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Two people and a dog are escorted to a rescue boat in Chimney Rock, N.C., on Sunday.

President Biden orders Fort Liberty troops to Western NC as part of Helene response

BY ADAM WAGNER
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A thousand soldiers from Fort Liberty will "immediately" be deployed to

Western North Carolina as part of the response to Tropical Storm Helene, President Joe Biden announced Wednesday morning.

"These soldiers will

speed up the delivery of life-saving supplies of food, water and medicine to isolated communities in North Carolina — they have the manpower and logistical capabilities to get

this vital job done, and fast. They will join hundreds of North Carolina National Guard members deployed under State authorities in support of the response," Biden said in a statement.

The soldiers headed to Western North Carolina are part of an infantry battalion task force, the White House said in a statement. Their unit includes a forward support company that can station key resources like fuel, water and mechanics in areas that are still without power or water nearly a week after the storm.

Soldiers will help with the delivery of key commodities like food and water, according to the White House. They will also help FEMA and other agencies participating in the response reach hard-hit areas that remain inaccessible due to catastrophic damage to the region's roads and bridges from flooding and landslides.

Additionally, the Department of Defense will send 22 helicopters to help with search-and-rescue operations and "dozens" of high-water clearance vehicles.

The National Guard has activated more than 700 members to work on the delivery of supplies and to conduct search and rescue missions in the region. There were 15 aircraft and 275 vehicles involved in that mission as of Tuesday morning, according to a press release from Gov. Roy Cooper's office.

At a Tuesday press conference, Cooper said he and Biden had recently discussed deploying troops to Western North Carolina to help with the relief ef-

fort, saying there was a particular focus on aircraft to help deliver supplies.

"I want to make sure we get every single resource that we possibly can into North Carolina for what may be a long haul to make sure that we're continuing to get water and supplies all across Western North Carolina," Cooper said.

Biden is scheduled to visit South Carolina and North Carolina on Wednesday, with the president expected to view storm-battered Western North Carolina from the air before receiving a briefing in Raleigh.

"Hurricane Helene has been a storm of historic proportion. My heart goes out to everyone who has experienced unthinkable loss. We are here for you — and we will stay here for as long as it takes," Biden said in a statement.

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Energy officials announce \$1.5B for power grid upgrades

BY DOUG CUNNINGHAM
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The U.S. Department of Energy Thursday announced a \$1.5 billion transmission investment to improve electric grid reliability.

The Energy Department said the \$1.5 billion will fund four transmission projects "that will improve grid reliability and resilience, relieve costly transmission congestion, and open access to affordable energy to millions of Americans across the country."

"The U.S. transmission network is the backbone of our nation's electricity system. Though our grid has served U.S. energy needs for more than a century, our country's needs are changing," said U.S. Deputy Secretary of Energy David Turk in a statement.

The projects will increase grid capacity and are funded by the Biden-Harris administration's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

The projects will enable nearly 1,000 miles of new electric transmission development and 7,100 megawatts of new capacity in Louisiana, Maine, Mississippi, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas.

The department said the projects will also create 9,000 good-paying jobs.

They include the Aroostook Renewable Project in Maine, the Cimarron Link in Oklahoma, Southern Spirit connecting the Texas grid for the first time to southeastern U.S. power markets and Southline in New Mexico.

The Energy Department's National Transmission Planning study released Thursday was meant to be a long-term planning tool.

It found that a substantial expansion of the transmission system throughout the entire contiguous United States would deliver the biggest grid benefits. That could also save the national electric system between \$270 billion to \$490 billion through 2050.



An aerial view of downtown Marshall on Tuesday, after the French Broad River caused catastrophic flooding. The remnants of Hurricane Helene caused widespread flooding, downed trees, and power outages in western North Carolina.

UNC Health offers free virtual visits for Helene storm victims in Western NC

BY CHYNA BLACKMON
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As recovery efforts continue for thousands of North Carolinians impacted by Hurricane Helene, UNC Health is now stepping up to provide free virtual care for those in need.

The Triangle-based healthcare system announced that any Western North Carolina residents

18 years or older can be treated virtually through UNC Health Virtual Care. Now with a smartphone, laptop or other speaker and camera-enabled device at no cost.

