

Mountain residents meet disaster with resolve

October 8, 2024 | Daily Reflector, The (Greenville, NC) Author: Bobby Burns| Section: Local | 1064 Words OpenURL Link

Residents in one mountain county continued to rely on each other to untangle themselves from the mess left by Hurricane Helene even as help from the outside arrived en masse.

Will Stricklin, an Iraq War veteran and former Daily Reflector photographer who is now a volunteer firefighter in Mitchell County, said late last week that the main challenge continued to be communications.

Stricklin reached his old newspaper Thursday thanks to an emergency cellular signal established for rescue workers by state and federal teams that first reached the isolated area between Boone and Asheville on Sept. 30, about three days after Helene hit.

Otherwise, he and other rescue workers had been relying on the Starlink satellite system, which Stricklin said has been patchy but still useful with all other communications down.

"So I view communication as the biggest problem," he said. "Like we said in the army ... if you don't have communications, you're dead. You can't call in air support, you can't do anything. So comms are always, to me, the biggest problem. From there, you can manage everything else."

Gov. Roy Cooper on Monday reported with FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell that more than 2,500 soldiers and airmen are now working in the state with approximately 500 more on their way to aid in rescue and recovery. They join 1,300 responders from 35 state and local agencies from across the country, plus teams from nonprofit organizations and an army of civilian volunteers coordinated by FEMA.

National Guard and military personnel are operating more than 40 helicopters and more than 1,100 specialized vehicles, Cooper said. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is helping to assess water and wastewater plants and dams. Cooper reported earlier that 80 percent of cellular communications have been restored in the region, but many areas are still lacking.

Stricklin said he drove up on a neighbor near Bakersville last Wednesday as the man was building a makeshift bridge from storm debris and recycled lumber to replace a bridge at the end of his driveway wiped out by flooding.

The man's wife has serious health issues, he said. Without cell service, he would have to carry her across the bridge in an emergency, then get her up a set of stairs and over to his car, and then drive to the fire department where rescuers could facilitate a move to a medical facility.

"Imagine if she's having a stroke or a heart attack or some severe diabetic problems," Stricklin said. "That's a big move for a guy who's 80 years old. But if he had a cell phone and he could call 9-1-1, then the fire department with the right extrication equipment could get to them and we could facilitate that with a bunch of young men with strong backs."

After The Daily Reflector published an initial report from Bakersville on Oct. 1, five people who read the story from as far away as Washington state and Maryland called or emailed the newspaper asking for help to reach loved ones they had not heard from. Two of the people were later confirmed safe, but Stricklin said confirming the status of all the missing will take time.

Search and rescue efforts are ongoing, and federal emergency managers who have taken over the response want to be sure they are releasing accurate information about damage and loss of life, Stricklin said.

"They want the right information going out at the right time with the right numbers and everything, so that it's not a guessing game," he said.

He said he has seen teams scour hillsides, houses and hollers. They have done a very good, thorough check of everybody who's alive, he said, but grim discoveries continue and the final toll won't be known until even after the rescue stage ends and recovery begins.

"That'll be a whole process, because it could be that you go and check every house and there's not someone in the house, but a group of linemen might find a body trapped under a bridge that they're working near. So that process could take a really long time," Stricklin said.

As of Tuesday, at least 77 people had been confirmed dead by the storm, according to Cooper's office, and the toll is expected to rise. The Associated Press was reporting a total of 230 deaths across four states, with 76 in Asheville alone, all while a new storm, Hurricane Milton, barreled toward Florida.

The area around Bakersville, like much of the mountains, remained largely inaccessible. Large helicopters were delivering food and water, including military ready-to-eat meals, Stricklin said. A steady supply of food and water will be crucial as the water infrastructure is compromised and people have eaten much of the food they had on hand before the storm — much of what was frozen or refrigerated had to be eaten or go to waste because electricity had not been restored and fuel for generators was not available.

{p class="p1"}{span class="s1"}Meanwhile, neighbor continues to help neighbor, clearing roads and trees, building bridges to reach homes, cooking communal meals and sharing gasoline.{/span}

Young's Fuel Service in downtown Bakersville was rationing its last supplies to residents through the week, Stricklin said Thursday.

"Basically their whole operation was like, just is under mud," but two men were pumping fuel from their tanks and filling 5-gallon jugs for a line of vehicles.

In the nearby community of Toecane, an enclave of artists tucked away in a mountain cove, residents were cut off from the main road until they built a bridge.

"When we went out there, everybody building that bridge, I bet you, was over the age of 60. ... They were all out there with their few bottles of water," Stricklin said. "They had built a little bridge, literally pulling lumber out of the washed-up river banks, just so if one of their older (community) members needed to get out — which they did. There were two, it was an older wife and husband that needed to get out."

Stricklin called the experience humbling.

"I've never seen people step up to the plate like they have," he said. "... When we were driving around during the hurricane with the fire department, one of the guys made a joke. He said, 'Y'all realize that like every man in Mitchell County owns a chainsaw. Like these roads will be cleared in no time.' Just for the simple fact that, you know, people have the will and the determination to return back to normal as quickly as possible."

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Cape Fear Habitat receives grant from Wells Fargo to expand access to affordable homes

October 8, 2024 | Daily Reflector, The (Greenville, NC) Author: Nichole Heller | Section: Local | 458 Words OpenURL Link

The Wells Fargo Foundation has awarded \$15,000 in funding to Cape Fear Habitat to repair a home in Duplin County. According to a news release, Cape Fear Habitat is one of 179 local Habitat for Humanity affiliates awarded grant funding through the 2024 Wells Fargo Builds program to increase access to affordable homes across the U.S.

The grant to Cape Fear Habitat will help repair a home in Duplin County, according to the release. After an initial viewing of the home, the applicant who remains anonymous was accepted into the Critical Home Repair Program.

Once the project started, however, extensive damage was found, leading to the decision to build a small efficiency cottage for the homeowner.

This home includes accessibility features so that the homeowner can continue to live in her home safely as she ages.

When we asked her about her experience in the program, she said, "I like to meet new people and to help others, and I thank you for any and all help you give me."

"The extensive damage to this home made it nearly unlivable and beyond repair," said Cape Fear Habitat Development Director Christina Ferris. "This support from Wells Fargo is truly transformational, helping restore this homeowner to safe, livable conditions for the first time in years."

According to the North Carolina Housing Coalition's 2024 report, 25% of Duplin County residents are cost-burdened by housing, so that's one in four. The fair market rent in Duplin County has increased by 33% in the past five years and is projected to rise slightly again in 2025. The North Carolina Regional MLS said that new homeowners in Duplin County are seeing a price increase of 17% since this time last year. The Wells Fargo Grant will support Cape Fear Habitat's efforts to increase affordable housing in New Hanover, Pender, and Duplin counties, in both the Homeownership and Repair programs.

"We are proud to continue our support of Cape Fear Habitat and their efforts to provide affordable housing in eastern North Carolina," said Suzie Koonce, Community Impact and Sustainability Specialist at Wells Fargo. "At Wells Fargo, we believe a quality, affordable place to call home is something everyone should have access to. Having a quality and affordable place to live supports economic stability, physical and mental health, and generational wealth."

This funding is part of a \$6.375 million donation to Habitat for Humanity International through the 2024 Wells Fargo Builds program to help support more than 290 families in communities nationwide.

Habitat for Humanity is preparing its response to Helene and actively finding ways to recover the communities affected by the hurricane. Habitat's role will primarily be in the long-term recovery of disaster-stricken communities, following the immediate response.

Those who wish to donate to Habitat's response for Hurricane Helene can do so at habitat.org/hurricanehelene.

