

Helene's devastation: A look at counties in western NC

BY DREW JACKSON, RICHARD STRADLING AND EVAN MOORE
jdjackson@newsobserver.com
rstradling@newsobserver.com
emoore@charlotteobserver.com

The toll of the tropical storm that was once Hurricane Helene continues to unfold in North Carolina. The state's picture-esque and mountainous western region was inundated with historic rainfall, flooding, land and mudslides.

We're gathering what we know of the damage in each county in Western North Carolina. Here is an evolving snapshot of that toll as new information becomes available.

We'll update this in the coming days with more counties and specific details.

ALEXANDER COUNTY

About 8% of the 19,000 homes and businesses in Alexander County remain without power as of Tuesday morning.

The Alexander County Sheriff's Office said 7 main roads remain closed, including the Highway 16 bridge, which passes over Lake Hickory near the Oxford Dam, which saw water spill over its top during Friday's rainfall.

The county reports that phone, internet and cell service have improved and have been restored in most government buildings.

ALLEGHANY COUNTY

About 22% of the 9,835 homes and businesses in Alleghany County remain without power as of Tuesday morning.

Road closures include large sections of the Blue Ridge Parkway along the rural county along the Virginia border.

ASHE COUNTY

About 45% of the 21,778 homes and businesses in Ashe County remain without power as of Tuesday morning.

A long stretch of Highway 18 along the eastern border of Ashe County is closed. The New River State Park is currently closed.

The New River crested at 18.27 feet, higher than the 18-foot crest during the Great Flood of 1916.

The historic record, though, for the Jefferson water station is 22.5 feet, from 1940.

AVERY COUNTY

About 56% of the 1,803 homes and businesses in Avery County remain without power as of Tuesday morning.

Three major road closures remain and many others are impassable in this mountainous county along the Tennessee border.

Grandfather Mountain, which includes Avery, Caldwell and Watauga counties, is closed until further notice.



TRAVIS LONG tlong@newsobserver.com

A man crosses a narrow section of flood damaged bridge in Swannanoa on Sunday, Sept. 29, 2024. The remnants of Hurricane Helene caused widespread flooding, downed trees and power outages in western North Carolina.

Five shelters have been set up in Banner Elk, Beech Mountain, Ingalls, Newland and Minneapolis.

Curfew is in place from 8 p.m. to 5 a.m. to keep roadways clear.

BUNCOMBE COUNTY

Buncombe County officials said Monday afternoon that **40 people have been found dead** in that county alone.

So far Buncombe, which is home to **Asheville**, has the most reported Helene deaths in the state.

Buncombe County Register of Deeds Drew Reisinger said Monday that his office has received 11,000 requests from people seeking help to locate their loved ones amid the spotty cell service and destroyed roadways.

CLAY COUNTY

All of the power has been restored to homes and businesses in Clay County.

CLEVELAND COUNTY

About 39% of the 48,385 homes and businesses in the county remain without power as of Monday evening.

An emergency shelter remains open at the Cleveland County Health Department in Shelby.

At least four main roads remain closed around the Shelby area.

GASTON COUNTY

About 4% of the 115,000 homes and businesses in the county remain without power.

An emergency shelter remains open at the Cleveland County Health Department in Shelby.

At least eight roads remain closed throughout the county.

HAYWOOD COUNTY

There have been four deaths, according to the Haywood County Sheriff's Office.

Around 26 percent of the 39,200 homes and businesses in the county remain without power as of Tuesday morning.

A large section of Interstate 40 is closed in the county, as well as numerous roads and highways.

A curfew remains in place from 9 p.m. to 7 a.m.

The Haywood County fair has been canceled for 2024.

A shelter remains open

WEST CALDWELL HIGH SCHOOL

CATAWBA COUNTY

Around 12% of the county's 82,391 homes and businesses remained without power Tuesday morning.

The westbound lane of Interstate 40 is closed to non-emergency traffic throughout the county. The **Oxford Dam bridge** on Highway 16 also remains closed.

CLAY COUNTY

Around 39% of the 48,385 homes and businesses in the county remain without power as of Monday evening.

Numerous roads throughout Mitchell County are impassable, and "a good bit of the county infrastructure has been either damaged or destroyed by floodwaters and uprooted trees and downed power lines," according to the county.

Bakersville, the county seat along Cane Creek, has been particularly hit hard.

The Red Cross opened a shelter at Mitchell High School in **Ledge**, while another opened at First Baptist Church in **Spruce Pine**. There's a county-wide curfew from 8 p.m. to 7 a.m.

A quartz mine in Spruce Pine owned by Sibelco has been temporarily closed due to flooding and damage in the storm.

MICHELL COUNTY

About 66% of homes and businesses in Polk are without power as of Tuesday morning.

The county has set up a phone line with a recorded message for those seeking information, at 828-722-5086.

Polk County High School in **Columbus** is serving as a shelter,

MCDOWELL COUNTY

Around 65% of the county's 30,262 homes and businesses remained without power Tuesday morning.

County offices will remain closed through Friday, October 4. Offices will reopen on Monday, October 7.

