

How damage from Hurricane Helene could affect NC high school playoff schedule

October 1, 2024 | Hickory Daily Record (NC) Author: Langston Wertz Jr. The Charlotte Observer | Section: Football | 536 Words OpenURL Link

Eight years ago, the N.C. High School Athletic Association pushed back the start of its football playoffs due to Hurricane Matthew.

NCHSAA commissioner Que Tucker said that could be a possibility again this year after the devastation brought to the western part of the state by Hurricane Helene.

Tucker said any decisions about the playoffs would come from the NCHSAA board of directors, which she expects will meet via Zoom sometime later this week.

"With the devastation they have had," Tucker said Monday. "I'm not sure one week would do it. But that's a decision that has to be made by our board members. As a staff we want to huddle up and look at what we have found and see what we can come up with to present to the board, but we want to make sure our board members (from the regions most affected) can be on the Zoom with us because they have boots-on-the-ground knowledge, and we need to get their perspective."

Tucker said in her talks with coaches and athletic officials in the mountains that the damage is excessive and that schools in all four of the NCHSAA's classes have been affected.

So the association will not be able to delay one or two classifications in the playoffs, she said.

Tucker also doesn't expect that many football games, or any sports, will be played in that region this week. She noted she saw a photograph of the football field at Morganton's Freedom High School showing it almost completely submerged.

"Even if we thought one school could play, well, who would they be playing?" Tucker asked. "How can they get there? That's the crazy part. We talked to a coach at Mountain Heritage and he had been out with a chainsaw trying to help. He stopped long enough and found a spot with cell service and said it may be two months before they can get back to school; that they are using the school building to house the workers and everybody."

The NCHSAA playoffs are scheduled to begin in about two weeks, with girls' tennis (Oct. 14), volleyball (Oct. 19), girls' golf (Oct. 21) and cross-country (Oct. 26) up first.

Football playoffs are scheduled to begin Nov. 8.

"Until we can get a true assessment to when schools can return to play, and just be able to open up school, we can't make decisions at this point," Tucker said. "But I do know our board will be as far as equitable as when they were dealing with situations (brought on by past weather events) in eastern North Carolina."

Tucker said she is worried about how to get the playoffs going, knowing they are important so many schools and athletes and families. But seeing the images of the damage done, she said, is heartbreaking.

"It's a lot to think about," Tucker said. "Some people don't have drinking water. But you have to have hope, and hope brings about renewed excitement to push through. We know when we get to the other side, we'll play again, and we don't want to act like we don't have hope. But we have to be patient and try to keep it all in perspective as we try to do things that are in the best interest of everyone."

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Newton-Conover-Lincolnton football will happen Wednesday, some games moved to Saturday

October 1, 2024 | Hickory Daily Record (NC) Author: Jason Koon| Section: Football | 146 Words OpenURL Link

Newton-Conover High School has joined the list of Catawba County schools that will be able to get their week six football games in the week after Helene upended high school sports schedules last week.

The Red Devils will visit Lincolnton High School on Wednesday at 7:30 p.m. Maiden and Hickory High will also be playing at home on Wednesday at 7:30 p.m.

Several schools have moved back this week's games to Saturday to accommodate the compressed schedules. Hickory's home game and Bunker Hill's road game at West Lincoln have been moved to Saturday at 6:30 p.m.

The Northwestern 3A/4A conference has suspended all athletic activities for the rest of the week, according to a statement from the organization. This will indefinitely postpone the Alexander Central-Ashe County and South Caldwell-Watauga football games originally scheduled for this Friday. Alexander Central and South Caldwell were both on bye weeks last week.

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Catawba County Schools closed on Wednesday, Hickory operating on 2-hour delay

October 1, 2024 | Hickory Daily Record (NC) Author: Miya Banks | Section: Education | 229 Words OpenURL Link

Catawba County Schools posted to its Facebook page that all schools will be closed on Wednesday with an optional teacher workday.

The district said its goal is to return to school when power outages decrease and it is safe to transport students.

QUEST Childcare will operate from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. at Catawba, Mountain View, Oxford, Snow Creek, St. Stephens and Startown elementary schools, according to the post.

"Extracurricular activities and athletics will be allowed as scheduled — please check with your individual school or coach for updates," the Catawba Schools said.

The district said all absences due to the impact of Hurricane Helene will be excused.

Hickory City Schools

Hickory City Schools will be operating on a two-hour delay according to an email to parents and staff, meaning students will report to school two hours after their school's official start time.

The email said all buildings are functional and ready for students, and that it is essential for students to return to learning.

"We will have limited bus routes and delays," the email said. "Bus 462 will not run, and if you have down powerlines or trees near your home, please drive your student to school, as yellow buses will not be able to travel down your street. Breakfast and lunch will still be served as scheduled."

Families who feel unsafe traveling may reach out to their school for assistance and support, the email said.

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Former local librarian describes wrath of Helene

October 1, 2024 | High Point Enterprise (NC) Author: Paul B. Johnson ENTERPRISE STAFF WRITER | Section: News | 337 Words OpenURL Link

HIGH POINT — Former High Point Public Library director Kem Ellis had no idea the fate that he would be dealt when he moved in mid-August to Asheville from the state of Washington.

Ellis and his husband, Mark Livingston, were excited about moving to a comfortable home in a neighborhood with beautiful trees in the southern part of Asheville 15 minutes from the bustling downtown.

"We've just gotten settled in, met the neighbors, gotten involved in the community and are busy making a house a home," Ellis said in an email. "Then Helene came to call."

Ellis, who retired as High Point library director in 2011, said he "seriously underestimated" the devastation Tropical Storm Helene would inflict. They lost power and cellular service on Friday and water service on Saturday. Downed trees littered his neighborhood.

"Nothing was open, no stoplights, nothing but streets carpeted with trees and power lines," said Ellis, a longtime High Point Rotary Club member when he lived here. "We joined our neighbors in carrying buckets of water from a neighborhood spring to use for toilet flushing."

Authorities in Asheville say power won't be restored for another week and water service won't be available for the foreseeable future, at least the next month, Ellis told The High Point Enterprise.

