

81 people still missing in western NC after Helene

October 17, 2024 | Star, The (Shelby, NC) Author: Karrigan Monk, Ryley Ober , and Mary Boyte; USA TODAY NETWORK Section: News | 458 Words Page: A15 OpenURL Link

North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper said Tuesday afternoon that 81 people remain missing in the western part of the state in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene.

A task force has been formed to find the missing.

"The task force, law enforcement and other partners will continue working to locate those who are unaccounted for and I am thankful for their efforts," Cooper said during a tour of the town of Swannanoa.

Cooper said that 77,000 individuals have applied for relief through the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and that FEMA has paid \$99million and is paying for temporary housing for 1,900 people.

The governor also addressed continued misinformation campaigns and domestic threats against recovery efforts.

"If you're participating in spreading (misinformation), stop it," Cooper said. "Whatever your aim is, the people you are really hurting is the people in Western North Carolina who need help."

Cooper said Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson, the Republican nominee for governor, is participating in the spread of disinformation. He said it was disappointing and wrong when candidates "are using people's misery to sow chaos for their own political objectives."

William Jacob Parsons, 44, was arrested on public terror charges Saturday after threatening to "go mess up some FEMA personnel," according to Rutherford County sheriff's office Capt. Jamie Keever. Parsons was armed with an AR-style rifle and two handguns at the time of the arrest, according to authorities.

On the same day, the U.S. Forest Service received an email from FEMA that said a National Guard unit working for the agency "came across some militia members who said they were out hunting FEMA," according to Jason Nedlo, a spokesperson for the Forest Service's Southern Area Blue Incident Management Team. The email was first reported by The Washington Post.

In response, FEMA advised all federal responders in Rutherford County "to stand down and evacuate the county immediately," an official with the U.S. Forest Service wrote to other federal agencies, according to The Post.

The threats caused FEMA employees to temporarily stop accepting in-person applications for federal assistance in some of North Carolina's mountain communities, according to a statement posted Sunday on social media by the Ashe County Emergency Management Department.

Cooper said at the news conference that he was not aware of any other threats but said the swirl of disinformation had demoralized volunteers and prevented those who could apply for aid from doing so. He has directed the North Carolina Department of Public Safety to provide more security for FEMA.

Contributing: James Powel, Christopher Cann, Josh Meyer, Minnah Arshad and Thao Nguyen, USA TODAY

Karrigan Monk and Ryley Ober are Asheville Citizen Times reporters. Mary Boyte is a Jackson Clarion-Ledger reporter.

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At Wilmington rally, JD Vance critiques Kamala Harris' policies, focuses on border, economy

October 17, 2024 | StarNews (Wilmington, NC) Author: Molly Wilhelm, Wilmington StarNews | Section: News | 873 Words OpenURL Link

JD Vance, Ohio senator and Republican vice-presidential nominee, made a notable entrance at Wilmington's Aero Center on Wednesday evening, stepping off a Trump-Vance plane emblazoned with the 'Make America Great Again' slogan. But this wasn't the first time Vance stepped foot in the Port City.

"It's great my friends to be in Wilmington, North Carolina," Vance said, taking the stage around 6 p.m."I actually was an extra in a TV show that was filmed in Wilmington, North Carolina. You ever see the show One Tree Hill?"

After reflecting on his prior time in Wilmington, Vance's remarks centered heavily on critiquing the policies of his Democratic opponents, Vice President Kamala Harris and Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz. He focused on border control, inflation and housing.

With Harris appearing for an interview on Fox News around the same time as Vance's Wilmington rally, the Republican vice-presidential nominee took a jab at the type of media coverage Harris has received, describing the interview as her first that wouldn't be a "softball."

More: JD Vance in Wilmington: Highlights from the campaign rally

Voter Guide: Learn more about candidates for NC, Wilmington-area races in the 2024 election

"The problem with a softball interview is that you've still got to be able to hit a softball," Vance said. "She can't hit a softball. She can't even hit a tee ball. ... The reason she does so bad in these interviews is that her record is so bad for the American people."

The Ohio senator challenged the vice president's border policies, arguing that they have worsened the affordable housing crisis in the United States. Contrasting Harris' policies with those of a potential second Donald Trump presidency, Vance said, "if you come to this country illegally, pack your bags, because in four months, you're going home."

Vance's running mate, former President Trump, hosted a rally at the same venue nearly one month prior, touching on similar issues of border security and the economy in his speech.

Referring to "the simple Donald Trump plan," Vance said the Republican presidential nominee would "restore a golden age of prosperity in this country" by cutting taxes for American workers, cutting down on regulations "that make it harder to hire and make a business," lowering the cost of fuel and electricity, and making it harder for companies to outsource jobs overseas.

Related Coverage: In Wilmington, second gentleman outlines plan for a Kamala Harris presidency

Labeling Harris as "incompetent to be president," Vance argued that the "bureaucratic incompetence" that caused delays in providing resources to those impacted by Hurricane Helene was connected to her leadership.

"The critical test of leadership comes in a moment of crisis and at that moment of crisis, for the people of North Carolina, Kamala Harris wasn't doing her job," Vance said "I promise you that Donald J. Trump will."

Prior to Vance's remarks, two other political figures spoke to the cheering crowd, including Republican nominee for Lt. Gov. Hal Weatherman and Republican Congressman and candidate for N.C. Attorney General Dan Bishop.

Weatherman said he thanks God for Trump and Vance and urged voters to elect Republicans across the ballot in the upcoming November election. Bishop echoed Weatherman's statement, asking North Carolinians to "vote for every single Republican on (their) ballot."

Before heading off stage, Vance fielded questions from the press, addressing the recent strike of dock workers.

"The very simple reason the dock workers went on strike is because the dollar just doesn't go as far as it did threeand-a-half-years ago," Vance said. "We've got to get back to common sense economic policies so that our dock workers can thrive and so that everybody can thrive who depends on their very very important work."

Vance also responded to additional questions about Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson's observed absence from Trump-Vance campaign events. He said that Robinson, the Republican nominee for governor, did a "hell of a job with those hurricanes" but that whoever becomes the next governor is "up to the people of North Carolina."

He also addressed a recent arrest in Rutherford County after an alleged assault on FEMA workers. He said he "condemns any act of violence" but that the main scandal is that "people of North Carolina went days and weeks without the help of their own government."

"What I'd ask you is to not let our frustration at Kamala Harris blind us to the fact that this is still the greatest country in the history of the world, and we ought to be proud of it," Vance said, urging North Carolinians to vote early. "We've got 19 days to go. Let's spend every single one of those days fixing the broken leadership and giving the American people a president who is fit to lead this great nation."

Related Coverage: Ahead of Vance rally in Wilmington, former Republicans say turn the page on Trump and MAGA

Ahead of Vance's rally, a few city and state officials spoke in opposition of the Trump-Vance ticket at a virtual press conference. City Councilmember Salette Andrews referred to the possibility of a second Trump term as "disastrous."

The Port City has remained a popular political destination in recent months. In addition to Wednesday's visit from the Republican vice-presidential candidate, Wilmington has welcomed former President Trump, second gentleman Doug Emhoff, first lady Jill Biden, Senior Advisor to the President Tom Perez, and President Joe Biden in 2024.

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Riverwalk bridge closed

October 17, 2024 | Statesville Record & Landmark (NC) Author: STAFF REPORTS | Section: Mapping | 121 Words OpenURL Link

Hickory's Riverwalk bridge is closed until further notice due to damage caused by Hurricane Helene, according to a press release from the city of Hickory.

The bridge trailhead and parking lot at 1580 Old Lenoir Road NW will also remain closed, the press release said.

The Riverwalk section that goes over the water is closed due to damage caused Sept. 27 by the remnants of the hurricane, the press release said. A section of handrailing was damaged by debris and must be replaced, the city said.

