Archives | 645 Words OpenURL Link

RALEIGH

I got it wrong. Deeply wrong. Embarrassingly wrong.

It was a few days after Hurricane Floyd struck the coast on September 16, 1999. I'd been covering North Carolina politics for more than a dozen years by then, penning my syndicated column and appearing regularly on radio and television. Our discussion program "N.C. Spin" had debuted the previous fall on the Triangle's Fox affiliate and was in the process of expanding to some two dozen TV and radio stations across the state.

During a segment of the show devoted to the destruction wrought by Floyd, I said something to the effect that North Carolina's emergency personnel, government agencies, utilities, private contractors, and relief organizations knew what to do and how to do it. They didn't need politicians holding press conferences and yapping incessantly about matters beyond their ken.

I thought I was praising the skill and determination of those at the forefront of the response to Hurricane Floyd, which devastated much of eastern North Carolina and killed an estimated 85 people, including 51 North Carolinians. I thought I was championing policy expertise over political exploitation.

What I was really doing was exhibiting my ignorance.

One "N.C. Spin" viewer was particularly incensed: then-Gov. Jim Hunt. One of the targets of my criticism, he let it be known through a mutual acquaintance that he considered my argument poorly reasoned. I don't remember the specifics of what got passed on to me, but it was something to the effect that in times of crisis, political leadership is crucial.

Emergency responders aren't necessarily sure what to do when. Agencies butt heads. Harried public and private actors misinterpret, miscommunicate, and inadvertently misinform. Sometimes they move too slowly, making people wait too long for rescue and relief. At other times they react recklessly, misspending scarce resources on lower priorities rather than waiting to make wiser decisions with a firmer grasp of the facts on the ground.

It is the task of leaders, elected and appointed, to make such judgment calls, to focus minds and referee disputes, to comfort the suffering, and to offer hope and reassurance to a panicky public.

Now, as North Carolinians grapple with the tragic aftermath of another monstrous storm, Gov. Roy Cooper and other political and civic leaders must rise to the challenge Hunt helped me grasp a quarter of a century ago.

Helene has ravaged western North Carolina. Her path of destruction is broad, deep, and jaw-dropping. Homes, businesses, entire towns crushed or swept away. At this writing, hundreds of thousands of people remain without power, some trapped in place by gaping holes or raging rivers. The death count, already heart-rending, will grow as more of the missing are found.

North Carolina will recover. We will rebuild. We've done it before. But there's nothing automatic about the process. And we all have parts to play in it, whatever our roles, wherever we live.

If you have family or friends in the affected areas, keep trying to reach them. Once you do, offer help and comfort. If you'd like to contribute money, supplies, or volunteer time to relief and recovery efforts, there are many

organizations well-situated to deploy your gifts effectively, including Samaritan's Purse, Baptists on Mission, Catholic Charities USA, and Operation Airdrop.

At the state level, lawmakers have prudently accumulated \$4.75 billion in our rainy-day fund plus billions more in unreserved credit balance. That rainy day is here. Localities will spend additional dollars from their own reserves, as will utility companies, cooperatives, and municipal agencies.

There are many tough decisions to be made, some now, some weeks or months from now as the full extent of the needs and priorities come more clearly into view. That's something else I learned from past disasters. Some funds originally earmarked for reconstruction after Hurricane Matthew in 2016 have still not been expended.

Through it all, North Carolinians will look to our leaders for guidance and reassurance. Pray for them, and for us all. Copyright 2024, The News-Topic, All Rights Reserved.

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More than 120 people seek shelter at R-S Central High School in wake of Helene

October 1, 2024 | News-Topic, The (Lenoir, NC) Author: Victoria McGuinn Young vyoung@thedigitalcourier.com| Section: Archives | 416 Words OpenURL Link

RUTHERFORDTON — The Rutherford County Emergency Shelter was mostly quiet Tuesday morning as volunteers and Rutherford County staff members hauled boxes of baby diapers and bags of donated clothes off of a trailer.

Any conversation was low as donations were organized in sections around the R-S Central High School's cafeteria.

Kayla Fox, disaster coordinator with Rutherford County Social Services, was solemn as she reflected on her role.

"It is a part of my job I never wanted to have to learn," said Fox.

As of 10 a.m. Oct. 1, 126 people have arrived at the high school looking for shelter. But volunteers and staff aren't able to count the numerous residents that have come to the shelter looking for essential supplies.