Ellis and Livingston couldn't leave the city during the weekend because all roads into Asheville were closed. By Monday Interstate 26 was reopened, and they left Asheville to stay with their extended family in Lake Norman.

They plan to return to their home in Asheville next weekend, but Ellis acknowledges he won't return to the atmosphere of the city that drew him there.

"So much of what makes Asheville, Asheville, has been destroyed," Ellis said. "Recovery there and throughout the region will take a long time. We'll wait for the city's water system to be rebuilt. We're very fortunate to still have an undamaged home there, many do not. We will look for ways we can help with the recovery efforts in the weeks and months to come."

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Hurricane Helene sounds climate,

October 1, 2024 | Laurinburg Exchange, The (NC) Author: Rob Schofield NC Newsline | Section: Op-Ed opinion | 847 Words OpenURL Link

Tempting as it might be for those who've long watched, worried and warned about the increasingly destructive impacts of climate change, the massive – what many are describing as "Biblical" – destruction wrought last week by Hurricane Helene is not a moment for lengthy "I-told-you-so's."

No, much as some might want to devote their energy to detailing how and why we've known for years that storms like Helene were and are fast becoming the new normal in our warming world, this is not the time for victory laps or settling old debating scores.

What's needed now is action - forward looking action to tackle the crisis with every tool at our disposal.

And admittedly, it's a daunting proposition.

When it comes to climate change and the way it's rapidly remaking our world for the worse – more and more intense severe weather like Helene, rising oceans, species extinction, mass human migration — the temptation to throw up one's hands in despair or surrender is powerful.

It's the kind of despair that thousands of North Carolinians are feeling right now as they survey their wrecked homes and communities that will never be the same.

It's the kind of surrender that one sees and hears in the voices of those who tell us that the solutions to the existential challenges we face are to crank up the air conditioner, and "drill, baby, drill" for still more fossil fuels.

And yet, as scientists have repeatedly and conclusively demonstrated, there are numerous vitally important things humans can and simply must do right away to slow global warming and better prepare for the huge challenges that a fast-warming planet poses.

First, of course, is rapidly ending our addiction to fossil fuels and dramatically reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Even if we were to meet the ambitious goals set forth by the Biden-Harris administration and various international bodies – goals that right now we seem unlikely to attain – the severe storms, intense droughts, searing summers, intense wildfires, and frightening weather swings are going to continue to get worse.

And that fact serves only to heighten the urgency of the second obvious imperative: making large new investments in infrastructure and sustainable energy systems.

Even for those who stubbornly cling to the fantasy that pollution-induced climate change isn't real, Hurricane Helene just reenforced an undeniable message about infrastructure on a planet of more than eight billion people.

In other words, whether you accept the plain truth that climate change is making storms like Helene more frequent and intense or not, you can't deny that when they happen, the destruction is greatly worsened by the fact that our fast-growing population continues to turn more and more once open and uninhabited land into urban hardscape.

In 1944, North Carolina maintained less than 12,500 miles of hard surfaced roads. Today, that number is well over 100,000 miles. Meanwhile, huge and growing segments of the population reside in suburban environments in which the miles of roads and utilities per household is extremely high. In such a radically transformed environment, handling even moderate storms requires vastly more careful planning and hardened infrastructure.

On Sunday, western North Carolina Congressman Chuck Edwards reported that 360 electric substations had been knocked out of commission by Helene and that "There is a high likelihood that the substations are not reparable, and replacement of the substation equipment will be necessary."

And, of course, all of this sobering news comes only a few days after another storm — one so modest that it didn't even claim a name — wreaked havoc on the North Carolina coast.

Fortunately, as noted above, it's still not too late to act to save much of our state and nation as we know and love them. We have the resources and know-how to transform our energy system, preserve and protect more open space, and make inhabited areas vastly more resilient.

The trick, of course, is that these things will require a concerted, all-hands-on-deck effort — one that involves the public and private sectors working together to plan, to invest big dollars, and to make several important system changes. And that means electing leaders who will both be guided by science and resist the temptation to sacrifice our core public structures on the tax cut altar.

Less than a year ago, the North Carolina Department of Transportation reported that low pay was contributing to a 20% job vacancy rate — hardly the kind of numbers we'll need to rebuild the west and make the rest of the state adequately resilient.

Next week, the North Carolina General Assembly returns to Raleigh and could, if its leaders mustered even a hint of the political vision and courage, make the necessary appropriations — in storm relief, renewable energy, urban planning and infrastructure — and jumpstart the actions that are so desperately needed. Adequate reserve funds are plentiful, and such legislation could win enormous bipartisan support.

Let's hope they act ambitiously and that if they don't, voters will keep in mind that climate change and our ability to withstand it will both be on the ballot this fall.

Editor's note: The views in this article do not necessarily reflect the views of The Laurinburg Exchange.

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Neighbors continue to help neighbors

October 1, 2024 | Laurinburg Exchange, The (NC) Author: Richard Hudson Contributing columnist | Section: opinion | 569 Words OpenURL Link

It breaks my heart to see the devastation brought to our beautiful state and all those impacted by Hurricane Helene. The damage is unbelievably catastrophic and communities across Western North Carolina face a long road to recovery, but we will be with them every step of the way.

Our North Carolina Congressional Delegation is working together to ensure these communities have the federal support they need as they recover and rebuild, and my staff and I are in close communication with federal, state, and local partners.

Recently, I led Republican Members of our delegation in urging the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to utilize the unoccupied Greensboro Influx Care Facility (ICF) to assist in Western North Carolina's recovery efforts. After my repeated requests, FEMA told us it will have the facility available, but more needs to be done. Countless North Carolinians are now tragically displaced or without basic supplies because of Hurricane Helene, and they must be taken care of and offered every resource available.

My team and I are continuing to receive briefings from FEMA, HHS, North Carolina Emergency Management (NCEM) and other agencies on their ongoing efforts to help Western North Carolina. While I am extremely frustrated by how slow the federal response has been, I am grateful for the service of the first responders, troops, charitable organizations, and individuals across the state and nation who are stepping up and saving lives. I will keep pushing to get more resources and support on the ground quickly because these communities need help.

