

Social media videos capture devastating damage in NC after Hurricane Helene

October 2, 2024 \mid News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Chyna Blackmon, News & Observer \mid Section: north carolina \mid 271 Words OpenURL Link

Rescue, relief and recovery efforts are still underway to restore the damage left behind in Western North Carolina after Hurricane Helene.

Wednesday morning, nearly one week after Helen swept through the state as a tropical storm, thousands of people are still without power and many fatalities and injuries are still being assessed by officials.

While state and local agencies continue to provide updates on road closures and repairs, electricity restoration and storm damage cleanup, many social media videos and photos are also circulating online showcasing the damage and destruction - and even rescues - in some regions hit heavily by the storm in Western NC.

See photos and video from Helene's devastation in the mountains of western NC

From its first arrival in the area to several days after its landfall, here's a look at some of the areas hit hardest by Helene in the mountain communities of the state (warning: some videos may contain strong language).

boone nc before and after helene damage tiktok

western nc car flooded helene tiktok

black mountain nc flooded cars helene tiktok

grassy creek nc helene water rescue tiktok

sugar mountain helene damage no

avery county helene damage tiktok

biltmore village helene damage tiktok

burnsville nc helene damage tiktok

western nc homes flooded helene tiktok

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

You can read all News & Observer coverage of Hurricane Helene with no paywall at newsobserver.com/topics/helene-nc.

RAL_100124-HELENE-KLM-05.JPGA person walks by a section of washed out road near Highway 421 in Boone, N.C., days after Hurricane Helene brought heavy rain and flooding to the western part of the state.

Ask NC service journalism team EMBED

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"The nation has your back': Biden joins Cooper for Helene flyover, promises recovery aid

October 2, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Adam Wagner, News & Observer | Section: north carolina | 821 Words OpenURL Link

After taking an aerial tour of damage inflicted by Tropical Storm Helene in Western North Carolina on Wednesday, President Joe Biden visited North Carolina's Emergency Operations Center in Raleigh to promise that the federal government will continue to help with the state's recovery.

"The United States, the nation, has your back. The nation has your back. We're not leaving until you get back on your feet completely," Biden said to a roomful of emergency management officials and members of the National Guard.

Gov. Roy Cooper told Biden about challenges ranging from washed-out bridges and roads to damaged water systems and electrical grids to lost homes and businesses.

"An entire region of our state is still in a dangerous situation," Cooper said.

Earlier Wednesday, Biden approved additional federal resources for the response, including up to 1,000 active duty U.S. Army soldiers from Fort Liberty and 22 aircraft.

"Simply put, we've got the capabilities to get the job done and we're going to get it done as fast as possible," Biden said.

BIDEN02-100224-EDH.jpgPresident Joe Biden speaks while getting a briefing on the response to Hurricane Helene at the N.C. Emergency Operations Center in Raleigh, N.C., Wednesday, Oct. 2, 2024. N.C. Gov. Roy Cooper sits to the left.

Biden also said he'd approved a request Wednesday from Cooper to cover all of the costs of debris removal for the next six months. And 50 StarLink satellite links have been deployed, Biden said, with more on the way..

"Folks, it's going to cost us billions of dollars. It's going to cost billions of dollars to deal with this storm and all the communities affected, and Congress has an obligation to ensure that states have the resources they need," Biden said.

RAL_OLDFORT-NE-100224-RTW_13.JPGBrooke Canning climbs out a window of her damaged home on Wednesday, October 2, 2024 in Old Fort, N.C. Canning was trying to salvage personal items after flood waters from Hurricane Helene flooded Mill Creek and her neighborhood in the center of town.

NC Emergency Management Director Will Ray told Biden that North Carolina still has about 350,000 people without power, five days after Helene barreled through.

NC residents dig out of the mud, knowing Helene has forever changed their communitiesThe News & Observer's Travis Long, Kaitlin McKeown and Josh Shaffer capture the scenes in Marshall and Avery County, NC as residents begin the long process to recover from Helene's devastation.

Ray said 24 North Carolina search-and-rescue teams are working in Western North Carolina, along with 13 from other states and 18 from the federal government. Those teams have had more than 5,000 interactions - from rescues to evacuations to shelter inspections - since Helene response began.

"The teams continue to do really incredible work in some pretty austere conditions," Ray said.

North Carolina is also operating 26 aircraft in Western North Carolina that have airlifted more than 700,000 pounds of supplies, Ray added.

Biden said that since becoming president in 2021, he'd flown over so many downed trees that they would cover an area larger than the state of Maryland, largely from wildfires.

"I've seen a lot, but looking at Asheville and just imagining what it must have been like sitting along those rivers and streams as all of that rain came down ... You could see homes that were removed clearly from one side of the river, down the river, to the other side of the river," Biden said.

RAL_OLDFORT-NE-100224-RTW_14.JPGTwo cars, completely demolished by flood waters from Mills Creek in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene on Wednesday, October 2, 2024 in Old Fort, N.C.

Biden thanked Cooper and South Carolina Gov. Henry McMaster, a Republican, for focusing on the response instead of prioritizing politics. Tuesday, Biden called former President Donald Trump a liar after Trump said he was hearing reports that Cooper and Biden, both Democrats, were not helping parts of the state where large proportions of Republicans live.

"In a moment like this, we put politics aside. Or at least we should put it all aside, and we have here. There are no Democrats or Republicans, only Americans," Biden said.

biden1.jpgPresident Joe Biden arrives in Raleigh, N.C. Wednesday, October 2, 2024 after touring areas of western parts of N.C. and S.C. devastated by Helene.

Biden closed by saying it is clear that the climate crisis is having an impact in the United States, including strengthening storms like Helene. Those storms like Helene are going to get stronger and stronger as oceans continue to warm, he said.

"Nobody can deny the impact of the climate crisis anymore," he said. "At least I hope they don't. They must be brain-dead if they do."

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Congress ignored disaster relief requests. Now, calls begin to return for Helene recovery

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p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C6955A6D423A38>



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

October 2, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Martha Quillin, News & Observer | Section: north carolina | 582 Words OpenURL Link

Asheville's River Arts District, where painters, sculptors, potters and others found outlets for their creative wares, took a direct hit as the French Broad River raged through the west side of the city during flooding from Hurricane Helene.

When barricades blocking access to Riverside Drive were removed on Tuesday, local residents ventured into the area where Interstate 240 and a railroad trestle cross the river. Last week, an array of businesses lined the river on the south side of the trestle: White Duck Taco Shop; a music venue called The Salvage Station; an auto parts dealer, a crematorium and a river outfitter.

Upstream, on the other side of the bridge, were galleries and shops.

riverside_05.JPG"LOOTERS WILL BE SHOT" is spray painted on a building on Riverside Drive in Asheville, N.C. on Tuesday, October 1, 2024.

But when the river came out of its banks, water at least 10 feet deep swept through the buildings, pushing their contents so hard in the current that exterior walls were broken or bulged outward.

It was an eerie scene near sunset. Parking lots were mud plateaus, and power poles, street signs and the remains of small trees were snagged with bits of plastic and ragged fabric that fluttered in the breeze, making the place look like it was occupied by ghosts and bones.

It was nearly incomprehensible to Sonia Pitts of Weaverville, who works for the nonprofit Open Heart Arts Center in Asheville.

Asheville's River Arts District satellite imagery of flooding from Helene

Looking at the devastation along Riverside Drive, Pitts was near tears.

"I don't even know how to describe how I feel," she said. "I feel hopeless and helpless, like I need to be doing more to help other people."

Pitts said her family came through the storm safely, though there were tense hours when she couldn't reach her grown children or get word on more distant relatives.

Before and after satellite images show flooding from Helene in AshevilleBiltmore Village and the River Arts District in Asheville received extensive damage from flooding of the Swannanoa River after Helene caused torrential rainfall in western North Carolina over the weekend. Satellite imagery provided by Planet Labs PBC shows the river overwhelming parts of the city.

