

LOCAL ROUNDUP: Ledford soccer shuts out rival North

October 10, 2024 | High Point Enterprise (NC) Author: ENTERPRISE STAFF | Section: Sports | 546 Words OpenURL Link

WELCOME — Ledford beat rival North Davidson 4-0 in Mid-Piedmont 3A Conference boys soccer Wednesday at North.

Valentino Ontiveros scored three goals to lead the Panthers (8-5-4 overall, 4-1 conference). Emanuel Galindo also scored a goal, while Joaquin Leal-Godoy had two assists. Kevin Palacios made six saves in goal.

SOUTHWEST GUILFORD, GRIMSLEY

HIGH POINT — Southwest Guilford lost 1-0 against Grimsley in Metro 4A Conference boys soccer Wednesday at Southwest. The Cowboys moved to 4-10-2 overall and 1-6 in the conference.

EAST DAVIDSON, McMICHAEL

MAYODAN — East Davidson tied McMichael in nonconference boys soccer Wednesday at McMichael. The Golden Eagles moved to 7-8-1 overall.

CROSS-COUNTRY

AT CALDWELL

GREENSBORO — Four area runners finished inside the top 10 to highlight Wednesday's PTAC meet at Caldwell.

Calvary Day won both team scores — 36 points for the boys and 31 points for the girls. Westchester Country Day was fourth in the boys score with 88 and High Point Christian was fifth with 91. Westchester was fourth in the girls score with 8, HPCA was fifth with 125 and Wesleyan Christian was sixth with 145.

Posting top-10 finishes were: HPCA's Blaine Hamlett (third, 16:56.93) and Westchester's Christian Smith (seventh, 18:22.84) for the boys, plus Westchester's Addy Grace Winstead (third, 21:36.64) and HPCA's Harper Garrett (10th, 23:46.15) for the girls.

AT SOUTHWESTERN RANDOLPH

 $\label{eq:FARMER-wheatmore} FARMER-Wheatmore's girls won their fourth straight meet while the boys took third in Wednesday's fourth-team meet at Southwestern Randolph.$

Tyler McCormick, Daylan Rada and Johnathan Wall were the top three finishers for the boys, while Scarlett Hildreth, Lydia Madison and Emmie Messner were top three for the girls.

The Warriors will host the PAC 1A/2A championship Wednesday.

FOOTBALL

TRIAD — Over a dozen games highlight this week's football schedule — including six at home.

All three city public schools will be on the road, while High Point Christian will host Clear Dot Charter from South Carolina after Hurricane Helene affected its scheduling with the Asheville schools.

Ledford, Ragsdale, Southern Guilford, Thomasville and Wheatmore will also be at home. Perhaps the two most notable games of the week are Oak Grove, the area's highest-ranked team, visits rival North Davidson while Ragsdale looks to topple Grimsley, one of the top teams in the state.

Here's a look at the full slate of games:

T.W. Andrews (3-3, 0-2) at Morehead (1-6, 1-2), 7:30

High Point Central (0-6, 0-3) at Rockingham County (4-2, 2-1), 7

Southwest Guilford (1-5, 0-3) at Southeast Guilford (3-3, 1-2), 7:30

Clear Dot Charter at High Point Christian (6-0), 7

Bishop McGuinness (4-2, 1-2) at Pine Lake Prep (2-4, 2-1), 7

East Davidson (1-5, 0-2) at Salisbury (6-1, 3-0), 7:30

Montgomery Central (4-2, 0-1) at Ledford (3-3, 0-1), 7:30

Oak Grove (5-1, 1-0) at North Davidson (2-4, 1-0), 7:30

Grimsley (6-0, 3-0) at Ragsdale (2-4, 0-3), 7:30

Smith (2-4, 0-3) at Southern Guilford (2-4, 1-2), 7

South Davidson (0-7, 0-3) at Thomasville (2-5, 0-3), 7:30

Trinity (2-4, 0-1) at Eastern Randolph (6-0, 1-0), 7:30

Southwestern Randolph (3-3, 0-1) at Wheatmore (0-6, 0-1), 7:30

HIGH POINT UNIVERSITY

VOLLEYBALL FALLS AT NEW HAMPSHIRE

DURHAM, N.H. — High Point University lost 25-20, 25-22, 25-20 against New Hampshire in nonconference volleyball Wednesday at New Hampshire.

Dylan Maberry had seven kills and an ace for the Panthers (10-5). Arica Davis added seven kills and four blocks, while Hannah Hawkins had 10 assists, nine digs and an ace. Allie Gray chipped in 15 assists and 11 digs, and Jordyn Schilling had 12 digs and three assists.

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Hurricane Milton offers a catastrophic reminder

October 10, 2024 | McDowell News, The (Marion, NC) Author: Staff Writer| Section: News| 618 Words OpenURL Link

Less than two weeks ago, Hurricane Helene ravaged southern Appalachia with unprecedented floods and claimed hundreds of lives. Now Hurricane Milton has targeted the west coast of Florida, which is still cleaning up from Helene's glancing blow. And less than a month from now, voters will choose between Democrats who accept the reality of climate change and Republicans who do not.

These are not the "normal" hurricanes of the past. Hurricanes are not supposed to retain catastrophic power as they race far inland from the Gulf of Mexico, dumping a Noah's flood of rainfall all the way to Tennessee, the way Helene did. Hurricanes are not supposed to grow from newly formed tropical storm to Category 5 monster in less than two days, the way Milton did — intensification so lightning-fast that it stunned experts.