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The great floods of 1916 and 2024

October 8, 2024 | Daily Reflector, The (Greenville, NC) Author: D.G. Martin Columnist| Section: News| 562 Words OpenURL Link

One of Miss Letitia Currie's favorite topics in her history class in the 1950s at Davidson Junior High School was the Great Flood of 1916.

Miss Currie was the daughter of a Davidson College professor.

Many of her students also knew what she was talking about because their parents had experienced that 1916 flood and talked about it whenever rain poured down hard.

Today, many of Miss Currie's students, their parents and grandparents, great grandparents, and their children and grandchildren are having a similar experience dealing with the flooding that followed Hurricane Helene.

And they will be talking about it for the rest of their lives, calling it "The great flood of 2024."

"News of Davidson," the news outlet in my hometown, published the following account by Gatewood Payne Campbell, granddaughter of Davidson professor Gatey Workman and niece of the late, great opera singer William Workman. Gatewood and her husband Johnny live near Black Mountain.

"Life has stopped. We don't know dates or times. Sirens are 24 hours a day. It's relentless. Helicopters invade our sky. Chainsaws sound nonstop and we run outside in hopes it's in our neighborhood. ...

"Let me back up. We awoke around 6 Friday morning without power. The storm was loud and pounding but we didn't know where we were in the storm. We could not get updates. Around 8:30 we lost internet across cell lines. I called a friend and got her to look at radar and let me know an ETA on rain ending. That was the last call I was able to make. By 9:30 ALL cell signal was completely lost. The rain was increasing. We could see the creek rising. Johnny stepped outside under the porch and was soaked from head to toe after 30 seconds.

"Around 11 we felt like we could go out and survey the neighborhood. We began to feel the weight of the destruction, yet we had NO clue. The creek had turned into a river greater than 50 yards wide. The noise of water heaters, propane tanks, bikes, grills, construction supplies and yard equipment banging on the rails of our bridge to Black Mountain was deafening. We saw two neighbors with trees on their homes and knew they were taking on water."

Meanwhile in Asheville, Bryan King and his wife Angela Koh are assessing the damage to their 12 Bones Smokehouse on Foundry Street in the River Arts District. As I wrote in my book, "North Carolina's Eateries," "Even if 12 Bones had not been made famous by Barack Obama's visits there, it would be a 'must-do' in Asheville."

When I first visited 12 Bones several years ago, it was located closer to the French Broad River. Had Bryan and Angela not moved the restaurant a few blocks up the hill it would have been completely washed away. At its current location they may be able to repair and survive.

Angela's sister writes, "As the floodwaters recede, we see catastrophic damage to homes and businesses, including the River Arts District, where 12 Bones was founded. Entire livelihoods have been lost. In nearly every direction you look, everything is caked in mud and scattered debris. Broken wood and mangled wiring now stand where intersections once existed."

Coincidentally, on October 15, the publisher Blair is releasing "River Road," a book of poems by mountain author

Wayne Caldwell. His fine poetry describes the power of the flooding waters on the French Broad.

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In Bethel, one church has a new family after Hurricane Helene

October 8, 2024 | Enterprise, The (Martin County, NC) Author: Moss Brennan The Watauga Democrat| Section: Across Carolina | 980 Words OpenURL Link

BETHEL — At Bethel Baptist Church, one of the rooms downstairs has become a mini convenience store. The lower parking lot has become a landing zone for helicopters and a place to take a hot shower. An area on the top floor became a FEMA office to help people apply for disaster relief. Above all, it has become a place for the community after the devastation Hurricane Helene left in the High Country.

On Sunday morning, the church held its first service after the storm.

"I've been to this church now, I would guess, for almost almost 30 years. (It was) probably the best service I've ever attended," said worship leader Carter Dishman. "The spirit was strong. Part of it was a relief from the day-to-day of what we're in the middle of right now. The only way I knew how to put it this morning was, 'Today we didn't come to church. Today, we were the church."

With many in the community in need in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene, Bethel Baptist Church has become a place where they can get food and hygiene items, as well as hot meals, showers, and ADA bathrooms.

In the first few days, the church and Beaver Dam Volunteer Fire Department worked together to create a community plan. At the time, both the fire department and church were collecting donations. However, with the outpouring of volunteer support, they decided to take donations at the church so the fire department could focus on emergencies.

There wasn't a free space in the room where donations were gathered, as supplies — from snacks to diapers — were piled high for those in need.

The showers have especially been good for community members. While it can't fix a house or driveway, Dishman said just taking a hot shower can help with a little bit of "mental stability."

"At least if nothing else, they smell better, and they feel better," Dishman said.

The church hasn't just been a place for those in need to pick up much-needed supplies. It's also been a place where volunteers can gather to help other community members recover from the storm.

Dishman has coordinated the volunteers as they go into the community and help those who need some repairs or access to their homes or out of their homes. For the last four days or so, their focus has been getting everybody out.

"We've gotten now to the point where most people are out, and they're trying to repair driveways and that kind of stuff," Dishman said.

As volunteer and church member Matt Marton said, once the sun started to come out from behind the clouds, it sounded "like a hornet's nest" up and down the road.

"The fact that we were able to open up roads ourselves before anybody could even get out here. Made a huge difference," Marton said. "I mean, by Saturday morning, we were able to take any supplies that we had and what was coming in and drive it to people. Even if they couldn't get out of their house or across their bridge, we could walk them into them because the main road was opened up. It's just awesome to see how fast people out here came together, worked together, and cared for one another."

Dishman said there have been countless people who have helped in the community and that there's "not enough time" in the day to list them all. He did mention

Dishman made a point to mention Ground Effects Landscaping — among many — who have been absolute heroes in helping people start the recovery process.

He said National Guard soldiers stationed at the church helping with supply drops and manning the showers and bathrooms have become close with everyone. When not needing to help at the bathrooms or showers, the soldiers — six in total — could be seen playing catch with children in the field outside the church or singing during the worship service.

With the community coming together like it has in the aftermath of Helene, Dishman knows they have a new family.

"We've got a new family through this. I think the church family and the community family has definitely grown in numbers and in spirit this week," Dishman said. "I've got names and numbers of people that I want to be, I think, long life friends with after this."

Dishman and Marton know there will be a new normal in their community and across Watauga County and western North Carolina. They know that roads that were completely destroyed won't be repaired overnight. They know that — as Dishman put it — "a lesson in patience has been learned throughout all this."

"I've seen more good than I've seen bad," Dishman said. "That's a testament to the community."

Marton said he doesn't have any expectations on the community getting fixed. He just wants people to be able to get out and that services be able to get to them in an emergency. He also does not want it to go completely back to normal.

"I don't know if I want to go completely back to normal right away because watching this community get so close together, whether you're part of the church or not, this community has grown so close together that I don't want to see it go back," Marton said.

He said he knows that, as a community, they are better than big cities in terms of closeness, but even then, he met people he hadn't met before. He doesn't want to go back to where the community was splintered in some ways.

"The mountain people are sticking together," said Charlene Capps, a community member utilizing the showers. "Everybody's pulling together. Everybody's helping everybody."

Bethel Baptist Church is located at 125 Mountaindale Rd. They have hot food available for lunch and dinner as well as ADA showers and toilets daily from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

"Our community took care of each other before, but now it's like on steroids," Dishman said.

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Coltrain sworn in as new Williamston Chief of Police

October 8, 2024 | Enterprise, The (Martin County, NC) Author: John Foley | Section: Local | 382 Words OpenURL Link

A standing room-only crowd filled the Williamston's boardroom Monday evening to partake in history.

However, before cameras were focused, Williamston Mayor Dean McCall asked for a moment of silence for those devastated by Hurricane Helene.