When she was able to travel down Riverside Drive, Pitts got out of her car and pulled on her mud boots to walk around, using her phone to photograph the graffiti on the concrete railroad trestle supports. The bright colors of the art stood out against the tall piles of tangled debris that had jammed against the bridge during the flood.

"These are some of my artists," she said.

Thousands still in the dark in Asheville post-Helene. Duke Energy has a temporary fix

During the flood, Pitts had stood on the highway bridge above the water watching the deluge, which looked like it was boiling with huge metal containers and big propane tanks that rolled over and over against the supports before finally passing under the railroad trestle.

From Riverside Drive, Pitts walked up a bank to stand on the rail line, closed by fallen trees and other debris, and gasped at the sight of a black bear lumbering away down the tracks.

Pitts took the bear sighting as a sign of nature's resilience.

Wildlife will bounce back, Pitts said. "And humans will too."

riverside_01.JPGA black bear walks along the train tracks above Riverside Drive in Asheville, N.C. on Tuesday, October 1, 2024.

Asheville watercolor artist Erica Schaffel has launched a Kickstarter campaign to raise money for more than 50 local artists affected by the flood. Here's a link.

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

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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 cameraenabled device at no cost.

unc health free virtual care helene tweet

"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."

RAL_100124-HURRICANE-HELENE-TEL-35.JPGAn aerial view of downtown Marshall on Tuesday, Oct. 1, 2024 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.

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 allergiesAsthmaColds, coughs and the fluDiarrheaFemale urinary problemsFeverInsect bitesMild headache/migraineMild stomach achePink eyeRashSinus infectionSore throat

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

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-nowSelect "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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Fake, misleading images of Helene spread on social media. Here's how to spot them.

October 2, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC)
Author: Emily Vespa and Caitlyn Yaede, correspondents, News & Observer Section: north carolina 599 Words
OpenURL Link

Amid the fallout from Hurricane Helene, deceptive images claiming to show the storm are circulating on social media

One video on Facebook that claimed to show footage of Helene in North Carolina spliced a series of flood videos with the sound of screams and gunshots. But many clips are outdated and from other locations, a reverse Google image search of several frames shows: One seems to be of flooding in Sioux Falls, South Dakota; another shows a bus operated by a city in Ontario, Canada; and one is July footage of Aguascalientes, Mexico.

Another image, widely shared on X, Threads and right-wing social media site Gab, shows a herd of cows following four dogs swimming through a river.

"Farm dogs leading away from flood waters in NC," one user captioned the photo in a post that garnered nearly 10,000 likes.

Capture.PNGAn image shared widely after Hurricane Helene on X, Threads and Gab shows a herd of cows following dogs swimming through a river.

The photo, which is at least seven years old, isn't of Helene. It was posted after several hurricanes, but it appears to have first surfaced online after Hurricane Irma swept across Florida in 2017.

Other photos are generated using artificial intelligence. Many seem designed to evoke an emotional reaction and depict dogs or other animals stranded in floodwaters or being rescued by humans.

In one fake image posted on Facebook, a man lifts a dog from a roof as he stands in torso-deep water. The man has six fingers and a disfigured face, both signs of an Al-generated image. Even so, the post fooled some.

"This man is my hero," wrote one commenter.

How to spot misleading images

If you suspect an image is deceptive, link or upload it to Google's reverse image search to trace its origin. If you want to search for a video, take a screenshot of a frame and upload it.

Similar to Google's tool is TinEye, a free website that allows you to search an image and sort results by "most changed" to identify manipulated images.

How to spot Al-generated images

Josephine Lukito, an assistant professor at the University of Texas at Austin's School of Journalism and Media, said being able to detect artificial intelligence is becoming an important part of media literacy. "But," she added, "it is also something that will become increasingly challenging."

Al-generated images may appear too perfect, yet they tend to poorly depict details. In fact, Lukito said details can be the biggest hint that an image or video is artificially generated.

"Several giveaways tend to be if you look around kind of the edge of the individual, or you look at kind of nuanced

details, things like fingers or patterns," she said. Text in photos and videos may also appear misspelled or incomprehensible.

A set of Al-generated images posted on Facebook ostensibly showed boaters conducting "deer rescue operations" in floodwater. In one, a deer's antlers appear unnaturally thick, almost like a tree branch. A man's arm blends into a deer's torso in another.

People in Al-generated photos may have:

Unlikely body proportionsExtra or missing fingers or limbsOverly shiny eyesWaxy skin

Also look for implausible situations, like a photo shared on Facebook of a dog wearing sunglasses and floating through floodwater in an inner tube. A closer look at the image reveals that a glass appears to be hovering on top of the float, violating the laws of physics - another indication of an Al-generated image.

Also, consider the account that posted the photo. If it frequently shares Al-generated images, be wary.

"I do think that these sorts of cases are becoming increasingly common, especially in video and audio form," Lukito said of artificially generated content.

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

October 2, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Adam Wagner, News & Observer | Section: north carolina | 521 Words OpenURL Link

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.

Drone video: Small NC town starts the long recovery from HeleneAerial footage from N&O visual journalist Travis Long shows people trying to dig out from the catastrophic destruction in downtown Marshall, Tuesday, Oct. 1, 2024, after flooding from the French Broad River inundated the small western North Carolina town.

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 effort, 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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Starlink reconnects Western NC reeling from Helene. Who gets credit becomes political.

October 2, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC)
Author: Brian Gordon and Emily Vespa, correspondent, News & Observer Section: business 803 Words
OpenURL Link

To reconnect emergency responders and residents after Hurricane Helene, the Federal Emergency Management Agency has shipped dozens of Starlink satellite systems to rural Western North Carolina.

On Monday, FEMA announced 40 Starlink systems were in the region to assist emergency communications, with plans to deploy one system to each county affected by the storm. Another 140 systems will be sent to aid "with communications infrastructure restoration," the White House said in a Sept. 30 statement on relief efforts.

A subsidiary of Elon Musk's SpaceX, Starlink has positioned more than 6,000 satellites in low-Earth orbit to beam broadband internet service to on-the-ground terminals. The first North Carolina households installed Starlink in 2021, and since then, the system has been used in the aftermaths of natural disasters and war worldwide where traditional internet infrastructure faltered. Ukraine fighters, for example, have relied on Starlink in their battle against Russia.

On Tuesday, North Carolina mountain counties reported Starlink enabled emergency responders to receive calls and residents to check in on family. In Ashe County, north of Boone, the emergency management department has established connection at more than a half-dozen fire stations. Residents are advised to turn on Wi-Fi calling on their phones to link to this satellite service.

RAL_100124-HURRICANE-HELENE-TEL-16.JPGResidents and volunteers clean up on Tuesday, Oct. 1, 2024 after the French Broad River flooded downtown Marshall. The remnants of Hurricane Helene caused widespread flooding, downed trees, and power outages in western North Carolina.

Many areas across Western North Carolina, from Cherokee to Asheville to the Blue Ridge foothills, have struggled to find consistent internet and cellular connectivity since Friday, after the remnants of Hurricane Helene dumped feet of water and caused destructive flooding. As of Monday, close to 70% of the region's cellphone towers and equipment were out of service, federal communications data showed, as cut fiber-optic cables prompted widespread blackouts, according to the nonprofit news outlet Asheville Watchdog.

Starlink service gets political

Outside the region, the deployment of Starlink to North Carolina became politicized after false claims spread that former President Donald Trump had arranged the deployment of Starlink systems to storm-affected areas after the current administration failed or refused to do the same.

Trump said Monday during a speech in Valdosta, Georgia, that he had spoken to Musk about delivering Starlink systems to storm-affected areas. Early the next morning, Musk, who has endorsed Trump's reelection bid, announced his coordination with the Republican candidate. On the platform X, which Musk also owns, the SpaceX founder wrote "Earlier today, @realDonaldTrump alerted me to additional people who need Starlink Internet in North Carolina. We are sending them terminals right away."