Boxes of clothes organized by gender and size line one wall. Toiletries are clustered across folding tables. And boxes of apples, drinks, sweets and chips are laid out ready for people to grab.

While the shelter put out information on donations it needs, Fox said they later learned of other items in scarce supply.

"There are some things we didn't know we would need at first — like distilled water for CPAP machines," she explained.

So far, more than 40 people and organizations have dropped off donations at the shelter. Some people have even brought food to help feed staff and volunteers.

The health department is also taking donations to help distribute items to the shelter.

But while the flood of donations has been heartwarming, volunteers and staff have seen heartbreak.

People come into the shelter having lost everything, Fox said. And people are trying to connect with family members. One man, she said, has been to the shelter every day looking for his wife and child.

But with the bitter has come some sweet.

The reunifications of families, when they do happen, Fox said, make every onlooker emotional.

"Reunifications are just — I can't describe it. The hugs they give show so much. They didn't know where their family member was but now they have them," Fox recounted with emotion. "It gives me chills and I'm only an observer."

As of Tuesday morning, the shelter still didn't have power, but Fox was hopeful it would be back on soon.

She had also spoken with a representative from the Red Cross Monday evening who said the Red Cross may be there by Tuesday afternoon.

Donations can be dropped off at the Rutherford County Health Department. The Health Department is located at 221 Callahan Koon Road, Spindale.

Donations needed are:

paper towelstoilet paperpeanut butter (small jars, to-go size)gallon ziplock bagswaterGatoradeDog foodTrash bagsDish soapShampooDeodorantClorox wipes

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The heartbreaking story unfolding

October 1, 2024 | News-Topic, The (Lenoir, NC) Author: ARLENE NEAL Columnist| Section: Archives | 665 Words OpenURL Link

This morning, the day after The Storm, I write this to the buzz and whine of chain saws and the roar of generator engines across this area. Most of us are still without power. Folks are out cleaning yards and roadways, moving downed trees, clearing rooftops of debris and beginning to repair damage from wind. Those close to water have much more to deal with after the flood recedes.

Area waterways have the sad evidence of damage: docks, fences, pieces of structures, and other objects washed away from homes and into lakes turned back to rivers that swept the shorelines, taking structures and anything else unable to remain standing. Boats, broken away from moorings, drifted downstream. What a mighty force unrestrained water can be!

We lost power, internet and phone service, but suffered no damage. This is such small stuff compared to what our neighbors west of us are experiencing where life and death situations occurred and are still ongoing. Initially, we received bits of news the old way—word of mouth—then cell towers must have been repaired since we started to get a few calls in and some text messages in and out.

The catastrophic news was hard to absorb, like the devastation in Chimney Rock where we spent a wonderful weekend a few years ago. The laid-back friendly atmosphere and gorgeous scenery made the stay perfect. I doubt that our old hotel near a creek where we stayed is still there. Flood waters swept away most of Chimney Rock Village on Friday. The beautiful Hickory Nut Gorge funneled water, record-setting inches of it, down into communities nestled at the foot of the mountains to disastrous results.

While Jim Cantore of the Weather Channel stood in the rain in Florida waiting for Hurricane Helene, thinking of things to say, the big story was building by the moment in the set-up of a perfect storm flooding event, called historic, unprecedented, multi-state, and quite unbelievable. A stalled front to the west kept channeling storms into the Appalachians and foothills saturating the ground prior to the hurricane effects. When the tropical storm rain fell, the water had nowhere to go, so it ran into creeks, streams, rivers, lakes, and low-lying areas. And it showed no mercy, hour after hour.

Our daughter who has lived in the Asheville/Black Mountain area for 20 years, came down to ride out the storm with us. Now, she is wondering how her neighborhood fared. Her street was evacuated on Friday, and the news from Montreat, Swannanoa, and Black Mountain is horrific. Perhaps by the time this goes to print, the news will reflect the magnitude of the disaster, the loss of life in cars washing away with people inside them, mudslides, neighborhoods washed away, roads and bridges gone, structure fires without folks having any means to call for help.

As we received messages from different sources, we tried to separate the factual from the sensational as we would in other newsworthy happenings. As it is, the truth about conditions all over the mountains and foothills ARE sensational without any hype.

Any disaster will make most people evaluate what's really important in life. After emergency situations, some tragedy we may experience, the world is never the same for us. This Flood of

2024 will change the way we look at life, one that is temporary, changeable, even fickle it seems. We can't put much stock in the part of life that can be swept away in a day.

