

Helene was a warning. NC must get ready for climate shocks - Opinion

October 7, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Ned Barnett, News & Observer | Section: opinion | 624 Words OpenURL Link

Hurricane Helene's flooding of western North Carolina left vast destruction, but it should also bring new urgency to construction - how and where to build, not only in the mountains but across the state. After the deluge that left more than 100 dead in North Carolina, the state must increase its commitment to making communities more resilient as climate change causes more flooding, higher winds, rising seas, longer droughts and more frequent wildfires.Improving the state's resiliency is a well-established goal, if not a well-established action. In the wake of Hurricane Florence in 2018, Gov. Roy Cooper created a state Office of Recovery and Resiliency. Meanwhile, researchers at the state's universities are focused on how to improve building codes and channel development away from flood risks.But improving the state's ability to withstand stronger and wetter storms has been slowed by development interests and political resistance to new regulations. Under pressure from the state's home-building industry, the Republican-controlled legislature recently opened isolated wetlands to development and blocked efforts to strengthen the state's building code. The disaster in western North Carolina should make it clear that such impediments need to give way to a broad and robust commitment to improving the state's resiliency. Erin Seekamp, a professor who directs the Coastal Resilience and Sustainability Initiative at N.C. State University, said it's time for a strong consensus about how to respond to the natural forces being fueled by a warming planet. "Climate change. Even those words in North Carolina have been politically charged," she said. "We need to realize it's not a conversation about whether climate change is occurring - it is - but how we are approaching our planning." Amanda Martin, the state's chief resilience officer, said local governments need to consider the siting of new homes and businesses in light of how climate change has expanded flood risks beyond what outdated flood zone maps show.Martin said, "We're going to need to remap parts of the state because the hydrology has changed." Local governments, she said, "need to be careful about where new development goes. There's a place for people and there's a place for water."Homes and public infrastructure need to reflect the rising pressure from natural forces, she said: "If you want a bridge to last 100 years, you have to build it to survive the climate of the next 100 years." North Carolina has made progress on resiliency. The state has a resilience plan. Homes have been moved from chronic flooding areas. A state grant program encourages coastal homeowners to have fortified roofs that withstand powerful winds. But, as the legislature's action on wetlands and its inaction on building code improvements show, the growing hazards of long-term climate change are too often ignored in favor of short-term profits. The legislature will return this week to allocate money for relief from Hurricane Helene. Lawmakers should also be investing in reducing the cost of the next natural disaster. It's not a question of political ideology. Alabama, a deep red state, has a "Strengthen Alabama Homes" program to make homes more storm resistant. At UNC-Chapel Hill, Antonia Sebastian, an assistant professor in the Department of Earth, Marine and Environmental Sciences, studies how climate and land-use changes affect flood hazards. She said flooding in North Carolina's mountains shows that the impact of climate change goes beyond coastal areas. "This is a wakeup call. The whole state can flood," she said. "If we don't think about where the next structures are going, we may be unwittingly putting people in harm's way."The state must "design for the future rather than putting things back exactly the way they were before," she said. Hurricane Helene's deluge wasn't a freak event. It is a warning: Don't simply restore, prepare..

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JD Vance to host town hall in Greensboro, criticizing Harris on immigration and Helene

October 7, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Luciana Perez Uribe Guinassi, News & Observer | Section: election | 400 Words OpenURL Link

Republican vice presidential candidate JD Vance is coming back to North Carolina this week, this time to host a town hall in Greensboro.

Doors for the town hall at the Koury Convention Center will open at 4 p.m. on Thursday, with Vance slated to speak at 6 p.m. Topics will likely include the economy, illegal immigration and Hurricane Helene.

The remnants of Hurricane Helene, which began to be felt in North Carolina on the last Thursday of September, devastated the western part of the state, bringing historic flooding, destruction and death.

The Trump campaign has heavily politicized the ongoing recovery efforts. Most recently, former President Donald Trump, during a town hall meeting in Fayetteville on Friday night, said that the federal government's response to the devastating storm had been "terrible." The news release announcing Vance's town hall said Vice President Kamala Harris "completely left North Carolinians behind in the wake of devastation post-Hurricane Helene."

The Harris campaign responded to Vance by pointing to Harris's comments about Trump being "extraordinarily irresponsible" in pushing "disinformation" about Helene relief aid.

Many on social media platforms like X have also taken to criticizing the response despite federal responders working in the area alongside their local and state counterparts. Conspiracy theories have also spread on social media.

President Joe Biden surveyed the damage in North Carolina by air on Wednesday and pledged more resources. Harris visited Charlotte on Saturday, announcing Mecklenburg County would also be eligible for federal disaster aid.

The Trump campaign's news release hones in on the fiscal impact of immigrants living in the United States without legal authorization, citing research by the Federation for American Immigration Reform, a nonprofit, antimmigration organization.

"While Kamala Harris continues to ignore these critical issues," says the release, Trump "has a proven track record of putting North Carolinians first."

"President Trump understands the importance of lowering taxes, securing the border and stopping the unchecked flow of illegal immigration that drains resources from American citizens. President Trump has always fought for the people, and he will continue to fight to restore economic stability, security, and prosperity in North Carolina," says the release.

Vance's visit to Greensboro is his fifth trip to North Carolina since becoming Trump's running mate.

In mid-September, he held a rally in Raleigh. Before that, he was with Trump in Asheboro. He has also visited Greenville twice.

Trump, Harris and Democratic vice presidential candidate Tim Walz have also visited the battleground state often this year.

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Under the Dome podcast: Helene response and what's to come

October 7, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Dawn Baumgartner Vaughan, News & Observer | Section: politics government | 241 Words OpenURL Link

Start your week in North Carolina politics with our latest Under the Dome podcast, for the week of Oct. 7, 2024. Dawn Vaughan here, your podcast host and The News & Observer's Capitol bureau chief. On this episode, I'm joined by my N&O colleague Adam Wagner, who covers the environment and climate change.

Wagner is one of the team of reporters covering Hurricane Helene's impact on Western North Carolina. We spend this week's episode talking about what we know, and what we don't, about Helene's devastating flooding and damage in the state. We recorded the episode late on Thursday. On Friday, Senate leader Phil Berger and House Speaker Tim Moore announced what we thought was coming - an initial round of relief legislation is expected during the Oct. 9 session.

Wagner was also there this past week for President Joe Biden's visit to North Carolina and briefing with Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper. We talk about why the damage is so large and what recovery might look like.

Headliner of the Week

After the break, we talk more about Helene response and share our picks for Headliner of the Week. Both are related to Helene - learning about the quartz mine in Spruce Pine and making sure to "look for the helpers."

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.

Under The Dome embed (2022)

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Hurricane Milton is now a Category 5 headed for Florida. Here's what NC can expect

October 7, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Martha Quillin and Renee Umsted, News & Observer | Section: weather news | 587 Words OpenURL Link

Hurricane Milton became a Category 5 storm Monday in the Gulf of Mexico, and it will make landfall mid-week on the west coast of Florida, forecasters say.

The storm, with maximum sustained winds of about 150 mph as of Tuesday afternoon, is expected to have minimal effects on North Carolina.

Milton cone Oct. 8. jpgThe predicted track of Hurricane Milton, as of Tuesday, Oct. 8. It is predicted to make landfall in Florida on Wednesday, Oct. 9.

Where is Hurricane Milton now?

As of Tuesday morning, Oct. 8, Milton was about 545 miles southwest of Tampa, Florida. The storm is expected to make landfall in Florida the night of Wednesday, Oct. 9, according to the National Hurricane Center.

milton wind arrival.pngTropical-storm-force winds from Hurricane Milton are expected to reach all the way to the southern coast of North Carolina as the storm moves across Florida this week and into the Atlantic.

When will Hurricane Milton hit Florida?

Milton is expected to move across the Gulf toward Florida Tuesday and Wednesday. The center of the storm could make landfall around 6 or 7 p.m. Wednesday near Tampa, but much of Florida's west coast was under a hurricane watch as of Tuesday.

Tropical-storm-force winds will reach Florida's west coast beginning Wednesday morning, forecasters said. At least 12 inches of rain is expected in some areas up to 12 feet of storm surge is possible along the coast.

The storm will cross the state on a northeasterly path, forecasters say, heading for the Atlantic Ocean. The center of the storm should be over water off Florida's east coast sometime Thursday morning.

milton wind speeds.pngGusty winds are expected along North Carolina's southern coast as Hurricane Milton crosses Florida this week on its way into the Atlantic.

Will Hurricane Milton impact North Carolina? And when?

Because of its size and strength, Hurricane Milton will generate winds far from the center of the storm.

As it crosses Florida and heads into the Atlantic, forecasters say Milton will generate tropical-storm-force winds in southern Georgia, coastal South Carolina and on the southern coast of North Carolina Wednesday night through Thursday night.

Local forecasts for Carolina Beach all the way to Hatteras say there is an increased risk of rip currents, and rough seas should be expected from Wednesday to late Thursday.

According to a report issued around 5 p.m. Oct. 7 by the National Weather Service's Forecast Office in Newport/Morehead City, distant impacts from Milton are expected Thursday into Saturday. Those effects include dangerous rip currents, rough surf, beach erosion and ocean overwash, especially in parts of the Outer Banks.

Minor coastal flooding is possible, especially during daytime high tides.

It will be windy along the southern N.C. coast Wednesday and Thursday as the storm passes, with gusts around 20 mph.

What about storms Kirk and Leslie?

- « As of Monday afternoon, Kirk was a post-tropical cyclone with maximum sustained winds of 75 mph. The National Hurricane Center forecast for the storm shows it in the north-central Atlantic tracking east, well away from the U.S.
- « Hurricane Leslie, in the south-central Atlantic, had maximum sustained winds of 85 mph Monday afternoon. The Hurricane Center said the storm will likely track northwest, then north-northwest, over the ocean for the next five days. By Friday or Saturday, Leslie is expected to run into strong wind shear as it cross the ocean, which typically weakens a hurricane or causes it to fall apart.

'Hopeless and helpless': River Arts District in Asheville was another casualty of Helene

Baptists on Mission among helpers at work in Western NC after Helene devastation

'There's just nothing left.' Helene wipes out Chimney Rock's Main Street

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Popular discount store opens in Triangle town & new indoor pickleball opens in Raleigh

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The popular discount retailer Five Below opened its newest Triangle location in Johnston County.