"At this time, the reopening date is unknown," the press release said.

Other parts of the Riverwalk trail, including sections that are elevated over land and the paved greenway within Rotary-Geitner Park, are open, the press release said.

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BALLOONS IN FLIGHT

October 17, 2024 | Statesville Record & Landmark (NC) Author: BEN GIBSON bgibson@statesville.com| Section: Mapping | 1185 Words OpenURL Link

If you want to get the most out of a day at the 49th Annual Carolina Balloon Fest, Executive Director Sam Parks recommends coming early and staying late to see the hot-air balloons taking to the sky or glowing as the sun goes down.

"If you don't get there in time to see the mass ascension, the next best thing is to watch the balloon glow, which is going to be at about seven o'clock and that's when it's dark and all the balloons start to light up," Parks said. "It's really magical to see that, as well."

Weather permitting the balloons launch around 7 a.m. and then again just a few hours before sunset. There is also the nightly balloon glow that takes place around 6:30 p.m.

This year's Carolina BalloonFest kicks off at the Statesville Regional Airport on Friday at 3 p.m. and closes for the night at 8:30 p.m. Saturday's festivities run from 7 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. and the weekend closes out on Sunday from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Here are seven things to know if you're planning to attend what organizers say is the second-oldest, hot-air balloon festival in the country.

How much are tickets?

The price depends on which day you go. On Friday, tickets are \$20 for adults, \$10 for children 7-12, and children 6 and under get in free. While children's prices are the same all weekend, it costs \$30 for adults on Saturday and \$25 on Sunday. Weekend passes are \$60 for adults and \$35 for children.

VIP tickets cost \$175 for adults and \$40 for children 12 and under. A VIP ticket allows access to covered seating for viewing main stage entertainment, balloon ascensions, and the nightly balloon glow for all three days. Other benefits included catered meals all three days, unlimited coffee and non-alcoholic beverages, and limited amounts of beer and wine.

Guests can leave and return to the festival at any time, but parking spots may fill up and park-and-ride options can be halted due to festival capacity. When leaving, guests can have their hands stamped to allow free re-entry. Guests have access to park-and-ride options which are included in the ticket price.

Where do I park?

There is still on-site parking that will set guests back \$15 for general parking and \$25 for VIP, which has a private entrance and exit. A general parking pass for all three days is \$40. VIP parking passes for the weekend are sold out.

Parks said organizers have nearly doubled the number of parking spaces on-site and at park-and-ride locations.

Bicyclists can take advantage of this year's Park & Bike option, which allows them to park at Celeste Henkel Elementary School and take a 2.5-mile bike ride down Bethlehem Road to the airport where the bikes will be taken care of by valet service.

A ride-share drop-off point has also been established to make it easier for people to use apps like Uber or Lyft to get behind the airport and to the area of the property where the event takes place.

Parks said organizers hope these changes will make for a better experience for guests.

What should I bring? What should I leave at home?

According to the festival's website, there are a few things they recommend to bring as well as prohibitions against others. Bring your camera, lawn chairs, and a small umbrella. Unopened water bottles and snacks are allowed, but leave large hard-shell coolers, alcohol, glass, and weapons — including knives with blades longer than 4 inches — at home. Drones and pop-up canopies are also banned.

No pets are allowed, except for service animals.

Guests are advised to bring cash for purchases.

Keep an eye on the weather

Clear skies and only light winds are expected for the upcoming weekend. The wind is an important factor, Parks said, as anything above 10 mph can make landing a hot air balloon — with no brakes and limited ways to control flight — a dangerous proposition.

In a conversation at last year's event, veteran pilot Jack Ponticelli said he once tried to land a balloon in 38 mph winds. He said he went nearly 200 yards before successfully stopping the balloon on the ground.

With powerlines and trees dotting the countryside of Iredell County, pilots said they need calm conditions to ensure the safety of passengers and pilots.

Windy weather last year grounded the fleet of balloons. The festival continued with music, food, vendors, and other entertainment for the thousands who attended.

Want to ride in a hot-air balloon?

If you're looking to take to the skies and see Iredell County from above, you'll need to book a balloon flight ahead of time. The flights often sell out ahead of time. The rides cost \$400 a person and are booked directly through the pilots. More information is available on the BalloonFest website.

Flights take place early in the morning and late afternoon.

For those looking to stay a little closer to the ground but still want the experience of floating in a balloon, tethered rides are available on a first-come, first-served basis at the festival. Tether pilots only accept cash, according to the festival website, and rides are \$10 a person. Children under the age of 12 must be accompanied by an adult.

Hot-air balloon pilot meet and-greets are also scheduled for Saturday and Sunday afternoons from 2-3 p.m.

What else is there to do?

Music, food, shopping, as well as play zones for children are part of the attractions at the festival.

Main stage entertainment begins on Friday with Bing Futch taking the stage at 3 p.m., followed by Dani Kerr and the Skeleton Crew at 5 p.m., and Albannach at 7:30 p.m.

The first band to hit the stage on Saturday morning will be the fittingly named LeeD Not Follow at 10 a.m. The music continues with Albannach at 11:15 a.m., The Broad Pickups at 12:30 p.m., The Chain at 2 p.m., Bing Futch at 3:45 p.m., N-SPIRE at 5:15 p.m.

Randall Sprinkle kicks off Sunday's entertainment at 10 a.m., Love Not Money at 11:30 a.m., Bing Futch at 1 p.m., On The Border at 2:30 p.m., Bing Futch at 4:15 p.m., and finally A Ibannach closing out the fest with a 5:15 p.m. show.

The Kids Zone has inflatables for children to play in and on, as well as a Ninja Course that costs \$10 to take part in. The Interactive Theater of Jeff and Mr. Marvel's Magic Show are scheduled throughout all three days of the event. A balloon that guests can walk inside costs \$2 as well.

The NC Wine & Craft Beer Garden is open from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Saturday and 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on Sunday.

The Artisan Village and Marketplace where vendors offer crafts and festival souvenirs is open throughout the weekend.

Profits will help Hurricane Helene victims

Carolina BalloonFest organizers said the balloon festival could go on for two reasons.

"We're far enough away both in the calendar as well as geographically that it was OK for us to continue to move forward with this. And then also to be able to give back to the relief effort," Parks said.

A portion of profits from the 49th Annual Carolina BalloonFest will go towards relief efforts.

For more information, visit www.carolinaballoonfest.com.

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North Carolina sheriffs' offices help with disaster relief

October 17, 2024 | Stokes News, The (Walnut Cove, NC) Author: Staff Reports| Section: Meteorology | 597 Words OpenURL Link

In an Oct. 15 statement, the North Carolina Sheriffs' Association shared details of how offices throughout the state including Stokes County continue to coordinate a recovery response to Western North Carolina areas that were impacted by the devastating Hurricane Helene.

The association's Statewide Disaster Assistance Network (SDAN), in coordination with North Carolina Emergency Management, allows sheriffs' offices across the state to request and offer aid to other sheriffs in the event of a disaster.

SDAN was activated by North Carolina Sheriffs' Association President Sheriff Mike Roberson of Chatham County on Thursday, Sept. 26, as Hurricane Helene left a path of destruction in its wake in 27 Western North Carolina Counties.

The impact was catastrophic as the storm brought heavy rainfall and wind, causing widespread flash flooding, mudslides, and extremely dangerous, life-threatening conditions.

Sheriff Roberson explained, "We knew immediately that this storm would have a massive impact in our state. The effects have been like nothing we have seen in the recent past. Activating the Statewide Disaster Assistance Network allowed the North Carolina Sheriffs' Association to begin working right away to coordinate resources and let sheriffs' offices from around the state get assistance to those counties impacted as soon as possible."

