

# 10 homes have collapsed into NC surf since 2020

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Associated Press

NORFOLK, Va. — A slow-motion catastrophe is playing out in the coastal North Carolina village of Rodanthe, where 10 houses have fallen into the Atlantic since 2020. Three were lost since last week.

The most recent collapse was Tuesday afternoon, when the wooden pilings of a home nicknamed "Front Row Seats" buckled in the surf. The structure bumped against another house before it bobbed in the waves, prompting now familiar warnings about splintered wood and nail-riddled debris.

The destruction was decades in the making as beach erosion and climate change slowly edged the Atlantic closer to homes in the somewhat out-of-the-way vacation spot. The threat is more insidious than a hurricane, while the possible solutions won't be easy or cheap, either in Rodanthe

or other parts of the U.S.

**Barrier islands**

Rodanthe is a village of about 200 people on the Outer Banks, a strip of narrow barrier islands that protrude into the Atlantic like a flexed arm.

Barrier islands were never an ideal place for development, according to experts. They typically form as waves deposit sediment off the mainland. They move based on weather patterns and other ocean forces. Some even disappear.

David Hallac, superintendent of the Cape Hatteras National Seashore, along which Rodanthe is located, said it was more common in previous decades for homeowners to move their houses from the encroaching surf.

"Perhaps it was more well understood in the past that the barrier island was dynamic, that it was moving," Hallac said.

"And if you built something on the beachfront it may not be there forever or it may need to be moved."

**Rapid erosion**

Rodanthe is one of many communities on Hatteras Island, which is about 50 miles long and has experienced beach erosion for decades.

The Cape Hatteras Lighthouse was 1,500 feet from the ocean when it was built in 1870, Hallac said. By 1919, the Atlantic was 300 feet away. The lighthouse was later moved to a more protected location.

The erosion has been measured to be as much as 10 to 15 feet a year or more in some places.

"And so every year, 10 to 15 feet of that white sandy beach is gone," Hallac said. "And then the dunes and then the back-dune area. And then all of a sudden, the foreshore, that area between low water and high water, is right

up next to somebody's backyard. And then the erosion continues."

**'Like a toothpick into wet sand'**

Ocean waves eventually lap at the wooden pilings that hold up the beach houses. The supports could be 15 feet deep. But the surf slowly takes away the sand that is packed around them.

"It's like a toothpick in wet sand or even a beach umbrella," Hallac said. "The deeper you put it, the more likely it is to stand up straight and resist leaning over. But if you only put it down a few inches, it doesn't take much wind for that umbrella to start leaning. And it starts to tip over."

A single home collapse can shed debris up to fifteen miles along the coast, according to an August report from a group of federal, state and local officials who are studying threatened oceanfront structures in North

Carolina. Collapses can injure beachgoers and lead to potential contamination from septic tanks, among other environmental concerns.

**Compliance**

Rules that govern coastal development in North Carolina have been in place since the 1970s, before many of the collapsed houses were built and when there was a lot more beach, said Noah Gillam, Dare County's planning director.

"At the time they were built, they were likely in compliance with all of the set-back requirements," Gillam said. "And they were set back, in many situations, hundreds of yards from the dune line, let alone the ocean."

Since then, the rate of erosion has sped up, swallowing swaths of sand. Storms also have become more frequent and more intense, pounding the shoreline of a community that is acutely exposed to the ocean.

**Harris**

From A1

About 4 in 10 Americans think Harris' gender will hurt her chances of getting elected this fall. During the 2016 campaign, about 3 in 10 said the same about Clinton's gender.

The shift in attitudes is largely driven by Democrats — particularly Democratic men. About 3 in 10 Democratic men thought Clinton's gender would hurt her "somewhat" or "a lot" prior to her loss to Trump. About half now say that about Harris.

"I would say this country doesn't really have an outstanding track record of supporting female candidates," said Julian Zeng, a 34-year-old copy editor and writer from California who is a Democrat.

Democratic women also grew more likely to say being a woman could be a hurdle for a presidential candidate: About 4 in 10 Democratic women said Clinton's gender would hurt her, and about

half say that about Harris now. Republican men only shifted slightly, and Republican women's views remained stable.

Americans are also more likely to see Trump's gender as something that will help his chances of being elected. About 4 in 10 U.S. adults now say that being a man is something that will help him, up from about 3 in 10 when the same question was asked in an AP-NORC poll during his 2016 campaign.

The poll's findings seem to bolster arguments for the way both candidates have addressed gender in their campaigns.

Harris focuses less on the history-making potential of her win than Clinton did, even though the possibility of electing a woman president could enthuse her supporters. She does emphasize reproductive rights in her campaign and Trump's nomination of three of the Supreme Court justices who voted to overturn a national guaranteed right to abortion.

Trump, who for years has preferred to blast the Village People's

song "Macho Man" as he enters and exits his campaign rallies, has courted younger men and promoted a masculine image with appearances at mixed-martial arts events and football games. He has recently started calling himself a "protector" of women.

Carlos Stalworth, a 59-year-old Republican from California, said Trump's gendered appeal comes through in his campaigning, calling the former president "a guy's guy, a man's man kind of guy."

Stalworth, who said he's undecided but leaning toward Trump in November, said he is skeptical that Harris can win and feels that she's not coming off as a forceful would-be commander-in-chief by not releasing more detailed plans, particularly on issues like the economy, that will help her overcome attitudes in "a male-chauvinist world."

"It's going to take a little bit more for her than just like the average guy," he said.

Some voters said Trump's persona and rhetoric might help Har-

ris get past baked-in attitudes about women in power.

"Were it not Trump, I think that it would hurt her," said Elizabeth Aguilar, a 48-year-old university professor from Illinois.