The store, which opened Friday, Oct. 4, in Selma, is known for its wide selection of merchandise, most of it priced between \$1 and \$5. Shoppers can find candy, snacks, beauty items, home decor, tech, party supplies and more.

Headquartered in Philadelphia Five Below has more than 1,700 stores in 44 states.

The new Johnston County store is the latest Triangle location for the brand, which also operates in Apex, Cary, Durham, Garner, Holly Springs, Morrisville and Raleigh.

Located at 610 Saint Mark Ave., the Selma store is one of several retailers planned for the Eastfield development.

Academy Sports + Outdoors' grand opening celebration began Friday, Oct. 4. Burlington's grand opening is scheduled for Friday, Oct. 11.Marshalls will open at 620 Saint Mark Ave. on Thursday, Oct. 17.Ulta Beauty, Hobby Lobby and Old Navy are also expected to open soon in Selma. Target is also planning to open a store at the development.

Here's some other Triangle retail news you may have missed.

Pin Point pickleball & golf concept opens in Raleigh

Pin Point Raleigh

A new entertainment business offering indoor pickleball and golf opens Wednesday, Oct. 9, in Raleigh.

Pin Point has 16 indoor pickleball courts, eight Trackman golf simulators and a 3,600-square-foot short-game area for putting and chipping, along with two full bars, according to its website.

Located at 2201 S. Wilmington St. in Raleigh, this is the latest entertainment concept to come to the Triangle.

Hop Shots Putt Putt, an 18-hole miniature golf course, is open at Raleigh Beer Garden in downtown Raleigh. Pins Mechanical Co. is expected to open in winter 2025 at Seaboard Station. It will offer duckpin bowling, arcade games and ping pong. ParTee Shack, another mini golf place, is expanding in the Triangle, with two new North Raleigh locations expected to open in 2025.

50-year-old pizza chain expands in the Triangle

Mellow Mushroom Holly Springs

Mellow Mushroom, a pizza chain founded in 1974, opened a new Triangle restaurant in late September.

The store, known for its stone-baked pies and psychedelic vibes, is at 128 Collins Crossing Road in Holly Springs.

It's the brand's latest expansion in the Raleigh area, joining restaurants in Cary, Raleigh, Durham and Wake Forest.

Well-known Raleigh restaurant moves to new location

POOLES.JEL.JPGA crispy cheese top forms on the legendary macaroni au gratin at Poole's Diner in Raleigh.

Poole's Diner, a Southern restaurant from chef Ashley Christensen, is closing its current space and moving to a new one, The News & Observer reported.

The move, though, is just next door. Poole's Diner will serve its last meals at its original location on Sunday, Oct. 27, and will move to 428 S. McDowell St. in Raleigh on Friday, Nov. 1.

Ask NC service journalism team EMBED

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

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

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UNC, NC State near failing, Duke showing promise: Grading Triangle football at midpoint

October 7, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Andrew Carter, News & Observer | Section: acc | 2199 Words OpenURL Link

Well, that was a wild college football Saturday, wasn't it? Vanderbilt taking down Alabama, and then delirious Commodores fans parading one of the goal posts through downtown Nashville and depositing it into the Cumberland River.

Arkansas beating Tennessee (see, N.C. State: such a thing is possible!).

Michigan losing. USC losing.

Miami, in a special edition of ACC After Dark, coming back from 25 down (!) lateish in the third quarter to win at Cal, which put on a show and reveled in the national spotlight that ESPN's College GameDay provided.

Whew. A lot happened.

It's college football Saturdays like that that have allowed this sport to maintain such a hold, despite all its obvious flaws. It's Saturdays like that that keep fans following and tuning in, despite the reality that we pretty much know, right now, which three or four teams actually have a real chance of competing at the highest level (sorry, about 130 other schools).

And it's Saturdays like the one we just witnessed that can leave us, in North Carolina, with something of a sense of longing. A sense of ... missing out? Something like that. At its best college football can be a delightful and unpredictable spectacle. At its worst, or most mediocre, it can make anyone question why schools continue to pour money into it, with so little return.

Such is the case, sadly enough, for the majority of FBS programs in North Carolina these days. We're at the midpoint of the regular season and only one out of the seven teams in this state – Duke – can say with any confidence or grounding in reality that it's happy with how things have gone over the past six weeks. (And OK, maybe Charlotte qualifies here, too.)

The others? Well, some fleeting hope mixed with a good amount of letdown.

Given we're at the midpoint, a progress report is in order for the three Triangle schools. Warning: It's not especially encouraging for two of the three. For State and Carolina, it's the sort of report card they'd hide from their parents before forging Mom's signature and turning it back in.

Hey, we've all been there. No? Just me?

092824-DUKE-UNC-KLM-12.jpgDuke head coach Manny Diaz reacts as officials review a call during the second half of the Blue Devils' 21-20 win over North Carolina on Saturday, Sept. 28, 2024, at Wallace Wade Stadium in Durham, N.C.

The grades

Duke (5-1, 1-1)

Midpoint grade: A.

Why: Easy schedule, yes, but Duke has exceeded all expectations under a new coaching staff. The Blue Devils have also been ... what's the word? Fun? Yes, that's it. A fun team to watch, which is more than its two Triangle counterparts can say.

The highlight: Erasing a 20-point deficit in a 21-20 victory against UNC gave first-year head coach Manny Diaz an early signature moment - and sent a rival further into despair. Can't beat that.

The lowlight: Duke couldn't hold a third quarter lead of its own Saturday night in a loss at Georgia Tech, which ended the Blue Devils' perfect start.

From here: The schedule doesn't get any easier, even against downtrodden Florida State later this month. But the question is not so much how Duke finishes, but what kind of foundation Diaz is building in his first year. And that part of the equation looks strong.

Predication: An eight-win regular season, which would be fantastic in Year One under Diaz.

STATEWAKE16-100524-EDH..jpgN.C. State head coach Dave Doeren walks off the field after Wake Forest's 34-30 victory over N.C. State at Carter-Finley Stadium in Raleigh, N.C., Saturday, Oct. 5, 2024.

N.C. State (3-3, 0-2)

Midpoint grade: D.

Why: This was supposed to be The Year for the Wolfpack. It ... has not been.

The highlight: Ummmmm ... [10 minutes later] ... hmmmmmm ... [15 minutes later] ... uhhhhhh ... coming from behind to beat Western Carolina and Louisiana Tech? That probably says it all, doesn't it?

The lowlight: State suffered blowout losses against Tennessee and Clemson, in games the Wolfpack pointed toward as opportunities to prove it belonged on the national stage. The only thing they proved is how far away State really is from ever doing that.

From here: The Wolfpack rallied a season ago amid a similarly uninspired start. But that team had Payton Wilson, and strong leadership. This team has underperformed just about everywhere. Who does State beat from here? Its best chance for another win is probably against UNC.

Prediction: Five wins, which is half as many as State expected.

RAL_UNCJMU-SP-092124-RTW_24.JPGNorth Carolina coach Mack Brown watches the coin flip at the start of the Tar Heels' game against James Madison on Saturday, September 21, 2024 at Kenan Stadium in Chapel Hill, N.C.

UNC (3-3, 0-2)

Midpoint grade: D-minus

Why: Allowing 70 points against James Madison, the Mack Brown locker room fiasco that followed, blowing a 20-point lead days later at Duke ... that pretty much covers it, no?

The highlight: Well, at the time, the season-opening victory at Minnesota really was a big deal, and a good moment for a program that needed it. And then came ...

The lowlight: The 70-50 defeat against James Madison, and whatever happened in the locker room in the aftermath, will be worth a chapter whenever the book is written on Brown's UNC's tenure (both parts of it). Surrendering a 20-point lead at Duke days later did not help matters.

From here: This more and more has the vibe of Brown's final season, barring some sort of spectacular (and probably impossible) turnaround. Crazy thing is, given the schedule, there's not a game UNC can't win. But it can also lose every one of them, too. There's a decent chance that UNC and State meet in Chapel Hill in late November as two three- or four-win teams.

Prediction: A 4-8 finish and a likely and merciful program reset.

In other words, with all of this said: It's pretty much basketball season in the Triangle.

STATEWAKE14-100524-EDH..jpgN.C. State quarterback Grayson McCall (2) scrambles for yards before he was hit and injured during the first half of N.C. State's game against Wake Forest at Carter-Finley Stadium in Raleigh, N.C., Saturday, Oct. 5, 2024.

ONE BIG THING

The question is not whether N.C. State quarterback Grayson McCall has played his final football game but whether that should be the case, given he was on the other side of another horrific collision that ended with him on a stretcher, on the back of a cart on Saturday against Wake Forest. McCall's courage and competitive spirit is admirable. He came back this season after missing half of last season - while still at Coastal Carolina - after sustaining a hit that looked a lot like the one he took Saturday. But some things - a lot of things, in fact - are bigger than football.

THREE TO LIKE

1. Some mountain camaraderie at Marshall.

The only good thing about the aftermath of Hurricane Helene in Western North Carolina (and other devastated parts of the southeast) is how people have come together in support of each other, and their communities. And so it was at Marshall, which hosted Appalachian State on Saturday. The Mountaineers' band did not travel. The Marshall band filled the void, and played the App State fight song early on. A small but humanizing and empathetic moment between two rivals.

2. ACC after Dark in ... Berkeley.

OK, it's time to admit it: We were wrong about Cal in the ACC. Well, maybe not, in terms of logistics and the fact that Berkeley remains on the other side of the United States from most of the rest of the conference. But for the sake of this argument, we'll say we were wrong. Outside of the absurd geographical conflict, Cal has been a great fit in the ACC. Its online-minded, meme-generating fans are smart, and fun. Its football team is worthy. The atmosphere Saturday night for Miami was incredible. And Cal even lost in heartbreaking, confounding fashion - which is also very ACC-like.

CHARLOTTE_ECU_18.jpgCharlotte 49ers tight end Colin Weber, left, congratulates running back Hahsaun Wilson on his touchdown run during fourth quarter action against the East Carolina Pirates on Saturday, October 5, 2024 at Jerry Richardson Stadium in Charlotte, NC. The 49ers defeated ECU 55-24.