In support of these efforts, I joined several of my House Republican colleagues in demanding the Biden-Harris Administration remove as many federal barriers as possible to make it easier for communities to rebuild homes and businesses. Western North Carolina and all regions affected by Helene do not have the time to deal with burdensome, unnecessary regulations as they work to rebuild from the ground up. The clock is ticking, and if bureaucratic red tape gets in the way, it will be a serious failure by the federal government.

Additionally, I've been in contact with our hospitals and health care providers to ensure they have all they need to take care of patients. I've been working with HHS to make sure hospitals are open and they have sufficient resources, including medicines and surgical tools, to treat patients throughout the impacted region.

Now is the time for agencies like FEMA and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to work efficiently and support - not hinder - the recovery effort in North Carolina and across the southeast. Countless lives have been uprooted, and the last thing they need is government interference.

While this tragedy is a once in a lifetime event, we are reminded that we are Carolina Strong. Back home in our region, I saw firsthand all the people that have stepped up to help collect supplies and send them to our neighbors in Western North Carolina. It was truly inspiring to see neighbors helping neighbors, and I'm thankful for all those who are lending a hand.

We continue to pray for everyone affected by this storm. Should you or a family member need assistance, please visit my website for Hurricane Helene resources and information: hudson.house.gov/hurricane-helene-resources

The road ahead will be incredibly tough, but North Carolinians are resilient.

Editor's Note: The opinions expressed by the author of this column do not necessarily reflect the views of The

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HELENE'S IMPACT CONTINUES

October 1, 2024 | McDowell News, The (Marion, NC) Author: FROM STAFF REPORTS | Section: News | 791 Words OpenURL Link

The remnants of Hurricane Helene, a tropical storm by the time it reached North Carolina, hit McDowell County on Friday. The storm brought strong wind, rain and fl ooding. It knocked out power, cellphone service, internet and water for most of the county.

The National Weather Service said portions of western McDowell County received around 9 inches of rain from Tropical Storm Helene.

The storm initially left nearly all of McDowell County residents without power Saturday. On Sunday, 78% were still without power.

McDowell County's water is limited after the storm, according to emergency management officials. Marion's water supply was expected to be depleted by noon Sunday, and Old Fort has limited to not water as of Saturday evening.

Marion's water intakes were without power or were not producing water, according to a Saturday news release from McDowell County Emergency Management. The city is working with Duke Energy to restore power to the Buck Creek water intake, but it may take time, the release said.

Without power, the water supply in Marion was expected to run out, the release said.

"It is urgent that all city of Marion and McDowell County water customers conserve water to the greatest possible degree in order to extend the city and county water supplies," the release said.

Non-essential water use was prohibited.

Old Fort's water system was impacted by flooding as well, leaving the city with little to no water, a Saturday emergency management update said.

The county is still working to rescue people who are trapped and missing, emergency management said.

Distribution centers

McDowell County opened distribution centers for food and water and a third shelter on Sunday.

The distribution centers are located at:

- Woodlawn: Hicks Chapel Church, 6008 U.S. Hwy. 221 N.
- North Cove: North Cove Elementary, 8153 U.S. Hwy. 221 N.

Emergency management said this is the first of many distribution centers.

"Since the early morning hours, McDowell County Emergency Services has been working tirelessly to set up Points of Distribution across the county to provide critical supplies, including food and water, to every community," emergency management said in the release. "Our dedicated team will not stop until all citizens have access to the resources they need for their safety and well-being. We are working around the clock, doing everything we can to bring resources into McDowell County as quickly as possible.

The county is opened a third shelter at the YMCA in Marion on Sunday, emergency management said in a release. The county had three shelters as of Sunday afternoon:

- Glenwood Baptist Church, 155 Glenwood Church Road, Marion.
- Senior Center in Marion, 100 Spaulding Road, Marion.
- YMCA of Marion, 348 Grace Corpening Drive, Marion. (Opening Sunday night at 7 p.m.)

There is no shelter in Old Fort, the county said.

Information was limited about the impact the storm had on Old Fort

Calls for help

McDowell County 911 received over 760 calls for service during this storm on Friday, according to McDowell County Emergency Management.

Even in the days after, McDowell County 911 got hundreds of calls for help every hour, emergency management said. The calls involve patients who are trapped with severe trauma and running out of oxygen or essential medical supplies, the county said.

It took time for emergency management to respond, because multiple areas in McDowell were inaccessible to emergency personnel in the days after the storm, emergency management said.

"Mutual aid agencies from all across North Carolina are assisting McDowell County respond to this disaster," the county said Friday. "A mass casualty bus, multiple out-of-county ambulances, National Guard personnel, Urban Search and Rescue Teams, swift water rescue teams and state law enforcement are supporting local fire, rescue, EMS, and law enforcement. Heavy construction equipment is also being used to access several critical incidents."

In some areas, responders could not reach those in help because of landslides, downed trees, power lines and flooded roads, the Saturday release said. By Sunday, water was starting to recede and some of the Catawba River was back at bank level, an alert from McDowell County Emergency Management said. But the county said there is still standing water around the county.

With the water receding, rescue efforts shifted from swift water rescue to urban search and rescue, the Sunday alert said.

More than 20 air rescues were conducted Saturday to extract people from isolates areas, emergency management said.

The biggest challenges in emergency response were road blockages, fuel supply shortages for emergency vehicles, difficulty communicating with little to no cell and radio service and delivery of food and water, the county said.

Responders worked to deliver supplies like food and water throughout McDowell County, emergency management said. The supplies were distributed to drop points by the U.S. National Guard, the county said.

I-40 mudslide

The North Carolina Department of Transportation reported a mudslide on Interstate 40 near Old Fort.

The interstate is closed from exit 66 to exit 77, according to DriveNC.gov.

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Town Tavern destroyed by Hurricane Helene flooding from Catawba River

October 1, 2024 | McDowell News, The (Marion, NC) Author: Sharon McBrayer smcbrayer@morganton.com| Section: Business | 575 Words OpenURL Link

Justin Davis summed the damage caused by Tropical Storm Helene to his Morganton restaurant in one word Monday afternoon: "Heartbreaking."

Davis is one of the owners of Town Tavern in the River Village shopping center on Sanford Drive in Morganton. He said flooding from the adjacent Catawba River rose about 5 feet into the restaurant.