This morning, I watched hummingbirds working the zinnas spared by the storm. Somewhere those tiny birds had

huddled in the gale force winds and survived and will keep on their journey to the tropics. Like them, we will recover, the communities will rebuild, the families who lost all, even loved ones, will survive—changed, but alive and facing the future. For now, they grieve.

A faith that cannot be swept away will sustain us, even in dire conditions. Please pray for our mountain communities, the heartbroken and hurting. And any way you are able, please help.

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NC State Board of Elections working to "gain better sense" of county voting facilities, operations

October 1, 2024 | North State Journal (NC) Author: A.P. Dillon| Section: Article | 1000 Words OpenURL Link

RALEIGH — In a call with media on Tuesday, the North Carolina State Board of Elections Executive Director Karen Brinson Bell addressed voting questions for those living in the areas in the western part of the state impacted by Hurricane Helene.

This storm is like nothing we've seen in our lifetimes in western North Carolina," Brinson Bell said in prepared remarks. "The destruction is unprecedented and this level of uncertainty this close to election day is daunting."

"Mountain people are strong and the election people who serve them are resilient and tough too," Brinson Bell said. "Just go back to 2020, when we held an incredibly successful election with record turnout during the COVID pandemic."

There are 12 county boards of elections offices still closed today, per Brinson Bell, who said she had no reports of voting equipment being damaged in any of the county board of elections sites and that five sites have requested the NCSBE's Attack Response Kits (ARK) in order to regain communications. An ARK includes a clean laptop, wi-fi hotspot, a connectivity protection device, and sometimes a cellphone.

25 counties plus the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians Tribal areas which spans three counties are under NC's emergency disaster declaration that was approved by President Joe Biden. Counties included are Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Cherokee, Clay, Cleveland, Gaston, Graham, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Lincoln, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Swain, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes, and Yancey.

With a few exceptions like Buncombe and Watauga, the majority of the counties impacted are considered Republican leaning.

In-person early voting begins Oct. 17 and ends Nov. 2. Election Day is Nov. 5, but around 250,000 absentee ballots have gone out to voters already. Brinson Bell answered a number of questions arose about tracking those ballots. She said use of Omniballot, the online ballot portal used by overseas citizens and visually impaired persons, might be an option but wasn't being considered at the moment.

Returning absentee ballots to early voting sites or on Election Day could be issues the NCSBE may need to take up and make asks of the legislature for, as well as possibly asking for an extension on the grace period for returning those ballots. Right now, all absentee ballots must be received by the appropriate county board of elections by 7:30 p.m. on Election Day.

North State Journal asked Brinson Bell if the NCSBE was monitoring the suspension of mail delivery to around 40 zip codes in the affected areas.

Brinson Bell said they were in contact with US Postal Service officials "directly," and that there was an assigned customer service person working with them. She said they were watching the suspensions and were working in coordination with the postal service.

"We also are working with Emergency Management and our federal authorities who have constant communication with the postal service as well," Brinson Bell said.

When asked about making sure early voting sites were up and running as well as election day polling places, Brinson Bell said they are working to "gain a better sense" of when voting locations and facilities will be able to come back online with their operations.

"Right now, our main objective is to get the county boards of elections up and operating," said Brinson Bell. "And for many of those folks in the affected communities, where roads have been washed out, or they do not have utilities, water power, different circumstances. So, even getting our staff in to be able to assess is a challenge."

She added that by communicating with Emergency Management officials that "mid to late" this week is when they would be able to assess the full range of issues and any facilities that may be impacted.

"We have a good sense of which facilities were in flood areas, but of course this damage extends far beyond flood damage," Brinson Bell said. She added there may be sites impacted by flooding, mudslides or downed trees.

"What we do know is when we've been able to respond in past storms, be it from flooding or other situations and State Emergency Management, the North Carolina National Guard have helped us to stand up temporary polling sites," Brinson Bell said. "It was during Hurricane Dorian that we actually had voting from a tent that was stood up by the National Guard that made voting possible in Hyde County."

Brinson Bell said it was "too soon to know, if the NCSBE would need to consider mergers of polling places or potentially extending use of early voting facilities.

"We anticipate having a better idea in the next few days and hopefully by the end of the week, as to whether we need to take actions with the State Board, the legislature or just work with our Emergency Management officials to do temporary locations," said Brinson Bell.