On Tuesday, North Carolina state Sen. Danny Britt, a Republican who represents the Sandhills counties of Robeson, Hoke and Scotland across the state from Western North Carolina, posted on X that he had asked Trump "for help restoring communications to Western NC, and he delivered."

"Within hours, President Trump got <person value="APIN:2621757612">Elon Musk on the phone and a commitment of as many Starlink devices as we need to help save North Carolinians."

RAL_100124-HURRICANE-HELENE-TEL-33.JPGAn aerial view of downtown Marshall on Tuesday, Oct. 1, 2024 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.

However, the White House says the Starlink systems were on their way before these conversations occurred. FEMA announced Starlink's presence in North Carolina on Sept. 30, the same day Trump spoke in Valdosta.

On X, White House spokesperson Andrew Bates commented on the Starlink deployment chronology, responding to an article about Trump and Musk's conversations by stating, "This is already happening."Trump's daughter, Ivanka, visited Hickory on Wednesday to deliver 300 Starlink systems in a visit coordinated by Medic Corps, a group running relief operations out of the Hickory Regional Airport. Ivanka Trump took photos with pilots, airport staff and volunteers.

What happened to grant funding?

Some on social media claimed that President Joe Biden or the Federal Communications Commission previously revoked from Starlink more than \$900 million in grant funds to expand high-speed internet access in rural North Carolina. That's not accurate.

In fact, the FCC had reviewed the grant applications in a two-phase process. Starlink was one of 379 applicants - called "winning bidders" - that made it past the first phase.

But funds for the winning bidders were contingent on a second-phase, in-depth application. After Starlink filed that application, the FCC determined that it didn't qualify for funding.

According to a letter from the FCC chairperson, the agency found that Starlink:

Couldn't provide internet at the required speed set by the FCC. Would have imposed "high start-up costs on rural consumers," requiring subscribers to buy a \$600 dish to access internet. Proposed using some funds to provide internet to places like parking lots and road medians, which are not underserved rural households like the program intended.

Julia Coin of the Charlotte Observer contributed.

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Under the Dome: NC election officials uncertain how Helene may affect voting sites

October 2, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Kyle Ingram, News & Observer | Section: politics government | 702 Words OpenURL Link

Good morning and welcome to the Under the Dome newsletter. I'm Kyle Ingram. The destruction caused by Hurricane Helene could require significant adjustments to voting across Western North Carolina, but election officials are still uncertain of the scope of the damage.

Speaking to reporters on Tuesday, Karen Brinson Bell, executive director of the State Board of Elections, said the state will do everything in its power to hold safe and secure elections in the aftermath of the storm.

"We are taking this situation one step at a time," she said. "...We do not have all the answers right now, but we are diligently working to figure them out."

As of Tuesday, 12 county election offices were closed and the state was uncertain how many voting sites had been rendered unusable by Helene.

In the coming days and weeks, the state board will have to determine if early voting plans must be changed, potentially relocating polling places or setting up mobile voting sites, as has happened after previous natural disasters.

Brinson Bell said it is too early to know if early voting, which is supposed to begin on Oct. 17, will start on time in all of the counties affected by the storm.

Election officials have also not determined what, if anything, they will ask the legislature to do to address the situation when it comes back into session next week.

They could ask lawmakers to approve funding for county election boards or for adjustments to the deadlines for receiving absentee ballots, considering postal service is still disrupted in many western counties.

On Monday, the state board voted to give counties flexibility on when they hold meetings to process absentee ballots, given that many of them would not have been able to meet this week's deadline given the disruption from the storm.

The board has set up a dedicated webpage with information about Helene's impact on elections at ncsbe.gov/helene.

What else the Under the Dome politics team has been working on

More proof that Ronald Reagan's Eleventh Commandment ("Thou shalt not speak ill of another Republican") is not exactly carved into stone: State Treasurer Dale Folwell and House Speaker Tim Moore are trading accusatory letters about State Health Plan costs. Luciana Perez Uribe Guinassi has the latest on the intra-GOP spat and what is driving the health plan's financial woes. Any drop in voter turnout because of Hurricane Helene could affect the presidential race. Mary Ramsey of the Charlotte Observer reports on what that might look like. Classes at UNC Asheville will be canceled for longer than planned because of Helene, Korie Dean reports. Public high school athletes will be able to immediately make money off of their name, image and likeness, a judge ruled. Langston Wertz Jr. of the Observer has the details.

Poll watch

Former President Donald Trump is up 2 points over Vice President Kamala Harris in the latest poll of North Carolina voters by Quinnipiac University – a statistical tie, but an improvement for Trump.

Attorney General Josh Stein leads Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson by a comfortable 13 points in that survey. It was taken after CNN revealed the extreme and graphic online comments that Robinson denies posting a decade ago on a porn website, like the one supporting the reinstatement of slavery. But the poll doesn't show a huge change from the 10-point lead Stein held in the last Quinnipiac poll.

Robinson still had the support of 81% of Republicans polled.

VOTER GUIDE

In the latest candidate questionnaires from our 2024 NC Voter Guide, see what candidates for state treasurer have to say about the issues, and learn more about their biographies. Two candidates answered our questions:

Republican Brad Briner

Democrat Wesley Harris

Check your inbox tomorrow for more questionnaires, and lots more #ncpol news.

You can sign up to receive the Under the Dome newsletter at newsobserver.com/newsletters. Want your friends to get our email, too? Forward them this newsletter so they can sign up. We want to know what you would like to see in the Under the Dome newsletter. Do you like highlights from the legislature? Political analysis? Do you have a question you'd like The News & Observer team to answer? Tell us here. You can also email us at dome@newsobserver.comDon't forget to follow our tweets and listen to our Under the Dome podcast for more developments.

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Avery Co. family escaped Helene with just their dogs. Everything else sits in a river

October 2, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Josh Shaffer, News & Observer | Section: weather news | 811 Words OpenURL Link

Bob Tatum stared over the Toe River bridge and pointed out the pieces of his house, smashed to splinters and wedged in the rocks below.

There's his wife's jewelry box, red and round.

There's the solid walnut mantle piece, cut by his father-in-law.

There's a cushion from his paddle boat, hanging from a tree.

"I might start crying," said Tatum, 74. "I'm raw. I don't know what day it is. You wake up in the middle of the night and you think, 'I don't have a house.' Your heart's pounding and you start to jump out of your skin."

RAL_100224-HELENE-KLM-01.JPGMinneapolis, N.C. resident Bob Tatum, photographed on Wednesday, Oct. 2, 2024, had lived 46 years in his riverfront house before flooding from Hurricane Helene washed it away. He found remnants from his house wedged underneath a bridge about a guarter of a mile away.

Before Hurricane Helene washed his entire house downriver and drowned both of his horses, Tatum woke his wife to say, "Edwina, we need to get out of here."

"We grabbed our dogs and a little cash," he said Wednesday. "Not thinking we weren't going to come back in a day or two. We've been through hurricanes before. I was in Vietnam. This is worse."

The not-quite-a-town of Minneapolis took some of Helene's worst, to the point everyone around can rattle off the names of half a dozen friends now homeless, and more than a few know a police officer who's pulled a body from the mud and debris.

RAL_100224-HELENE-KLM-02.JPGA person walks by debris wedged near a North Toe River bridge in Minneapolis, N.C. on Wednesday, Oct. 2, 2024, days after Hurricane Helene brought heavy flooding to the North Carolina mountains.

Dogtown residents alone without power after Helene

Though named Minneapolis, the tiny hamlet in Avery County with a population of 185 near the Tennessee border more often goes by its nickname: Dogtown.

"At one time, there were more dogs than people," said Randy Pitman, a longtime local. "They called it Dogtown."