"It's devastating. It's pretty sad to see," Davis said.

He said the damage to the restaurant is substantial.

"I guess they call it a hundred-year flood," Davis said. "I hope I never see nothing like it again in my lifetime."

He said he hopes to rebuild but the owners, like everyone else, are taking it day by day. He said the restaurant will have to be gutted and renovated from scratch.

"Build back bigger, better," Davis said of starting over.

The restaurant opened in its River Village location in March 2021, Davis said.

He said it was a beautiful restaurant that people seemed to enjoy. Other locations of Town Tavern are in Blowing Rock and Banner Elk. Even though those two towns suffered devastating destruction, the Town Taverns in those locations faired much better than the Morganton location, Davis said.

"We were real fortunate that all of our locations are good, but all around us is just so much destruction everywhere," Davis said. "Roads washed out, trees, roads, homes destroyed and flooding. It's just so much to process. All the office buildings in that strip (in Morganton) all washed out, all destroyed."

Lisa Rector, owner of Salon 337 in the same shopping center, didn't think the water would get above the greenway behind River Village.

But when she made it to the salon to check out the damage, the inside was ruined. Almost everything needs to be thrown out. Water made it all the way to the roof.

"I just imagined it would be just a little bit of flooding, maybe halfway up," Rector said. "I didn't realize it would go to the ceiling, to the gutters. It's just heartbreaking because we're a family, and I don't want everybody to be out of a job, so we're sticking together."

She was headed to check out a building the salon could rent moving forward while her friends and family cleaned out the building. She said other salons have already offered temporary spaces for their staff to work until the salon is back up and running.

"I don't want everybody out of a job, so we're sticking together," Rector said. "It's just devastating. We're going to rebuild and hang in there together. ... This is a salon that's going to come back again."

Her husband, Rob, said Lisa had asked if they should pack up some of the stuff and take it home to keep it safe from flooding.

"I said, 'It'll never get that high,'" Rob said. "But it fooled us all."

He worked for Rutherford Electric for more than 30 years, but he'd never seen flooding that bad.

Davis said he is thankful none of the Town Tavern employees were hurt, and said things can be replaced.

"It is sad for the staff," Davis said. "We have so many key employees. Great and wonderful employees."

He hopes there are some programs they can get in place for the restaurant's staff to help them out until the restaurant can rebuild.

"It's just going to take some time," Davis said. "But we look forward to getting back open and seeing all of our family and friends and people in the community come back in and pick up right where we left off.

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Tucker said any decisions about the playoffs would come from the NCHSAA Board of Directors, which she expects will meet via Zoom sometime later this week.

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Tucker said she is worried about how to get the playoffs going, knowing they are important so many schools and athletes and families. But seeing the images of the damage done, she said, is heartbreaking.

"It's a lot to think about," Tucker said. "Some people don't have drinking water. But you have to have hope, and hope brings about renewed excitement to push through. We know when we get to the other side, we'll play again, and we don't want to act like we don't have hope. But we have to be patient and try to keep it all in perspective as we try to do things that are in the best interest of everyone."

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SPORTS ON PAUSE

October 1, 2024 | McDowell News, The (Marion, NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: Sports On Pause | 649 Words OpenURL Link

COMMENTARY

All of western North Carolina continues to deal with the catastrophic flooding and loss of infrastructure associated with the remnants of Hurricane Helene that moved in.

The local sports scene is no diff erent as many facilities from local recreational leagues to high school fields also have taken significant damage from the fl ooding withHelene. Burke and Dowell counties were hit very hard over a three-day period with rain in excess of 20 inches that fell along the area, according to the National Weather Service. The rain led to rapid rises of water all along the Catawba River.

In McDowell County, the most significant sports damage is focused on ball fields operated by the McDowell County Parks and Recreation. As of Sunday afternoon, more of the damage is becoming realized. The North Fork of the Catawba River widened as the storm peaked on Friday and brought a lot of damage into the valley in the Ashford and North Cove communities.

Sandy Andrews Park is one of the locations in North Cove that received extensive damage from the rapids that developed as the North Fork reached major fl ood stage on Friday. Other facilities owned by McDowell Parks and Recreation that may have been damaged include Lindley Park in Old Fort, which lies a matter of yards from the Catawba River. As the recovery eff orts continue over the next few days, additional issues will likely be realized as we learn more about the true scope of the fl ooding.

Another area that was heavily impacted includes the practice and baseball fields at West McDowell Middle School due to the Catawba River's expansive reach.

According to U.S. Geological Survey data, the Catawba River at Pleasant Gardens had a record high crest of 21.66 feet Friday afternoon, nearly four feet above the previous record crest that occurred in 2004. That all results in several feet of water covering the practice football field and baseball field for the school. With the water now gone, all the debris and a muddy mess is left behind.

McDowell High School's athletic facilities as of Sunday has appeared to fare in better shape. The school, which is located on a ridge, was well away from the fl oodwaters. More will be known about the status of the high school fields once members of the school and athletic department can safely get out and inspect things.

Freedom High School dealing with flashbacks of 2004

In western Burke County, the fl ood damage associated with Helene brings back memories of 2004, but worse.

Lake James water levels peaked at 10 feet above full pond, according to Duke Energy, which forced an immense amount of water and debris down to the Morganton area.

Freedom High School was one of the areas hit hard. The Catawba River overtook both the football stadium and baseball field on Friday, sending water levels that may have exceeded the amounts witnessed during the September 2004 floods.

Other local school fields and recreational areas along the Catawba and Silver Creek areas in Morganton include Catawba Meadows, Catawba River Greenway, Catawba River Soccer Complex and Shuey Park.

Much like what we are seeing across McDowell County, the full scope of the tragedy will be known across Burke in upcoming days and weeks.

Athletics may play a role in the healing process

The result is that sports across a large part of western North Carolina will be taking an extended hiatus until more pressing matters such as restoring infrastructure can be done. The priority right now is getting through this unprecedented disaster that has impacted everyone in a safe manner.

I do believe once we can get back to a resemblance of normalcy, local sports will do what it can do best and that's to galvanize the community again. Regardless as to whether you are a Titan, Patriot, Panther, Bear, Dragon, Wildcat or Cavalier, we will all get through this together and hopefully become a better community because of it.