3. Charlotte has its first signature moment under Biff Poggi.

Don't look now, but the 49ers just might have something going under Poggi, Charlotte's second-year head coach. The Sleeveless Wonder led Charlotte to a dominant victory against ECU Saturday at Jerry Richardson Stadium, and Charlotte, at 3-3, has already equaled its win total from each of the past two seasons.

THREE TO ... NOT LIKE AS MUCH

1. N.C. State's late collapse against Wake Forest.

The aforementioned collision that sent McCall to the hospital was by far the most concerning moment from the State-Wake game - one whose significance extends well beyond the field. In a football sense, though, the Wolfpack's late collapse - surrendering a 10-point fourth quarter lead - is the sort of nightmare finish that can send a season into a tailspin.

STATEWAKE17-100524-EDH..jpgWolfpack fans sit in the stands after Wake Forest's 34-30 victory over N.C. State at Carter-Finley Stadium in Raleigh, N.C., Saturday, Oct. 5, 2024.

2. Fourth-and-short and ... lining up in the shotgun.

Here's an Old Man Rant (or, OK, Middle Aged) about how the game is played these days: Whatever happened to just lining up in the I-formation in short yardage situations and plowing ahead? We see this every week nowadays: teams lining up on 4th-and-1 in the shotgun, and then handing to a running back two or three yards behind the line of scrimmage. And it seems like those plays fail fairly often. It happened to Duke in the third quarter at Georgia Tech. Why do teams do this? What is the logic? Why make a 4th-and-short play ... longer ... than it needs to be?

3. Tar Heels fans tuning out.

Look, we get it, UNC fans: The JMU loss was demoralizing. The collapse against Duke was embarrassing. But still: It's so easy to rip on the football culture at UNC exactly because of the scene at Kenan Stadium on Saturday, where empty seats reigned even more than usual when the Tar Heels are struggling. Like it or not, this much is true: There may not be another athletics-minded, major-conference school in the country where football fans bail faster on their program or coach than they do at UNC.

THIS WEEK'S BEST PROGRAM IN THE STATE

As impressive as Charlotte was during its dismantling of ECU, the honors go to another formerly-downtrodden program that celebrated a big moment against an in-state rival. Yes, Wake Forest, that means you. These haven't been the best of times for Wake and Dave Clawson, who built a very strong program on the idea of finding underthe-radar talent, keeping it and developing it and turning those players into major contributors by the time they were juniors and seniors. In other words: Clawson's program-building philosophy worked perfectly in a time that no longer really exists in today's college football environment, thanks to NIL and the transfer portal.

Even so, Wake found a way at N.C. State on Saturday. Leave it to the Wolfpack to help the Demon Deacons get right.

USATSI_24311065.jpgAppalachian State Mountaineers quarterback Joey Aguilar (4) drops to throw a pass during the second half against the South Alabama Jaguars at Kidd Brewer Stadium.

CAROLINAS RANKING

The sentimental top spot will belong to Appalachian State this week and for the rest of the season. The Mountaineers are dealing with (and will continue to deal with) something much larger than football. Here's hoping Boone and the surrounding communities find some normalcy and peace sooner than later. Beyond that, on the field, it continues to be Clemson, a huge gap ... a gap after that gap ... another gap even after that other gap ... and then everyone else, in some order. But Charlotte is not last this week. That much is clear.

ECU? Well, there's nowhere to go but up.

FINAL THOUGHTS, IN NO PARTICULAR ORDER

« I think the weekend wasn't a total wash for the Triangle - despite the 0-3 record for Carolina, Duke and State. If

you're looking for a bright spot, there was N.C. Central, with an impressive 45-14 victory against Campbell. The Eagles have won three straight, and all by at least 27 points. That run includes a 66-24 victory against North Carolina A&T. We see you, NCCU.

- « I think the reaction to Vanderbilt's stunning victory against Alabama told us a lot about media narratives and how things are talked about in college football. Where were the takes about the SEC being an inferior league, because its supposed worst team took down one of its best? The national talking heads didn't have much to say. Yet when a similar thing happens in the ACC, there always seems to be a lot to say about the ACC's perceived strength (or weakness). Why is that?
- « I think it's easy for State and UNC football fans to become disillusioned and, OK. Understandable, to an extent. But let's keep some perspective. Last week, led by graduate defensive end Davin Vann, State came together to do important work in aiding the recovery from Helene in Western North Carolina. And at UNC, Mack Brown on Saturday asked for prayers for Tylee Craft, the Tar Heels receiver who for years has been fighting cancer. There's a lot more important things going on than the weekly results in this absurd (yet occasionally delightful) game.

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Pet supplies in Hickory: Veterinary hospital brings pet food, beds for Hurricane Helene relief

October 7, 2024 | News Herald, The (Morganton, NC) Author: Sarah C. Johnson sjohnson@hickoryrecord.com| Section: Business| 692 Words OpenURL Link

A load of about 6,000 pounds of dog and cat food arrived at Viewmont Animal Hospital on Friday to help those impacted by Hurricane Helene in western North Carolina.

The food was delivered by an animal hospital out of Wilmington. Leashes, cages, carriers, water and dog beds were also donated, Eastern Carolina Veterinary Referral Emergency and Specialty Hospital Director Gary Walker said.

"Anyone that needs anything, if you can get here (to Viewmont Animal Hospital)," Walker said. "Come and get what you need. Get as much as you need. It's open access and free to the public."

The pet food and supplies can be picked up at Viewmont Animal Hospital during regular business hours, Hospital Manager Melissa Hammer said.

Charlotte Quinney works the front desk at Viewmont Animal Hospital. She said some of the calls she received by people seeking help for their animals have been heartbreaking.

"One lady was looking for a certain cat food. She called from Black Mountain," Quinney said. "She'd just gotten cell service, and she was desperate. She said, through her panic, her house and car are fine, but she was rambling, 'The neighbors are dead. All the cars are crushed.' Her daughter lives in Hickory, so she was trying to make her way down here and then the phone disconnected. I tried to go back and see if I could find her number, but it wouldn't pull up."

Quinney said another elderly woman came down from Banner Elk in Avery County. The woman had her 14-year-old dog with her. She came to get medication for her dog, Quinney said.

Quinney said Viewmont Animal Hospital can fill emergency prescriptions for people's pets.

"(The Banner Elk woman's) house is gone. She's just displaced and she's probably in her 80s," Quinney said. "Everyone I have talked to is elderly."

Hammer said seeing the devastation up close has been mentally difficult for her and other staff members. Quinney agreed.

"Face-to-face you get more of an impact," Quinney said. "Versus watching it on your Facebook and your TV. It's the emotion you are actually feeling. It's gut wrenching. I think that's what's affected me is actually talking (to victims of Hurricane Helene)."

Chris Johnson lives in Brevard in Transylvania County, which is a little less than an hour south of Asheville. Johnson volunteered to bring his truck and a trailer. After loading the trailer and bed of his truck, Johnson said he would take the supplies directly to places with heavy impact like Old Fort in McDowell County and Black Mountain and Swannanoa in Buncombe County.

"Send more stuff," Johnson said. "They need help. Send anything. Nothing's too small. I feel like a lot of people that I've talked to don't know how to help. They think it's too small or it's not enough. I think it all adds up quickly."

Walker said the supplies taken up the mountains by Johnson will be made available to the public. "(Johnson) is going to deliver it house to house if he needs to," Walker said.

Hammer said she is overwhelmed and thankful for the support from the North Carolina coast to help the mountain communities impacted by Hurricane Helene. The donations filled a large U-Haul box truck and four cars. The lobby and several exam rooms at Viewmont Animal Hospital were full of supplies.

"When we first decided to come out here, people said, 'You can't get to Asheville,'" Walker said. "And I said, 'I know, but I know I can get to Hickory.' We're part of the same parent company, so I called them on Monday morning and said, 'We have a plan that we're going to bring food, and I need to deliver it to you. Will you allow us to drop it off?' They said, 'Absolutely.'"

Walker said when Eastern Carolina Veterinary Referral Emergency and Specialty Hospital started taking donations, the lobby was filled within 72 hours. Walker said he plans to bring another shipment to Hickory on Wednesday since the Wilmington hospital filled up again with donations.

Hammer said monetary donations can be made to Viewmont Animal Hospital to help pay for emergency treatment for animals. To make a monetary donation, call or text 828-328-2448.

Viewmont Animal Hospital is at 2870 Second St. NE in Hickory.

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Morganton hospital ER seeing more patients, storm-related injuries after Hurricane Helene

October 7, 2024 | News Herald, The (Morganton, NC) Author: Sharon McBrayer | Section: Health Care | 729 Words OpenURL Link

Morganton's new hospital CEO started his tenure with a trial by fire.

With less than a month on the job, Gary Paxson, CEO of UNC Health Blue Ridge since early September, had to manage the fallout from Hurricane Helene.

The storm tore a path across western North Carolina, causing flooding, mud slides, downed trees, power outages and deaths.

Paxson and the hospital system initially dealt with power loss and water issues, as well as making sure the hospital had the resources needed to continue operating as normally as possible during and after the storm.

Paxson said the Morganton hospital went to emergency generator on Friday, Sept. 27. The generator typically has enough fuel to power the hospital for 96 hours, he said.

The hospital was able to have its full power restored on Saturday, Sept. 28.

The hospital also lost water and had to get an outside tanker truck to pump water into the hospital so it could function safely, Paxson said. It was able to return to city water Wednesday morning, he said.

"The city's done an amazing job of trying to get us back up and running," Paxson said.

Initially, after the storm, the hospital had to postpone non-emergency surgeries. But after it got back to using regular water and power, the hospital has returned to its normal operations.

Paxson said initially after the storm there were several employees who the hospital could not get in contact with, but as of Wednesday all employees but one have been accounted for.

"And we will continue to strive to find that last one as well," Paxson said.

He said the hospital is using every resource available to make sure all staff members are accounted for and safe.

As the hospital system was dealing with the storm and its aftermath, multiple staff members slept at the hospital because they either could not get home, didn't have power at home or just needed a safe place to sleep, Paxson said.

"And so we're housing a lot of those," he said.

Through it all, Paxson said the hospital has had support from UNC Health out of Chapel Hill. Some staff drove in from Chapel Hill and Lenoir to help.

"We've gotten physicians, nurses and other type of staff that have come in voluntarily to help us. We've had increased volumes in our emergency room and patients in-house, and so we've gotten amazing support from across the state to serve those extra needs," Paxson said. "That outpouring of assistance has been truly impressive and greatly appreciated."