Emergency services in Western North Carolina have been overwhelmed with the countless calls for service and requests for help from their citizens. Thanks to coordination from the North Carolina Sheriffs' Association's SDAN, as of today, 78 sheriffs' offices from across North Carolina have sent much needed personnel and equipment to Western North Carolina. This includes 578 deputies, 18 detention officers, and 18 telecommunicators. SDAN has also coordinated the relocation of almost 350 county jail inmates to other county jails.

Stokes County Sheriff Joey Lemons said his office currently has a team assisting with various law enforcement functions in the western part of the state, and inmates from three western counties are housed in the Stokes County Jail.

"This is an example of how our state's sheriffs work together in times of need," Lemons said.

Sheriffs' offices also provided a variety of rescue equipment to the area, including aerial and underwater drones, helicopters, tactical Bearcat vehicles, utility terrain vehicles (UTVs), generators, high-water vehicles, and more.

Personnel at the North Carolina Sheriffs' Association headquarters in Raleigh have been working around the clock each day since SDAN was activated to make sure that deputies, detention officers and telecommunicators have been dispatched immediately to sheriffs' offices in the mountain counties in need.

The NCSA SDAN program will continue to do so as long as there is a need for assistance. Sheriffs from impacted counties have expressed their gratitude for the assistance from SDAN and their fellow sheriffs in the wake of tragedy. Sheriff Len Hagaman of Watauga County commented, "I am once again amazed and am so very blessed for everyone on the NCSA team ... We are now both 'Watauga and NCSA Strong.'"

Sheriff Ricky Buchanan of McDowell County said, "With the help of sheriffs and deputy sheriffs from across the state, we have been able to maintain an increased law enforcement presence in our county, 24-7, since this

disaster occurred. This has allowed us to focus our attention on those hit hardest by this disaster."

Hurricane Helene has become the second-deadliest hurricane to hit the mainland United States since Hurricane Katrina in 2005, with a confirmed death toll of at least 231 people across six states. That number is still expected to climb as recovery efforts continue to take place. More than 100 of those deaths were in North Carolina, including two sheriff's deputies — one from the Macon County Sheriff's Office, and another from the Madison County Sheriff's Office.

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Early voting underway in NC

October 17, 2024 | Thomasville Times, The (NC) Author: Paul B. Johnson PAXTON MEDIA GROUP | Section: Thomasville Times | 321 Words OpenURL Link

TRIAD — Early voting began this week for the fall general election, giving people a chance to cast ballots on races ranging from president to county offices about three weeks before Election Day on Nov. 5.

Launched 24 years ago as an experiment with casting ballots, in-person early voting has steadily grown as an option.

"In-person early voting has been the most popular form of voting in recent general elections, and we expect that will continue in 2024," said Karen Brinson Bell, executive director for the N.C. State Board of Elections. "In 2020, for example, 65% of North Carolina voters chose in-person early voting as their voting method. And back in the presidential election of 2016, 62% of NC voters chose to vote early."

The Davidson County Board of Elections has six early voting locations. The site for the northern part of the county remains the Thomasville Public Library at 14 Randolph St.

Weekday hours for Davidson County early voting sites will be from 8 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. There will be five weekend days for early voting — Saturday, Oct. 19, Saturday, Oct. 26, and Saturday, Nov. 2, from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m., and Sunday, Oct. 20, and Sunday, Oct. 27, from 1 to 4 p.m.

Voters have to cast a ballot during early voting in the county where they reside.

People who aren't registered to vote can register on the same day and vote during early voting.

Statewide, 419 early voting sites will be used across North Carolina. The N.C. State Elections Board recently implemented changes for voting procedures in about two dozen western North Carolina counties to cope with the disruption of Tropical Storm Helene.

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Election offices

For more information about voter registration or questions about voting, call your local board of elections office: Guilford County Board of Elections offices in Greensboro at 336-641-3836 or High Point at 336-641-7895. Randolph County, 336-318-6900. Davidson County, 336-242-2190.

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After Helene, early voting begins Oct. 17 in Buncombe County

October 17, 2024 | Times-News, The (Hendersonville, NC) Author: Jacob Biba; Asheville Citizen Times | Section: News | 403 Words Page: A3 OpenURL Link

ASHEVILLE – Nearly three weeks after Tropical Storm Helene hit Western North Carolina, voters will soon begin showing up at Buncombe County poll locations to cast their ballots in this year's general election.

In North Carolina, early voting begins Oct. 17.

In Buncombe County, which suffered widespread damage and destruction from Helene, 10 early voting polling places will be open daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. through Friday, Nov. 1, according to the county's election services department.

Poll locations will close at 3 p.m. on the final day of early voting, Saturday, Nov. 2.

Before Helene hit, the department planned to open 14 early voting poll locations, according to Corinne Duncan, the county's elections director. But the number was decreased to 10 after the storm ripped through the region.

"These are all large-capacity sites, and they're spread out well over the county," Duncan said.

One third of poll workers are unable to staff early voting poll locations, Duncan said, so the county's Board of Elections approved the decrease in locations Oct. 8.

The board also approved expanded weekend voting hours because of Helene.

Voters can choose any early voting location that is most convenient, according to the county.

Buncombe County early voting sites

Black Mountain Library, 105 N. Dougherty Street, Black Mountain

East Asheville Library, 3 Avon Road, Asheville

Enka-Candler Library, 1404 Sand Hill Road, Candler

Fairview Library, 1 Taylor Road, Fairview

Leicester Community Center, 2979 New Leicester Highway, Leicester

South Buncombe Library, 260 Overlook Road, Asheville

UNCA Health & Counseling Center, 118 W.T. Weaver Boulevard, Asheville (new location)

Weaverville Community Center, 60 Lakeshore Drive, Weaverville

Dr. Wesley Grant Southside Center, 285 Livingston Street, Asheville, replacing the county's Board of Elections voting location

West Asheville Library, 942 Haywood Road, Asheville

Additional voter information from Buncombe County

You must be registered to vote in order to vote.

Registration to vote deadline was Oct. 11. Individuals can same-day register during early voting.

Election Day is Tuesday, Nov. 5

General questions can be answered at buncombecounty.org/vote or elections@buncombecounty.org or 828-250-4200

Voters can check their voter status or find sample ballots at buncombecounty.org/vote or in-person at 59 Woodfin Place, Asheville.

Voter ID is required. Free photo IDs are available at the county's Elections Office, 59 Woodfin Place, Asheville.

Update: A voter can request an absentee ballot, or a near relative can do it on their behalf, in person at the county board of elections office up until 5 p.m. Monday, Nov. 4, the day before the election.

Jacob Biba is the county watchdog reporter at the Asheville Citizen Times. Reach him at jbiba@citizentimes.com. Copyright 2024 Times-News, The (Hendersonville, NC), All Rights Reserved.

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NCDOT Asheville's I-26 Connector - Did Helene impact project?

October 17, 2024 | Times-News, The (Hendersonville, NC) Author: Sarah Honosky; Asheville Citizen Times | Section: News | 547 Words Page: A1 OpenURL Link

ASHEVILLE - As N.C. Department of Transportation crews and its contractors concentrate on immediate recovery, a spokesperson said the long-term impact of Helene on the monumental I-26 Connector project has yet to be determined, but "it's doubtful to have a significant impact on the end date."

Since Tropical Storm Helene slammed Western North Carolina Sept. 27, bringing record-breaking floods and devastation, NCDOT crews identified more than 6,900 sites where roads and bridges are damaged, with officials cautioning that some roads remain dangerous and travel limited.

The department has reopened more than 600 roads since the storm, according to an Oct. 14 release.