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Temporary repairs made for Morganton's water system

October 1, 2024 | McDowell News, The (Marion, NC) Author: CHRISSY MURPHY cmurphy@morganton.com| Section: News| 474 Words OpenURL Link

The skies may have cleared but Hurricane Helene's presence still can be seen around Burke County, including for anyone who uses city water.

A boil water advisory was issued Sunday afternoon for all public water in Burke County, according to an alert from Burke County 911.

Jonelle Sigmon, public information officer for the city of Morganton, said Saturday the city's pump station was underwater and would not be operable until floodwaters receded and repairs were made.

In a new statement Sunday, Sigmon said some temporary repairs had been made to the pump station and the distribution system was slowly filling with water.

"It is important for the system to be completely full before normal service can be restored," said the statement from Sigmon. "Therefore, patience is requested during the process. Once the direction is (given) to begin gradual usage, customers are reminded that our system remains under a boil water advisory."

In a separate statement Saturday, Sigmon said it could be 3-5 days before some Morganton residents have their power restored.

Burke County 911 Assistant Director Chris White said Friday that 911 dispatchers were busy dispatching calls for swift water rescues, structural collapses, mudslides, wrecks and more.

North Green Street was flooded Friday and Saturday, with the Catawba River spilling from its banks and covering the bridge at the corner of North Green and Sanford Drive. Bost Road was covered in water at the Burke County Fairgrounds Friday afternoon and Saturday, but finally cleared up Saturday night.

The flooding was one several said reminded them of Hurricane Frances, which happened a little more than 20 years ago.

"This storm is different than Frances," said Morganton Public Safety Chief Jason Whisnant. "We have widespread damage on electric, utility lines unlike anything I've ever seen."

So many roads were in states of disrepair, the North Carolina Department of Transportation said all roads in western North Carolina should be considered closed unless you are traveling for an emergency or to escape danger.

Morganton saw 9.79 inches of rainfall from Wednesday through Friday, said Doug Outlaw, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service.

Wind speeds were as high as 51 mph in Hickory. In Asheville, Outlaw said wind speeds were as high as 46 mph.

"This will be one of the most significant weather events that happened in the modern eras," Outlaw said. "The flooding was compared to Tropical Storm Fred in August of 2021. It's certainly one of the most historically significant storm events that we've ever had."

With the ground still saturated, Outlaw said the risk of trees falling in the coming days is high. He said it wouldn't take much to topple a tall tree.

Burke County Public Schools Superintendent Mike Swan announced in an alert from Burke County 911 that schools would be closed in Burke County at least through Wednesday, Oct. 2.

Chrissy Murphy is a staff writer and can be reached at cmurphy@ morganton.com or at 828-4328941.

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CHRISSY MURPHY cmurphy@morganton.com, 'Temporary repairs made for Morganton's water system', *McDowell News, The* (online), 1 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BEFF46D4C13798



School canceled for week

October 1, 2024 | McDowell News, The (Marion, NC) Author: FROM STAFF REPORTS | Section: News | 221 Words OpenURL Link

McDowell County Schools will be closed all week for students, the school system said in a news release Sunday.

The county canceled school because of the loss of power and water across the county caused by Tropical Storm Helene, the release said.

The school system's leadership team is asked to start work Tuesday at 2 p.m. if is is safe to do so, the release said.

Maintenance and garage staff were asked to begin work Monday if it is safe.

All other employees were asked not to work Monday or Tuesday, the release said.

"We will continue to keep everyone informed as we navigate the coming days," the school system said. "Our top priority is ensuring the safety and wellbeing of our employees and students during this challenging time. The strength of our organization has always been our people, and our commitment to you remains unwavering. Please continue to keep our county, its residence, our students and staff in your thoughts and prayers as we navigate this historic event."

Surrounding counties

Buncombe County Schools canceled school for the entire week as well.

Burke County Public Schools canceled school Monday-Wednesday.

Caldwell County schools are canceled Monday, according to a Facebook post from the school system. It is an optional teacher workday for the system.

Alexander County also canceled school for Monday, Sept. 30, the school system said in a Facebook post.

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FROM STAFF REPORTS, 'School canceled for week', *McDowell News, The* (online), 1 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BEFF46D7851670



Hurricane Helene hits High Country, devastates Avery County

October 1, 2024 | Mountain Times, The (Boone, NC) Author: Derek Halsey| Section: Mountaintimes | 1323 Words OpenURL Link

It is unusual to see Chinook helicopters land in Banner Elk, N.C., at the base of Beech Mountain, delivering muchneeded supplies to a disaster zone. But that is what happened this past week as Storm Helene made land on the coast of Florida, then hit Georgia before trouncing through Western North Carolina, Upstate South Carolina, East Tennessee and Southwest Virginia. As it went about its business, the damage done to trees, houses, businesses, bridges, vehicles and people by Storm Helene was on the apocalyptic side in many cases, and it will be a long while before the full extent of this story unfolds.

As of press time, throughout the region, and here in Avery County where I live, there are still hundreds of people missing, and there are still plenty of places where the phone towers are still down and little communication is happening. Hopefully by the time you read this, there will be better news to report.

Looking back, this will go down in history as a tale of two storms. On radar as of Wednesday, September 25, it looked like just one storm on the radar, with Hurricane Helene reaching category 4 status and what looked like a smokestack of hard rain and winds coming up out of it, flowing directly south to north. Ultimately, it was the south-to-north storm Number 1 that pulled Hurricane Helene up with it to our highest mountains east of the Rockies.

On Thursday afternoon, I interviewed Western North Carolina music legend Warren Haynes about his new solo album Million Voices Whisper, a wonderful piece of music featuring guests like Derek Trucks and more. Haynes, of course, grew up in nearby Asheville so I gave him an initial weather report, with the big news on Thursday being the tornado that hit Blowing Rock, and the mild flooding that was going on at the time.

"Oh wow," was Haynes reaction, as the mountains usually break up tornadoes before they get started. I then asked him about his world-renowned benefit concert that he does in Asheville every winter called Christmas Jam, with all of the proceeds going to help folks out in this part of the world. Little did either of us know how that dynamic would change, and that his beloved WNC would soon experience absolute devastation.