When the storm hit, neighbors fretted about Beulah Young, better-known as "Bootsy," who is 96.

RAL_100224-HELENE-KLM-05.JPGBeulah "Bootsy" Young, 96, photographed on Wednesday, Oct. 2, 2024, waited three days to be rescued from her riverfront home along the North Toe River following severe flooding from Hurricane Helene in Minneapolis, N.C.

She lives a quarter-mile upriver, with her son Champ Robert, wheelchair-bound since a motorcycle wreck his senior year of high school in 1977.

Now the mudslides blocked the steep mountain road to her house, leaving the two of them alone without power or water for three days.

"We had to hike in there with the mud up to our knees," said Larry Jones, her son-in-law. "I carried 30 pounds of water in a backpack. My wife had her legs all torn-up from rocks in her boots. They're infected. We just got some antibiotic."

The rescuers found the Young's barn swept away, and the yard replaced by river rocks.

RAL_100224-HELENE-KLM-08.JPGIt took neighbors three days to access the riverfront home of Champ Young, pictured on Wednesday, Oct. 2, 2024, following heavy flooding from Hurricane Helene in Minneapolis, N.C.

"Do you think she said 'Glad to see you?'" asked Della Wright, laughing at the memory. "She said, "Don't come in here with that mud on your shoes!"

On Wednesday, "Bootsy" left her house for the first time since Friday, riding in Jones' pickup to collect her mail.

Neighbors busy shoveling mud out of their basements, crowded around her. Just last summer, the 96-year-old Dogtown native was grand marshal of the Independence Day parade.

"We just prayed that God would let our house be there," said "Bootsy." "The Good Lord just left my house."

RAL_100224-HELENE-KLM-07 (1).JPGConstruction equipment works along a roadside in Minneapolis, N.C. on Wednesday, Oct. 2, 2024, days after Hurricane Helene brought heavy flooding to the area.

'I hurt for Spruce Pine. I hurt for Asheville.'

Back on the bridge, Tatum continued his survey. Since the storm, he has been unable to return to the spot he shared a house with Edwina, their maltipoo named Puppy and their border collie, Hitch.

"That's where I go to church right there," he said pointing to Minneapolis Baptist, where walls leaned at 45-degree angles and thick mud coated the ground. "My wife taught school right there."

He leaned back over the bridge, noticing some of the former walls in the water, and teared up while struggling to remember the words to a Psalm.

He isn't able to get blood pressure medicine.

He hasn't been able to find orthopedic shoes.

Everything he had sat in the river below.

"I know all these people," said Tatum, a retired Avery County school administrator. "I hurt for Spruce Pine. I hurt for Asheville. It's not just us.

"You realize you went from having a beautiful home, a beautiful place. Retired. Feeding the fish. Feeding the horses. Petting the horses. Now you know it's gone."

RAL_100224-HELENE-KLM-03a.JPGMinneapolis, N.C. resident Della Wright, photographed on Wednesday, Oct. 2, 2024, points to where a mudslide ravaged the mountainside near her home during Hurricane Helene.

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Helene battered NC in a once-in-a-lifetime weather event. How did this happen?

October 2, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Adam Wagner, News & Observer | Section: north carolina | 1182 Words OpenURL Link

How did this happen?

That's one of the key questions on many people's minds as the recovery from Tropical Storm Helene continues in Western North Carolina, with more than 100 people confirmed dead and damage estimated to be in the tens of billions of dollars over a mountainous 25-county region.

The News & Observer asked four experts why this storm's rainfall was so catastrophic. They pointed to a number of contributing factors, including abnormally high water temperatures as the storm chugged through the Gulf of Mexico to a stalled weather system that caused heavy rain in the 36 hours leading up to Helene's arrival in Western North Carolina and likely played a role in the storm remaining so strong as it moved inland.

Here's a look at the role each of those factors played.

Warm ocean and gulf waters

Experts have been eyeing warm waters in the North Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico warily for months.

Warm water means more water vapor, Gary Lackmann, the head of N.C. State University's Marine, Earth and Atmospheric Sciences department, told The News & Observer.

And water vapor is one of the key ingredients in severe weather.

"Water vapor is weather fuel. It's like you have this huge reservoir of anomalously large weather fuel and then you basically just need some mechanism to ignite that fuel," Lackmann said.

As Helene made its way through the Gulf of Mexico Sept. 25 and 26, it passed over abnormally warm water.

Climate change, it's worth noting, has a major impact on ocean temperatures around the world. About 90% of global warming takes place in oceans, according to NASA.

On Sept. 25, the Gulf of Mexico's sea surface temperature averaged 84.2 degrees between 1991 and 2020. This year, Helene encountered waters averaging nearly 86.7 degrees.

"Not only is the sea surface temperature along its path a toasty 30-31 C, the warm water runs deep, producing extremely high ocean heat content ... an endless source of fuel," Ben McNoldy, a University of Miami hurricane expert, wrote in a blog post as Helene started to take shape.

Helene rapidly intensified in the hours before making landfall, starting as a Category 1 storm on Sept. 26 before strengthening into a Category 4 storm with 140 mph winds and making landfall late in the day.

USATSI_24331740.jpgInfrared satellite image of Hurricane Helene as it approaches the Florida Coast Thursday, Sept. 24, 2024.

Rain before the storm

As Helene was working its way northward, Western North Carolina was already experiencing heavy rainfall.

A low-pressure system before the storm stalled over the Tennessee Valley, effectively creating an atmospheric wall with severe weather on its eastern side.

Low pressure systems create strong southerly winds on their eastern edges, said Justin Lane, a meteorologist at the National Weather Service's office in Greer, S.C., which covers Western North Carolina. Low pressure systems also lift air into the atmosphere, where water vapor is more likely to condense and become rainfall.

Those strong winds picked up vapor-laden air that was already in the Gulf of Mexico and carried it into Western North Carolina, where strong rains started falling about 36 hours before Helene made landfall near Perry, Florida, around 11:30 p.m. Sept. 26.

"Even without Helene, there would have been a significant rainfall and flooding event just due to the other weather system and setup and this really vapor-rich air," Lackmann said.

At Asheville Regional Airport, for instance, 9.85 inches of rain fell on Sept. 25 and 26.

"We were just streaming that moisture over the area, basically over the same area, continuously for a day and a half or so. You can envision it being a firehose of moisture that doesn't really move," Lane said.

That's the second time in September that meteorologists called a severe rain event a "firehose." The same label was applied to the Sept. 15-16 rainfall that caused significant flooding in Carolina Beach and across Brunswick County.

RAL_100124-HURRICANE-HELENE-TEL-35.JPGAn aerial view of downtown Marshall on Tuesday, Oct. 1, 2024 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.

Geography

The Blue Ridge Mountains played a key role.

As winds out of the east or southeast run into the mountains, air is pushed upward. And as air goes upward, more of the water vapor within it comes out in the form of rainfall or, in winter, snow.

In the case of Helene, that played a significant factor, said Chip Konrad, the director of NOAA's Southeast Regional Climate Center.

"There was more water vapor available to come in and then basically just being wrung out of the atmosphere at a very rapid rate as it's being forced up against the Blue Ridge escarpment," Konrad said in an interview.

Lane, the NWS researcher, agreed, saying the low pressure system and geography worked together to bring more rainfall.

"Because of the extra lift provided by those southeast winds flowing up the mountain, we basically were maximizing the efficiency of the rainfall rates given the available moisture," Lane said. "We got the most out of the moisture that was available."

Speed of the storm

The jet stream also played a role when Helene came into the picture, Lane said, helping the storm move swiftly northward through Florida, Georgia and South Carolina into Western North Carolina.

At one point after making landfall, Lane said, Helene was moving 40 to 45 mph through the Southeast. Normally,

storms have time to lose energy over land. This one didn't.