"Damage estimates from what we have been able to assess to this point are up to several billion dollars and we're not done," said state Transportation Secretary Joey Hopkins in the release. "The damage to our roads and bridges is like nothing we've ever seen after any storm, and this will be a long-term recovery operation. But we will be here until Western North Carolina can get back on its feet."

The agency is still calling on people to not travel in WNC, unless they are local, responding to the recovery effort or have essential travel needs.

What about the I-26 connector?

"NCDOT crews and its contractors are currently concentrating on immediate recovery and repair," said spokesperson David Uchiyama, in response to questions about the connector Oct. 15. "It's critical that we provide access to all residents, make temporary repairs to provide at least emergency access before beginning long-term permanent replacements."

The \$1.3 billion N.C. Department of Transportation project will design a median-divided freeway, accessible only by interchanges, which will connect I-26 in southwest Asheville to U.S. 19/23/70 throughout northwest Asheville.

Once complete, the freeway would be part of I-26, which extends from Kingsport, Tennessee, to Charleston, South Carolina.

Only days before Helene, NCDOT announced geotechnical drilling operations for preliminary work on the I-26 Connector would begin along the French Broad River between the Jeff Bowen Bridge and Pearson Road Bridge.

The drilling has been postponed indefinitely, Uchiyama said.

The long-awaited project, decades in the works, had recently reached a "milestone moment," with contracts awarded for the north and south sections of the project, both to Archer-Wright Joint Venture.

The contract for the North Section, which runs from Haywood Road in West Asheville and crosses the French Broad to connect to U.S. 19/23/70 and U.S. 240, was awarded in May at \$1.15 billion.

It is the largest contract awarded by the NCDOT in state history, the Citizen Times previously reported.

Also ongoing is another I-26 project to widen approximately 16.9 miles of the interstate from U.S. 64 in

Hendersonville to Brevard Road in Asheville. Construction began in 2019.

"Our I-26 widening contractors including Fluor-United have been part of the emergency response. They will likely transition back to interstate construction in the next few weeks," Uchiyama said.

"As for the Connector, the design firms continue developing the plans."

Sarah Honosky is the city government reporter for the Asheville Citizen Times, part of the USA TODAY Network. News Tips? Email shonosky@citizentimes.com or message on Twitter at @slhonosky. Please support local, daily journalism with a subscription to the Citizen Times.

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'We've got a plan' - Hot Springs Resort offers first look at Helene damage; will it reopen?

October 17, 2024 | Times-News, The (Hendersonville, NC) Author: Johnny Casey | Section: News | 1303 Words Page: A1 OpenURL Link

HOT SPRINGS - The Hot Springs Resort and Spa and the naturally-occurring warm springs of the region has drawn people from around the country for generations. Cherokee settlers of what is now the town of Hot Springs in Western North Carolina were said to have followed their psychic intuition to the region for the water's healing powers.

Now, even after the devastation and destruction caused by Tropical Storm Helene, the resort, one of the biggest draws in the region, has vowed to reopen again.

The News-Record and Sentinel met with Heather West, a Hot Springs Resort and Spa general manager, on the grounds of the property Oct. 14, where law enforcement teams from around the state arrived to help with search and recovery operations.

West was on the property Friday, Sept. 27 as the floods moved in. While she braved the storms as long as she could, she moved to higher ground that afternoon, she said.

If she hadn't, she may have been swept away.

"I had a small team, and I was on the property and water started coming over the tracks," West said. "It was at that moment that we knew catastrophic damage was going to come."

Debris is exactly what is left of the Hot Springs Resort and Spa property.

Entire sections of the main roadway to access the spa building are missing, and eight of the tubs at the downtown Hot Springs property's mineral bath property were lost to the floods. Nine of the 16 mineral water tubs were compromised in Helene's devastation, as well.

But despite the destruction and chaos, West said the Hot Springs Resort and Spa will be back.

West said the team is aiming to reopen in the spring.

The Resort and Spa's 34 employees were furloughed in the meantime, as West and the team will have to rebuild the pump system and well cap to rebuild 900 feet of water line to restore the facility's mineral water access, which comes from Spring Creek. The creek runs along the property's north end, while the French Broad River runs along the eastern side of the property.

As for the campground side, West said "a lot" of the lodging units were impacted and will require mold remediation at the very least.

"We lost our water system, and the spring system itself, which is on a private gated part of the property," West said.

Additionally, the Resort and Spa's pump house and sewer system was compromised, as the town of Hot Springs' sewer system was damaged.

'Ancient and strong and in charge'

West has served as general manager at the resort for 19 years.

She said she's never experienced something quite like Helene.

Rumors of the Hot Springs area having an underground vortex system have been talked about for many years.

But according to West, during the storm, the property battled a real-life water vortex, as the floods of Spring Creek and the French Broad River created a doubly powerful cross-current vortex.

"We became this confluence and this giant eddy formed," West said, adding that the parking lot had signs wash up from the back of the campground.

"There's always the joke that Hot Springs has been a vortex, a weird energy center. That's real. There really was a vortex here. There's something about this place. They say the French Broad River is older than the mountains.

"Whatever the energy is in this land, is ancient and strong and in charge."

For the West family, the brutal reminders of the losses and suffering endured by friends and neighbors greets them each morning.

"Watching these rescuers, they get on the property in the morning and they meet with cadaver dogs at the river, and then they hit the river," West said. "They've searched our debris piles. That realization every day is huge. There were hundreds of them here this morning."

'Hot Springs Resort and Spa 6.0'

The Hot Springs Resort and Spa operates as the living trust for the property's founder, Eugene Hicks.

Ron and Sandy West, Heather's parents, serve as vice president of operations and vice president of finance, respectively. Both are on the board of directors.

"Things happen," Ron said. "Sometimes you're in the middle of it. But we're good. We've got a plan."

The first hotel on the property, the Mountain Park Hotel — which included the first golf course in the state — was built in the 1860s. At the same time, the Resort and Spa's bath house was built.

Somehow, the building's foundations are still structurally standing after Helene.

"It's amazing that she withstood all that," West said. "If she could talk, the stories she would tell."

Heather West said Helene affords the Hot Springs Resort and Spa team "a complete reinvention."

Other iterations of the hotels on the property include The Patton, the Mont Aqua and the Hot Springs Inn.

"We were probably version 5.0 of this property — flood, fire, German internment," West said. "There've been all these kinds of things. So, now we stand here and say, 'We are going to build 6.0.' What a crazy world. And this property has embraced all of that.

"So, there's grief. But there's hope. It's a paradigm shift. COVID was a paradigm shift. The world had to shift everything to figure it out. This was a big one. We learned what we know: Mother Nature is absolutely in charge. She is CEO of this property. So, we are under an onus to be very responsible and good stewards so that we honor her path, because if we don't, she's going to level you."

While West said the property "has that history of being humbled by Mother Nature," she understands the crucial role the Resort and Spa plays in helping to rebuild the town and the region

"We take that responsibility very seriously," West said. "We always operate under the guise that anyone should be able to access the mineral water. There will be a price on it of course, but we will rebuild in a way so that access to the springs is open to everyone.

"That's the main operative of this business. It won't be exclusive. It won't be gated. It won't keep locals out. It will be a spot of pride in the town of Hot Springs. If we use that as a compass, then the other good things business-related fall into place. So making it sustainable for Mother Nature and accessible for people who live here is how this business thrives. It won't be sold to Omni or Biltmore."

According to West, Mayor Abby Norton and the Hot Springs Town Board will temporarily use the property's office to hold its town meetings, as the Bridge Street City Hall property was destroyed in the Helene floods.

Tattered clothing which lays embedded in downed trees along the river banks abutting the property.

West, who is fifth-generation Madison County, and has a 17-year-old son who lives in the county as well, said sorrow and pain is deeply embedded in Appalachians' DNAs.