The silence was replaced by applause once Williamston Police Captain Beth Coltrain was sworn in to become the town's first female chief of police. Chief Coltrain is also the first female chief in Martin County.

Local and county officials, the officers of the Williamston Police Department and representatives from the Edenton Police Department joined friends and family members to watch the ceremony.

Coltrain was surrounded by her husband, Eric, and her two children — Chase and Natalie — as District Court Judge Regina Parker administered the oath of office.

Following the ceremony, friends and fellow employees congratulated Coltrain and gathered for photographs with the first female chief, marking the historic moment.

While the room was filled with enthusiasm and excitement, there was a bittersweet moment.

Coltrain's appointment was an administrative line-up change. The chief's position became available in September when Williamston Police Chief Travis Cowan resigned after a 30-year career with the department. Simultaneously, Williamston Town Administrator Eric Pearson retired for the third time from that position causing the vacancy.

McCall commended Pearson on his service to Williamston and the strides the town made under his direction. Pearson was enthused about this particular official retirement.

"No, I don't think I will be returning for a fourth time, although I have enjoyed Williamston and I will be watching from afar," Pearson said.

The new chief is excited about her work.

"I am excited and grateful for the opportunity to continue to serve my hometown. I have always had a strong desire to serve others and to help those in need. God has opened doors for me and I have simply followed where I believe he has led me," said Coltrain. "Sir Isaac Newton stated 'if I have seen further [than others], it is by standing on the shoulders of giants,' I proudly stand on the shoulders of Chief Steve Smith and Chief Travis Cowan as I take the reins and continue that standard of excellence they set.

"I am proud of our department and I am honored to have this opportunity to continue to serve alongside my fellow officers as we continue our Community-Oriented approach to policing," she closed.

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FEMA head blasts Trump's claims on Helene recovery

October 8, 2024 | Fayetteville Observer, The (NC) Author: Zac Anderson; USA TODAY | Section: News | 512 Words Page: A3 OpenURL Link

With the federal response to Hurricane Helene becoming a major focus of the presidential campaign in the home stretch, the Biden administration continued to push back on Sunday against former President Donald Trump's unfounded claims about storm recovery.

Appearing on ABC's "This Week" Sunday, Federal Emergency Management Agency Administrator Deanne Criswell said her agency has all the resources it needs to respond to Helene, which ravaged parts of Florida, Georgia, North Carolina and other states.

North Carolina and Georgia are key swing states in the Nov. 5 election, which has heightened the political stakes for the recovery effort and the jockeying around it.

Criswell defended FEMA's response and shot down Trump's claims that the agency is short on disaster relief funds because money has been diverted to help undocumented immigrants, and that help is being withheld from Republican areas, calling such assertions "frankly ridiculous and just plain false."

"This kind of rhetoric is not helpful to people," she added. "It's really a shame that we're putting politics ahead of helping people."

Criswell noted that state and local officials have rebutted "this dangerous, truly dangerous narrative that is creating this fear."

Trump has made a series of unfounded claims about Helene recovery at multiple recent events. He said at a rally in Saginaw, Michigan, on Thursday that "Kamala (Harris) spent all her FEMA money, billions of dollars, on housing for illegal immigrants."

"They have almost no money, because they spent it all on illegal immigrants," Trump said, adding that "They stole the FEMA money, just like they stole it from a bank, so they could give it to their illegal immigrants."

FEMA does have a housing program, the Shelter and Services Program, that provides "financial support to non-federal entities to provide humanitarian services to noncitizen migrants following their release" from detention facilities, according to its website. It has \$650 million in funding, but that is separate from disaster relief funds.

"No money is being diverted from disaster response needs. None," the White House said in a news release.

Department of Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas told reporters during a White House briefing last week that FEMA has enough disaster relief money to meet current needs, but not for additional storms.

"We are meeting the immediate needs with the money that we have," Mayorkas said. "We are expecting another hurricane hitting. We do not have the funds. FEMA does not have the funds to make it through the season and ... what is imminent."

Congress recently appropriated \$20 billion in disaster funds, but Biden said in a letter this week that more is needed. "Without additional funding, FEMA would be required to forego longer-term recovery activities in favor of meeting urgent needs," Biden wrote, saying the Small Business Administration is particularly in need of funds.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., was asked on "Fox News Sunday" about Biden's letter and said "Congress will provide; we will help the people in these disaster-prone areas."

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Bear experts: Potential for clashes following Helene

October 8, 2024 | Fayetteville Observer, The (NC) Author: Iris Seaton; Asheville Citizen Times | Section: News | 532 Words Page: A3 OpenURL Link

ASHEVILLE, N.C. – Bear-human conflict may increase in Western North Carolina following Tropical Storm Helene, the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission is warning.

Colleen Olfenbuttel, a black bear biologist for the NCWRC, told the Citizen Times that, though there had been no reports of bear attacks as of Friday, an increase in reports of bear sightings led the commission to issue the warning in an attempt to avoid potential problems.

"We do have concerns that, with the number of damaged homes, it provides a lot of opportunity for bears to gain easy access to homes," Olfenbuttel said.

BearWise, a consortium of bear biologists including the NCWRC, offers this advice:

Keep windows and doors closed and latched if bears are observed in your area. If you are unable to secure them due to damage, consider setting out an "unwelcome mat" made of plywood and nails.

If you have an outdoor refrigerator or freezer, consider installing a padlock on the door to keep bears from accessing any food inside.

Secure food, garbage and recycling. This may be more difficult with many trash services suspended in areas of WNC. The NCWRC recommends making every effort to store garbage in a bear-resistant structure, such as a shed, garage or home until it can be collected.

Add bear-resistant measures to your trashcans using instructions from BearWise at bearwise.org under the heading "Keep Bears Out."

Olfenbuttel said there had been only one report to the NCWRC of a bear possibly injured in the storm, and none of bear deaths. She added that's likely in part due to their natural instincts.

"Compared to other wildlife, bears are remarkably adaptive to a whole host of conditions, including storms like this," she said. "Even though they don't have TVs or radios like us, they are wild animals that kind of can sense when a storm is coming, and they know to take shelter. We've received videos of bears going up in trees to escape floodwaters and to ride out the storm, which is kind of their natural behavior."

The recent warning from the NCWRC also said that bears are not experiencing a shortage of natural food sources in the wake of Helene and, as always, should under no circumstances be offered food.

Olfenbuttel said the rumor that black bears may be attracted to human feces left outdoors during water outages and issues with sewage systems could have some basis in reality.

"We certainly know that one component of trash that can attract certain bears – not all bears necessarily, you know; bears have sometimes have individual tastes just like us – but we do know certain bears, boy, when they find trash with a dirty diaper, they love it," she said.

But avoiding attracting bears with makeshift outdoor toilets is likely easier than avoiding attracting bears with garbage and food. Olfenbuttel said her advice is the same she would give regardless of bear activity. "If you're

having to use the bathroom outside, if it's possible, use a shovel, make a hole in the ground, use it, and then put the TP in there and cover it with dirt," she said.

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Benefit concert for NC will feature big names

October 8, 2024 | News & Record (Greensboro, NC)

Author: LISA O'DONNELL Staff Reporter | Section: Main | 301 Words

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Four of the biggest names in music - all of whom have ties to North Carolina - will headline Concert for Carolina, a fundraiser for relief efforts in the Carolina region, hard hit by Tropical Storm Helene.

Country stars Eric Church and Luke Combs, bluegrass sensation Billy Strings and folk singer James Taylor will headline the concert at Bank of America Stadium in Charlotte on Oct. 26.