"It was moving so fast, it just didn't have enough time to weaken significantly before moving into our area," Lane said.

See the devastation Helene left in western NCNews & Observer photojournalist Travis Long and Charlotte Observer photojournalist Khadejeh Nikouyeh document the destruction left in the path of Helene as it ravaged the western mountain region of North Carolina over the weekend.

And then Helene came

The region's strongest rainfall came as Helene was passing west of the region, Lane said.

The worst place to be when a hurricane is making landfall is the east side.

"By far the worst impacts are going to be in that area from just east of the center out to about 100 to 200 miles," Lane said.

That's exactly where Western North Carolina was.

At the Mountain Research Station in Waynesville, Helene brought 5 inches of rain the morning of Sept. 27.

The rain, which had been falling steadily from the predecessor event, picked up pace at about 2 a.m. Friday, with 0.4 inches of rain over the next hour. Then larger amounts started to fall.

By 6 a.m., there was 0.74 inches of rain falling in an hour. In the 9 a.m. hour, 0.87 inches of rain fell.

Friday brought nearly as much rain as the weather station saw fall in July and August combined. The 1.5 inches of rain that fell between 8 a.m. and 10 a.m. was more than the 1.21 inches the station recorded in August.

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Missing after Helene: Torn apart by landslides and floods, families frantic for news

October 2, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Virginia Bridges, News & Observer | Section: north carolina | 1399 Words OpenURL Link

John Norwood last saw Julie le Roux around 10 a.m. on Friday, Sept. 27, the day the storm came.

In Helene's chaos, Norwood and his fiancée took refuge at a neighbor's mountain home in Marion. As they watched water rise around them, a wave of debris and dirt roared into the home, crumbling a chimney beside them.

Norwood stepped to one side. Le Roux stepped to the other. Then the roof collapsed, crashing down on them.

"It happened so fast," said Norwood, 32. "All I remember is a bunch of crashing noises, and then I was underwater, and that was it."

Norwood is one of so many - no one has an exact count - waiting for word on whether missing loved ones survived Helene. With cell phone and internet service still dark in many hardest-hit locations, connecting in the usual ways has been impossible.

More than 95 have been confirmed dead by the state, as of Oct. 17, but an untold number remain unaccounted for. Local officials have been deluged with requests for help finding the missing.

Bulletin boards with notes seeking assistance have cropped up in mountain towns. People are posting cries from the heart on social media and calling into radio stations.

And as each day passed after Helene's historic assault, the worry grows more frantic.

"I'm praying for a miracle," Norwood said in a telephone interview Wednesday from a hospital room in Morganton.

Julie le RouxJulie le Roux is missing after Tropical Storm Helene hit North Carolina. She was last seen taking refuge in Marion, N.C. when a house crashed down on her and her fiance.

Facebook groups at work

On Wednesday, pleas for help continued to roll in on social media, including in the newly created Hurricane Helene Missing People group.

There, a mother looks for a daughter who was living on the streets of Asheville during the storm. A woman wants someone to find her sister in the Candler area. A man knows of an elderly couple in Lenoir that someone must check on.

"They need help! Food, water and oxygen. I've posted in multiple areas, but no response," he wrote.

uncle.jpegJasmin Colon, left, with her Uncle Bill Smith in a photo taken in Spruce Pine 15 years.

The waiting is torture, said Jasmin Colon, 36, who lives in Cape Coral, Fla. She is looking for her Uncle Billy, a 79-year-old longtime Bakersville resident.

"My biggest fear is that he stayed in his camper and that it got either crushed by a tree or the landslides took it out," she said Wednesday.

Family last spoke with William "Bill" Smith, a retired parachute instructor, on Wednesday. He told Colon's dad by phone that he was keeping an eye on Helene.

But when they followed up after that, Smith did not answer or respond to texts.

They reported him missing to the state and the American Red Cross. And Colon joined a local Facebook community group. She added his name to a spreadsheet she found online of missing people, and checked community lists of people who have been found, including those who were seen getting meals at a local church. Smith's neighbor told Colon Friday her uncle was safe.

"We found him," Colon said Friday evening.

RAL_092722-HURRICANE-HELENE-TEL-23.JPGPart of a structure sits in floodwaters on a road in Canton on Friday, Sept. 27, 2024 as the remnants of Hurricane Helene caused flooding, downed trees, and power outages in western North Carolina.

'We need to go'

Norwood, a blacksmith originally from Pittsboro, and le Roux, a 33-year-old artist from Georgia, had dated for three years before he proposed last summer.

Norwood woke up around 6 a.m. Friday and saw a nearby creek creeping close to his place, nestled with about a dozen other homes on the side of a mountain by Pisgah National Forest in McDowell County.

"We need to go," he told le Roux, who helped round up their cats, Ginger and Lily, in a crate. Carrying the bags they packed the night before, they loaded up their Subaru Outback.

First they drove up the mountain. As they rounded a corner, mud and rocks, deposited by a slide, blocked the road. Then they drove down, but were stopped again, by fallen trees laying flat.

Norwood pulled out his chainsaw and tried to clear a path.

"It was so windy and rainy that more and more trees just kept falling all around us, and we just agreed that it was too dangerous to be out here," said Norwood.

The couple drove back to the house in the dark rainfall.

RAL_100124-HURRICANE-HELENE-TEL-33.JPGAn aerial view of downtown Marshall on Tuesday, Oct. 1, 2024 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.

Refuge turned dangerous

Around 8:30 a.m., they walked to a neighbor's with a generator and a Starlink satellite phone.

Norwood texted his mother and his sister to let them know they were OK. As they sat and watched the water rise, they saw it push cars around and knock more trees down.

Then, through a window, he saw a wave of water, tree limbs and rocks sweeping down the mountain. It soon hit them.

"We looked up and there was this wall of water and debris coming towards us, and a split-second later, the whole house was coming down," Norwood said.

And they were swept into a rushing river of mud and debris.

Norwood struggled to keep his head above water as branches, rocks and pieces of houses hit him in the face and pulled him under, pulling off his sandals and shirt.

"I fully kind of accepted that I was going to die there," he said.

In no time, the water took Norwood about a quarter-mile, where he found himself stuck on a growing pile of tangled houses and debris atop something snagged below.

His arms were free and his head was above water, but two large pieces of wood had crushed his legs under the surface. A big log pushed at his back.

Norwood heard his neighbor yelling. But he didn't hear his fiancée.

"I was just screaming, 'Hey, I'm here. Help. Please. Help,'" Norwood said.

As Norwood's neighbor dug him out, pain in his legs set in. He started screaming for le Roux.

"Julie, Julie, Julie," he yelled, he said, for 20 minutes.

But she never answered.

"I kind of just went into shock and panic after that," he said.

'Please, God, let her be somewhere safe'

Unable to walk, Norwood crawled barefoot about 100 feet up the mountain on his hands and knees, getting a bird's eye view of the destruction.

"I see nothing. There's no road anymore. There's no way out of there," he said.

He leaned up against a tree and passed out for an unknown amount of time before the cold woke him up and sent him searching for shelter.

He shimmied down the mountain on his rear and found a woodshed, he said, where he waited for a few hours before seeing a cabin with a hand-made sign that said "Alive inside."

He opened the door and found his neighbors, but not le Roux.

"Please, God, let her be somewhere safe. Let her be OK somewhere," Norwood said he kept saying to himself.

Eventually, they saw people nearby but on the other side of rushing water, which muffled their yells as they tried to communicate.

Rescue teams strung a thick rope across the creek, and pulled Norwood and his neighbors across in metal baskets.

Firefighters carried them to vehicles that drove them about four miles to land clear enough for ambulances to reach those rescued from the mountain, Norwood said.

They took him to the hospital, where he was treated for muscle damage and a staph infection. And where he remained hopeful that le Roux had survived.

But awful news came Friday. Le Roux's family announced, using her nickname, that she had not.