He said the average number of patients in their emergency room is 80 to 90 people. Monday night the hospital saw

180 patients and Tuesday night another 125 patients, he said.

Some of those additional patients have been people in need of help to power oxygen equipment, he said. The hospital is working with the local Red Cross shelter to educate the community on the appropriate places to go so that the hospital can make sure the emergency room is prepared for emergencies. The Red Cross is operating a shelter at Oak Hill Methodist Church, located at 2239 N.C. Hwy 181, Morganton.

Paxson said the Red Cross has a generator that can power oxygen equipment at the shelter.

Paxson said the hospital has seen an increase in trauma incidents as people clear trees and debris, as well as from car wrecks.

"We need to make sure that our emergency room is preserved to care for those true emergencies," Paxson said.

For instance, on Tuesday, Paxson said a man who was involved in a mud slide was brought in to the Morganton hospital. He survived.

"I believe, tragically, over the next several days, and even weeks, that we don't know the extent of the damage in our surrounding region, and we're going to have to be prepared for a lot of different events, including loss of life, loss of homes, loss of property, for sure," Paxson said. "So I don't think we know the depth of that yet. As power comes on and resources continue to come into the area, I think those will become more evident, and we will just have to take it a day at a time and process accordingly."

Paxson said a special thanks to emergency responders, linemen, power companies, internet companies and others who have worked to help the community through the storm.

"The communities have come together. The state has come together in amazing ways," Paxson said. "I'm proud to be part of this community."

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Catawba, Burke County businesses, owners pitch in to help western NC hurricane relief efforts

October 7, 2024 | News Herald, The (Morganton, NC) Author: Billy Chapman wchapman@hickoryrecord.com| Section: Business | 1313 Words OpenURL Link

After Hurricane Helene hit western North Carolina, Olde Hickory Brewery co-founder Stephen Lyerly knew he wanted to take action.

Lyerly said the brewery had about 100 cases of new cans that had not been filled. Volunteers at the brewery began filling those cans with water instead of beer on Tuesday.

More cans were donated by Tap Hopper out of Greensboro. Lyerly said Olde Hickory planned to can about 340 more cases of water Friday.

Co-founder Jason Yates said the group plans to provide about 10,000 cans of water. Enough, he said, for a 30-day supply for about 100 people.

Some of the water will go to a nursing home in the Asheville area and some will go with Hickory Wrecker Service to areas where the service is dispatched.

Asked why the brewery decided to help this way, Lyerly paused and thought for a moment before shrugging and saying confidently, "It's obvious."

While volunteer organizations from within and outside of North Carolina use Hickory Regional Airport as a staging area for rescue missions, businesses around Catawba County have also decided the need to help was obvious.

Local businesses have committed to donating a portion of sales to relief efforts. Some are collecting donations or providing meals to workers in the area helping to clean up after the storm.

Other businesses and business owners have taken a more direct approach, delivering supplies and meals to residents in nearby counties where infrastructure has been destroyed and communication is challenging.

Some business owners expressed the desire to help residents in distress in nearby counties.

These are not the only examples of businesses and residents aiding those affected by Helene, but provide a look at how some residents responded when fellow North Carolinians needed assistance.

Providing meals

Cranford Hospitality contracted with North Carolina to provide three meals per day to areas affected by Helene.

Zack Cranford said several of the business' restaurants are providing about 1,500 meals per day to areas around Hendersonville. Flat Rock and others.

He said Cranford Hospitality is providing 200 meals per day to Pardee Hospital in Hendersonville. Another 100 meals are going to a location in Flat Rock.

Some of the 1,500 meals are being distributed to volunteers assisting with search-and-rescue operations in the western part of the state. Meals also are being distributed to shelters.

Cranford said it took about two-and-a-half to three hours each way to travel to Hendersonville due to closures along

Interstate 40 earlier after the storm.

Cranford said he expects to provide meals for the foreseeable future.

"We're just trying to help our community more than anything," Cranford said. "We're thankful for the opportunity and to be in a position to step up."

'A bunch of 12-year-olds should not be having to do this'

Garrett Osborne went to work on Monday but it didn't feel right.

"I just thought, 'This feels weird,'" Osborne said. "I've been seeing all these videos and pictures and all this kind of stuff, and it just feels weird. We lived through ... all these natural disasters that are hours away and even in other countries and it's unique, it hits a little bit different when 30 minutes away from my house there are people that literally lost everything they own."

Osborne, owner of Osborne Real Estate Group, connected with colleagues and friends to provide help to western North Carolina.

With a convoy of pickup trucks, many towing trailers, Osborne and others traveled to Canton, West Asheville and Black Mountain on Tuesday to deliver about 100,000 pounds of supplies, food and water.

Osborne said his eagerness to help caused him to learn some lessons from that first day about coordinating with churches or other officials in areas impacted by the storm. Some places did not have the ability to accept donations, but he did donate in Canton and found a church in Black Mountain also willing to accept donations.

"The churches in those areas are inundated," Osborne said. "They're inundated with supplies and they're overwhelmed. They're not meant to be distribution hubs. They're meant to be churches."

Osborne said a youth group at the church in Black Mountain was managing the incoming donations.

"It's cool to see because it's the power of what people can do when they come together and there's love and support," Osborne said. "But a youth group, a bunch of 12-year-olds, should not be having to do this."

Wednesday, he coordinated with a fire station in Spruce Pine with help from the city of Hickory. When he got there, Osborne said the town did not have power or water.

"It's unclear how soon those areas will get infrastructure back," Osborne said. "You've got an entire town that's operating with no power, no water."

Osborne said he's developed a way for people to request welfare checks on friends and family. He and others in Hickory are coordinating with Baptists on Mission in Spruce Pine, who send individuals out to conduct welfare checks.

Thursday, Osborne said welfare checks were conducted on 20 people. Thursday night, he said requests for checks were received on 70 new addresses.

He said the list for requests for welfare checks and missing persons is in the thousands.

Helping neighbors

Isaac Crouch, owner of Simply Green Recycling in Morganton, said while not able to collect recycling due to inaccessible roads, he wanted to keep doing what his business does: "Pick stuff up and take it somewhere else."

"As of Friday, we couldn't do that (collect recycling)," Crouch said. "We pretty much transitioned to using all of our operations for the relief efforts."

Crouch and Simply Green employees started assisting Saturday.

On Friday, the city of Morganton said it lost power to its water treatment plant. The city said it would take several days to restore operations at the water treatment facility.

"When we started to learn about how destructive (the storm) was, we had no idea how long it would be before we got power and drinkable water," Crouch said. "We started to put the word out on our personal social media pages and our business social media for people to reach out to anyone and everyone they knew outside of the disaster area that could get us enough water to pick up in our box truck."

Saturday, Crouch traveled with four SUVs and a trailer to meet friends and family around Statesville. There, water was collected to bring back to Burke County.

Crouch said they took water to Broughton Hospital and distributed some from the Simply Green parking lot in Morganton.

"Those first few days, there was a lot of hope and people helping each other, people willing to do anything and everything to get their neighbors what they need," Crouch said.

On Monday, 5,500 pounds — 140 cases — of bottled water was collected. Simply Green collected another 8,000 pounds of bottled water Tuesday and Wednesday.

Employees Ben Pannenbacker and Jon Gromm also delivered needed supplies Tuesday in a 20-foot box truck to the Jonas Ridge community in northern Burke County.

Wednesday morning, the city of Morganton reported the city was no longer under a boil water advisory and water operations were returning to normal.

Crouch will return to business operations now that areas around Morganton have drinkable water. He plans to continue to collect donations and take them where they are needed.

On Friday, Crouch picked up another 12,000 pounds of bottled water and 35 empty fuel cans to be filled and distributed in western North Carolina.

Crouch, who lives in Burke County and was also affected by Helene, said driving to collect, organize and distribute supplies was emotionally taxing. Seeing an area he grew up in, people he knows, devastated by flooding and mudslides caused him to have two emotional breakdowns.

He knows there is much work to be done but is hopeful that resilient communities in the region can continue to band together.

"Our ancient mountains have lost entire towns, and we are a long way from knowing how many have perished," Crouch said by email Thursday. "Those of us that continue on have also lost the lives we had before this. Give yourself grace and be kind to your neighbors."

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'Now it's all gone.' Old Fort faces future after Hurricane Helene leaves part of town in ruins

October 7, 2024 | News Herald, The (Morganton, NC) Author: CONNOR MCNEELY Winston-Salem Journal | Section: Travel | 1216 Words OpenURL Link

A brown fog of dust and dirt billowed through Old Fort, N.C., as Amy Davis served chicken and dumplings to every person who wearily climbed the steps of her country store.

By her rough estimation, it seemed as if half the town of about 820 had become homeless by the end of Hurricane Helene's devastation. The wind and water had tossed mobile homes hundreds of yards and washed away cars into the Catawba River, leaving the town's residents to wait for the restoration of cell service and the arrival of help from across North Carolina.

In the days after the flooding, the sun beat down on Old Fort and froze a thick layer of mud and muck around the houses, stores and churches that residents and visitors from surrounding counties now worked to break up and clear.

Power and running water had become an afterthought. Everyone who remained either walked the streets of the town in a daze, worked feverishly to clear debris, or a bit of both.

Davis positioned a "check-in" list on a poster board near the stairs of her store, which collected names of individuals and families from the edges of the town to then post on the Old Fort Facebook page as "safe."

There were still many families and elderly couples unaccounted for in the outer edges of the town. Feeding the rescue workers and wandering Old Fort residents was how Davis figured she could make the biggest difference.

With her family and fellow neighbors, Davis spent the weekend following the storm clearing the streets and cutting down trees until they reached the country store. When they realized the building was still intact, Davis and her family started putting together plans for free meals.

"It's not just that they're getting hot food and a hot meal, but that they know the family that's making it, and they know that we're from here," Davis said. Her husband's family traced their lineage to the mid-1700s, when English and Scottish settlers had arrived in the area, before it became a fort in the Revolutionary War.

As the lunch hour arrived Wednesday morning, construction workers climbed the stairs in grime-soaked T-shirts and pants. With about a dozen others, they cleaned a number of properties that lined the town's main street, Catawba Avenue, including the Hillman Beer brewery, which opened in 2020.