Three of the stars, Church, Combs and Taylor, lived in North Carolina for years and are closely tied to the state, with Taylor's song, "Carolina in My Mind," a sort of unofficial state song. Strings is a rising bluegrass star who has found inspiration from the music of the North Carolina mountains. He played Winston-Salem's Joel Coliseum in 2023 for a Doc Watson tribute.

Tickets go on sale Thursday at 10 a.m. Visit www.concertforcarolina.com.

Proceeds will go to Chief Cares, Manna Foodbank, Second Harvest Foodbank and Samaritan's Purse.

Church announced on his Instagram page last week that he was donating the publishing royalties of a new song, "Darkest Hour," to relief efforts. Church grew up in Granite Falls in Caldwell County.

Since Hurricane Helene's landfall, the death toll in North Carolina is up to 115 people as of Friday. The nationwide toll is at 227, making Helene the deadliest U.S. hurricane since Katrina in 2005 and the fourth deadliest to make landfall on the mainland since 1950.

President Joe Biden visited the Carolinas on Wednesday, taking an aerial tour to assess the widespread damage in Asheville following the deployment of up to 1,000 active-duty U.S. soldiers to support North Carolina National Guard members in the state's recovery efforts.

"I'm here to say the United States - the nation - has your back," Biden said at an emergency command center in Raleigh. "We're not leaving until you're back on your feet completely."

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Helene cast a pall over the Blue Ridge Mountains

October 8, 2024 | News & Record (Greensboro, NC)

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CAMDEN, S.C. - "Chill" is the word that comes to mind when thinking of Asheville, N.C., the center of Hurricane Helene's devastation. A hub for musicians, artists, writers, chefs, animal lovers and entrepreneurs nestled among the Blue Ridge Mountains at a temperate 2,134-foot elevation, Asheville today is bordering on a nervous breakdown.

So is the Southeast, generally. For generations, the Blue Ridge Mountains have provided a summer refuge for people from all around the Deep South. My family has been among the fortunate who could escape to higher climes during insufferably hot and humid summers. Mornings there were often cool enough to justify building a fire. (This is rarely true now, as the world becomes warmer.)

It seems almost everyone knows someone who lives in "the mountains," and nearly everybody else spends time there. We expect hurricanes and tropical storms to visit our coastline and Lowcountry, but who could have imagined that one could become a threat to towns hundreds of miles from the ocean.

Helene was a tropical storm by the time it reached the Carolinas, but it was still so big and so powerful. Its lashing rain and winds reached South Carolina's Midlands, and people across the region are feeling the storm's pain.

When Mark Edens, a friend and part owner of a popular antiques store here in Camden saw me the day after the storm, he skipped any greeting and went right to, "How bad are you hurting?" His despair was palpable. "You know, I physically live here," he said, "but my soul lives in the mountains. It was just too much. It broke me."

"Soul" is another word that fits the Blue Ridge. Something about the mountains nourishes the soul. It's the cooler air as you climb higher with each turn of the road. It's also the aroma of millions of trees that remind you of Christmas. Some might say when you're in the mountains, you're closer to the angels.

Asheville's fortunate location at the junction of two rivers, the French Broad and the Swannanoa, proved to be its undoing when Helene blew through and the waters rose to depths of massive destruction.

If there were an apocalyptic film named "Helene," the soundtrack would have to be Rhiannon Giddens' "Swannanoa Tunnel." The song, sometimes called "Asheville Junction," was first sung in the late 19th century to the sound of hammers pounding steel. It tells the story of the railroad tracks built by wrongfully imprisoned Black people who were labor for the Western North Carolina Railroad.

Towns along that rail line, including Swannanoa, Black Mountain, Ridgecrest and Old Fort, were almost destroyed by the storm. In Asheville, little was spared - certainly not the River Arts District, a mile-long oasis for artists and collectors that includes galleries for 240 artists and 23 converted warehouses offering art, food, music, breweries and what's understood as the Asheville vibe. Artsy, laid-back, cool and dog-friendly, it's a flannel-and-flip-flops mecca for hikers, mountain bikers, foodies and culture connoisseurs.

One of my favorite haunts was the Marquee, a 50,000-square-foot emporium of fantasy and over-the-top sensory stimulation. Architectural elements, paintings, vintage furniture, jewelry, clothing, olive oil - it's all there. Or was. On one of my frequent visits, I fell in love with a 1950s-era television set that was converted into a terrarium. I'm sorry I didn't buy it. Another time, I broke down and bought a blue Huffy Nel Lusso cruiser bicycle that I was able to ride throughout the gallery. All gone now.

In the immediate wake of the storm, the Asheville vibe was fully engaged, as neighbors and strangers helped one another by any means available. My son, John, who lives in Asheville, saw people going out of their way to share what others needed. But the novelty of shared catastrophe cannot last forever.

"A week later, now that so many have cleared out, the neighbors-helping-neighbors vibe has subsided somewhat," he texted me, "and it just feels like one of the bleakest places I've ever been." I asked him what the area smells like, because the mountains usually smell so fresh and clean.

"Mildew," he said. "It's not so much the smell as the ambiance. It feels like a bomb went off."

Businesses are closed, except the odd gas station or grocery store with lines outside. Many people are going without power and water.

It's hard to imagine how long it will take for the Blue Ridge to recover and rebuild. At least the birds are singing, John tells me. And the bears, who had been displaced by overdevelopment, are back to wandering the neighborhoods and downtown. John saw one walking down his street Thursday morning, probably scouting abandoned houses for leftovers, but otherwise minding his own business.

Chill, it seems, isn't just for people. Let's hope it lasts.

Kathleen Parker writes for The Washington Post.

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Areas hardest hit by Helene least likely to have insurance

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Author: Chantal Allam; Staff Writer | Section: News | 408 Words

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In addition to losing their homes and belongings, thousands of residents in Helene-ravaged Western North Carolina are facing another hard reality: They may not be covered by their insurance policies.

Less than 1% of households in the state's hardest-hit inland counties are protected by the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), according to an N&O analysis of Census Bureau and NFIP data.

In Buncombe County, home of Asheville, only 0.7% of the county's 137,000 housing units have flood insurance, data shows.

By contrast, some 44.3% of Dare County households on the Outer Banks have coverage.

The result: Many of the million-plus people living in the declared disaster area likely don't have protection for the damage they've suffered. Standard homeowners' policies do not cover flooding, landslides or anything caused by moving water.

The lack of flood insurance is "a huge problem," State Insurance Commissioner Mike Causey told the N&O. "We had flood education classes around the state in 2019. That education effort increased the number of flood policies by 25% but we're still just scratching the surface."

The lack of coverage will make recovery complicated. And the threat isn't going away.

Citing climate change, "more devastating weather events are coming," state Sen. Natasha Marcus, the Democratic nominee for state insurance commissioner, said this week. "Many will face hurdles due to gaps in their insurance coverage."

The NFIP, managed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, accounts for more than 95% of the nation's flood insurance policies.

Some lenders require it for homes in high-risk zones. Outside those areas, it's optional but often wise. Still, many remain unprotected. In North Carolina, less than 3% of households are protected with flood insurance, NFIP data shows.

Part of the problem, say experts, is that many homeowners underestimate the risk.

Georgina Sanchez, a research associate at NC State's Center for Geospatial Analytics, faults FEMA's existing flood maps that show where people are required to buy flood insurance.

She said these maps often fail to account for intense rain events and sea level rise. They're also not quickly updated.

"FEMA's designation of high-risk flood zones can mislead communities and encourage development that borders the floodplain, resulting in greater damages when flood events exceed design levels," Sanchez said in an NC State news publication.