"We feel the prayers, cherish the love and need continued support as Julie went to be with our Lord and Savior yesterday. Our Lulie, our wildflower [will] be greatly missed," read the Facebook post.

NorwoodLaRoux.jpegJohn Norwood and Julie le Roux in an undated photo.

How to report a missing person

To report a missing person or request non-emergency support, call NC 211 or 1-888-892-1162 if calling from out-of-state.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This story was updated on Oct. 17, to reflect the latest death toll reported by the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services.

Virginia Bridges covers criminal justice in the Triangle and across North Carolina for The News & Observer. Her work is produced with financial support from the nonprofit The Just Trust. The N&O maintains full editorial control of its journalism.

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There's new storm activity in the Atlantic and Gulf. Could any of them affect NC?

October 2, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Renee Umsted, News & Observer | Section: weather news | 417 Words OpenURL Link

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

Conditions could lead the system to develop into a tropical depression. As of Wednesday, Oct. 2, there's a 40% chance that a depression will form over the next seven days.

Current models are showing that the system will likely not develop into something strong, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service's Forecast Office in Raleigh told The News & Observer.

"This really looks like a threat of heavy rain and possibly a wind and surge threat, depending on storm strength, for Florida later next week," AccuWeather meteorologist Bernie Rayno said in a report.

Which storms are in the Atlantic now? What about Hurricane Kirk?

Hurricane Kirk Cone.jpgHurricane Kirk is expected to develop into a major hurricane and move northwest through Saturday, Oct. 5.

« 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.

Ask NC service journalism team EMBED

A cart of flowers lifts spirits and brings color back to Western NC's dire landscape

Triangle businesses and organizations collecting donations for Helene storm victims in NC

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'Gone.' The main route through the NC mountains will take a long time to rebuild

October 2, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Richard Stradling, News & Observer | Section: north carolina | 672 Words OpenURL Link

Of all the roads that need fixing in Western North Carolina, none will pose a bigger challenge than Interstate 40 in the Pigeon River Gorge.

The swollen river scoured the earth below the four-lane highway, washing away the eastbound lanes in several places. The largest section, about 4 miles from the Tennessee line, gave way around noon on Friday.

Remarkably, no one has reported any cars or trucks tumbling into the river, according to the State Highway Patrol.

But the highway is closed in both directions, severing the busiest connection between North Carolina and Tennessee, used by some 26,000 drivers a day. An alternate route, Interstate 26, is also closed because of severe flooding on the Tennessee side near the town of Erwin.

Both are likely to remain closed for a long time.

I40 MM4.pngThe Pigeon River damaged or destroyed the eastbound lanes of Interstate 40 in several places after the remnants of Hurricane Helene dropped historic amounts of rain on Western North Carolina. This photo was taken about four miles from the Tennessee line.

N.C. Department of Transportation engineers visited the damaged sections of I-40 on Monday, with officials from the Federal Highway Administration and the Tennessee Department of Transportation. They returned Tuesday to begin to determine how they will shore up and stabilize the eroded sections so they don't get any worse, according to NCDOT spokesman David Uchiyama.

"Those operations should begin within a week," Uchiyama wrote in an email.

But NCDOT engineers are only beginning to try to figure out how to rebuild I-40, Uchiyama said. Over a four-mile stretch near the Tennessee line, the two eastbound lanes are "either gone or partially gone," he said, and there are three other damaged places spread over the next 11 miles.

i 40.jpgThe eastbound lanes of I-40 near the Tennessee line washed out and collapsed during catastrophic flooding from Helene. The N.C. Department of Transportation says it's not clear how long it will take to repair and reopen the road.

It's not clear yet if the westbound lanes will be usable while the eastbound lanes are rebuilt, Uchiyama said.

Drone video: Small NC town starts the long recovery from HeleneAerial footage from N&O visual journalist Travis Long shows people trying to dig out from the catastrophic destruction in downtown Marshall, Tuesday, Oct. 1, 2024, after flooding from the French Broad River inundated the small western North Carolina town.

A road difficult to build and maintain

It took 15 years to build the section of I-40 that connects North Carolina and Tennessee. The highway snakes alongside the Pigeon River, perched on a shelf blasted from the side of the mountains. When the road opened in 1968, N.C. Gov. Dan Moore is reported to have said, "The genius of modern man has shown itself to be superior to the adversities of nature."

But nature has never conceded, and I-40's path through the Pigeon River Gorge has always been precarious.

Usually the threat comes from above, as rocks slide down the walls of the gorge onto the highway on both sides of the state line. A slide on the North Carolina side in October 2009 closed the interstate in both directions for six months, as crews cleared debris and stabilized with rock face.

During that closure, westbound drivers were encouraged to take I-26 north from Asheville to I-81 at Johnston City, Tennessee.

But that's not an option now. Floodwaters knocked down twin spans that carried I-26 over the Nolichucky River in Erwin, about 40 miles from the North Carolina line. Tennessee DOT spokesman Mark Nagi says there's no timeline set for rebuilding them and reopening the highway.

For now, traffic apps are advising drivers wishing to go west toward Knoxville and Nashville from the Triangle to take I-77 north to I-81 near Wytheville, Virginia. Drivers leaving Charlotte are advised to take Highway 321 to I-40 west to US 25/70 to I-81.

GY1S5yoXkAlTsed.jpgThe flooding Nolichucky River knocked down twin spans of Interstate 26 in Erwin, Tennessee, after the remnants of Hurricane Helene dumped historic amounts of rain on the Blue Ridge Mountains. It's not clear how long the highway will be closed.

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'NIL for good': NC State student-athletes pledge funds for NC storm relief

October 2, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Jadyn Watson-Fisher, News & Observer | Section: nc state | 344 Words OpenURL Link

N.C. State student-athletes decided to use name, image and likeness funding in a positive manner, the One Pack NIL announced on Tuesday.

Forty-eight members of the Wolfpack collective pledged a portion of their NIL earnings to Hurricane Helene relief efforts. The group has committed \$4,635 to Samaritan's Purse. It includes football, men's and women's basketball, and baseball players.

"This idea originated from our student-athletes asking how they can help our neighbors in need," Executive Director of One Pack NIL Chris Vurnakes said in a statement. "This initiative speaks to the culture of N.C. State, the leadership of our programs and the values of our student-athletes. This is truly NIL for good."

Helene caused significant damage to the western part of the state, including Watauga Country. Samaritan's Purse is headquartered in Boone, the county seat.

Defensive end Isaiah Shirley grew up in Boone and attended Watauga High School. Vurnakes said Shirley donated to the effort and his family introduced the collective to the nonprofit.

The collective asks its supporters to join the relief efforts. They can donate directly to Samaritan's Purse online or to obtain more information on relief work.

Supporters can also drop off donations at the Close-King Indoor Football Practice facility across from Carter-Finley Stadium. One Pack members and brothers Davin and Rylan Vann partnered with their family's moving company, Joyful Movers and Durham Rescue Mission to collect supplies for people in need.

The extent of the storm's damage and death toll remain uncertain, authorities said.

The N.C. Department of Transportation travel website lists more than 400 road closures. NCDOT told residents all roads in the western region should be considered closed and only used for emergencies. Portions of Interstates 26 and 40, south and east of Asheville, were reopened on Tuesday. Westbound I-40 was also set to reopen, but the department urged people to avoid travel.

Officials confirmed 38 people have been killed but the total remains unknown as search and rescue efforts continue.

Shirley's family, along with the families of Aydan White, Zack Myers and head coach Dave Doeren's sons, were all impacted by the storm but are safe.

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Wild horses are eating trees on NC's Outer Banks? It's not what it seems, experts say

October 2, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Mark Price, News & Observer | Section: north carolina | 314 Words OpenURL Link

The wild horses on North Carolina's Outer Banks have been seen chewing on trees in a phenomenon that has nothing to do with a food shortage on the barrier islands.