"My grandmother would say, 'They tote their sorrow, a bit,'" West said. "That's where our ballads come from, and our beautiful arts, and our communities come from, is these collective traumatic experiences.

"So, yes, it's awful to look at. But what I know about the tenacity of the river, of the mountains, these people that I know, is that it will turn into something beautiful."

Johnny Casey has covered Madison County for The Citizen Times and The News-Record & Sentinel for three years. He earned a first-place award in beat news reporting in the 2023 North Carolina Press Association awards. He can be reached at 828-210-6074 or jcasey@citizentimes.com.

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Forecasters face death threats over storm conspiracy theories

October 17, 2024 | Times-News, The (Hendersonville, NC) Author: Mary Boyte; USA TODAY NETWORK| Section: News | 557 Words Page: A2 OpenURL Link

In the wake of recent destruction from Hurricane Helene and now Hurricane Milton, conspiracy theories regarding human-made weather have floated around social media leading to many meteorologists receiving backlash and even death threats.

Among other conspiracy theories, including widely-spread falsehoods regarding Federal Emergency Management Agency relief efforts, many have taken to social media to spread theories that the recent hurricanes were manmade and that the U.S. Government played a part in their creation or manipulation.

Many meteorologists throughout the nation have reported receiving hate comments and death threats from citizens who believe the weather forecasters are intentionally spreading lies or aiding the government in a mass cover-up.

U.S. meteorologist share threatening messages targeting 'those that made (the hurricanes)'

Katie Nickolaou, meteorologist for WLNS news in Lansing, MI, has received several threatening comments after posting social media videos debunking the conspiracy theories.

On Oct. 8, Nickolaou posted a screenshot of one of these social media interactions on X, formally known as Twitter. The caption accompanying the screenshot says. "Murdering meteorologists won't stop hurricanes. I can't believe I just had to type that." The screen shot shows a comment on one of Nickolaou's posts in which she says hurricanes are not man-made. The comment states, "Stop the breathing of those that made (the hurricanes) and their affiliates."

Greenville-based meteorologist Chris Justus posted on social media Thursday responding to messages about human-controlled weather, of which he said he has received several. Justus, chief meteorologist with WYFF News, was one of several meteorologists reporting on the front lines during Helene.

"I've been asked if the government or mankind in general is controlling the weather," the post says. "Let me clarify; I firmly believe God Almighty is the ONLY one in control. I've been asked, why didn't God stop the hurricane this week. There are many answers to that. Personally, I believe we are an imperfect world and unfortunately we also have an imperfect atmosphere that causes radical changes in our environment that results in severe weather."

Justus goes on to say although his job as a meteorologist is rooted in scientific explanation, his Christian faith leads him to believe something larger is also at play.

"The Bible offers many examples of storms, but also emphasizes God's protection in scripture. I believe Divine protection is at work for Western North Carolina, the mountains and the Upstate this week," the post says.

Not all meteorologists responding to backlash have included their religious beliefs, but most agree that the weather events are natural and do not involve any kind of human manipulation.

Politicians have added to the growing mistrust of meteorologists with some Republican officials taking to social media to spread the theories. In an X post, Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene stated, "Yes they can control the weather. It's ridiculous for anyone to lie and say it can't be done."

Amid the backlash, some politicians have used their platforms to debunk the conspiracy theories. President Joe Biden called the theories a "reckless and irresponsible and relentless promotion of disinformation."

Republican North Carolina Rep. Chuck Edwards released a statement responding to what he called "outrageous rumors that have circulated online."

"Nobody can control the weather...Current geoengineering technology can serve as a large-scale intervention to mitigate the negative consequences of naturally occurring weather phenomena, but it cannot be used to create or manipulate hurricanes," Edwards said.

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Blue Ridge Parkway closed; Park Service warns visitors not to enter

October 17, 2024 | Times-News, The (Hendersonville, NC) Author: Karen Chávez; Asheville Citizen Times | Section: News | 374 Words Page: A2 OpenURL Link

ASHEVILLE - At the height of fall color season in Western North Carolina, when the star attraction is the Blue Ridge Parkway, the scenic roadway remains closed indefinitely.

The entire North Carolina section of the parkway remains closed after Tropical Storm Helene smashed into Western North Carolina Sept. 27, bringing record rainfall and flooding that swept away lives, homes, towns and chunks of roads and highways.

According to the Oct. 15 parkway Facebook post, the National Park Service said the roadway in parts of WNC have been compromised by flooding and tree hazards. Crews continue with emergency stabilization and damage assessments following Helene.

For safety reasons, park managers are asking the public to be patient and respect the closures. Many areas remain unsafe due to visible and hidden hazards, such as weakened and missing portions of the roadway; standing dead and downed trees; unstable slopes; and crews and heavy equipment operating on the road. Unauthorized use also hinders recovery operations of work crews.

While the parkway often allows pedestrians, dog walkers and cyclists to access the roadway when it's closed for snow or other weather conditions that are dangerous to motor vehicles, the destruction is too severe to allow that now.

The parkway stretches 469 miles from Shenandoah National Park, across the spine of the Blue Ridge Mountains, and directly through Asheville to its terminus at Great Smoky Mountains National Park. It is the most visited unit of the NPS with 16.7 million visitors last year.

The park service is working diligently, and areas will reopen as soon as it is safe to do so.

"Due to increasing instances of visitors entering closed areas and disregarding or vandalizing safety barriers, rangers will begin enforcing closure violations and issuing citations as necessary. These actions are necessary to prevent accidents and injuries to the public and our crews," the post read.

Updates are posted regularly on the parkway website and social media platforms. Updates will be posted on the Blue Ridge Parkway website at www.nps.gov/blri and on the park's social media platforms at @BlueRidgeNPS (Facebook, X and Instagram).

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Citation (aglc Style)

Karen Chávez, Asheville Citizen Times, 'Blue Ridge Parkway closed; Park Service warns visitors not to enter', *Times-News, The* (online), 17 Oct 2024 A2 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?
p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C43775ECD38E30>



81 people still missing in western NC after Helene

October 17, 2024 | Times-News, The (Hendersonville, NC)
Author: Karrigan Monk, Ryley Ober , and Mary Boyte; USA TODAY NETWORK Section: News | 458 Words Page: A8
OpenURL Link

North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper said Tuesday afternoon that 81 people remain missing in the western part of the state in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene.

A task force has been formed to find the missing.

"The task force, law enforcement and other partners will continue working to locate those who are unaccounted for and I am thankful for their efforts," Cooper said during a tour of the town of Swannanoa.

Cooper said that 77,000 individuals have applied for relief through the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and that FEMA has paid \$99million and is paying for temporary housing for 1,900 people.

The governor also addressed continued misinformation campaigns and domestic threats against recovery efforts.

"If you're participating in spreading (misinformation), stop it," Cooper said. "Whatever your aim is, the people you are really hurting is the people in Western North Carolina who need help."

Cooper said Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson, the Republican nominee for governor, is participating in the spread of disinformation. He said it was disappointing and wrong when candidates "are using people's misery to sow chaos for their own political objectives."

William Jacob Parsons, 44, was arrested on public terror charges Saturday after threatening to "go mess up some FEMA personnel," according to Rutherford County sheriff's office Capt. Jamie Keever. Parsons was armed with an AR-style rifle and two handguns at the time of the arrest, according to authorities.

On the same day, the U.S. Forest Service received an email from FEMA that said a National Guard unit working for the agency "came across some militia members who said they were out hunting FEMA," according to Jason Nedlo, a spokesperson for the Forest Service's Southern Area Blue Incident Management Team. The email was first reported by The Washington Post.

In response, FEMA advised all federal responders in Rutherford County "to stand down and evacuate the county immediately," an official with the U.S. Forest Service wrote to other federal agencies, according to The Post.