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In Helene's aftermath, FEMA search-and-rescue teams know they now are seeking victims

October 8, 2024 | Herald-Sun, The (Durham, NC) Author: Adam Wagner; Staff Writer | Section: News | 1072 Words Page: 3A OpenURL Link

SWANNANOA When the excavator's claws clenched and lifted the white Dodge Charger out of the Swannanoa River on Sunday, brown water and mud poured from its undercarriage.

Once the car had landed on the ground with a loud thunk, four men dressed in blue swarmed it with crowbars and shovels. These were members of Maryland Task Force One, a federally funded Montgomery County, Maryland-based urban search-and-rescue team that has been part of FEMA's response to Helene.

FEMA has sent more than 1,200 urban search-and-rescue personnel to North Carolina as part of the Helene response.

On Sunday, part of that task force was scrambling across a hillside on the southern bank of the Swannanoa River, just east of the Whitson Avenue Bridge. They were looking for people who died during Helene, as search team dogs had indicated there could be human remains in the Dodge Charger partially sunk into the bank and in the debris of a structure that had been smashed against the U.S. 70 embankment by the floodwaters.

Moving brush and debris

Largely using chainsaws, team members dismantled what was left of the building. They pulled off a piece of sheet metal here, lifted a two-by-four wood plank away there, quickly but methodically taking the ruins apart to try to find whatever the dog had smelled.

Before Helene, the area where the team worked had been a forested bank of the Swannanoa, tucked between the river and U.S. 70.

Now, many of the trees had fallen and cars were littered throughout the area, some of them tossed onto their sides by a river that had risen to historic levels. It was impossible to tell what building the long ribbons of sheet metal high up in the trees had started on, or whether they'd started nearby at all.

Many of those cars were marked with a spray-painted X. That's a sign that the car or structure has been searched.

When members of the search team enter the structure, they spray paint a slash mark to indicate that they're in it. They also spray paint the date and time. When they leave, they put another slash, along with the number of people found there and symbols for any known hazards, Robert Lipp, a FEMA spokesman, explained as he walked past several buildings and cars marked with different colors of paint.

That's partially for safety, in case something happens while the searcher is inside the building, and partially to keep rescue teams from duplicating efforts.

Teams have helped more than 6,500 people

As of Sunday afternoon, nearly 50 search-and-rescue teams working in Western North Carolina had rescued, evacuated or helped 6,586 people, according to a release from Gov. Roy Cooper's office.

While the unofficial death toll from Helene is well over 100 in North Carolina, Cooper's office said 77 deaths have been confirmed by the state medical examiner's office. That number will rise as the Maryland team and others like

it locate victims.

"It's one of those things where somebody's got to do it and we hate to see a disaster happen, but the majority of us are firemen, and if there's a disaster and somebody needs to help, we want it to be us," Josh Kurland, the leader of Maryland Task Force One, told The News & Observer.

Kurland's team was originally deployed to Georgia on Sept. 25, arriving by noon the next day. Helene hit in the early hours of the 27th, and Maryland Task Force One was woken up at 4 a.m. to respond to a two-story brick building that had collapsed in Valdosta, Georgia.

After working there for two days, the team was sent to Cherokee, North Carolina. Operating from, they worked in Haywood County for two days before being sent to Swannanoa.

A typical day right now in Helene's response lasts from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m., with a lengthy drive on each end.

"They're long days," Kurland said, also acknowledging that at this point there are fewer rescues and more recoveries of those who died in the storm.

A car full of mud

On the banks of the Swannanoa, the search team knew that it needed to reach the Charger. First, though, a member of a construction crew who was operating an excavator needed to move a silver Toyota SUV and several trees that had either fallen or were leaning precariously where the floodwaters had rushed past.

Claw-full by claw-full, the excavator worked through the brush and debris until he reached the Charger itself. Then, after some discussion with rescue team members about where it should go, he lowered the claw, closed it around the car's hood and dragged it out of the mud.

When the car came down with a thud, the search-and-rescue team members surrounded it.

They smashed out its remaining windows using shovels and a baton handed over by a U.S. Border Patrol Agent who was watching.

When the front doors opened, the car's interior was filled nearly to the windows with mud. A foul odor hit some onlookers.

The search and rescue team pulled the silt out gently, shaking it out on the ground to make sure they weren't missing anything important.

Then they moved to the backseat, asking the construction crew to bring in a smaller excavator that could pull the rear door of the car off entirely. With the crunching of glass and mangling of twisted metal, the excavator did just that.

As the mud was lifted out of the car, it became clear that no one was inside. In fact, the owner arrived, searching for the wallet he thought he'd left in the center console. He had to settle for the pair of prescription sunglasses that were in the car, still sealed inside their case.

Lipp, the FEMA spokesman, recalled seeing similar small pieces of people's lives recovered after other disasters.

"It seems really tiny," Lipp said, "but for him I'll bet it's a little bit of a bright spot in his day."

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'Heartbreaking' landslides reshape community's landscape

October 8, 2024 \mid Herald-Sun, The (Durham, NC)

Author: Adam Wagner; Staff Writer | Section: News | 1339 Words

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CRUSO Arlen Heatherly walked up the mountainside, using a walking stick to pick his way through mud and boulders and uprooted trees.

This land, in the unincorporated community of Cruso, North Carolina, had been in his family for 65 years. This past week it was the site of one of the 326 landslides triggered by Tropical Storm Helene that had been detected by the U.S. Geological Survey as of late Saturday. Of those, 231 had impacted homes or infrastructure like roads.

The Cruso landslide carved a 150-foot swath through what had been forest. Full-grown trees were downed and caked in mud as the side of the mountain flowed downhill. Michael Heatherly, Arlen's son, estimated that the slide had started near the top of the mountain, and had run all the way to the bottom.

"It's just devastating," Michael Heatherly said.

As Arlen stood near a huge downed tree, the home he'd grown up in was downhill. Now owned by a Raleigh family, it was partially ringed by a 2-foot-deep layer of mud still settling from squishy to a dry cake.

Mud nearly reached the seat of a rocking chair on the back porch. As the landslide slammed against the building, some of the mud had splattered across its yellow paint. Still, there wasn't any obvious structural damage.

Uphill from where Arlen stood was largely ruins. An aging silo and barn had been wiped out, crumpled roofs and building materials and sheet metals lying where the mud had taken them.

Saturday, a small mountain stream gurgled down the middle of that path, its gentleness as it flowed through a ravine carved into the hillside a reminder by contrast of how violent the thunderous landslide that reshaped the mountainside must have been.

Many of the landslides associated with Helene took place in Western North Carolina, with clusters east of Asheville near places like Bat Cave, Bear Hollow and Summerhaven. They have taken 11 lives, according to the state Department of Health and Human Services.

In Cruso, a pair of landslides fell - one on the north side of a mountain and one on the south. Neither was fatal.

The one on the northern side is the slide that reshaped the Heatherly land.

'Pretty heartbreaking' landslide

Arlen Heatherly, now 81 years old, was the first member of the family to see the mudslide that had effectively split their land in half.

"All I could think of was my dad. He worked so hard. And I did, too," Arlen said.

The Heatherleys had grown potatoes, tobacco and tomatoes on the land. They'd raised livestock.

Michael had also worked on that land. For the last 20 years, he's been clearing old logging roads that run up the mountain, making it possible for he and his sister to have small cabins in the forest, with a pizza oven at Michael's.

"I had it looking really good," Michael said Saturday as he stood in the middle of the landslide's scar.

The landslide cut many of those logging roads in half. Sections of them are buried under what Michael estimates are 12 to 15 feet of mud. The cabins are now only accessible by hiking up the mountainside

In the days since the landslide, Michael has tried to count how many trees fell in a forest he's played and worked in since he was a child. He hasn't come close to an answer.