Aguilar, a Democrat, said she thinks some voters may still be uncomfortable with the idea of a female president.

"But I think that his comments and his misogynist attitude are so far out that people may be willing to overlook the fact that she's a woman," she said.

Only about one-quarter of Americans say Harris' gender "won't make a difference" to her chances of getting elected this fall, down from when one-third said that about Clinton in 2016. Slightly less than half say Trump's gender won't have an impact, down from 6 in 10 during his first run.

In a recent interview with the AP conducted prior to the poll, Clinton said she's "feeling really optimistic" that Harris will win. She said she also feels Harris will benefit from the fact that the na-

tion has become more accustomed to the image of a female presidential candidate, having seen not only her run eight years ago but also a crowded Democratic presidential primary four years later that included multiple female candidates.

"We now don't just have one image of a person who happens to be a woman who ran for president, namely me," Clinton said. "We've got a broader view, and I think that's all for the good."

Cherene Bates, a 51-year-old Republican from Pocatello, Idaho, said she hasn't decided who she's supporting in November, but she is optimistic that Harris' gender will not be an impediment for other voters.

"I really hope that people wouldn't discredit her because she's a female," Bates said.

She said it's possible gender played a role in Clinton's loss in 2016, but she hopes it didn't.

"As a nation, I think we still are ready to switch gears, to have a different frame of mind and elect a female president," Bates said. "I hope that we're even more so now."

**Helene**

From A1

prepare for flooding.

As of 11:30 a.m. Thursday, Lookout Shoals was at a depth of 97.9 feet, according to Duke Energy's lakes database. Lake James was at 99.3 feet.

The 110-foot mark would be the highest level ever reached at Lake James, according to Duke Energy.

Williamson said Duke Energy is working with Catawba County to monitor weather conditions and prepare for any emergency responses. Lake Hickory was below normal level as of 11:30 a.m. One gate was open on Thursday morning to allow more water to flow through the dam, Williamson said.

**School systems and colleges**

School systems and colleges in the area announced closures or modified schedules as Hurricane Helene approached the area.

**McDowell County Schools:** Closed Thursday and Friday, option of remote workday for teachers.

**Burke County Schools:** Remote learning days Thursday and Friday, YMCA day cares closed.

**Catawba County Schools:** Closed Friday, optional workday for teachers.

**Hickory City Schools:** Closed for remote workday for K-8 teachers Friday, remote learning day for grades 9-12.

**Newton-Conover City Schools:** Closed for students, teacher workday Friday.

**Caldwell County Schools:** Three-hour early release Thursday, closed Friday.

**Alexander County Schools:** Early release at noon for middle schools, 12:30 p.m. for elementary and high schools on Thursday, closed Friday.

**Iredell-Statesville Schools and Mooresville Graded School District:** No decision made as of 10 a.m. Thursday.

The release from Cooper's office said the state is deploying equip-

**Colleges**  
**Lenoir-Rhyne University:** No closings as of 10 a.m. Thursday.

**Appalachian State-Hickory campus:** Closed Friday.

**Catawba Valley Community College:** No changes to schedule as of 10 a.m. Thursday.

**Western Piedmont Community College:** Closed Friday.

**McDowell Technical Community College:** Closed Thursday and Friday.

**State of Emergency**

N.C. Gov. Roy Cooper declared a state of emergency Wednesday ahead of Helene's landfall.

"Helene threatens heavy rain, flash flooding, landslides, and damaging winds to the mountains and Piedmont areas of our state," Cooper said in a press release Thursday. "Now is the time for North Carolinians to prepare, make sure emergency kits are up-to-date and pay attention to the weather alerts in your area."

The release from Cooper's office said the state is deploying equip-

ment, personnel and resources to support impacted communities, including swift water rescue teams and urban search and rescue teams. Resources from the NC National Guard and communications and incident management support also have been activated.

McDowell County, the city of Marion and the town of Old Fort declared a state of emergency, which went into effect at 5 p.m. Wednesday, according to a release from McDowell County.

Burke County also issued a state of emergency declaration Wednesday for the county and all municipalities.

Caldwell County declared a state of emergency Wednesday at noon.

Catawba County issued a state of emergency declaration Thursday morning.

"The declaration enables Catawba County Emergency Services to implement coordinated response and recovery efforts in all affected unincorporated areas of the county," Catawba County Strategic Operations and Com-

munications Director Amy McCauley said in a statement.

The statement also said all Catawba County parks (Bakers Mountain Park, Mountain Creek Park, Riverbend Park and St. Stephens Park) are closed until further notice.

**Warnings**

A tropical storm warning was in effect for McDowell, Burke, Catawba and Caldwell counties as of 11 a.m. on Thursday.

A tropical storm warning means sustained winds of 39 to 73 mph are expected in an area in 36 hours or less.

A flood warning is in effect for McDowell County until 1 p.m. Thursday.

At 7 a.m. Thursday, the National Weather Service said three to six inches of rain fell overnight in McDowell County. Stream gauges at Mill Creek, Pleasant Gardens and Ashford were elevated but were no longer rising.

Billy Chapman is a reporter for the Hickory Daily Record.

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**IDENTIFICATION**

The News Herald (ISSN 0770-3980), a Lee

Enterprises Newspaper, is published Tuesdays,

Thursdays and Saturdays at 3078 U.S. HIGHWAY

70 E., MORGANTON, NC 28655. Periodicals Postage Paid at Morganton, NC. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to PO BOX 2795, MECHANICSVILLE, VA 23161.

**PRICING**

The Morganton News Herald is a Lee Enter-

prises Newspaper and is published online daily,

and three days per