"Our patients and teammates in Western North Carolina are dealing with widespread power outages, extreme flooding, mudslides, road closures and more," Dr. Wesley Burks, CEO of UNC Health said in a media

release. "We will support our patients, teammates and communities in this time of greatest need. We want to offer free virtual services for those who have stable Internet access — and will continue to provide in-person care at our clinics and hospitals."

HOW TO MAKE A FREE VIRTUAL APPOINTMENT

Virtual services through UNC Health Virtual Care

Now are available everyday from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. If you have a medical emergency, you should call 911, but UNC's virtual care providers assist patients with a wide range of conditions, including:

- Seasonal allergies
- Asthma
- Colds, coughs and the flu
- Diarrhea
- Female urinary problems
- Fever
- Insect bites
- Mild headache/migraine
- Mild stomach ache
- Pink eye
- Rash
- Sinus infection
- Sore throat

Appointments are not needed but you must register and have a My UNC Chart account to book a provider. Here's what to do if you need to make an appointment:

- Visit unchealth.org/care-services/virtual-care#virtual-care-now
- Select "Get in Line"
- Enter your information to join the queue and then complete the eCheck-in process.

You can find more information about UNC's virtual care services online at unchealth.org/care-services/virtual-care.

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Ukraine accuses Russia of executing 16 POWs

BY DARRYL COOTE
[UPI.com](https://www.upi.com)

Sixteen Ukrainian soldiers were allegedly executed by Russian forces they were surrendering to, said Ukrainian authorities, who have launched an investigation into the incident.

Ukrainian Prosecutor General Andriy Kostin said on X that the alleged execution occurred along the eastern front in Pokrovsk, Donetsk Oblast. The date of the incident was unclear.

"This is the largest reported case of the execution of Ukrainian POWs on the frontline and yet another indication that the killing and torture of prisoners of war are not isolated incidents," he said. "This is a deliberate policy of the Russian military and political leadership."

He said an investigation has been launched "into this flagrant violation of the laws and customs of war," and vowed that those responsible, from soldiers to those who gave the orders, would be identified and held to account.

Kostin's office said on Telegram that a video of the alleged execution appeared on the social media platform Tuesday, stating it shows captured Ukrainian soldiers lined up by Russian troops who opened fire on them.

"The wounded, who showed signs of life, were finished off at close range with automatic rounds," the office said.

"Such actions are a cynical and gross violation of the Geneva Conventions and qualify as a grave international crime."

Caribbean sea into the southern Gulf of Mexico, according to the National Hurricane Center.

Recovery efforts are underway across the Southeast days after Helene swept through the region, but two months remain for Atlantic hurricane season, and more storms could be on the way.

Storms are moving and developing in the Atlantic Ocean, and there's a system that may be coming together in the Caribbean Sea. Here's the latest.

STORM SYSTEM BUILDING IN THE GULF OF MEXICO

There's a low pressure system producing a large area of disorganized showers and thunderstorms from the southwestern

AccuWeather meteorologist Bernie Rayno said in a report.

WHICH STORMS ARE IN THE ATLANTIC NOW?

WHAT ABOUT HURRICANE KIRK?

Hurricane Kirk is about 1,200 miles west of the Cabo Verde Islands off the coast of west Africa and 1,280 miles east of the Lesser Antilles. It is expected to move northwest before turning and heading northeast.

While the NHC expects Kirk to strengthen and become a major hurricane by Thursday, Oct. 3, it is not near land. No coastal watches or warnings are in effect.

There is another system developing in the eastern Atlantic, a few hundred miles southwest

of the Cabo Verde Islands. The system has a 90% chance of developing into a tropical depression within 48 hours as of Oct. 2, according to the NHC. It is expected to move northwest and then north, the NWS Raleigh meteorologist said.

WILL ANY OF THE STORMS AFFECT NC?

Hurricane Kirk and the other system developing in the Atlantic are not expected to impact land at all.

The system in the Caribbean is expected to stay well to the south of North Carolina, the NWS Raleigh meteorologist said.

WHAT WILL THE NEXT NAMED STORM BE?

The next named storm would be Leslie.

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