The brewpub is one of two breweries in Old Fort, which is a dry town situated in the dry McDowell County. It was only relatively recent state laws that allowed breweries across North Carolina to serve beer, wine and cider in dry counties, but only what they made themselves.

Residents felt a deep sense of connection to the brewery as a new kind of meeting place that attracted tourists traveling from Charlotte to Asheville.

Jeff Parker, the landlord that owned the property in addition to many others in the downtown area, said the brewery had become the social hub of the Old Fort community.

But now the building's upcoming Oktoberfest decorations were caked in mud. A twisted smell of yeast rose from sludge of the taproom, where dozens of kegs were stacked on top of one another.

"It's all concrete masonry and stainless steel," Parker said of the building. "It's going to be a lot of work, but we're not giving up."

In the streets of the town, employees from the N.C. Department of Transportation, Old Fort residents, members of the Coast Guard and others cleared away trees and debris. Caravans of military jeeps, semi-trucks, and police vehicles filled the faded parking lots. Helicopters thundered overhead about every hour, a strange sight for Old Fort.

Chuck Aldridge, a local bed and breakfast owner, pointed to the surrounding buildings with a warning: the sewer system needed to be replaced, and it wasn't something the town could do without help from the state.

What they could do was take care of their own. On Monday, days after the storm had passed, Old Fort's police chief called Bo Cooper, who managed a Columbia Forest Products warehouse, and asked if the town could use it as a distribution center for supplies.

By the next day, Cooper was driving a forklift in the warehouse, surrounded by dozens of others who carried food and supplies to trucks and waiting families.

Residents drove pickup trucks with stacks of water bottles and toilet paper loaded into their beds and drove them down the streets and avenues of Old Fort.

At the edge of the mud-covered parking lot of the Old Fort Elementary School, which is a mere 3 years old, two sister teachers reunited with three students who brought flowers and cards with well wishes.

"We love you, we'll be praying for you," one of the cards read. "We have Old Fort pride deep inside."

"That's the truth! We'll come back," Lindsay Rowland Latham said. "That hurricane will spit out the Rowland girls."

Her sister, Anna Rowland, stared ahead at the old white house she had grown up in. She had been staying in the house with their mother, Emily, and her sister Lindsay, as the floodwaters rose around it.

When they left the house and reached higher ground near the school, their family watched a couple with a 10-month-baby clinging to its mother's chest wade in knee-deep water to break into the school windows. The man had grabbed a tree-limb and broke the glass to get his family in after the waters swept away their car, Rowland said.

Rumors abounded about what would happen to their classes. Both Rowland and Latham worried about many of their students who lived further out from town and mulled over potential meeting places at nearby churches.

"They don't want to split the kids up but what are you going to do?" Latham said.

Inside the elementary school, there was already a strong stench of sewage that choked the hallways. Filth streaked across the terrazzo floors and masked construction crews sawed open the floor of the basketball gym, where the water had buckled and ruined the seams of the hardwood. Outside, the recess yard was an endless field of dried mud.

The surrounding rows of houses and mobile homes was worse. The structures stood on low-lying land now filled with mounds of silt and packed dirt that cracked and sunk around feet, exposing tree roots, fractured fences, tarps and plastic bottles.

Glass scattered across the rooftop of a house, where its owner had punched out a window to escape the rising flood. Back in front of the elementary school, Emily Rowland stood with Belinda Wright, a neighbor from down the street.

Wright said she was asleep Friday morning when she heard a knock on the door. She grabbed pictures, the ashes of her mother and granddaughter, and left. The next thing she knew, the floodwaters were slapping up on the porch

and her daughter was pushing her out of the house.

"We got out about as far as the Old Fort exit, and we watched our life float away," Wright said. "Every last bit of it."

Rowland turned her gaze over to the house her family had built and lived in for the last 20 years.

"That's all they knew," Rowland said of her daughters. "They walked across the street every day for work, and now it's all gone."

After a pause in conversation, the two glanced at each other with small smiles hinting on their faces.

"I'm just glad you're OK, honey," Rowland said, pulling Wright into an embrace.

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Blue Cross NC, Blue Cross NC Foundation commit \$2.5 million to Helene relief

October 7, 2024 | News-Topic, The (Lenoir, NC) Author: STAFF REPORTS | Section: Archives | 623 Words OpenURL Link

In the wake of destruction caused by Hurricane Helene in western North Carolina, Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina (Blue Cross NC) is taking action, according to a press release from Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina.

Blue Cross NC is working with local organizations, as well as state, federal and local officials, to understand the needs of our communities and determine how we can best support them with immediate relief, recovery, and long-term rebuilding. As part of this work, Blue Cross NC and the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation (Blue Cross NC Foundation) are donating more than \$2.5 million to local, regional and statewide relief and recovery efforts, including support for food, shelter, and supplies, according to the press release.

"Our family, friends and neighbors in western North Carolina are facing unbelievable loss, and we are here for them – making it easier to get the health care they need and providing immediate relief and supplies," said Blue Cross NC CEO Dr. Tunde Sotunde. "We will continue to be there for our customers, employees, and communities as we navigate the challenges ahead together. This is how we take care of each other in North Carolina."

Working With Local Organizations

Community organizations have mobilized to get resources to North Carolinians in need. Blue Cross NC, the Healthy Blue Medicaid managed care plan and the Blue Cross NC Foundation have partnered with organizations on the ground in western North Carolina to ensure they have the support they need to continue their work, according to the press release.

For example, food is a critical need for those impacted. Darnell Farm is a working farm in Swain County that serves as a hub for prescription food boxes. Healthy Blue provided funding to purchase milk, bread and food supplies to serve 2,000 families. Diaper Bank of NC is distributing diapers and other baby supplies across western North Carolina. Healthy Blue purchased 900 units of formula for distribution through the Diaper Bank, helping to meet an urgent need in the region. WNC Food Systems Coalition is distributing emergency food supplies in McDowell, Buncombe and Macon counties, and Interfaith Assistance Ministry is working with NC Medicaid to provide food and supplies to Henderson County families, according to the press release.

Ensuring vulnerable children and families are safe and supported is also a need in western North Carolina. Foster Family Alliance is actively helping resource families in need of assistance due to the impact of Hurricane Helene in western North Carolina. Healthy Blue partnered with them to provide short term housing needs for foster families displaced by flooding. Crossnore Communities for Children provides homes for foster children in Avery, Henderson and Forsyth counties, as well as training and support for families. Healthy Blue rented a generator to provide power to a cottage housing eight young children in Avery County, according to the press release.

Supporting Regional & Statewide Efforts

The Blue Cross NC Foundation is donating \$1 million to the North Carolina Disaster Relief Fund at United Way of North Carolina for rapid response, recovery and long-term rebuilding. Additional funding is being provided to the Community Foundation of Western North Carolina, the Red Cross and the Diaper Bank of North Carolina, according to the press release.

To provide immediate relief, Blue Cross NC is increasing the availability of health care services and helping members access the care they need as quickly as possible. More information on these actions is available at www.bluecrossnc.com/helene, and doctors, hospitals and other providers can find the latest updates on the Provider News Page, according to the press release.

Additional updates and developments will be shared at www.bluecrossnc.com/helene. Members can also call the number on the back of their member ID cards for help getting care.

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Caldwell schools to start back with 2-hour delay, power mostly restored to the county

October 7, 2024 | News-Topic, The (Lenoir, NC) Author: SHELBY POWELL spowell@newstopicnews.com| Section: Archives | 601 Words OpenURL Link

Caldwell County continues to recover from Helene's impact, with line workers steadily restoring power to residents, with roads being cleared and debris pickup beginning on Monday, Oct. 7. Here is an update on recovery efforts over the weekend.

Power

According to FindEnergy.com, which monitors outage date for Duke Energy, Blue Ridge Energy and Rutherford Electric, 569 of Caldwell's 41,082 tracked electric customers remain without power, including 82 Duke customers, 330 Blue Ridge customers and 157 Rutherford customers as of 2 p.m. on Oct. 7.

According to Blue Ridge Energy's outage map, the cooperative has small outages affecting customers fairly evenly across the county with a few larger outages affecting customers mainly in the northern Caldwell.

Across its entire service area, Blue Ridge has restored power to all but 8,917 members according to an Oct. 7 press release, a drastic improvement from the 63,000 members without power on Sept. 27.

"Power restoration efforts will continue in full force until every member has power," said Renee Walker, director of public relations. "No one has been forgotten; we continue working until every member is restored."

Caldwell County

According to a press release from Caldwell County, recovery efforts continue in Caldwell County. On Saturday, volunteers worked around the county to help neighbors deal with damage from the storm. Since the storm hit, volunteers have cleared debris, prepared meals, and manned donation centers.

FEMA is setting up a field office in Caldwell County to aid residents with applying for assistance. Office hours will be announced once the office is operational. To apply online, visit www.fema.gov/disaster/4827.

Anyone who received oxygen from Caldwell County EMS during the storm can have the oxygen tanks picked up by calling Tara Swanson at 828-729-1082.

Caldwell County has officially set up a County Receiving and Distribution Point Warehouse at 2145 Norwood Street Lenoir. The county announced that it has temporarily stopped donations due to needing more time to process donations after being overwhelmed by the outpouring of gifts.

Several websites have been established to give people access to information:

Debris removal begins Monday, Oct. 7, on the southern end of the county. For more information, visit https://www.caldwellcountync.org/494/Helene

For up-to-date road closures in Caldwell County and Western NC, visit https://drivenc.gov/

To help Caldwell County know the extent of damage, complete the county's damage assessment form at https://nc-caldwellcounty.civicplus.com/494/Helene.

A volunteer application form is on the County website to assist in responding to damaged areas

https://caldwellcountync.org/497/Volunteer

Caldwell County Schools

The Caldwell school system was out the week of Sept. 30 and Monday, Oct. 7. The system announced a two-hour delay for Tuesday, Oct. 8, with some bus routes limited due to downed lines, fallen trees and closed roads across the county. Wraparound will also operate on a two-hour delay.

An emergency school board meeting was held on Oct. 7 to discuss necessary changes to the calendar to make up time lost due to the storm. Monday and Tuesday, Oct. 14-15, were changed from a teacher workday and parent-teacher conference day to full student days to account for lost time. Additional outreach will be conducted by the school to make up for the lost parent-teacher conferences.

The system's athletic board will be conducting additional meetings to discuss schedule changes that will help make up for additional lost time.