It's persimmon season, according to the Corolla Wild Horse Fund.

"Persimmon trees are native to our area and this is the time of year when the fruit is ripe and sweet," the fund wrote in a Sept. 30 Facebook post.

"You'll often see the wild Bankers eating them right out of the trees. ... Great example of seasonal foraging!"

horseseatingembed

Video shared by the fund shows horses will linger under persimmon trees for extended periods, pressing their noses into the branches and chewing at the dangling clusters of fruit.

The trees are found all over the islands, including in yards. Ripe persimmons are orange and "sticky sweet" when ripe, "but very astringent if unripe," according to Will Cook, a plant ecology researcher at Duke University.

The seasonal feast provides a glimpse of how the horses managed to survived in forbidding turf after being introduced to the islands by Spanish explorers in the 1500s, historians say.

Their island diet eventually evolved to a combination of "sea oats, coastal grasses, acorns, persimmons, and other area vegetation," Outerbanks.com reports.

The nonprofit Corolla Wild Horse Fund tends a herd of around 100 wild horses on the northern end of the Outer Banks, including capturing injured and sick horses for medical care. It operates a horse farm for animals that can't be returned to the wild.

The Outer Banks is among the few regions in the state that did not endure severe flooding related to Tropical Storm Helene the last week of September, officials say.

Beachgoers watch as third home in 5 days collapses along NC's Outer Banks. See video

Two wild horses have been feuding for weeks on NC's Outer Banks. See video of brawl

Once-ostracized wild horse seen wandering NC Outer Banks is now a mom, photos show

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Mark Price, News & Observer, 'Wild horses are eating trees on NC's Outer Banks? It's not what it seems, experts say', *News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles* (online), 2 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C695599587C3B8>



Baxter plant in Marion closed because of Helene flooding; 2,500+ workers affected

October 2, 2024 | News Herald, The (Morganton, NC) Author: RICHARD CRAVER Winston-Salem Journal | Section: Business | 536 Words OpenURL Link

The North Cove manufacturing plant of Baxter International Inc. has experienced significant flooding damage from the remnants of Hurricane Helene, the company said Tuesday.

The Marion campus is closed for production. It is Baxter's largest manufacturing facility with more than 2,500 employees.

Production primarily involves making intravenous and peritoneal dialysis solutions. Baxter is the largest U.S. manufacturer of these solutions.

"Our hearts and thoughts are with all those affected by Hurricane Helene," said José Almeida, Baxter's chair, president and chief executive.

"The safety of our employees, their families and the communities in which we operate remains our utmost concern, and we are committed to helping ensure reliable supply of products to patients.

The company said "it is working around the clock in close coordination with local, state and federal officials to assess the extent of the damage and implement a plan to bring the plant back online as quickly as possible to help mitigate supply disruption to patients."

"Remediation efforts are already under way, and we will spare no resource -- human or financial -- to resume production and help ensure patients and providers have the products they need," Almeida said.

The damage occurred in spite of Baxter's preparation efforts, which included evacuation plans for workers, moving products to higher ground or secure storage where feasible.

However, the company said the heavy rain and storm surge triggered a levee breach, which led to water permeating the site. The bridges accessing the site have been damaged.

The Baxter International Foundation has committed \$1.5 million in donations to help address recovery needs, including allocating additional funds to its Employee Disaster Relief Fund, and is matching employee donations \$2 for \$1 toward relief efforts.

Baster said the temporary closing of the Baxter plant is expected to "negatively impact the company's financial results."

"Once the company can more fully assess the damage, it will be in a better position to estimate any expected impact and plans to provide an update in its third-quarter earnings announcement."

On Tuesday, the N.C. Division of Employment Security listed McDowell County among 25 counties in northwest and western N.C. whose citizens have been declared eligible for federal disaster unemployment assistance benefits.

The eligibility is a byproduct of the Biden administration's declaration of a state of emergency in North Carolina.

The assistance covers individuals who are unemployed as a direct result of Hurricane Helene. Business owners and self-employed individuals affected by the storm also may qualify for benefits.

Benefits would be made retroactive to Sept. 29 and may last for up to 26 weeks.

The other counties, along with the Cherokee Indians of N.C., are: Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Clay, Cleveland, Gaston, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Lincoln, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes and Yancey.

The division said additional counties may be added at a later date.

Eligible individuals have until Dec. 2 to file an application for disaster unemployment assistance at des.nc.gov or the DUA Hotline at 919-629-3857.

Individuals must first apply for state unemployment benefits. For those determined to be ineligible for or have exhausted regular state benefits, they may be eligible to make a federal disaster unemployment assistance claim.

Eligibility is determined weekly, and individuals must continue to be out of work as a direct result of the disaster each week to get unemployment benefits.

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Searches underway as Helene deaths pass 165

October 2, 2024 | News Herald, The (Morganton, NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: News | 136 Words OpenURL Link

SWANNANOA, N.C. — Cadaver dogs and search crews trudged through knee-deep muck and debris Tuesday looking in the mountains of western North Carolina for victims of Hurricane Helene, days after the storm carved a destructive path through the Southeast.

With Helene's death toll passing 165, searchers used helicopters and hiked through wilderness to reach isolated homes. The storm knocked out power and cellular service in some towns and cities, leaving people frustrated, hot and increasingly worried. Some cooked food on charcoal grills or hiked to high ground in the hopes of finding a signal to contact loved ones.

"Communities were wiped off the map," North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper said Tuesday at a news conference. Devastation was especially bad in the Blue Ridge Mountains, where at least 57 people died in and around Asheville, a tourism haven.

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Staff Writer, 'Searches underway as Helene deaths pass 165', *News Herald, The* (online), 2 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BF5029EFA07D58



WANT TO HELP?

October 2, 2024 | News Herald, The (Morganton, NC) Author: SARAH C. JOHNSON Hickory Daily Record | Section: Want To Help | 1099 Words OpenURL Link

WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA | HELENE AFTERMATH

The remnants of Hurricane Helene hit western North Carolina Friday, bringing significant flooding and damage. The storm left many residents without power, water or cell service.

In the days since, federal, state and local governments have worked to help the area recover. Also helping are numerous private companies and individuals.

Here is information about food, shelter, power and donation sites in McDowell, Burke, Catawba and Iredell counties and surrounding areas.

Meals, shelters for flood victims in western NC

Grace Community Church will be providing hot meals at 5182 U.S. 70 West in Marion. Lunch will be served from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Dinner will be served from 4-5:30 p.m.

Local emergency shelters are listed below:

- Glenwood Baptist Church 155 Glenwood Church Road in Marion
- Marion Senior Center 100 Spauling Road in Marion
- YMCA of Marion 438 Grace Corpening Drive in Marion
- Oak Hill Methodist Church 2239 N.C. 181 in Morganton
- West Caldwell High School 300 West Caldwell Drive in Lenoir

Food, water, supplies in McDowell County

Numerous agencies from all across McDowell County continue to assist McDowell County

Emergency Management with points of distribution. These places will operate daily from 10 a.m. to noon and 4-6 p.m., depending on available supplies. The locations are as follows:

- Hicks Chapel Church 6008 U.S. Hwy. 221 N. in Marion
- Former TJ's Discount 8153 U.S. Hwy. 221 N. in Marion
- Old Fort Town Hall 38 Catawba Ave. in Old Fort
- New Manna Baptist Church 225 E. Court St. in Marion
- Solid Rock Free Will Baptist Church 7860 N.C. Hwy. 226 S. in Nebo

Food, water and ice in Burke County

Burke County has set up a donation and distribution location at Foothills Higher Education Center in Morganton. The center is at 2128 S. Sterling St., Morganton.

Donations are being accepted from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. every day and will be distributing needed items from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. every day.