Brinson Bell and NCSBE Legal Counsel Paul Cox both underscored that voters having to temporarily living elsewhere can request an absentee ballot and have it sent to the temporary address.

Citizens can obtain an absentee ballot through the North Carolina Absentee Ballot Portal: https://votebymail.ncsbe.gov/app/home

If a voter has already requested an absentee ballot but cannot get it at the address where it was to be delivered need to contact their county board of elections in order to spoil the original ballot and get a new one sent to their temporary address.

The NC State Board of Elections (NCSBE) has created a dedicated website for voters in the impacted areas to get information on voting, mail disruptions, and other key information which will be routinely updated: ncsbe.gov/Helene

FEMA disaster assistance available for Hurricane Helene victims in the affected counties and tribal areas. The aid can help cover uninsured damage, lodging, repairs, property loss. To apply visit DisasterAssistance.gov, use the FEMA App, call or 800-621-3362. Those applying will need to supply contact information, the address in question, social security number, a damage list, as well as banking and insurance details. For more information visit: https://www.fema.gov/disaster/4827

The post NC State Board of Elections working to "gain better sense" of county voting facilities, operations first appeared on The North State Journal.

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Musk, with assist from Trump and Britt, promises more Starlink terminals to help Western NC

October 1, 2024 | North State Journal (NC) Author: Cory Lavalette | Section: Article | 333 Words OpenURL Link

Tech mogul Elon Musk has committed to sending "as many Starlink terminals as possible" to battered Western North Carolina after former President Donald Trump contacted him at the behest of state Sen. Danny Britt.

"Yesterday morning, I called a Trump family friend who is a close buddy of mine," Britt said in a post on X. "He got one of President Trump's closest advisors on the phone immediately."

That set in motion a chain of events that led to Trump contacting Musk, leading to the SpaceX CEO agreeing to send more emergency internet access to the region as it struggles in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene.

"Sen. Danny Britt called me on Monday morning and said he was hearing from state officials that Western NC was in desperate need of additional communication resources and asked if Starlink might be available," said Ches McDowell, managing partner of Checkmate Government Relations and a Trump family friend. "I called the Trump campaign and let them know. Almost immediately, President Trump called Elon Musk, who agreed to help."

William Ray, director of the Emergency Management division of the state's Department of Public Safety, was put in contact with Trump's campaign.

"Good afternoon, we would appreciate any assistance with additional Starlink units to deploy into impacted communities across our state," Ray said in a group text message with Trump campaign staff and Britt that North State Journal obtained. "Apologies if this hasn't gone through yet."

The Trump team responded, "Director, I am with DJT, he is going to call Elon now. We are on it."

At 1:31 a.m. Tuesday, Musk posted on X that his company would provide assistance.

"Since the Hurricane Helene disaster, SpaceX has sent as many Starlink terminals as possible to help areas in need," Musk posted. "Earlier today, @realDonaldTrump alerted me to additional people who need Starlink Internet in North Carolina. We are sending them terminals right away."

The post Musk, with assist from Trump and Britt, promises more Starlink terminals to help Western NC first appeared on The North State Journal.

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Officials Suggest Ways to Help Helene Storm Recovery

October 1, 2024 | Pilot, The (Southern Pines, NC) Author: Staff Report | Section: News | 567 Words OpenURL Link

After a disaster or public tragedy, such as Hurricane Helene, people want to help in any way possible, often contributing to fundraisers to help the survivors and the victims' families.

Sadly, scammers often take advantage of these moments to deceive donors. In addition, there are often campaigns set up by well-meaning individuals who may not be able to deliver on promised relief activities. Disaster relief experts say well-meaning but disjointed donations of random goods may not end up getting to those who need help.

The Better Business Bureau Serving Eastern Carolinas urges donors to be cautious about appeals that do not specifically identify the intended use of funds.

To donate to the North Carolina Disaster Relief Fund, visit nc.gov/donate. Eligible non-profits can seek grants and reimbursement of up to \$10,000 from the NC Disaster Relief Fund for efforts to meet immediate storm recovery needs via the United Way of North Carolina.

Those affected by the storm can apply for federal assistance through FEMA's website.

Officials caution you that cash is frequently the best donation because it allows organized relief efforts to identify and best serve storm victims. But because scammers are always looking for opportunities, look for certain characteristics when making a donation.