On Friday, Storm Helene hit Avery County and all points listed above with ferocity. With the electric out, I decided to take a nap and let it pass. But soon, I was awakened to the sound of tree branches hitting my front door. When I looked up and out, all I could see were those branches and leaves, and when I opened the door, just a few feet from my place, I saw the big pine tree that was blown completely over, thankfully landing between myself and the chicken coop with no one hurt. That intense event was just a hint as to what was happening all around.

Once the high winds died down a bit, I went outside to see the damage and that is when I knew we had entered a changed world.

As I drove to the town of Newland, trees were down everywhere, water was still very much in a flood stage, and it looked like a war zone. When I turned the corner in my vehicle, which had little fuel in it as I failed to fill up the tank before the storm arrived, electric lines were down all over the place and debris was omnipresent. When I turned the corner to come into Newland proper, I not only got the full grasp of what damage had been done, I also instantly knew that folks away from town and down in the Toe River Valley and similar areas had to have been hit as hard or worse.

Dave Calvert's Carolina BBQ restaurant has been a staple in Newland for many years. Not only is it an eatery, but the Pickin Parlor side to it has also hosted many music show, including the annual concert to benefit the High Country Toy Drive. Now, with the parking lot and every other piece of nearby pavement upended, destroyed and thrown in many directions, his front doors were blown open as the water swept in and totaled the venue.

The same fate happened to other businesses, including the Valero Gas Station on the corner whose pavement was also upside down and broken into many pieces, dislodged from the ground below.

All of that devastation was sadly just a small portion of the destruction that happened throughout this region of the country. But, there were also things that happened amidst the carnage that represented grace and the resilience of the human spirit.

Hours later, there was a couple on the main street in Newland who had brought out their charcoal grill and were cooking food for anyone who needed a free meal. The Puerto Nuevo Restaurant did the same thing, cooking their food in front of their store. At the Dollar General store in Elk Creek, on the Avery County-Tennessee border, the man behind the cash register said that there was no way to communicate with his workers, not knowing their situation, so his family, friends and even a brother-in-law came to the store with him to help him open it up so folks could buy supplies.

Back in Newland, the Cranberry Street Café was not open for business, and yet it had satellite wifi and happily kept it on for all who wanted to get a message out to the outside world, or to check on others who lived nearby, wondering who needed rescuing. That store front has been full of people since then, with virtually every person having a harrowing storm tale to share.

The latter attitude and action here in the High Country was rampant, as in folks driving to their friends or family's places to check on them, or asking others if they had heard a word about somebody else's fate. Sadly, few if any messages have yet to come out of Asheville. Erwin, TN, just across the NC border, was also hit hard, with the Nolichucky River hitting 30 feet, which was a record flood.

A lot of us are wondering what the outside world knows about what has happened here. When the electricity was still out in Newland and Linville, all I had was an emergency radio to listen to, smartly given to me by my mother Glyn Halsey back in Ohio, which became my only connection to civilization. On Saturday afternoon, I picked up the North Carolina State football game, , happening in Raleigh, and the play-by-play team of Matt Chazanow and crew took a minute to say during the broadcast, "Folks, there is more than just football going on here in North Carolina today, and our thoughts are with everyone in Boone and Asheville and all of the western part of the state."

Later that evening, I picked up the Grand Ole Opry at 650 on the AM dial and bluegrass star Larry Stephenson said the same thing from that historic stage, which went out over the airwaves. And Carolina Panthers coach Dave Canales, though his team had just lost the game last Sunday, took the time to mention all of Western North Carolina and said he would be a part of the effort to help. An emotional Tre Lamb, head coach of the East Tennessee State University football team, also conveyed the same thoughts for the victims on his side of the disaster, which included relatives and friends of his players.

Meanwhile, in the big city of Charlotte, folks came together to create the Hurricane Helene Operation Airdrop, which gathered supplies so that amazing pilots from the North Carolina Division of Aviation and others could pick the goods up at the Concord Regional Airport.

There is still a lot to play out in this situation, and a long row to hoe, but mountain folks know how to come together and that is what will happen going forward.

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FEMA announces Debris Removal program to expedite cleanup in wake of Hurricane Helene

October 1, 2024 | Mountain Times, The (Boone, NC) Author: JERRY SNOW| Section: Mountaintimes | 297 Words OpenURL Link

WATAUGA — The Federal Emergency Management Agency(FEMA) has responded to the destruction left in the wake of Hurricane Helene. The unrelenting rain saturated the High Country, and was accompanied by heavy wind that resulted in a lot of uprooted trees. It arrived on Sept. 26 and resulted in deadly flooding in the region.

FEMA was launched in 1979 and has since been the Federal Government's response to disasters. Learn more about FEMA at FEMA.gov.

FEMA announced that federal disaster assistance is available to the state of North Carolina to supplement recovery efforts in the areas affected by Tropical Storm Helene, according to a statement from the organization.

The President's action makes federal funding available to individuals in Watauga, Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Clay, Cleveland, Gaston, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Lincoln, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Transylvania, Wilkes and Yancey counties and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians; assistance can include grants for temporary housing and home repairs, low-cost loans to cover uninsured property losses and other programs to help individuals and business owners recover from the effects of the disaster.

Federal funding is also available to eligible local governments and certain private nonprofit organizations on a costsharing basis for emergency work in Watauga and other impacted counties across N.C.

FEMA has released its "Debris Removal Guidelines for Private Residential Properties" in an attempt to speed up the removal process in the area.

FEMA is asking homeowners to pile any debris curbside, including appliances. FEMA recommends contacting Watauga County Emergency Services' non-emergency line at 828-265-7625 for more information. Details about road conditions in Watauga County can be found by calling 828-265-7630.

For more information about the Watauga County Emergency Services, go online to www.wataugacounty.org.

Will Holt is the Watauga County Emergency Services Director, and can be contacted by email at Will.Holt@watgov.org.