The county is off ering free bags of ice at four locations:

- Old Kmart parking lot 110 Bost Road, Morganton
- Fiddlers Run Shopping Center 160 Fidler Run Blvd., Morganton
- Brentwood Water Corporation 1911 Jamestown Road, Morganton
- Foothills Thrift Store 2886 U.S. Hwy. 17, Morganton

Where to donate for flood relief in western NC

Looking to donate food, clothes or toiletries to flood victims in western North Carolina? Here are donation sites in Catawba, Caldwell, Burke, Iredell and McDowell counties.

Several sites around the Catawba Valley are collecting donations:

- N.C. State Highway Patrol station 3265 U.S. Highway 70 SE in Conover
- Catawba County United Way off ce 2760 Tate Blvd. SE in Hickory
- WHKY off ce 526 Main Ave. SE in Hickory
- Conover Fire Department, Station No. 3 1776 Village Square NW in Conover
- Hickory Motor Speedway 3130 U.S. Highway 70 SE in Newton
- Klingspor Abrasives 2566 Third Ave. NW in Hickory
- Brookford Police Department lobby 1700 S. Center St. in Hickory
- Long View Town Hall 2404 First Ave. SW in Long View (Until Oct. 7)
- Adrian L. Shuford Jr. YMCA 1104 Conover Blvd. E. in Conover
- Hickory Foundation YMCA 701 First St. NW in Hickory
- Lincoln County Family YMCA 1402 Gaston St. in Lincolnton
- Sally's YMCA 1601 Forney Creek Parkway in Denver
- Phifer Family YMCA 2165 S. Sterling St. in Morganton
- Lower Creek Baptist Church 633 Lower Creek Drive in Lenoir (10 a.m. to 4 p.m.)
- Statesville Regional Airport 238 Airport Road in Statesville (8 a.m. to 4 p.m.)

- ullet Statesville Fire Department Station No. 1 822 Fifth St. in Statesville
- ullet Statesville Fire Department Station No. 2 110 Security Drive in Statesville
- ullet Statesville Fire Department Station No. 3 779 Eastside Drive in Statesville
- ullet Statesville Fire Department Station No. 4 115 Martin Lane in Statesville
- Universal Advanced Manufacturing Center 634 College Drive in Marion
- Foothills Higher Education Center 2128 S. Sterling St. in Morganton

Items needed for flood victims

Don't know what to donate? Here is a list of items that local donations sites are requesting.

- · Powdered drink mix packets
- Bottled water
- Baby formula/baby food
- · Nonperishable food items
- Plastic utensils
- Paper plates/cups Manual can openers
- Toiletries
- Toothbrushes/toothpaste
- Hand sanitizer
- Baby wipes
- · Diapers for adults/children
- Sanitizing wipes
- Feminine hygiene products
- Bug spray
- Sunscreen
- Dog/cat food
- Cat litter
- New clothes
- · Unopened socks of all sizes

- Blankets
- · Heavy-duty work gloves
- Plastic tarps
- · Cleaning supplies
- Trash bags 13-gallon or bigger
- Batteries
- Flashlights
- Chain saws (Brookford Police Department only)

Statesville Fire Departments are not accepting used clothes, water, fuel or flammable items, most chemicals including bleach, or hazardous materials. Other sites are not accepting glass items.

North Carolina Helene disaster relief funds

Want to donate money to help Hurricane Helene victims? Here are two off cial relief funds for North Carolina.

Monetary donations can be made to the N.C. Department of Public Safety's disaster relief fund at nc.gov/donate.

The North Carolina United Way is also accepting monetary donations through NC 211 at unitedwaync.org.

Power outages in Catawba Valley

Nearly 65% of McDowell County was without power on Tuesday at 10:45 a.m. There were 19,562 customers out of 30,262 with no power, according to PowerOutages. us.

Half of Burke County residents still had no power as of Tuesday. As of 10:45 a.m., 21,853 out of 43,519 customers were without power, according to PowerOutages.us.

Nearly 40% of Caldwell County remained without power as of 10:45 a.m. on Tuesday. Out of 42,228 customers, 16,134 still did not have power, according to PowerOutages.us.

On Tuesday, 9,836 customers out of 82,391 in Catawba County were still without power, according to PowerOutages.us.

On Tuesday, 1,643 customers out of 19,481 in Alexander County were still without power, according to PowerOutages.us.

Report missing people in McDowell County

If you or someone you know is in need of assistance, call the Helene Hotline at 828652-3241. The 24/7 volunteer operators are standing by to help. The hotline can be used for the following:

- 1. Report missing or stranded persons
- 2. Request transportation to a shelter
- 3. Report urgent medical equipment needs (oxygen, life-saving medication)

4. Any other questions or concerns

How to apply for FEMA assistance

Did you experience damage from Tropical Storm Helene? If you live in Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Clay, Cleveland, Gaston, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Lincoln, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes or Yancey counties or are a tribal member of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, FEMA may be able to help with serious needs, displacement, home repair or other expenses.

To apply, go online to DisasterAssistance. gov, use the FEMA app for mobile devices or call 800-621-3362.

Sarah Johnson is the courts and breaking news reporter for the Hickory Daily Record.

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Western NC courts, including Burke County, canceled due to Hurricane Helene

October 2, 2024 | News Herald, The (Morganton, NC) Author: Sarah C. Johnson Hickory Daily Record | Section: Crime Courts | 296 Words OpenURL Link

Courts in at least 22 counties in western North Carolina — including Caldwell, Catawba and McDowell — have canceled court, according to the N.C. Judicial Branch.

Court filing deadlines for 28 counties were extended by N.C. Chief Justice Paul Newby on Sunday. Alexander, Burke, Caldwell. Catawba and McDowell counties were included in the order.

All criminal and civil hearings for Catawba County District Court and Catawba County Superior Court have been canceled through Friday, according to the N.C. Judicial Branch website. The Catawba County Courthouse is at 100 Government Drive, Newton.

Burke County District Court is closed through Friday. Burke County Superior Court was closed Tuesday. Decisions about Superior Court are being made on a day-by-day basis, Assistant District Attorney Mitch Walker said. The Burke County Courthouse is at 201 S. Green St. in Morganton.

Caldwell County District Court is closed through Friday. Caldwell County Superior Court is open for criminal cases, according to the N.C. Judicial Branch website. The Caldwell County Courthouse is at 216 Main St. NW in Lenoir.

The McDowell County Courthouse is closed due to power outages and flooding from Hurricane Helene. The N.C. Judicial Branch website says McDowell County courts are closed through Wednesday. The McDowell County Courthouse is at 21 S. Main St. in Marion.

Filing extension for western NC

Chief Justice Paul Newby ordered that all pleadings, motions, notices and other documents that were due to be filed between Sept. 26 and Oct. 14 shall be deemed timely if filed by the end of business on Oct. 14. That includes documents for civil actions, criminal actions, estates and special proceedings.

The counties included in the order are Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Cherokee, Clay, Cleveland, Gaston, Graham, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Lincoln, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Swain, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes and Yancey.

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Hickory's Riverwalk overwater bridge closed until further notice due to storm damage

October 2, 2024 | News Herald, The (Morganton, NC) Author: Billy Chapman wchapman@hickoryrecord.com| Section: News | 118 Words OpenURL Link

The railing of Hickory's Riverwalk bridge was hit by debris as the remnants of Hurricane Helene moved through the area Friday. The trail's overwater bridge is closed until further notice, Hickory Communications Specialist Sarah Killian said in an email.

The boardwalk at Glenn Hilton Park, tennis courts at Civitan Park and the small dog area at Fairbrook Optimist Dog Park are also closed.

Killian said all Hickory parks, except Henry Fork River Park, were open Monday.

All Hickory recreation centers and libraries were also open Monday.

A hangar at Hickory Regional Airport was destroyed as the remnants of Hurricane Helene came through the area.

Killian said the hangar was under construction and the contractor building it is responsible for removing and rebuilding.

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