The school board selected Nathan Pope to serve as public information officer, filling the role left by Libby Brown earlier this year.

Collettsville

The Collettsville community is still recovering, with members in the community working on debris removal, building inspections and other necessary recovery steps. Most roads into and out of the community have been reopened. Most community members are able to get in and out of the area without specialty vehicles.

Power has mostly been restored to the region.

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IRS announces tax relief for victims of Hurricane Helene in North Carolina

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The Internal Revenue Service announced today tax relief for individuals and businesses in the entire state of North Carolina that were affected by Hurricane Helene that began on Sept. 25, 2024. These taxpayers now have until May 1, 2025, to file various federal individual and business tax returns and make tax payments, according to a press release from the IRS.

Following the disaster declaration issued by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), individuals and households that reside or have a business in the entire state qualify for tax relief, according to the press release.

Affected taxpayers with returns and payments with due dates postponed until Feb. 3, 2025, due to Tropical Storm Debby in North Carolina (NC-2024-07) will also now have until May 1, 2025, to file and/or pay, according to the press release.

The declaration permits the IRS to postpone certain tax-filing and tax-payment deadlines for taxpayers who reside or have a business in the disaster area. For instance, certain deadlines falling on or after Sept. 25, 2024, and before May 1, 2025, are granted additional time to file through May 1, 2025. As a result, affected individuals and businesses will have until May 1, 2025, to file returns and pay any taxes that were originally due during this period, according to the press release.

The May 1, 2025, filing deadline applies to:

Individuals who had a valid extension to file their 2023 return due to run out on Oct. 15, 2024. The IRS noted, however, that because tax payments related to these 2023 returns were due on April 15, 2024, those payments are not eligible for this relief. Calendar-year corporations whose 2023 extensions run out on Oct. 15, 2024.

The May 1, 2025, deadline also applies to any payment normally due during this period, including the quarterly estimated tax payments due on Jan. 15 and April 15, 2025. The May 1, 2025, deadline also applies to the quarterly payroll and excise tax returns normally due on Oct. 31, 2024, and Jan. 31, and April 30, 2025. In addition, penalties on payroll and excise tax deposits due on or after Sept. 25, 2024, and before Oct. 10, 2024, will be abated as long as the tax deposits are made by Oct. 10, 2024, according to the press release.

If an affected taxpayer receives a late filing or late payment penalty notice from the IRS that has an original filing, payment or deposit due date that falls within the postponement period, the taxpayer should call the telephone number on the notice to have the IRS abate the penalty, according to the press release.

The IRS automatically identifies taxpayers located in the covered disaster area and applies filing and payment relief. But affected taxpayers who reside or have a business located outside the covered disaster area should call the IRS disaster hotline at 866-562-5227 to request this tax relief. Tax preparers located in the disaster area with clients located outside the disaster area can choose to use the Bulk requests from practitioners for disaster relief option, described on IRS.gov, according to the press release.

Affected taxpayers

Taxpayers considered to be affected taxpayers eligible for the postponement of time to file returns, pay taxes and perform other time-sensitive acts are those taxpayers listed in Treas. Reg. § 301.7508A-1(d)(1), and include individuals who live, and businesses (including tax-exempt organizations) whose principal place of business is located, in the covered disaster area. Taxpayers not in the covered disaster area, but whose records necessary to

meet a deadline listed in Treas. Reg. § 301.7508A-1© are in the covered disaster area, are also entitled to relief. In addition, all relief workers affiliated with a recognized government or philanthropic organization assisting in the relief activities in the covered disaster area and any individual visiting the covered disaster area who was killed or injured as a result of the disaster are entitled to relief, according to the press release.

Under section 7508A, the IRS gives affected taxpayers until May 1, 2025, to file most tax returns (including individual, corporate, and estate and trust income tax returns; partnership returns, S corporation returns, and trust returns; estate, gift, and generation-skipping transfer tax returns; annual information returns of tax-exempt organizations; and employment and certain excise tax returns), that have either an original or extended due date occurring on or after Sept. 26, 2024, and before May. 1, 2025, are granted additional time to file through May. 1, 2025, according to the press release.

Affected taxpayers that have an estimated income tax payment originally due on or after Sept. 26, 2024, are postponed through May 1, 2025, will not be subject to penalties for failure to pay estimated tax installments as long as such payments are paid on or before May 1, 2025, according to the press release.

The IRS also gives affected taxpayers until May 1, 2025, to perform other time-sensitive actions described in Treas. Reg. § 301.7508A-1©(1) and Rev. Proc. 2018-58, 2018-50 IRB 990 (December 10, 2018), that are due to be performed on or after September 26, 2024, and before May 1, 2025, are granted additional time to file through May 1, 2025, according to the press release.

This relief also includes the filing of Form 5500 series returns that were required to be filed on or after Sept. 26, 2024, and before May. 1, 2025, are postponed through May. 1, 2025, in the manner described in section 8 of Rev. Proc. 2018-58. The relief described in section 17 of Rev. Proc. 2018-58, pertaining to like-kind exchanges of property, also applies to certain taxpayers who are not otherwise affected taxpayers and may include acts required to be performed before or after the period above, according to the press release.

Unless an act is specifically listed in Rev. Proc. 2018-58, the postponement of time to file and pay does not apply to information returns in the W-2, 1094, 1095, 1097, 1098 or 1099 series; to Forms 1042-S, 3921, 3922 or 8027; or to employment and excise tax deposits. However, penalties on deposits due on or after Sept. 26, 2024, and — CORRECTED INFORMATION: before Oct. 10, 2024, will be abated as long as the tax deposits were made by Oct. 10, 2024, according to the press release.

Casualty losses

Affected taxpayers in a federally declared disaster area have the option of claiming disaster-related casualty losses on their federal income tax return for either the year in which the event occurred, or the prior year. In this instance, the 2024 return normally filed next year), or the return for the prior year (the 2023 return filed this year). Taxpayers have extra time — up to six months after the due date of the taxpayer's federal income tax return for the disaster year (without regard to any extension of time to file) — to make the election. See Publication 547 for details. Individuals may deduct personal property losses that are not covered by insurance or other reimbursements. For details, see Form 4684, Casualties and Thefts and its instructions. Affected taxpayers claiming the disaster loss on their return should put FEMA disaster declaration number, FEMA-3617--EM on any return. See Publication 547 for details, according to the press release.

Other relief

The IRS will waive the usual fees and requests for copies of previously filed tax returns for affected taxpayers. Taxpayers should put the assigned FEMA declaration number (3617-EM), in bold letters at the top of Form 4506, Request for Copy of Tax Return, or Form 4506-T, Request for Transcript of Tax Return, as appropriate, and submit it to the IRS, according to the press release.

Qualified disaster relief payments are generally excluded from gross income. This means that affected taxpayers can exclude from their gross income amounts received from a government agency for reasonable and necessary

personal, family, living or funeral expenses, as well as for the repair or rehabilitation of their home, or for the repair or replacement of its contents. See Publication 525 for details, according to the press release.

Additional relief may be available to affected taxpayers who participate in a retirement plan or individual retirement arrangement (IRA). For example, a taxpayer may be eligible to take a special disaster distribution that would not be subject to the additional 10% early distribution tax and allows the taxpayer to spread the income over three years. Taxpayers may also be eligible to make a hardship withdrawal. Each plan or IRA has specific rules and guidance for their participants to follow, according to the press release.

The IRS may provide additional disaster relief in the future, according to the press release.

Affected taxpayers who are contacted by the IRS on a collection or examination matter should explain how the disaster impacts them so that the IRS can provide appropriate consideration to their case. Taxpayers may download forms and publications from the official IRS website, IRS.gov, according to the press release.

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Cyclists pour into Lenoir as 25th annual Mountains to Coast ride gears up

October 7, 2024 | News-Topic, The (Lenoir, NC) Author: SHELBY POWELL spowell@newstopicnews.com| Section: Archives | 573 Words OpenURL Link

Cyle NC's 25th Mountains to Coast ride started in Lenoir the morning of Monday, Oct. 7, with participants pouring into town from across the country on Sunday to stay overnight for the event in local hotels and at Mulberry Recreation Center in Lenoir.

Background

According to the ride web page at ncsports.org, "The first Cycle North Carolina Mountains to Coast Ride was held in 1999. The inaugural ride was a two-week tour covering terrain from Murphy to Manteo. In the twenty-four years since, the Mountains to Coast Ride has traversed the state using a different week-long route each year. The ride has stopped overnight in more than 100 North Carolina towns and passed through over 800 North Carolina communities. The Mountains to Coast Ride is not a race, but a recreational trek across the state using scenic back roads. The ride is designed to promote physical fitness, good health and the scenic beauty of North Carolina."

Riders passed through Lenoir in 2009 and 2003 previously, and Lenoir was previously scheduled to be an overnight town for 2024. Following devastation from Helene, Lenoir was selected to be the starting point for the route after Spruce Pine, the original starting point, suffered damages too serious to safely host the riders. Cycle NC has directed attention to the residents of Spruce Pine and has set up multiple avenues for which participants can support the community as it rebuilds.

The Ride

And 2024's ride had more than 900 people register, though Cycle NC only anticipates around 800 total participants this year, including several participants from Lenoir. Participants range in age from 10 to 87 and represent 42 states, according to organizer Chip Hofler. On Monday, the cyclists rode 58 miles to reach Statesville, after which the riders will continue an average of 61-62 miles each day until they reach Ocean Isle Beach on Oct. 12.

The Mountains to Coast ride is not a race, but a tourism event designed to allow for riders to enjoy the route at their own pace, taking in the sights of the countryside and visiting local towns along the way.

To ensure the safety of riders, Cycle NC has Support and Gear vehicles driving alonside the riders to pick them up in the event that riders suffer an equipment failure or exhaustion. The organization has also partnered with the State Highway Patrol to monitor busy intersections and look out for the well-being of participants as they make the trip. There are three rest stops set up along each section of the route to ensure riders have a safe place to stop and rest.

Downtown Lenoir prepared for the riders' arrival on Sunday. Fercott Fermentables hosted a downtown clean up day on Saturday, Oct. 5, to help remove any trash from the social district, and several businesses opened with special hours to welcome the riders to the city. During the day the street bustled with foot traffic as participants were bussed in from their campground at the Mulberry Recreation Center to shop.