- * Can the charity get to the impacted area? Not all relief organizations will be positioned to provide relief quickly. Check to see if they are already in the area or will be soon.
- * Be alert to possible social media scams. Scammers recognize the emotional motivation to help in response to emergency situations. Be wary of responding to appeals without taking the opportunity to verify the trustworthiness of the social media source or the specified charity.
- * Local drives to collect clothing and food may not be practical as the logistics and timing to deliver and disperse such items will be challenging. Relief organizations are better equipped to obtain what is needed, distribute it effectively and avoid duplication of effort.
- * Is the charity experienced in providing emergency relief? Experienced disaster relief charities are the best bet to help deliver aid as soon as possible. New entrants may have difficulty in following through even if they have the best of intentions.
- * Are you considering crowdfunding appeals? If engaging in crowdfunding, it is safest to give to someone you personally know and trust, keeping in mind that some crowdfunding sites take measures to vet posts, others don't. If the poster claims they will forward funds to a specified charity, consider visiting the charity's website on your own and giving to them directly after having checked them out.
- * Be cautious about "100 percent" claims in appeals. Charities have fundraising and administrative expenses. If a charity promotion claims that all funds collected will be used for relief, see if there is an explanation about how they are able to do this. Even a credit card donation will have a processing fee.
- * Watch out for charity name confusion. Be alert to questionable groups seeking to confuse donors with names that

sound similar to charities you know.

Organizations you can donate to with a good sense of security and reliability:

American Red Cross - redcross.orgGofundme - hurricane relief fundSalvation Army - give.helpsalvationarmy.orgUnited Way - support.unitedway.orgWorld Central Kitchen - donate.wck.orgFEMA - fema.gov

In addition, there are a number of other religious and charitable organizations collecting funds for Western North Carolina relief efforts. including:

JAARS — jaars.orgMANNA Foodbank — https://donate.mannafoodbank.orgDiaper Bank — https://babiesneedbottoms.orgFoothills Food Hub — https://www.foothillsfoodhub.org/donateBrother Wolf animal rescue — https://www.bwar.org

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Commissioners Fund Sewer Project, Plan Spending

October 1, 2024 | Pilot, The (Southern Pines, NC) Author: ELENA MARSH || Staff Writer | Section: News | 797 Words OpenURL Link

Allocating resources required for Moore County operations is one of the largest jobs for the Board of Commissioners and two of its most important resources, infrastructure and public safety, were a large part of action taken during the board's meeting Tuesday.

Extension of sewer service in and around the town of Vass is continuing to make headway with its expansion across the eastern part of the county. Commissioners Tuesday approved a contract allowing for the extension of sewer along Cameron Avenue and N.C. 690, allowing for sewer connections to additional properties in the project area within the town limits.

The cost of this phase of the project is just over \$159,000 and is funded with grant money from the USDA.

Back in 2018, the county accepted a low-interest loan and a grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development division totaling \$4.8 million to pay for an extension of the sewer lines. But the federal agency tossed in a caveat and required 100 new customers to sign up and pay the \$1,800 connection fee in advance.

Vass applied for a state Community Development Block Grant to lower that fee and finally met the 100 sign-up threshold late last year. The county had also been busy acquiring land easements needed for the new sewer lines. That process, and Vass' new growth patterns, drove some adaptations in the overall plan.

As presented Tuesday, plans include installation of approximately 36,400 linear feet of an 8-inch gravity sewer line east of U.S. 1, 5,600 feet of a sewer force main, two lift stations and related equipment.

The project was initially bid in May; however, only one bid was received and it was over budget. The decision was made to divide the work into four separate contracts. Tuesday's most recent approved contract was number three of four.

Another important aspect of the county's function is its first responders and the vehicles they drive.

Commissioners approved a plan from the county's Fire Commission to standardize the down payment percentage and basic recommended terms for financing large truck and equipment purchases.

The Moore County Fire Commission was put into place with the start of the fire tax in 2015. The county assesses each property tax payer 8.75 cents for every \$100 of taxable value. Those funds pay for equipment and other resources to all 16 fire departments in the county. Before the unified tax was implemented, each of the 16 fire districts charged its own rate, ranging from 4 cents for Seven Lakes to 11.1 cents for Crains Creek.

The new plan states that the purchase of any equipment greater than \$200,000 requires a 10 percent down payment. The down payment is based on the funding formula allowance minus the percentage split.