"To see it like this, it's pretty heartbreaking," he said.

He wants to know what to do next.

He's worried about what will happen if another heavy rain comes - will it trigger another landslide? And in the meantime, will water carry high levels of sediment into the Pigeon River?

When Tropical Storm Fred hit Western North Carolina in August 2021, it killed six people in Cruso. Linda Heatherly, Michael's mother, said that storm also left debris in the Pigeon River, including a red Chevy Suburban that was clearly visible from the access road to their property.

A private citizen finally got the permits for and finished removing that car from the river, Linda Heatherly said - about two weeks before Helene arrived.

Michael and Linda, who is retired from the U.S. Forest Service, expressed interest in planting grass seed to try to stabilize the landscape.

"I'm just trying to figure out what to to do," Michael Heatherly said.

Creek becomes a 'meat grinder'

On the southern side of the Cruso mountain, Roger Largent knew a landslide had happened shortly after 10:30 a.m. on Friday, Sept. 27 - the day the storm arrived.

As he watched the stream that runs past his Cabin Creek Road home rise, Largent heard a roar that sounded like thunder coming from somewhere up the mountain.

Then the rushing water changed color.

What had been a muddy firehose stream became black, almost the color of oil. And the consistency changed, with the water so full of dirt that it almost seemed to become a dangerous, dancing solid.

As the water gushed downstream, Largent filmed on his phone.

In one video, he can be heard shouting that the creek has become "a meat grinder."

As the thick water rushed down the hill, it took out a five-foot culvert and road that Largent and his neighbor Dale Smith used to access their properties.

Largent nearly froze at the sight.

"It landlocked me," Largent said. "I couldn't freaking move."

He jumped into his Jeep and floored the gas pedal, sluicing across the yard to get away from the raging creek. He leaned on the horn, trying to get the attention of Smith, who had headed up the the creekside road not 10 minutes

before.

Unbeknownst to Largent, Smith had come back down after seeing that a normally calm tributary to the creek had turned angry.

"I guess it was just the Lord telling me to get out," Smith said Saturday as he picked his way through the creek bed, jumping from bolder to boulder and clambering over fallen trees, many of them still coated in the mud that had carried them down the side of the mountain.

Smith has lived in the area for 71 years. During Frances and Ivan, he heard the sound of boulders being carried down the creek. He also rebuilt the culvert to reach his and Largent's homes after Fred.

"This one was a lot worse because we had the slide up through there," Smith said.

The mudslide started in Pisgah National Park's Shining Rock Wilderness, Smith said, rushing downhill before hitting the creek that is part of his property line, carrying the mud and trees with it.

Some of those trees snarled together across the creek, the logs and rootballs creating a dam. When the next storm comes, Smith worries, the heavy flow of water will eat away at the land on the southern edge of the creek. That will imperil the road leading to his property.

He hopes the National Park Service will help remove the logs and chop them up before another storm causes the creek to swell and the gushing water to wear out everything holding the road up.

"The government needs to get up here with something and fix it before that happens," Smith said.

He walked through his own landslide and crossed the creek via a makeshift bridge he'd made out of two fallen logs, heading to the bottom of the mountain.

There, he jumped on a compact excavator to help the Heatherly family rebuild the culvert they all need to reach their property.

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Advocates worry for Asheville's homeless after Helene

October 8, 2024 | Herald-Sun, The (Durham, NC)

Author: Mary Ramsey; Staff Writer | Section: News | 918 Words

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Asheville When Helene barreled through Asheville, it was like nothing Renee Maynor had ever seen.

Maynor, who is experiencing homelessness, grew up in Charlotte. Like many in the region, when thinking about big hurricanes, she always thought of 1989's Hurricane Hugo.

But now, she'll think of the disorienting chaos she and her community felt in the week since Helene hit.

"I don't know if I'm coming or going ... I haven't had a shower. I just got a cup of coffee this morning," she told The Charlotte Observer Friday.

The storm caused devastating flooding and landslides, leaving Asheville and residents in the surrounding area without power or running water. It was a brutal hit for the more than 700 people without housing in the city, Maynor and local advocates say.

"This has been an unprecedented event," said Micheal Woods, the executive director of Western Carolina Rescue Ministries.

As the community works to find out who survived the storm and provide immediate assistance, they're also worried about the long-term impacts in a place where housing already was tricky.

"The magnitude of the families and individuals who need housing will be insurmountable," predicted Melissa Duong, the board president of Homeward Bound.

'They thought they were going to die'

Maynor, who has been in Asheville for three years, took refuge during the storm at the emergency shelter at the Harrah's Cherokee Center.

There, she focused much of her energy on trying to care for older adults experiencing homelessness she knew and were also at the shelter.

"They thought they were going to die, and they didn't want to die," she said.

A week later, she was still exhausted.

"The days are running into nights and the nights are running into days because there's always someone needing help," she said. "My muscles hurt from helping tote and carry people's stuff."

She already knows of some friends who didn't survive. She's bracing herself for more bad news.

Woods, whose group has worked in Asheville for 43 years, is especially concerned about people he knows who camped by the Swannanoa River, which swelled during the storm and flooded the area.

"Our hope is that they got out," he said.

'Working around the clock' to help, find survivors

Service providers are keeping "lost and found lists" of people they've served previously and want to track down since the storm, Woods said.

Due to ongoing safety concerns, his group will leave searches to authorities. But he's worried that his "invisible neighbors" are left out of the missing persons numbers.

Western Carolina Rescue has received calls and social media messages from "all over the country" from people seeking assistance with finding loved ones who are unhoused in the Asheville area.

"There's a lot of people that we're thinking about, caring about, praying about that right now we don't know," Woods said.

Teams with Homeward Bound, which focuses on placing homeless people in permanent housing and gaining access to services including mental and physical health care, "have been working around the clock for over a week" to check on clients, Duong said.

As of Friday, they had confirmed three clients died, all of whom lived in mobile homes in Swannanoa. More are "unaccounted for," and case managers are trying to get to them for wellness checks.

"We're boots on the ground as long as the roads are safe," she said.

Potentially 'insurmountable' challenges

Both Western Carolina Rescue Ministries and Homeward Bound also continue to shelter people.

More than 130 men, women and children are staying at Western Carolina. Another 80 people live at Homeward Bound's Compass Point Village, and more stop by the group's AHOPE Day Center.

All lack clean running water.

Woods said his group got help from donors to get portable toilets, and on Friday morning they were testing a system to get people hot showers.

"We've been problem solving on the fly," he said.

Both groups say they need monetary donations and water, as well as gas cans, undergarments for people who can't wash their clothes, phone chargers and food, especially non-perishable food and food that's kid-friendly.

Long-term, the storm creates even more challenges.

Rescue ministries had to cancel its annual fundraising gala.

"That was a part of our budget ... We're going to have to figure out how to make that up," Woods said.

Service providers will also have to grapple with how to help people now dealing with "trauma on top of trauma."

"No one as a kid wakes up and says, 'when I grow up I want to be homeless.' For us, we want this to be a place of stability, a place of safety, a place of love," he said.

He predicted Helene will "create a new kind of paradigm when it comes to the unhoused in Buncombe County."

"The magnitude of just the number of people that we know are going to be displaced because of this ... These are

folks who were already probably in substandard housing, housing is very tough anyway in this community. We're going to have the introduction of a whole new group of people into the homeless community," he said.

Duong is worried about people who were already struggling with affording housing in the expensive Asheville market.

"We live in a gorgeous area, but that prohibits us from being able to use a lot of the land," she said.