The westbound lane of Interstate 40 is closed to non-emergency traffic throughout the county.

The county has set up a donation site for water and emergency supplies at 634 College Dr. in Marion.

RUTHERFORD COUNTY

About 63% of 44,499 homes and businesses in Rutherford County are without power as of Tuesday morning.

There is widespread damage throughout the county, including in Chimney Rock. The Lake Lure Dam, once thought in danger of failure, has stabilized.

The town of **Lake Lure** said firefighters and town workers went door to door over the weekend rescuing people in the most affected area, many on foot or via helicopter because of closed roads. The top of the lake was covered in debris, including floating propane tanks, that the Broad River swept up on its way through Chimney Rock.

Town officials have advised residents to leave town, if possible, and ask nonresidents to stay away.

"Please do not come to town unless you absolutely need to be here as this is an ongoing rescue situation and the roads are not safe," town officials wrote Monday afternoon.

"Your absence will allow first responders to focus on rescue operations."

A resource center with food, showers, restrooms, a tool trailer, charging stations and wifi will be available for residents at the Ingles on N.C. 9 Tuesday at 5 p.m.

YANCEY COUNTY

About 81% of the 14,610 homes and businesses in Yancey County were without power as of Tuesday morning.

N.C. 97 partially collapsed near **Burnsville** and NC 80 collapsed south of Burnsville. Both roads are closed.

nesses in Transylvania County are without power as of Tuesday morning.

The sheriff's office said Sunday that Transylvania County had "received catastrophic damages, and we have still not been able to access all parts of the county." Phone and cell service was out in many places, and power may take two weeks to restore in some areas.

Roads that were closed due to downed trees had been at least partially reopened on Monday, but several roads remain closed due to slides and are expected to be closed for an extended period of time. Among the roads closed Monday were U.S. 276 in **Brevard** and U.S. 64 throughout the county. The county has a curfew from 8 p.m. to 8 a.m.

WATAUGA COUNTY

About 40% of 29,118 homes and businesses in Watauga were without power on Tuesday morning.

Numerous homes and businesses were flooded in **Boone**, and the town's water pipes were broken in several places. Residents have been told to boil drinking water before consuming it.

The Red Cross is running a shelter for residents and Appalachian University students whose off-campus homes were damaged.

More than 100 roads were closed or partially closed in the county as of Sunday evening. On Monday, N.C. 105 near Boone was impassable, and U.S. 321 near Banner Elk and the Tennessee state line was closed.

County and local officials ask all leisure travel to the area be postponed.

WILKES COUNTY

About 9% of 38,691 homes and businesses in Wilkes County were without power as of Tuesday morning.

A county official told MyFox80, a local TV station, that between 150 and 200 homes are inaccessible because of blocked roads. A landslide had closed N.C. 18 between **Wilkesboro** and **Sparta**, and the road will likely be closed for about a month, said Jason Reavis, the Emergency Services Director.

The county got up to 16 inches of rain, Reavis said, but wasn't as hard hit as others.

"We caught the side of it pretty much," he said. "We are very fortunate and very blessed."

A Red Cross shelter was opened at West Wilkes Middle School in Wilkesboro for those displaced or needing a meal or place to charge devices.

YANCEY COUNTY

81% of the 14,610 homes and businesses in Yancey County were without power as of Tuesday morning.

N.C. 97 partially collapsed near **Burnsville** and NC 80 collapsed south of Burnsville. Both roads are closed.

Drew Jackson:

919-829-4707,
@jdrewjackson

Trying to reach a missing person impacted by Helene in NC? What to do and whom to call

BY CHYNA BLACKMON
cblackmon@charlotteobserver.com

Days after Hurricane Helene swept through the southeast, recovery efforts are still underway for North Carolinians stranded without food, water and other supplies in the

western part of the state.

According to Governor Roy Cooper, first responders have received hundreds of calls for rescue and more than 1,000 requests for welfare checks, with that number expected to rise.

HOW TO REPORT MISSING PERSON OR REQUEST WELFARE CHECK

As crews work alongside local governments, state and federal partners and volunteer organizations to support victims impacted by the storm, officials say 911 calls should be made for emergencies only.

made for emergencies only.

If you need to report a missing person or request a welfare check on someone potentially in danger, you should call NC 211 (1-888-892-1162), a information and referral service provided by United Way of North Carolina.

Available in most languages at all times in every county, NC 211 is used to provide residents verified resources across the state for basic needs, including housing, food and healthcare, its website says.

When disaster strikes, like Hurricane Helene, the service is part of the State's Emergency Plan for updates, storm-related issues or non-emergency related questions. Residents can dial 2-1-1 and speak to a trained Community Resource Specialist or use the online NC 211 search tool at nc211.org.

If you're struggling to

contact someone who may need assistance, you can add loved ones to the United Way of North Carolina's search and rescue efforts by submitting a missing persons request, welfare check or rescue request online at unitedwaync.org.

Requests can also be made by texting 'PERSON' to 40403.

You can find more information about Helene-related information and resources, including power outages, open shelters and crisis cleanup, online at ncdisasters.gov/helene.

Chyna Blackmon:
@chynablackmon