The cyclists returned to the center at 6:30 p.m. to listen to a safety meeting from Hofler, where they were also welcomed by Lenoir Mayor Joseph Gibbons. Gibbons spoke briefly about the impact of Helene, about Caldwell's recovery and the event the cyclists would be taking part in.

"You find out what it takes to be a community when something like this happens," Gibbons said. "Best of luck, and we are honored to have you here in Lenoir. Thank you."

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SHELBY POWELL spowell@newstopicnews.com, 'Cyclists pour into Lenoir as 25th annual Mountains to Coast ride gears up', *News-Topic, The* (online), 7 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C149E83B870F38>



Brother Wolf Animal Rescue in critical need of support, \$500,000 donation match

October 7, 2024 | News-Topic, The (Lenoir, NC) Author: STAFF REPORTS | Section: Archives | 397 Words OpenURL Link

ASHEVILLE — A week has passed since Hurricane Helene devastated Brother Wolf Animal Rescue's shelter and destroyed all of their physical assets. All 150 animals were evacuated to foster homes before the deadly flood waters hit, and all 34 staff members have been accounted for, though some have lost everything, according to a press release from Brother Wolf Animal Rescue.

Despite the overwhelming challenges, a small, dedicated team has been working around the clock to ensure the safety of animals. Operating from a makeshift office in one of the few areas with internet access, the Brother Wolf Animal Rescue team is navigating impassable roads, no power, fuel shortages, and extreme communication difficulties. As of Oct. 4, 100 animals have either been transported to the safety of partner shelters from Charlotte to Massachusetts, or adopted by the families who fostered them during the hurricane, according to the press release.

Brother Wolf Animal Rescue plays a vital role in saving more than 5,400 animals annually, with over 60% of these animals coming from rural shelters across the Western North Carolina region. These small shelters often lack resources and adopters and depend on Brother Wolf Animal Rescue for life-saving support to get their animals the resources they need and to find them adoptive homes. The sudden halt in operations threatens not only Asheville but also the surrounding communities that rely on Brother Wolf Animal Rescue's services for their most vulnerable animals, according to the press release.

In response to this devastating loss, Brother Wolf is launching a \$500,000 donation match campaign. Thanks to a compassionate donor, all contributions will be matched—dollar for dollar—up to \$500,000. This means that every donation made will have double the impact to help Brother Wolf establish temporary headquarters now, and eventually build a new facility in Asheville, to continue its vital mission of providing critical care to animals in need, according to the press release.

"We are incredibly moved by the community's response so far," says Executive Director Leah Craig Chumbley. "But our fight is far from over. We urgently need financial support to rebuild and to continue serving the communities and thousands of animals each year who depend on us."

To help Brother Wolf Animal Rescue provide emergency shelter, supplies, and care for homeless pets as we work to rebuild, visit www.bwar.org to donate. Every dollar will be matched up to \$500,000, doubling the impact of your support.

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Blue Cross NC offers relief for members

October 7, 2024 | News-Topic, The (Lenoir, NC) Author: STAFF REPORTS | Section: Archives | 361 Words OpenURL Link

To provide immediate relief, Blue Cross NC is implementing measures to increase the availability of health care services and help members access the care they need as quickly as possible, according to a press release from Blue Cross NC.

Blue Cross NC has made emergency adjustments to its policies to help members in western North Carolina get the care they need:

Blue Cross NC is contacting members with critical health needs to connect them to care and needed supplies.

Members and employers in impacted areas have an extra 30 days to pay their premiums.

Telehealth is available for members who aren't able to see a provider in person, including telephone or audio-only visits.

Members can request early prescription refills to restore lost or missing medications and opt to transfer their prescriptions to a different pharmacy if their regular pharmacy is not available. To locate an open pharmacy in western North Carolina, visit https://www.ncbop.org/emergencyoperatingpharmacieshelene.html

These measures will remain in effect through the state of disaster declaration and will be re-evaluated as necessary. Additional information on these flexibilities is available at www.bluecrossnc.com/helene, and doctors, hospitals and other providers can find the latest updates on the Provider News Page, according to the press release.

Members who have questions about their coverage or who need help accessing care, should call the number on the back of their member ID card, according to the press release.

Members who are in crisis and have access to communications should use these resources:

Visit the North Carolina Department of Public Safety (NCDPS) page for up-to-date information.

Visit ReadyNC.gov for information on shelters, evacuations, road conditions and more.

Call 2-1-1 or 1-888-892-1162, a hotline provided by United Way of North Carolina to receive free and confidential information on health and human services within their community.

Get confidential counseling, referrals or other support anytime by calling the Disaster Distress Hotline at 1-800-985-5990.

You can apply for assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency by visiting FEMA.gov or calling 1-800-621-3362 between 7 a.m. – 11 p.m. daily.

Blue Cross NC members can access available mental health resources by connecting with a behavioral health care navigator.

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STAFF REPORTS, 'Blue Cross NC offers relief for members', *News-Topic, The* (online), 7 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C111028F841B60



State superintendent lays out over \$162M in Helene-related asks for lawmakers

October 7, 2024 | North State Journal (NC) Author: A.P. Dillon | Section: Article | 620 Words OpenURL Link

RALEIGH — State Superintendent Catherine Truitt laid out the Department of Public Instruction's legislative asks related to Hurricane Helene at the monthly meeting of the NC State Board of Education last week.

"Just reflecting on what's been happening since the weekend, it never ceases to amaze me, the irony that out of the worst tragedies comes a chance to see the best in our fellow humans and this storm and its aftermath has certainly not been an exception," Truitt said.

"It is with gravity that I present these asks to you all and to the legislature," said Truitt. "There's still a lot we don't know yet. For example, we don't know the extent of damage to buildings yet to school facilities. We're still working to assess that damage and there are some schools that folks can't even get to yet, so I can't say how long it's going to be before we know the extent of the damage to our public school infrastructure."

The areas impacted by Hurricane Helene include 459 local public schools in 28 districts as well as 24 public charter schools.

The NC Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) legislative asks include \$16 million for school nutrition staff deemed employed for scheduled instructional days missed due to Hurricane Helene and subsequent impact of the storm, and \$150 million in repairs and renovations, school nutrition, equipment, and supplies, as well as technology loss that is not covered by insurance.

Both chambers of the legislature are due back in Raleigh to handle the request on Oct. 9.

Three LEA's with no connectivity; Mitchell and Yancey do not have service and Mitchell still does not have power. Following Truitt's remarks, NCDPI Communications Director Blair Rhoades noted that Micaville Elementary School in Burnsville is "likely out of commission."

Truitt said for context, School Construction Grants amounts in legislation to replace a school building is \$42 million for an elementary school, \$52 million for a middle school and \$62 million for a high school. She also noted the \$150 million ask would be an addition to federal funds that would be coming in.

The superintendent said the districts already have certain repair and renovation funds that are appropriated by the General Assembly each year.

"Some of them save that money and some of them spend that down depending on what their needs are," Truitt said of the already appropriated funds. "I can tell you that having looked at that fund balance, some of the impacted districts have \$500,000 in there, some of them have \$1.3 million. I don't recall seeing a district that had more than \$1.3 million in there so they're starting with something, but of course it's not enough."

Non-funding asks for the legislature to act on include

Concerns about attendance waivers for athletic eligibility were also brought up at the meeting. Truitt said NCDPI will consult with legal counsel to determine if they have the power act on waivers in that area.

"We definitely want to make sure that our students are not penalized for missing school when it comes to participating in athletics beyond the days that are forgiven," she said. "Because we know that this is impacting families on a very individual basis."

Addressing class size waiver issues, Truitt said she already has the power to grant class size waivers for situations such as the current storm impacts and that NCDPI has extended reporting applications for districts hit by the storm.

Additionally, she said schools can go through NCPDI's Financial and Business Services to get a waiver request rolling and that she has directed superintendents to apply as a safeguard if it arises that students or staff changes would cross current limits.

The post State superintendent lays out over \$162M in Helene-related asks for lawmakers first appeared on The North State Journal.

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NC State Board of Elections resolution addressed voting issues for 13 Helene-affected counties

October 7, 2024 | North State Journal (NC) Author: A.P. Dillon | Section: Article | 1027 Words OpenURL Link

RALEIGH — The North Carolina State Board of Elections unanimously passed a resolution directed at facilitating voting for certain counties impacted by Hurricane Helene during a meeting on Oct. 7.

"We may have to bring voting to the people," said NCSBE Executive Director Karren Brinson Bell at the onset of the meeting.

Member Stacey "Four" Eggers underscored the importance for local county board directors to coordinate with state emergency management services to get the supplies and support they need.

The North Carolina State Board of Elections' (NCSBE) resolution will cover voters in 13 counties: Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Haywood, Henderson, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Transylvania, Watauga and Yancey.

The board's resolution only covers 13 of the 28 counties that include tribal lands on its Helene landing page.

"These counties report that not all of their scheduled early voting sites or election day voting sites will be available due to damage from the storm, inaccessibility, the site's current use for disaster response, or the likely unavailability of sufficient staff," the resolution states.

The remaining counties and tribal lands under the federal disaster declaration are Alexander, Alleghany, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Cherokee (Tribal Area), Clay, Cleveland, Gaston, Graham (Tribal Area), Jackson, Lincoln, Macon, Swain (Tribal Area) and Wilkes.

The U.S. Postal Service is still listing at least six ZIP codes in the disaster zone where mail delivery still is not possible. Duke Energy's power outage map shows at least 121,000 customers still without power.

When asked during a media call later the same day about voters outside of the 13 counties, Brinson Bell said the counties in the resolution are the ones who appear most impacted by Hurricane Helene and the others are not being considered because "they are very much back online" and operating.

Changes to early voting plans

The 13 identified counties are "authorized to modify their early voting plans by bipartisan majority vote without a requirement for the State Board to approve those modifications."

Each county board has to create a resolution supporting that the modifications they have voted on they feel are needed due to Helene's impacted and must provide a copy of that resolution to the NCSBE.

Modifications can include changing or adding sites or removing sites that are unusable, adding or reducing days that any site is open within the established early voting period, as well as extending or reducing hours that any site is open on any days within the established early voting period.

There are 40 early voting sites in the 13 counties covered by the resolution. Brinson Bell said early voting may "look different" in some affected areas, but it will commence Oct. 17 in all 100 counties as planned.