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App State students offering hurricane outreach

October 1, 2024 | Mountain Times, The (Boone, NC) Author: Luke Barber luke.barber@wataugademocrat.com| Section: Mountaintimes | 433 Words OpenURL Link

BOONE—While Hurricane Helene's effects may have been unprecedented, the response to the once-in-a-lifetime natural disaster has been just as extraordinary.

Not long after Hurricane Helene swept through much of Watauga County and the rest of western North Carolina, people throughout the community, including Appalachian State University students, have been pitching in to help those most affected.

Carolina Hughes is one of the admins for ASU Helping Hand, a group of App State students and community members who have been hard at work connecting those in need with local resources ever since the waters began to recede on Friday.

"It started with a group of students on the App Yik Yak who were posting that they wanted to help or needed help and asking who was accepting donations, who had beds, and other things. So we just started a group chat that blossomed into an Instagram account," Hughes said.

Over the past several days, the account has been posting feverishly and connecting those in need with resources such as food, water, shelter and transportation. Early on, Hughes said they were able to help someone get a ride to a friend's house in Raleigh after the person lost their car and their home in the storm.

To request assistance or to offer services, simply fill out the Google form listed on the ASU Helping Hands account on Instagram.

"We try to connect people with resources to donate, volunteer and get them in touch with those who need assistance," Hughes said. "We've had several donations that we have delivered directly to people who were not able to get off the mountain. We're also helping to offer transportation to those who have been displaced."

Hughes said they have also started a group chat with 64 members who are willing to offer their time and resources. Hughes said she has been experiencing the outpouring of support firsthand.

"Personally, I brought a friend some water the other day, and their road was blocked off," Hughes said. "There were power lines down. Once you get out of the valley, it is unfathomable. I don't think I would have ever expected to see this in Boone."

Hughes said they're helping people get in touch with organizations, such as the Red Cross and Samaritan's Purse.

"We go through those submissions, and for those needing immediate help, we direct them to resources that can help them with their needs, or if it's something we can handle ourselves, we'll send them to our massive group chat," Hughes said.

To get connected with ASU Helping Hand, simply give them a follow on Instagram and fill out the Google form to offer help or request assistance.

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Events at App Theatre scheduled for week of Sept. 30 postponed due to historic flood

October 1, 2024 | Mountain Times, The (Boone, NC) Author: JERRY SNOW| Section: Mountaintimes | 144 Words OpenURL Link

BOONE — The Appalachian Theatre of the High Country will be closed this week, from Sept. 30 through the weekend, due to the damage left by Hurricane Helene last week, according to a post on the non-profit organization's website (apptheatre.org): "Events scheduled for the week of Sept. 30 are postponed until further notice."

The Theatre was scheduled to host Deep Gap's rising bluegrass star Liam Purcell & Cane Mill Road with The Wilder Flower on Friday, Oct. 4, but that show has been postponed until further notice.

The Theatre was also scheduled to show "The Straight Ball" and "The All Golden" this weekend.

"Casper" the movie, scheduled for Oct. 5, has also been postponed by App Theatre.

The Appalachian State University Jazz Ensemble was scheduled to perform on Oct. 6 but that show has been postponed.

To learn more about upcoming events at App Theatre, go to apptheatre.org (c) 2024 The Mountain Times. All rights reserved.

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JERRY SNOW, 'Events at App Theatre scheduled for week of Sept. 30 postponed due to historic flood', *Mountain Times, The* (online), 1 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BF0F8C06CF31D0



Annual Valle Country Fair cancelled this year due to historic flood

October 1, 2024 | Mountain Times, The (Boone, NC) Author: Staff Report| Section: Mountaintimes| 178 Words OpenURL Link

The 46th Annual Valle Country Fair, which was scheduled for Oct. 19, has been cancelled due to the damage Hurricane Helene did to the area last week. The co-sponsors of the event, Holy Cross Episcopal Church and the Valle Crucis Conference Center, are working on ways to provide resources to the non-profit agencies and families in need, according to spokesman Keith Martin.

Valle Country Fair is a non-profit annual fundraiser that has grown in scope over the decades. The Fair now helps fund 122 different agencies across the High Country, according to vallecountryfair.org.

Food booths operated church members generate funds from the event, plus the more than 150 arts and crafts vendors that pay a fee to sell their products at the Fair. Fresh cooked food is always popular at the Fair, and so is the Mountain Music.

The event is produced annually by Holy Cross Episcopal Church in cooperation with the Valle Crucis Conference Center. Proceeds help provide grants to local non-profit organizations, and relief to local families with emergency needs.

For more information, contact Holy Cross Church at 828-963-4609.

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Four fatalities confirmed in Haywood from Helene flooding

October 1, 2024 | Mountaineer, The (Waynesville, NC) Author: Kathy N Ross| Section: News| 566 Words OpenURL Link

Four people have died in Haywood County as a result of Helene, though several people who have yet to be found are "cause for concern," Haywood County Sheriff Bill Wilke reported Monday.

All four deaths were witnessed, and the families have been notified. Wilke declined to provide names of the deceased, nor was he ready to give the community locations where those deaths had occurred. Separate reports indicate at least one of those deaths occurred at a campground along Jonathan Creek, downstream from Maggie Valley.

All four deaths were witnessed by other people, he said.

There are still some individuals for which the sheriff's department has concern, Wilke said, though he would not elaborate.

The sheriff had held off giving an official death count until Monday to ensure that all families were notified. During the press conference, Wilke repeatedly emphasized that the department had no unidentified human remains or bodies whose families were not aware of the death.

Meanwhile, the sheriff's department has conducted several hundred welfare checks, Willke said. The number of those missing in Western North Carolina has been reported at more than 600, but the sheriff declined to give a number for Haywood – in part because the number fluctuates so rapidly. In fact, he said, the department is keeping a list of requests for "welfare checks," and those people are not considered missing until an attempt at contact is made. As relatives are getting more anxious about those in communities cut off by flooding, more people are calling to request help from law enforcement – but names are constantly being removed from the list as individuals are found safe, often simply unable to communicate due to the loss of phone service.

At times, emergency management crews have crossed creeks and hiked to residences while hauling equipment to cut out a path in order to confirm a person is well, the sheriff said.

If a person cannot be contacted, the name is moved to a second list which "requires additional investigation," the sheriff said. He declined to give details regarding the second list.