The threats caused FEMA employees to temporarily stop accepting in-person applications for federal assistance in some of North Carolina's mountain communities, according to a statement posted Sunday on social media by the Ashe County Emergency Management Department.

Cooper said at the news conference that he was not aware of any other threats but said the swirl of disinformation had demoralized volunteers and prevented those who could apply for aid from doing so. He has directed the North Carolina Department of Public Safety to provide more security for FEMA.

Contributing: James Powel, Christopher Cann, Josh Meyer, Minnah Arshad and Thao Nguyen, USA TODAY

Karrigan Monk and Ryley Ober are Asheville Citizen Times reporters. Mary Boyte is a Jackson Clarion-Ledger reporter.

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Karrigan Monk, Ryley Ober , and Mary Boyte, USA TODAY NETWORK, '81 people still missing in western NC after Helene', *Times-News, The* (online), 17 Oct 2024 A8 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C43775B56167C0>



FEMA seeks properties to lease to house Helene survivors

October 17, 2024 | Tryon Daily Bulletin, The (NC) Author: Staff Reports | Section: Community | 106 Words OpenURL Link

As the community continues to recover from Helene, there is a need for places to house storm survivors, according to the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

FEMA is currently seeking interested, qualified owners or property management companies

to help meet the temporary housing needs of disaster survivors by leasing their properties

directly to FEMA.

The government agency is also seeking information from owners of multifamily properties that can be repaired to local, state and federal standards and be offered as temporary housing to survivors impacted by Tropical Storm Helene.

To learn more, visit polknc.info/fema-seeks-properties-to-lease-to-house-helene-survivors.

The post FEMA seeks properties to lease to house Helene survivors appeared first on The Tryon Daily Bulletin. Copyright 2024, The Tryon Daily Bulletin, All Rights Reserved.

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BBBS Fall Fundraiser rescheduled for November 16

October 17, 2024 | Tryon Daily Bulletin, The (NC) Author: Storme Smith| Section: Community | 353 Words OpenURL Link

TRYON—Due to the impacts of Tropical Storme Helene, the Polk County Big Brothers Big Sisters Council has rescheduled its annual Fall Fundraiser. The event will now take place on Saturday, November 16, from 5 to 7 p.m. at The Mimosa Inn.

This year's fundraiser promises to be memorable. It will feature live entertainment by the Basement Bunch Band and Harry Denton and delicious offerings from All Good Things Bakery. Guests will also be able to participate in a large silent auction, and tickets will include access to wine and beer.

"Don't miss this opportunity to help create a brighter future for our youth. We look forward to seeing everyone at The Mimosa Inn on November 16," said BBBS Board Member Bill Smith.

This annual fundraiser is essential for the organization, particularly during these challenging times. The Polk BBBS Council has tirelessly collaborated with various charity organizations to provide critical resources such as food, dehumidifiers, CO2 monitors, and essential supplies, including cash, water, propane tanks, and battery-operated radios for families in need. The ongoing crisis has heightened the need for support in the community.

Special thanks are extended to those making a difference, including Cindy Wickland from Steps to Hope, Margot Carter from Thermal Belt Outreach, Jessica Toney and her son Gideon, and supporters from the Polk Community Foundation. The Polk County Council members—Bruce and Jane Ollis, Jessica Silva, Cindy Wickland, Lynne Parsons, Amber Thompson, Veronica Hassig, and Louise Johnson—have also played critical roles throughout the year, supporting the underserved youth in Polk County.

With nearly 400 youth enrolled in the direct community program and outreach through high school mentoring and other school support initiatives, the Polk County BBBS is committed to making a difference.

Residents of Polk County and surrounding areas are encouraged to attend this vital event to help support local youth and families in need. Lelia Duncan, President of the 18-county Western North Carolina region, and her staff appreciate the community's support.

For tickets and more information, contact Bill Smith at 864-608-9807 or wdsclemson68@gmail.com, or Jessica Spivey at jessica@bbbswnc.org or 828-429-7626.

The post BBBS Fall Fundraiser rescheduled for November 16 appeared first on The Tryon Daily Bulletin.

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2024 Watauga Democrat Voter Guide

October 17, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Moss Brennan moss.brennan@wataugademocrat.com| Section: Local | 824 Words OpenURL Link

This page has all of the candidate responses for the 2024 Watauga Democrat Guide in one place as well as information about early voting and Election Day.

Candidate Responses

Election Information

Even as the community recovers from the devastation of Hurricane Helene, the election will go on.

"We are grateful to all the people that worked so hard to build our county's infrastructure back so quickly," said Watauga Director of Elections Matt Snyder. "It is truly amazing to see people from all over the country pitching in to help strangers in need. That's what America is all about. This helped minimize any disruptions to voters so that every voice can be heard. We also want to thank all the election officials who offered to work the new weekend shifts. We literally can't do it without them."

Snyder said the county has had very minimal disruption to the normal voting sites. The only change for election day is that New River 3 precinct will be voting at the Recreation Center. The normal location is the National Guard Armory across the street, but it has been impacted by Helene. All of our other Nov. 5 election day sites will be open at the same normal locations from 6:30 a.m. until 7:30 p.m.

Early voting sites have remained the same, but the schedule has changed.

Early voting times are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekdays and Saturdays and 1 to 5 p.m. on Sundays between Oct. 17 and Nov. 2. The last day of early voting, Nov. 2, will be from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. The Watauga County Board of Elections approved the new early voting hours on Oct. 10.

"We hope by adding weekend voting it allows some added flexibility for people. Everyone's life's have been upended in one way or another," Snyder said. "If you know a voter who can't make it out to any of our early or election day sites, call our office so we can help. We had around 32,000 voters in 2020. If we can do that during a pandemic, I have no doubt Wataugans will find a way to vote this year too."

The polling locations for early voting have remained the same and are located at:

Watauga County Administration Building (Commissioners' Board Room 814 W. King Street, Boone)Blowing Rock American Legion Building (333 Wallingford Street, Blowing Rock)Deep Gap Fire Department (6583 Old 421 S, Deep Gap)Meat Camp Fire Department (4797 NC Hwy 194 N, Boone)Plemmons Student Union Blue Ridge Ballroom (263 Locust Street, Boone with parking available at 644 Howard Street)Western Watauga Community Center (1081 Old US Hwy 421, Sugar Grove)

If you are registered to vote in Watauga County, you may vote at any early voting site you choose. Same Day Registration is available at every early voting site, but voters must provide proof of residence in Watauga County.

A photo ID is required to vote. Voters who may have lost their ID due to Hurricane Helene have the following options:

Fill out a Photo ID Exception Form at your voting site or send the form back with your absentee ballot. (A blank

Exception Form will arrive with your absentee packet.) Check the box for "Exception 3: Victim of a Natural Disaster." Make sure to sign the form.Go to your county board of elections office. If you are a registered voter, they can take your photo and print an acceptable ID on the spot. For details, go to Get a Free Voter Photo ID.Get a free ID from an NCDMV office in your area. For details, see State IDs | NCDMV.

For details about North Carolina's photo ID requirement, including a list of all acceptable IDs, go to BringltNC.gov.

On Election Day, polls will be open from 6:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. Voters must vote at their assigned precinct on Election Day. The following are the precinct voting sites:

Bald Mountain — Todd Fire Department

Beaver Dam — Beaver Dam Fire Department

Blowing Rock — American Legion Building

Blue Ridge — Laurel Fork Baptist Church

Boone 1 — Watauga County Administration Building

Boone 2 — ASU Plemmons Student Union — Blue Ridge Ballroom

Brushy Fork — Caldwell Community College & Technical Institute BLDG 460

Cove Creek — Zionville Fire Station 2

Elk — Stewart Simmons Fire Department

Laurel Creek — Cove Creek Fire Department

Meat Camp — Meat Camp Fire Department

Boone 3 — Agricultural Conference Center

New River 1 — Boone Town Chambers

New River 2 — Three Forks Baptist Association

New River 3 — Watauga County Recreation Center

North Fork — Edgar Eller's Garage

Shawneehaw — Matney Community Center

Stony Fork — Deep Gap Fire Department

Watauga — Foscoe Christian Church

Beech Mountain — Buckeye Recreation Center

Voters in the New River 3 precinct have previously voted at the National Guard Armory, which was damaged during Hurricane Helene.