When asked if temporary voting sites might be used and how secure they might be, Brinson Bell said those type of

sites are typically National Guard tents like the ones they used during Hurricane Dorian.

Election Day polling places

The resolution says any changes to precincts and Election Day polling places have to be as minimal as possible, stating "the county board shall strive to maintain voting access as close to existing voting locations as possible and should resort to establishing a voting site outside of a precinct only as a last resort."

Poll worker recruitment and assignment

The provision allows for boards to appoint election officials who are registered voters for early voting and Election Day voting sites from other counties. The appointment of election officials for Election Day voting sites "without regard to the official's precinct of residence"

County boards are given authority to make appointments of emergency Election Day assistants and assign them to a precinct as well as reassigning poll workers to other precincts where they may be needed.

Absentee ballot processing

The resolution allows voters to request and receive an absentee ballot in person at their county board of elections office up until Nov. 4.

Near relatives or guardians of a voter can pick up and deliver a ballot to the voter as well as drop off completed ballots to county boards of election, the NCSBE or Election Day polling places. Absentee ballots must be received by these entities by 7:30 p.m. on Election Day.

Absentee voting for affected voters

Voters displaced from their home at which they are registered within the 13 counties in the resolution can return their absentee ballots to the county they may be residing in. This process is designed to help people vote even if something has disrupted normal voting in their home county while still making sure their votes are counted in the right place.

The county office that receives these out-of-county ballots will date stamp the ballots and send them to the voter's correct county before the votes are counted. The county boards will keep a record of the chain of custody of these types of ballots.

The board discussed and amended the resolution to include reporting of the number of absentee ballots returned to counties other than the county in which the voter was registered. The county board will compile a weekly count report of those incidents to be provided to the NCSBE.

Multipartisan assistance teams (MATs)

These will be expanded to cover shelters and locations in the disaster area.

Per the NCSBE, a multipartisan assistance team, or "MAT," is a group with multiple party affiliations appointed by a county board of elections that assist with mail-in absentee voting and other services for voters that need additional help, such as individuals in hospitals, shelters and nursing homes.

MATs can provide voters with registration services, absentee ballot requests, serving as an absentee ballot witness, sealing the ballot and mailing it.

In limited cases, a MAT may help the voter in marking a ballot, but the voter's selection is "kept in strict confidence."

"These measures were put in place to ensure the victims of Helene can vote in the upcoming election and provide election officials in the hardest hit areas the tools they need to conduct a secure election under extraordinarily difficult conditions," Brinson Bell said in a post-meeting press release. "Just like the people of western North Carolina, election officials are resilient. We are determined to get the job done for our neighbors and friends in western North Carolina."

The post NC State Board of Elections resolution addressed voting issues for 13 Helene-affected counties first appeared on The North State Journal.

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Board of Health Discusses Helene, Public Safety

October 7, 2024 | Pilot, The (Southern Pines, NC) Author: ELENA MARSH || Staff Writer | Section: News | 590 Words OpenURL Link

Members of the Board of Health gathered to hear updates on health and safety measures regarding Hurricane Helene and its relief efforts

Health Director Matt Garner gave a presentation at Monday's meeting detailing the ways that Moore County and surrounding communities can aid the west while protecting themselves.

Garner detailed the public health priorities for Western North Carolina and the ways that they have been affected from a public health perspective.

"Many of the health departments that are across these counties have been affected," said Garner. "Twenty-six in total and of those about eight have been closed indefinitely."

The main goal of these county health departments in the coming months will be to get back to a working capacity in order to provide life-safety services to residents.

Part of that mission will involve the formation of a regional health department assessment team. These groups consist of a local health director, director of nursing, environmental health staff and other essential staff whose job it will be to evaluate the departments in the western part of the state.

Local health departments in unaffected areas have been called upon to plan for the distribution of well water testing kits and disinfection information for private well systems.

That duty will include collecting samples from residence, conducting analysis and reporting back to the owner of the well.

"One of the calls for the unaffected counties is having environmental health specialists go out and perform that testing and help folks get their wells back in order," said Garner.

Unaffected health departments have also been asked to deploy nurses and environmental health specialists to evaluate restaurants and other food preparation and serving areas.

"As we experienced with the substation attacks, if you remember, one of the issues was reopening our local restaurants," said Garner. "Making sure they are safe to serve food and making sure they are safe for operation for the public."

Shelter operations, as they remain open, continue to require staffing by local public health nurses to help with maintaining safe operating procedures.

Garner continued to explain that, from a public health standpoint, monetary donations are the best way to help people in the western part of the state.

"North Carolina has established the North Carolina Disaster Relief Fund which is managed by United Way of North Carolina," said Garner. "The money is being used to provide grants to nonprofits working directly in the impacted communities."

While there are many places to donate to, Garner recommended visiting the North Carolina Attorney General's

website at www.ncdoj.gov for a consumer alert describing how to donate safely and ways to spot scams.

"Individuals from outside storm damaged areas who are gathering supplies are urged to collect them, but not attempt to deliver them to western North Carolina on their own," said Garner. "Needs vary from area to area and may change rapidly. Uncoordinated efforts to deliver supplies can disrupt ongoing rescue efforts."

Garner not only cited hazardous road conditions but also that the available routes should be reserved for ongoing emergency needs including search and rescue.

"Recovering from Hurricane Helene will be a long term process and volunteer help will be needed for months to come," said Garner.

Health officials urge those wanting to help to volunteer with an official emergency organization for their own safety and ensuring that those in need receive the supplies and attention they require.

Becoming a volunteer can be done through www.nc.gov/volunteernc.

Aside from poor road conditions – currently there are 652 road closures in the west – the risk for communicable diseases and potential exposure to toxic substances remains high on the front lines.

Contact Elena Marsh at (910) 693-2484 or elena@thepilot.com.

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GOP legislative leaders plan Wednesday vote on Helene relief funding

October 7, 2024 | RockinghamNow (NC) Author: Richard Craver| Section: Rockingham Now| 877 Words OpenURL Link

Republican legislative leaders said Friday that next week's scheduled one-day session will include a vote on an initial disaster relief package to launch the state's funding response to Hurricane Helene.

When the regular part of the 2024 session was adjourned, the legislature established specific dates to return to address certain pending legislation and to hold potential veto override votes.

The next date is Wednesday, which was expected to involve veto override votes of House Bill 10, which features Republican priorities of \$460 million in K-12 Opportunity Scholarship funding for the 2024-25 school year, and would require all sheriffs to cooperate with federal ICE officials.

A joint statement from Senate leader Phil Berger, R-Rockingham, and House speaker Tim Moore, R-Cleveland, said "we are still working to determine what needs to be included in that legislation."

There is about \$5 billion in the state's so-called "rainy day fund" that has been a set aside funding priority of Republican legislators toward natural disaster relief efforts.

"Over the past week, we've heard directly from residents in Western North Carolina and have seen the devastation firsthand," the legislative leaders said.

"Our hearts are broken for the communities that have been ravaged by Hurricane Helene. Despite the destruction, it has been incredible to see how North Carolinians have stepped up to help. We cannot let up on those efforts or forget about the small communities that have been effectively closed off because of this storm."

Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper and state and federal officials also are awaiting initial damage assessment in order to request Federal Emergency Management Administration assistance.

President Joe Biden has approved a federal emergency declaration for North Carolina, which provides federal financial reimbursement for response actions by government entities and some non-profits. Biden visited this week parts of western N.C. with Cooper and state and federal relief officials.

House Minority leader Rep. Robert Rieves, D-Chatham, said "House Democrats are thinking of and praying for the residents affected by Hurricane Helene, especially in Western North Carolina, but also in Eastern North Carolina where a tornado tore through Rocky Mount."

"We are committed to doing whatever it takes to help rebuild the region over the long term. We have to begin planning for the long-term recovery, which will take time. House Democrats have begun working on a package of relief measures and look forward to working with our Republican colleagues and the governor's team to help get it done.

"We stand ready to do this work in one of our regularly scheduled sessions or during a special session — whatever is necessary."

Mitch Kokai, senior policy analyst with conservative think tank John Locke Foundation, said "it's important to note that the statement referenced an initial disaster relief package."

"No one knows at this point how state government ultimately will need to respond to the storm's damage. We

might not have those answers before a new General Assembly convenes in 2025."

Kokai said lawmakers "can take steps now to free up money for items that can be addressed in the coming weeks."

"Since lawmakers are already scheduled to return to Raleigh again in November and December, it's likely that more hurricane-related legislation could be considered at those sessions as well."

Neither Berger nor Moore's office could be immediately reached for comment on whether veto override votes still were planned. Neither chamber have posted their planned agendas for Wednesday.

The Republican supermajority passed HB10 on Sept. 12. The Opportunity Scholarship language in HB10 allows North Carolina parents — no matter how much they make — to get vouchers to help cover tuition for K-12 private or religious schools for their children.

It's likely both chambers will override the veto, as they have seven of Cooper's eight vetoes this session.

It's not clear whether the legislature will look to divert the Opportunity Scholarship funding for 2024-25 school year to disaster relief efforts, or just draw from the rainy day fund.

Cooper has declared a state public education emergency in response to the proposed Opportunity Scholarship expansion, saying "we need to put a moratorium on destructive private-school vouchers until North Carolina's public schools are fully funded."

More than relief?

Berger and Moore did not indicate in their joint statement whether they intended to address any other pending legislation or call for a special session to do so.

In December 2016, the Republican super-majority held its third special session to pass a bill to provide \$200.9 million in disaster relief to 49 eastern counties affected by Hurricane Matthew and two tropical storms, as well as five western counties affected by wildfires.

However, rather than end that session and go home outside of scheduled joint oversight meetings, the General Assembly was called into a fourth special session protested by House Democrats.

Two bills were passed during that fourth session and quickly signed into law by Republican Gov. Pat McCrory. The bills surrendered gubernatorial appointee authority — held for decades — that Republican legislative leaders claimed allowed them to not have to go to court to enforce their reclaiming of authority.

For critics, McCrory's signing of the two bills demonstrated another example of a lack of political will and unwillingness to butt heads with strong Republican legislative leadership over potentially unconstitutional legislation.

The decision by McCrory not to hold a press conference or bill signing ceremony encapsulated his reputation as a go-along-to-get-along executive more in tune with being mayor of North Carolina than its governor.

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