The plan favors a 10-year financing period with other term limits to be considered following approval of the Fire Commission.

Guidelines for equipment less than \$200,000 are much the same with the exception of a five-year preferred financing. The county may also consider full purchase of equipment upon request from the fire department with approval from the Fire Commission.

There are five municipal departments to be paid out annually and do not have to submit apparatus requests. They include Aberdeen, Carthage, Pinehurst, Southern Pines and Whispering Pines.

Commissioners unanimously approved the plans as written with only one concern to bring back to the Fire Commission for further review.

"I hope that the commissioners will adopt a policy that the operational costs cannot exceed the rate of inflation going forward," said Commissioners Chairman Nick Picerno.

"My fear is, if we don't put a limit on the operational growth, the operational growth will continue to rise at a faster pace than inflation."

Picerno's worry about inflation is that the county could end up having to spend money from its general fund to help supplement the cost of large equipment purchases.

Earlier this year, commissioners approved spending for a few capital improvements to the Carthage, Seven Lakes and Robbins fire departments. The first was a \$50,000 request for building renovations in Carthage. A second asked for \$20,000 to repair the driveway and repaint bay doors in Seven Lakes. A third request sought to spend \$100,000 toward a tanker truck —used for hauling water to a fire — that was delivered in February 2023. The tanker's full cost is \$325,000; \$225,000 is being financed for 10 years at 1 percent interest.

Though fire trucks have remained largely the same in basic function over the years, the price tag on the vehicles has increased by hundreds of thousands of dollars.

In other action Tuesday, commissioners also discussed drafting a resolution for an "adopt a county" model following the devastation of Hurricane Helene on North Carolina's mountain towns. The concept would see counties east of Interstate 74 be assigned a county in the west potentially to provide aid to.

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More than 400 participate in ultra marathon - Hinson Lake run demonstrates community in suffering by giving donations to Hurricane Helene victims

October 1, 2024 | Richmond County Daily Journal (Rockingham, NC)

Section: sports | 508 Words

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ROCKINGHAM — More than 400 athletes put their bodies to the test as part of the 17th annual Hinson Lake 24 Hour Ultra Classic.

As part of the event, competitors attempted to do as many laps as their bodies would allow over a 24-hour period with the winner Zac Godfrey clocking more than 100 miles in one day.

"I have a set point where I would walk for a minute and a half, then run. I would do that twice and have these little marks I would hit to keep me on track. You just kind of zone out. After a while, you just become braindead. That's the best way to put it ... It's just suffering," said Godrey, who traveled with his wife and 2-year-old child to compete in the event.

Hinson Lake 24 Hour Utra Classic Organizer said this year's event set a record in overall attendance with more 430 participants. Lindstand credited a great group of volunteers and support among the running community for making the ultra marathon an annual tradition in Richmond County.

"Many hands make light work. It goes very smoothly because of all of the help I get. If you do any research on this type of event - 24-hour events - they're geared toward elite runners. They cost \$150 to \$250 bucks just to get in. We charge \$35. They come in, they get a shirt, a coffee mug or glass and they get all the food they can eat while they're out there. It's just a great cause and it's become a family reunion for most people," Lindstram said.

On the women's side, Michelle Gray from the Runners from Hell Ultra Team took first place as the only female competitor to clear 100 miles. Gray said she ran the race in honor of Bill Keane, who recently passed away and the Hinson Lake 24 Hour Ultra Marathon was one of his favorite events to compete in each year.

"His whole family is here. It's all for Bill. This was his favorite race, and he passed away a couple of years ago. It's my second year (at Hinson Lake) ... Jerry is outstanding. Every volunteer is outstanding. The race is outstanding. The course is outstanding. I saw a fox, and a shooting star. I could do without the snakes, but everything else was great," Gray said.

Altough a tradition since 2007, the events of Hurricane Helene shifted the focus of this year's run. The weather did not dappen the race. In fact, the hurricane dodged the event entirely. However, with so much suffering taking place in Western North Carolina, event organizers and Richmond County Operation Fix began a supply drive to assist pet owners impacted by the floods.

"They supply a lot of the help. We ask the runners to donate pet supplies ... There is going to be over a ton of dog food and litter. What they're planning on doing is because of the flooding in Western North Carolina they're going to take all of that food and donate it to the animals," Lindstrand said.