For more information on the Watauga County Board of Elections, visit tinyurl.com/3hajj7uj.

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App State to host Georgia State at home on Oct. 26 with kickoff set for 1 p.m.

October 17, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Staff Report sports@wataugademocrat.com| Section: Asu Sports | 545 Words OpenURL Link

BOONE — App State will host Georgia State for its Oct. 26 football game, as scheduled, with a 1 p.m. kickoff at Kidd Brewer Stadium. The game, which sold out of tickets in August, will be streamed live on ESPN+.

This will be the Mountaineers' first home football game since the High Country community and western North Carolina region were impacted by the effects of Hurricane Helene nearly three weeks ago.

"We're working to thoughtfully, responsibly and respectfully bring university events back to Boone that are supported by students, faculty and staff, as well as a passionate base of alumni and others who love Appalachian State University and Western North Carolina. We're committed to ensuring that the university continues to support and sustain our community in meaningful and lasting ways," said Interim Chancellor Heather Norris in a press release. "We worked together with the Town and County to respond to the immediate needs of our community during and after Hurricane Helene, and we are committed to sustaining this partnership as we continue to move forward with recovery efforts and build a sense of hope for the future to our broader community."

Norris said in her campus update email that the final three home football games of the season will be played in Boone. Homecoming festivities will be postponed until Nov. 23. Some events may be reduced and the university will share more closer to the time.

The university reopened after Hurricane Helene on Oct. 11 and resumed classes on Oct. 16. During that time, the App State Disaster Relief Fund was created, and more than \$2 million has been distributed to members of the university community who are facing hardships because of Helene.

"App State Football is an important part of the culture and economy of our university community, the High Country, and the western North Carolina region," Director of Athletics Doug Gillin said. "We are thankful to university, town and county leadership, and are committed to provide a safe and responsible return to home competition. We hope this event will further rally our community and help support all those who are recovering."

The following is important information below regarding the Saturday, Oct. 26 game vs. Georgia State.

Yosef Club parking lots open at 8 a.m. and close one hour after the game ends. Gates open at 11 a.m. Student Yosef Club early entry is at 10:45 a.m. Kickoff at 1 p.m., televised by ESPN+App State Homecoming events have been postponed to Nov. 23. Look for more information about Homecoming events coming soon. Ways to support the High Country community: Support local businesses by visiting their High Country locations or purchasing gift cards and gift certificates. Fans who do not plan to use their tickets for the Oct. 26 game can return them back to the App State Ticket Office. The ticket office will reissue tickets to those who have assisted with recovery efforts in the community. Per policy, tickets cannot be refunded.

Additional considerations to support recovery efforts in the High Country:

Fans should consider carpooling to the game to reduce road traffic. Take advantage of AppalCart or rideshare if you are able to do so. Be mindful that the Town and County curfew may still be in place on Oct. 26. Consider purchasing your tailgate supplies from local businesses. Please throw away trash in the proper receptacles before you leave.

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Staff Report sports@wataugademocrat.com, 'App State to host Georgia State at home on Oct. 26 with kickoff set for 1 p.m.', Watauga Democrat, The(online), 17 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C4612508E223B0>



Nearly 300 people cast their ballot in the first hour of early voting in Watauga

October 17, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Moss Brennan moss.brennan@wataugademocrat.com| Section: Local | 392 Words OpenURL Link

WATAUGA — Early voting has started in Watauga County, with nearly 300 community members casting their ballots in the first hour.

According to Watauga County Director of Elections Matt Snyder, 299 people voted as of 10 a.m.

The Watauga County Administration Building received the most votes, 87, while the Western Watauga Community Center received the fewest, 27.

The other sites saw the following number of voters in the first hour:

App State: 65Blowing Rock: 54Deep Gap: 40Meat Camp: 26

In 2020, the last presidential election, Watauga County had 32,346 people vote — a 71.62% turnout.

Early voting times are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekdays and Saturdays and 1 to 5 p.m. on Sundays between Oct. 17 and Nov. 2. The last day of early voting, Nov. 2, will be from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. The Watauga County Board of Elections approved the new early voting hours on Oct. 10.

Early voting polling sites are located at:

Watauga County Administration Building (Commissioners' Board Room 814 W. King Street, Boone)Blowing Rock American Legion Building (333 Wallingford Street, Blowing Rock)Deep Gap Fire Department (6583 Old 421 S, Deep Gap)Meat Camp Fire Department (4797 NC Hwy 194 N, Boone)Plemmons Student Union Blue Ridge Ballroom (263 Locust Street, Boone with parking available at 644 Howard Street)Western Watauga Community Center (1081 Old US Hwy 421, Sugar Grove)

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A photo ID is required to vote. Voters who may have lost their ID due to Hurricane Helene have the following options:

Fill out a Photo ID Exception Form at your voting site or send the form back with your absentee ballot. (A blank Exception Form will arrive with your absentee packet.) Check the box for "Exception 3: Victim of a Natural Disaster." Make sure to sign the form.Go to your county board of elections office. If you are a registered voter, they can take your photo and print an acceptable ID on the spot. For details, go to Get a Free Voter Photo ID.Get a free ID from an NCDMV office in your area. For details, see State IDs | NCDMV.

For details about North Carolina's photo ID requirement, including a list of all acceptable IDs, go to BringltNC.gov.

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Hagaman honored with Attorney General's Dogwood Award

October 17, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Moss Brennan moss.brennan@wataugademocrat.com| Section: Local | 580 Words OpenURL Link

RALEIGH — Watauga County Sheriff Len Hagaman was recently honored with the Attorney General's Dogwood

The award is given to people who are working to improve the health, safety, and well-being of their fellow North Carolinians, according to the North Carolina Attorney General's Office.

"As the people of Watauga County confront the devastation of Hurricane Helene, Sheriff Len Hagaman has been a steady hand of leadership," said Attorney General Josh Stein. "His office has been helping to keep people safe, conduct welfare checks, rescue people in danger, and ensure that Watauga residents have the latest information as they recover. Sheriff Hagaman has been tireless in this work, and I'm grateful for his service."

The awards event took place on Oct. 8.

Hagaman told the Watauga Democrat that he was not comfortable accepting the "singular accolade" when he sees and hears from "our own citizens who are still hurting."

"Let us also give pause and understand that this storm brought the loss of life, both here in Watauga and in Western North Carolina," Hagaman said. "I've seen and heard, first hand, the many verbs, adverbs, and adjectives used to describe the men and women who are still out, as I speak, assisting our citizens to get back to a 'new normal.' The accolades truly and sincerely rest with all of our Western North Carolina Law Enforcement partners, first responders, and governments, plus many, many, others."

Hagaman mentioned the western North Carolina Sheriffs, the NC Sheriffs' Association, detention staff and administrative staff, and "our municipal, state, and federal law enforcement partners - especially to Nash County Sheriff Keith Stone and Wake County Sheriff Willie Rowe who sent deputies to augment the Watauga County Sheriff's Office."

He also mentioned Watauga County Emergency Services, the 911 center, fire departments — while pointing out that "most our volunteers" — and their swift water teams, paramedics, Watauga County Rescue Squad, election county and town commissioners and councils and the various departments within those governments.