Tears welled in Maynor's eyes as she walked around downtown Asheville Friday to check on friends and get a meal. But she also remains optimistic.

"I'm tired, but I'll keep going ... I went through the storm, but the storm made me stronger," she said.

Mary Ramsey: @mcolleen1996

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UNC, NC State, Duke grades at midseason - UNC, N.C. State are struggling. Duke has shown promise, yet at the midpoint of the college football season, it feels like basketball already

October 8, 2024 | Herald-Sun, The (Durham, NC) Author: Andrew Carter; Staff Writer| Section: Sports | 2050 Words Page: 1B 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?

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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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Helene creates piles of debris in Western NC that foretell long cleanup ahead

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People in Western North Carolina still lack potable water, power and other basics after Tropical Storm Helene, and the search for the missing continues.

But some of the longer-term challenges of recovering from the storm are starting to come into focus, including how to deal with the mountains of fallen trees, shattered buildings and other debris.

Jonathan Kanipe, town manager of Biltmore Forest in Buncombe County, said Helene felled an "uncountable number" of trees in his heavily wooded community of 1,500. A debris removal company estimates it will collect 100,000 cubic yards of trees and limbs from the 3-square-mile town, Kanipe said.

"To visualize that, imagine a football field covered with material to a depth of 56 feet," he said at a press conference Thursday. "It's highly likely the final number will be greater than this."

The floodwaters that scoured Western North Carolina carried shattered pieces of farms, homes, country stores and campgrounds down the hills and valleys. Mangled cars and washing machines, propane tanks and the possessions of thousands of people are now snagged in tangled piles of trees felled by the wind and water.

The huge number of downed trees makes the task of cleaning up after Helene more daunting than after most hurricanes, said Joe Hack, a senior project manager for Mecklenburg County's solid waste department and president of the state chapter of the Solid Waste Association of North America, a trade group.

"It's probably going to take months, maybe years, to get some of the debris up from some of the back areas," Hack said in an interview.

For most communities, clearing that debris is not yet a priority. Buncombe County is still in the "cut-and-clear" phase, moving trees and debris off to the side of blocked streets and roads, said county manager Avril Pinder.

But Pinder said the county has begun talking with municipalities about where that material will go. They have designated storage areas for storm debris, she said, but with the sheer volume created by Tropical Storm Helene, "we have to expand that tremendously."

Pinder said Buncombe County has also begun talking to state regulators about possibly burning some vegetative debris. State law prohibits most outdoor burning, but trees and other plants can be burned under certain conditions, according to the state Division of Air Quality.

As for building materials, furniture and other non-vegetative waste, the county is talking with companies that take construction and demolition debris. Pinder said.

"We know of a couple of places close by that we can haul that to," she said. "We're working with them now on contracts and what that will look like."

Landfill shortage could become worse

The state Division of Solid Waste Management regulates and helps coordinate debris cleanup after a storm, Hack said. The Federal Emergency Management Agency will likely provide money to help pay for it. In Raleigh on

Wednesday, President Joe Biden said he'd approved a request from Gov. Roy Cooper to pay the entire cost of debris removal for at least the next six months.

But it will primarily be up to each county and town to determine how to clean up, in concert with private hauling and disposal companies, Hack said.

"Each community will evaluate the best way to handle it as they go," he said. "There's a lot we don't know yet."

Hack said much of the material will be hauled to emergency debris sites, where some effort is made to separate trees, cars and refrigerators, household trash and hazardous materials, so each can be shipped to the right disposal facility.

Some counties have landfills that can take the material; others usually ship their waste out anyway and will need to find some place to take storm debris.

"Long-term, there is ultimately a landfill shortage or disposal capacity shortage in North Carolina," Hack said. "And this is just going to accelerate filling up some of the facilities."

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Helene was a warning. NC must get ready for climate change

October 8, 2024 \mid Herald-Sun, The (Durham, NC) Author: Ned Barnett \mid Section: Editorial/Opinion \mid 658 Words

Page: 7A 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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Brunswick

A deadly mosquito virus is spreading in the US. Could it come to NC? Here's what to know

October 8, 2024 | Herald-Sun, The (Durham, NC) Author: Evan Moore; Staff Writer | Section: News | 674 Words Page: 4A

A person in New York died Monday, Sept. 30, after a contracting a rare virus not seen in the state in more than a decade.

The person died after being diagnosed with eastern equine encephalitis (EEE), a virus spread to people by the bite of an infected mosquito, ABC News reported.

Only about 11 human cases of the virus are reported each year in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Though the virus is rare, roughly a third of all people who develop a severe version of the virus die, and those who survive are left with long-term physical and mental problems, ranging from personality disorders to paralysis, the CDC says.

Could the virus make its way to North Carolina? Here's everything you need to know.

Could eastern equine encephalitis come to NC?

There's no evidence to show that EEE will be worse in North Carolina this year, but rain from recent tropical storms and Hurricane Helene could lead to more mosquito activity in the state, N.C. Department of Health and Human Services Entomologist Mike Doyle told The Charlotte Observer.

"The extra rain from Debbie...has increased water significantly on the eastern part of the state, so there's more mosquito larval sites, or mosquitoes growing in the water presently, but we don't have the evidence of infection within the mosquitoes or humans so far," Doyle said.

There haven't been any human cases of EEE reported in North Carolina this year, but there have been cases in the past, CDC data show. The most recent case occurred in 2021.

of the

North Carolina averages about one case of EEE per year, and the disease is more common in the eastern part of state than in other geographic regions, according to the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services.
Historical CDC data show that at least one human case of EEE has been reported in the following counties since 2003:
Catawba
Mecklenburg
Pitt
Perquimans
Pender

Cumberland
Hoke
Robeson
There have been 10 human cases of EEE reported in the U.S. this year, according to CDC data.
Non-human cases and infections, or cases found in mosquitoes, birds and other animals, have been reported in the majority of coastal and piedmont counties in North Carolina since 2003, CDC data show.
Who is most at-risk of contracting eastern equine encephalitis?
The CDC says the following groups are at increased risk of infection:
Residents of and visitors to areas with eastern equine encephalitis virus activity (the Atlantic and Gulf Coast states)
People who work and participate in recreational activities outdoors in endemic areas
People over 50 years of age or under 15 years of age
What are the symptoms of eastern equine encephalitis?
Most people with EEE have no symptoms, but the CDC says symptoms of severe cases include:
Fever
Headache
Vomiting
Diarrhea
Seizures
Behavioral changes
Drowsiness
The symptoms of EEE are similar to other neuro-invasive mosquito viruses, such as West Nile virus and La Crosse encephalitis, which are more common than EEE, Doyle said.
"They all start very similar," said Doyle. "It's not something that the average person or even physician, in many cases, could tell the difference early in the disease. And so we encourage people to seek medical attention from a health provider, and the provider can order a test through the state laboratory that covers all of the known viruses here."
How to prevent eastern equipe encephalitis

Here are some ways you can prevent mosquito bites, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency:

mosquito bites, according to the CDC.

There are no vaccines or treatment for EEE, but you can reduce your chances of contracting the virus by preventing

Remove mosquito habitats by eliminating standing water in rain gutters, old tires, buckets, plastic covers, toys, or any other container where mosquitoes can breed.

Use structural barriers by covering gaps in walls, doors, and windows to prevent mosquitoes from entering and making sure window and door screens are in good working order.

Avoid getting bitten by keeping mosquitoes away from exposed skin by wearing long-sleeved shirts, long pants, and socks. You can also tuck your shirt into your pants and pants into socks to cover gaps in your clothing where mosquitoes can get to your skin. Using insect repellent can also be helpful.