Jerry Lindstrand

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In Helene's wake, leadership is crucial

October 1, 2024 | Robesonian, The (Lumberton, NC) Author: John Hood Contributing columnist| Section: opinion | 645 Words OpenURL Link

I got it wrong. Deeply wrong. Embarrassingly wrong.

It was a few days after Hurricane Floyd struck the coast on September 16, 1999. I'd been covering North Carolina politics for more than a dozen years by then, penning my syndicated column and appearing regularly on radio and television. Our discussion program "N.C. Spin" had debuted the previous fall on the Triangle's Fox affiliate and was in the process of expanding to some two dozen TV and radio stations across the state.

During a segment of the show devoted to the destruction wrought by Floyd, I said something to the effect that North Carolina's emergency personnel, government agencies, utilities, private contractors, and relief organizations knew what to do and how to do it. They didn't need politicians holding press conferences and yapping incessantly about matters beyond their ken.

I thought I was praising the skill and determination of those at the forefront of the response to Hurricane Floyd, which devastated much of eastern North Carolina and killed an estimated 85 people, including 51 North Carolinians. I thought I was championing policy expertise over political exploitation.

What I was really doing was exhibiting my ignorance.

One "N.C. Spin" viewer was particularly incensed: then-Gov. Jim Hunt. One of the targets of my criticism, he let it be known through a mutual acquaintance that he considered my argument poorly reasoned. I don't remember the specifics of what got passed on to me, but it was something to the effect that in times of crisis, political leadership is crucial.

Emergency responders aren't necessarily sure what to do when. Agencies butt heads. Harried public and private actors misinterpret, miscommunicate, and inadvertently misinform. Sometimes they move too slowly, making people wait too long for rescue and relief. At other times they react recklessly, misspending scarce resources on lower priorities rather than waiting to make wiser decisions with a firmer grasp of the facts on the ground.

It is the task of leaders, elected and appointed, to make such judgment calls, to focus minds and referee disputes, to comfort the suffering, and to offer hope and reassurance to a panicky public.

Now, as North Carolinians grapple with the tragic aftermath of another monstrous storm, Gov. Roy Cooper and other political and civic leaders must rise to the challenge Hunt helped me grasp a quarter of a century ago.

Helene has ravaged western North Carolina. Her path of destruction is broad, deep, and jaw-dropping. Homes, businesses, entire towns crushed or swept away. At this writing, hundreds of thousands of people remain without power, some trapped in place by gaping holes or raging rivers. The death count, already heart-rending, will grow as more of the missing are found.

North Carolina will recover. We will rebuild. We've done it before. But there's nothing automatic about the process. And we all have parts to play in it, whatever our roles, wherever we live.

If you have family or friends in the affected areas, keep trying to reach them. Once you do, offer help and comfort. If you'd like to contribute money, supplies, or volunteer time to relief and recovery efforts, there are many organizations well-situated to deploy your gifts effectively, including Samaritan's Purse, Baptists on Mission, Catholic Charities USA, and Operation Airdrop.

At the state level, lawmakers have prudently accumulated \$4.75 billion in our rainy-day fund plus billions more in unreserved credit balance. That rainy day is here. Localities will spend additional dollars from their own reserves, as will utility companies, cooperatives, and municipal agencies.

There are many tough decisions to be made, some now, some weeks or months from now as the full extent of the needs and priorities come more clearly into view. That's something else I learned from past disasters. Some funds originally earmarked for reconstruction after Hurricane Matthew in 2016 have still not been expended.

Through it all, North Carolinians will look to our leaders for guidance and reassurance. Pray for them, and for us all. © 2024 Champion Media Carolinas.

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RCC holds first electrical lineman rodeo

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LUMBERTON [] Robeson Community College conducted its first Electrical Lineman rodeo Monday as an exhibition of the college's electrical lineman program launched in July. Nineteen students will graduate on today.

Program head Dr. Joshua Locklear said he is grateful to Lumbee River EMC for assistance in creating and planning the program.

Locklear also said the timing for the first cohort's graduation couldn't be better, as linemen are in critical demand in western North Carolina, Georgia and Florida due to the effects of Hurricane Helene.

Several potential employers were scheduled to attend the rodeo to scout the students for hire. However, several were unable to attend due to their hurricane relief efforts and personnel needed in western North Carolina.

RCC has been informed of available positions, and applications will be made available to the lineman students.

According to the RCC website, applications for the second cohort are open, and the third will soon be accepting applications.

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