Those unable to contact friends or family can request a welfare check by calling 1-888-892-1162.

Though the death toll could rise, and without diminishing the horrific losses suffered by families of those killed, Haywood County officials are relieved the number of dead is as low as it is at this time, given the scale of the flooding and considering the number of fatalities in neighboring Buncombe County (57 as of Wednesday afternoon). They credit that to preparation and planning, which began a week before Helene's arrival.

Rough as they were, the floods of 2004 and 2021 prepared the leaders of Canton, Clyde and Haywood County for this moment, they said. In Canton, Mayor Zeb Smathers was warning of a potential repeat of Tropical Storm Fred's devastation the weekend before Helene's arrival. Businesses there responded by packing up their wares and moving them to higher ground. And Haywood County's emergency management services leader, Travis Donaldson, was already tracking weather reports and patterns and organizing teams to respond.

"People have paid attention to the warnings, and we appreciated what they have done to assist us to assist them," Donaldson said.

Wilke and other county leaders were high in their praise for the emergency management coordinator.

"The reason (Haywood casualties were not greater) is this man right here and the commissioners who supported this," he said. "They were preparing days in advance and committing resources."

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Flooding in Maggie Valley swamps businesses on creek-side of town, leaves valley without water

October 1, 2024 | Mountaineer, The (Waynesville, NC) Author: Kathy Ross | Section: News | 603 Words OpenURL Link

Many residents in Maggie Valley and Jonathan Creek remain without water following damage from Hurricane Helene to water mains of the Maggie Valley Sanitary District, which serves as the water utility.

Sanitary officials are working on a temporary line to restore service. Meanwhile, those without are getting water at the Maggie Valley Fire Department or the Sanitary District's water plant, which has been filling containers for those in need.

"People have been really good about understanding," said the sanitary district's Scott Ward. "I haven't had anybody get ugly about it."

Jonathan Creek, which flows through Maggie Valley, swelled its banks — flooding the businesses along one side of Maggie Valley, including numerous hotels.

The flooding continued along Jonathan Creek's path down the adjacent valley of Jonathan Creek, where homes, farmers fields and bridges were destroyed — including a trailer park where one of four known fatalities in Haywood County occurred.

Ward, who had been at the sanitary district's water filtration plant since Saturday morning, recalled how he spent the night of the storm trying to save his home. The flood moved stone, which diverted the stream out of its banks and channeled it alongside his home.

Ward teared up as he recalled trying to figure out how to keep the water from taking the house, and hearing his neighbor, atop an excavator, pull up in his yard. That neighbor channeled the water away from the house and back toward the stream banks.

"I had 70 dollars in my pocket, and I pulled it out, and he wouldn't take it," Ward said, tears in his eyes. "He said, 'That's what neighbors do.'"

That night, as Ward and his extended family sat down to eat, his 2-year-old granddaughter asked if she could say the blessing.

"She thanked God for everybody there, and then she thanked God for her blanket and pillow, and it just hit me, how all this stuff is just stuff, and this was what mattered, that we were all there and nobody got hurt," he said.

Road repairs

With state transportation resources stretched beyond capacity, town crews spent two days clearing U.S. 19 of slides, flood debris and down trees. Technically, that's the job of the N.C. Department of Transportation, but in times of crisis, pressing needs take precedent.

The DOT did send relief in the form of a crew that removed the remnants of the bridge over Campbell Creek that linked the Johnson Branch community to the rest of the world.

Maggie Public Works Director Mike Mehaffey watched Sunday as the team placed three six-foot culverts in the stream to improvise a temporary crossing. That site was particularly critical because of a sewer line crossing that

also needed repair following the storm.

Mehaffey and Town Manager Vickie Best spent part of the day touring the town assessing damage and long-term needs, he said.

The town's wastewater treatment plant near Interstate 40 weathered Helene with raw sewage discharges, he said. Though Jonathan Creek flooded huge swaths of the lower section of the valley, the plant's levy diverted water from the plant.

"All in all, we're fortunate," Mehaffey said. "Other places in this county have a whole lot worse problems than we have."

The damage to Maggie Valley Sanitary District water lines involves the connection between water tanks that feed the system.

Water is drawn from an intake in Campbell Creek and stored in three 250,000-gallon tanks. One tank near Black Camp Gap serves customers north of Evans Cove. The remaining two serve customers from Evans Cown down the Jonathan Creek Valley. But the lines connecting those tanks to the water system have been taken out by floods, which also took out the bridge over Evans Cove, leaving customers dry.

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Kathy Ross, 'Flooding in Maggie Valley swamps businesses on creek-side of town, leaves valley without water', *Mountaineer, The* (online), 1 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BEF7360637F6F8>



Supply distribution, donation sites and clean-up assistance

October 1, 2024 | Mountaineer, The (Waynesville, NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: News | 232 Words OpenURL Link

Essential supplies will be distributed at Woodland Baptist Church in Crabtree from 1- 6 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 1, for those affected by flooding. There will be food, water, baby supplies, dog food, and limited cleaning supplies.

For those looking to help, this location is also accepting donations of supplies to support families in need.

"Let's come together as a community to ensure everyone has the resources they need to recover," said Dillon Huffman, Haywood County public information officer.

Woodland Baptist Church is located at 545 Crabtree Rd.

Mountain Projects in Waynesville is also accepting donations for flood victims, including clothing and household supplies. Mountain Projects is located on the Old Asheville Highway in Waynesville across from Junaluska Elementary School.

The United Way of Haywood County is being established as a centralized flood donation clearinghouse, including monetary donations.

Flood clean-up assistance

If you or someone you know needs help cleaning up damage from Hurricane Helene at your home/residence or house of worship, call Crisis Cleanup at 844-965-1386 to ask for help.

Crisis Cleanup is 100% free service that connects volunteers from local and national relief organizations, community groups, and faith communities who may be able to assist with mucking out after floods, moving debris to curbs, tarping roofs, and chain-sawing downed trees.

The hotline will be available through Oct. 10.

FEMA

People in North Carolina affected by Helene can apply for disaster assistance on DisasterAssistance.gov, on the FEMA App or by calling 1-800-621-3362.

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