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RISING TO THE TOP

October 8, 2024 | Hickory Daily Record (NC) Author: JASON KOON jason.koon@lee.net | Section: Rising To The Top | 667 Words OpenURL Link

5 TAKEAWAYS | HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL

With half of the 2024 high school football season in the books, here are five reasons for optimism in Hickory and Bunker Hill.

Hickory is playing on another level

Brady Stober's 10-for-14, 282-yard performance against St. Stephens on Satur

season.

Stober said having receivers like Little, Chappell, Damarion Lee and Austin Ballard makes his job easier.

"My job is just to get the ball to them ... and let them work," Stober said.

Football is a team sport

The only thing Stober wanted to talked about after the North Lincoln game was his teammates.

"I couldn't ask for a better five up front to protect me," he said. "The wide receiver corps. We only lost one last year, so the chemistry is still there ... there's a lot of unseen hours where we're running routes, getting the timing down."

Football is a team sport. And Hickory is winning as a team.

On defense, 12 different players have either grabbed an interception, forced a fumble or recovered a fumble this season. Linebackers Quenshea Abernathy, Kasen Tuttle and Carter Toney, fly to the ball, fill gaps and hit hard. Defensive backs Dorian Medley, Brett Rowland, Jamir Norwood and Tylar Johnson pester receivers, breaking up plays. Hickory has amassed 15 team interceptions in just six games.

The defensive line makes it all possible. The Hickory line gets great movement, tying up opposing blockers, pressuring quarterbacks and freeing up the secondary to step up and make big plays.

Hickory's title hopes hang on discipline

From back-to-back games against two of the toughest opponents in the conference to the chaos of Hurricane Helene, Hickory has come through what will likely prove to be the toughest part of its schedule unscathed.

That doesn't mean head coach Joe Glass doesn't have some ideas on what his team needs to do to keep winning.

"We have to stay disciplined," he said. "That's the biggest question mark I've had about this team all year long ... that's the biggest difference and the thing we've got to fix."

Glass' players are going to have to answer that question if they hope to repeat as state champs again this year.

"It's going to come down to discipline," he said. "We've got talent. Our coaches do a great job. It's just going to be being disciplined, doing the right thing on and off the field."

Bunker Hill is on the rise

Bunker Hill is securely in the Catawba Valley Athletic Conference driver's seat with a 35-21 win over West Lincoln on Saturday.

With Bandys losing to Lincolnton on Saturday and West Lincoln taking down Maiden on Wednesday, Bunker Hill is the lone undefeated team in conference play. The remaining seven teams each have one loss conference loss.

There is a lot of football left. Bunker Hill has to face Maiden and Bandys later this season. The Blue Devils and Trojans will battle each other on Friday.

Willis brothers are carrying the load

This year's Bunker Hill team features a host of new starters on the offensive line and a quarterback who came into the season with virtually no varsity experience.

So Bunker Hill is relying heavily on two of the top rushers in the 2A classification.

Jason Willis Jr. started things off on Saturday with a 95-yard touchdown run early in the first quarter. He finished with 230 yards on the ground and three touchdowns. He has piled up 934 yards and 13 touchdowns on 92 carries this season. He ranks third among 2A players in the state in rushing yards and his 10.2 yards per carry average ranks sixth among players with at least 30 attempts.

His brother, Jaylan, would be in fifth with 10.4 yards per carry if he had enough attempts.

Jaylan has 142 rushing yards on 13 carries and 267 receiving yards on 17 catches. He also has four touchdowns.

After a shaky start, junior quarterback Eli Davis Helms is coming into his own. In the last two games, he boasts a 73% completion rate and has thrown for 237 yards.

Jason Koon is the Sports Editor for the Hickory Record and can be reached at jason. koon@lee.net.

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Helene cast a pall over the Blue Ridge Mountains

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CAMDEN, S.C. — "Chill" is the word that comes to mind when thinking of Asheville, North Carolina, the center of Hurricane Helene's devastation last week. A hub for musicians, artists, writers, chefs, animal lovers and entrepreneurs nestled among the Blue Ridge Mountains at a temperate 2,134-foot elevation, Asheville today is bordering on a nervous breakdown.

So is the Southeast, generally. For generations, the Blue Ridge Mountains have provided a summer refuge for people from all around the Deep South. My family has been among the fortunate who could escape to higher climes during insuff erably hot and humid summers. Mornings there were often cool enough to justify building a fire.

It seems almost everyone knows someone who lives in "the mountains," and nearly everybody else spends time there. We expect hurricanes and tropical storms to visit our coastline and Lowcountry, but who could have imagined that one could become a threat to towns hundreds of miles from the ocean?

Helene was a tropical storm by the time it reached the Carolinas, but it was still so big and so powerful that its lashing rain and winds reached South Carolina's Midlands, and people across the region are feeling the storm's pain.

When Mark Edens, a friend and part owner of a popular antiques store here in Camden, saw me the day after the storm, he skipped any greeting and went right to, "How bad are you hurting?" His despair was palpable. "You know, I physically live here," he said, "but my soul lives in the mountains. It was just too much. It broke me."

"Soul" is another word that fits the Blue Ridge. Something about the mountains nourishes the soul. It's the cooler air as you climb higher with each turn of the road. It's also the aroma of millions of trees that remind you of Christmas. Some might say when you're in the mountains, you're closer to the angels.

Asheville's fortunate location at the junction of two rivers, the French Broad and the Swannanoa, proved to be its undoing when Helene blew through and the waters rose to depths of massive destruction.

If there were an apocalyptic film named "Helene," the soundtrack would have to be Rhiannon Giddens's "Swannanoa Tunnel." The song, sometimes called "Asheville Junction," was first sung in the late 19th century to the sound of hammers pounding steel. It tells the story of the railroad tracks built by wrongfully imprisoned Black people who were labor for the Western North Carolina Railroad.

Towns along that rail line, including Swannanoa, Black Mountain, Ridgecrest and Old Fort, were almost completely destroyed by the storm. In Asheville, little was spared — certainly not the River Arts District, a mile-long oasis for artists and collectors that includes galleries for 240 artists and 23 converted warehouses offering art, food, music, breweries and what's understood as the Asheville vibe. Artsy, laidback, cool and dog-friendly, it's a flannel-and-flip-flops mecca for hikers, mountain bikers, foodies and culture connoisseurs.

One of my favorite haunts was the Marquee, a 50,000-square-foot emporium of fantasy and over-the-top sensory stimulation. Architectural elements, paintings, vintage furniture, jewelry, clothing, olive oil — it's all there. Or was.

In the immediate wake of the storm, the Asheville vibe was fully engaged, as neighbors and strangers helped one another by any means available. My son, John, who lives in Asheville, saw people going out of their way to share what others needed. But the novelty of shared catastrophe cannot last forever.

"A week later, now that so many have cleared out, the neighbors-helping-neighbors vibe has subsided somewhat," he texted me, "and it just feels like one of the bleakest places I've ever been." I asked him what the area smells like, because the mountains usually smell so fresh and clean.

"Mildew," he said. "It's not so much the smell as the ambiance. It feels like a bomb went off . Very empty and quiet, except for the occasional siren or helicopter every 20 minutes or so." Businesses are closed, except the odd gas station or grocery store with lines outside. Many people are going without power and water.

It's hard to imagine how long it will take for the Blue Ridge to recover and rebuild. At least the birds are singing, John tells me. And the bears, who had been displaced by overdevelopment, are back to wandering the neighborhoods and downtown. John saw one walking down his street Thursday morning, probably scouting abandoned houses for leftovers.

Chill, it seems, isn't just for people. Let's hope it lasts.

Parker writes for The Washington Post.

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