"To Our Faith-Based entities: to the many Local churches who provided water, clothing, hot meals, water, and shelter; to the Baptist Missions and Baptist Men's Missions whose men and women fed hundreds and coordinated many disaster clean-ups; to Samaritan's Purse who flew, and continue to fly hundreds of air missions, all over Western North Carolina, in concert with the National Guard and the United States Army," Hagaman said. "They too supplied volunteers for local debris clearing and assisting families in need."

He also mentioned the Chamber of Commerce, hotel and motel communities, restaurants, local media and the school system.

"Finally, to the true unsung heroes, the many friends and people — known and unknown — who literally came to the help and rescue of their friends and neighbors, many who performed tree and debris removal, shared a generator, a meal, or provided a comforting word, or an attentive ear," Hagaman said. "All who gave by simply being a good neighbor; helping a good neighbor."

Other groups honored at the event included Charlotte Mayor Vi Lyles, Iredell County Sheriff Darren Campbell,

Cabarrus County Sheriff Van Shaw, Rep. John Torbett (District 108), Union County Deputy SRO Chris Byrum, president of the Charlotte Metro Human Trafficking Task Force and the founder and executive director of Present Age Ministries Hannah Arrowood, co-founder of the venture capital firm Bright Hope Capital, LLC Malcomb Coley former reporter Ann Doss Helms, former president and vice chairman of the Charlotte Hornets Fred Whitfield, Rep. Kelly Alexander (District 107), Tepper Sports & Entertainment, Food Lion, Bank of America, and NASCAR.

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More than 2,200 people have voted early as of 4 p.m. Oct. 17 in Watauga County

October 17, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Moss Brennan moss.brennan@wataugademocrat.com| Section: Local | 428 Words OpenURL Link

WATAUGA — More than 2,200 people have cast their ballot in Watauga County as of 4 p.m. on Oct. 17.

According to Watauga County Director of Elections Matt Snyder, 2,229 people have voted as of 4 p.m. Oct. 17. In Watauga County, 45,096 people are registered to vote, according to the North Carolina Board of Elections.

In the first hour of early voting on the first day, 299 people voted.

The App State location has had the most votes, 630, while the Meat Camp location has had the fewest, 138.

The other sites saw the following number of voters in the first hour:

Watauga County Administration Building: 626Blowing Rock: 333Deep Gap: 294Western Watauga Community Center: 208

In 2020, the last presidential election, Watauga County had 32,346 people vote — a 71.62% turnout.

Early voting times are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekdays and Saturdays and 1 to 5 p.m. on Sundays between Oct. 17 and Nov. 2. The last day of early voting, Nov. 2, will be from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. The Watauga County Board of Elections approved the new early voting hours on Oct. 10.

Early voting polling sites are located at:

Watauga County Administration Building (Commissioners' Board Room 814 W. King Street, Boone)Blowing Rock American Legion Building (333 Wallingford Street, Blowing Rock)Deep Gap Fire Department (6583 Old 421 S, Deep Gap)Meat Camp Fire Department (4797 NC Hwy 194 N, Boone)Plemmons Student Union Blue Ridge Ballroom (263 Locust Street, Boone with parking available at 644 Howard Street)Western Watauga Community Center (1081 Old US Hwy 421, Sugar Grove)

If you are registered to vote in Watauga County, you may vote at any early voting site you choose. Same Day Registration is available at every early voting site, but voters must provide proof of residence in Watauga County.

A photo ID is required to vote. Voters who may have lost their ID due to Hurricane Helene have the following options:

Fill out a Photo ID Exception Form at your voting site or send the form back with your absentee ballot. (A blank Exception Form will arrive with your absentee packet.) Check the box for "Exception 3: Victim of a Natural Disaster." Make sure to sign the form.Go to your county board of elections office. If you are a registered voter, they can take your photo and print an acceptable ID on the spot. For details, go to Get a Free Voter Photo ID.Get a free ID from an NCDMV office in your area. For details, see State IDs | NCDMV.

 $For details \ about \ North \ Carolina's \ photo \ ID \ requirement, \ including \ a \ list \ of \ all \ acceptable \ IDs, \ go \ to \ BringltNC.gov.$

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SBA waits for Congress as loan fund runs dry - Small business disaster loan program is out of money until Congress approves new funds

October 17, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC) Author: MAE ANDERSON Associated Press | Section: B | 717 Words Page: 5 OpenURL Link

NEW YORK - The Small Business Administration has run out of money for the disaster assistance loans it offers small businesses, homeowners and renters, delaying much needed relief for people applying for aid in the wake of the destruction caused by Hurricanes Helene and Milton.

The SBA offers Economic Injury Disaster Loans to businesses and people affected by disasters. The SBA warned earlier this month that it could run out of funding, given the anticipated surge in claims from Hurricane Helene, without more money from Congress.

There are other disaster relief programs available, including assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, or FEMA. The FEMA aid isn't affected by the SBA shortfall.

Helene was a Category 4 storm that first struck Florida's Gulf Coast on Sept. 26, dumped trillions of gallons of rain and left a trail of destruction for hundreds of miles across several states. Hurricane Milton swept across Florida two weeks later.

So far, the SBA has received around 37,000 applications for relief from those impacted by Hurricane Helene and made more than 700 loan offers totaling about \$48 million. It has received 12,000 applications from those impacted by Hurricane Milton.

The SBA is pausing new loan offers until it gets more funding, which means loans that have not already been offered will be delayed by at least a month. SBA Administrator Isabel Casillas Guzman said people should keep applying for the loans, however.

"We know that swift financial relief can help communities recover quickly to stabilize local economies," Guzman said in a statement. She added that the SBA will continue to process applications so assistance can be quickly disbursed once funds are replenished.

The SBA said it could also be able to make a small number of new loan offers during this time, if it gets more funds from loan cancellations or similar actions.

House Speaker Mike Johnson assured there would be strong support to provide necessary funds - when Congress returns after the November election.

"There's no question these devastating back-to-back storms have stressed the SBA funding program," Johnson, a Republican, said in a statement. "But the Biden-Harris Administration has the necessary disaster funding right now to address the immediate needs of American people in these hurricane affected areas."

The speaker declined to recall lawmakers back to Washington to vote on aid in the aftermath of deadly hurricanes and declined to do so now. He said Congress is tracking this situation closely.

"When Members return in just a few short weeks, the Administration should have an accurate assessment of the actual dollar amount needed and there will be strong bipartisan support to provide the necessary funding," he said.

The SBA offers two different types of disaster loans. Business physical disaster loans are for repairing or replacing

disaster-damaged property, including real estate, inventories, supplies, machinery and equipment. Economic injury disaster loans are working capital loans to help small businesses, small agricultural cooperatives, small businesses engaged in aquaculture, and most private, nonprofit organizations meet financial obligations that cannot be met as a direct result of a disaster.

Businesses can access loans up to \$2 million. Interest rates are as low as 4% for businesses and 3.25% for nonprofit organizations.

The SBA also offers disaster loans up to \$500,000 to homeowners to repair or replace disaster-damaged or destroyed real estate. Homeowners and renters are eligible for up to \$100,000 to repair or replace disaster-damaged or destroyed personal property.

FEMA's disaster relief fund is a pot of money the agency uses to respond to disasters. The money pays for things like refunding state and local officials for debris removal and rebuilding public infrastructure damaged by disasters. FEMA also gives disaster survivors money for things like rent while their homes are uninhabitable or for emergency needs like diapers.

FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell has repeatedly said that the disaster relief fund has enough money to respond to Helene and Milton. But Criswell has said that the agency eventually will need supplemental funding from Congress. If that doesn't happen, the agency would go into what's called "immediate needs funding." That means the agency stops paying out for previous disasters and conserves its money for life-saving missions during any new ones.

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