"I can't even find the right adjective," University of Pennsylvania climate scientist Michael Mann said Monday about Milton. And Mann — author of the famous "hockey stick" graph showing the human-induced rise in global temperatures — pointed me to a Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory study reporting that rainfall from Helene was boosted 50% by climate change.

Understanding why hurricanes now behave differently is a matter of "basic physics," Mann said. Warmer temperatures provide more energy and moisture to serve as fuel for hurricanes, making them bigger and wetter. It's not that there are more hurricanes. Rather, the ones that do form tend to be stronger and release much more rain. Counting Helene, the United States has seen eight Category 4 or Category 5 landfalls since 2017 — the same number as during the previous 57 years.

Milton could make it nine, though forecasters expected the storm to diminish slightly in wind speed before it lands. Another impact of climate change — roughly half a foot of sea level rise in the Gulf since 2010 — makes storm surge and coastal flooding much worse. Residents of low-lying areas in the Tampa Bay area have been told to leave their homes, and Tampa Mayor Jane Castor announced bluntly: "If you choose to stay in one of those evacuation areas, you're going to die."

Many Republicans are reluctant even to acknowledge climate change, much less do anything about it, because of politics, not physics.

Four of the states that suffered fatalities and major damage from Helene — Florida, Georgia, South Carolina and Tennessee — have Republican governors and legislative majorities. Given all the death and destruction, you might think those officials would be clamoring for urgent action.

But the GOP's unchallenged leader, Donald Trump, has famously called climate change a "hoax" and frequently rails against clean-energy power sources such as solar and wind. He says he would dismantle the tax credits and incentives that encourage moving away from fossil fuels, vowing that his energy policy would be "drill, baby, drill."

In a July 2023 poll, The Washington Post found that 55% of Republicans and GOP-leaning independents believed that human activity is "causing changes to the world's climate, including an increase in average temperature." That is far less than the 93% of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents who believe in climate change, but it's still a majority.

Those numbers suggest that Republican voters might be prepared to support policies to mitigate and adapt to climate change if the party's leaders proposed them. But GOP elected officials must take their cues from Trump, lest he turn on them.

Meanwhile, Helene and Milton and the supercharged hurricanes that will follow do not care whether the states they plow through are red or blue. Nor do the droughts, the wildfires or the punishing heat waves. Whether we like it or not, climate change is an area of common ground: We're all in this together.

Robinson writes for The Washington Post: eugenerobinson@washpost.com.

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Storm deaths reported in Burke, Catawba counties

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Author: SARAH JOHNSON sjohnson@hickoryrecord.com BILLY CHAPMAN wchapman@hickoryrecord.com | Section: News | 890 Words OpenURL Link

HURRICANE HELENE UPDATE

One death attributed to Hurricane Helene was reported in Catawba County and one was reported in Burke County.

Alexander, Caldwell and Iredell counties have reported no deaths attributed to the storm.

Ten days after the storm, thousands remain without power. Hundreds of thousands of customers were without power in the immediate aftermath of the remnants of Hurricane Helene.

Catawba County

Approximately 100 homes in the Lookout Shoals Lake area were flooded during Hurricane Helene.

The Lookout Shoals Lake area was the most heavily impacted area in Catawba County, Catawba County Communications and Marketing Director Amy McCauley said.

Approximately 50 other homes across Catawba County have major structural damage due to the storm.

McCauley said the county received 2,152 emergency calls Sept. 26 and 27 as Helene came through the area.

One death in Catawba County was attributed to the storm. A 4-year-old was killed in a car crash on Sept. 26 during heavy rains prior to Hurricane Helene officially reaching Catawba County, McCauley said.

One road in Catawba County remains closed.

According to DriveNC.gov, a bridge along Finger Bridge Road sustained significant damage during the storm and will have to either be replaced or repaired before the road is reopened.

The rest area on Interstate 40 in Claremont was closed Monday due to lack of power and water, according to DriveNC.gov.

More than 27,000 were left without power in Catawba County during the storm, McCauley said. As of Monday, there were 15 customers without power in Catawba County, according to PowerOutage.us.

Burke County

One fatality in Burke County was reported after a driver hit a tree on Summers Road, according to Burke County Emergency Communications Assistant Director Chris White.

Burke County emergency crews also conducted 31 water rescues, responded to 37 structure collapses and conducted 322 welfare checks.

"None of those turned up to be missing people or anything like that," White said. "So to our knowledge, we don't have anybody missing."

White said areas along the Catawba River, Johns River, Linville River and Lake James and Lake Rhodhiss were most

heavily impacted by Helene.

White said the Catawba River spread 100 to 150 yards in some places from its banks.

The county received 4,722 emergency calls for service Thursday and Friday. An additional 315 calls were routed to Catawba County while emergency service lines were down in Burke County.

Thirty swift water rescues have been conducted in Burke County.

Last week, Burke County water systems reported power outages and boil water advisories. This week, White said no public water systems are under a boil water advisory. White said test kits for private wells have been ordered but not received yet.

Over 1,800 customers were without power Monday afternoon in Burke County, the majority of which receive service from Rutherford EMC.

Seven roads were closed on Monday in Burke County due to Helene damage, according to DriveNC.gov.

Alexander County Alexander County reported 13 homes with structural damage following Hurricane Helene, Alexander County Public Information Officer Gary Herman said on Monday.

One of the homes was a total loss. The most heavily impacted areas of Alexander County were in the western and northern sections, Herman said.

As of Monday, two roads remain closed in Alexander County. Black Oak Ridge Road is closed due to a damaged culvert. Friendly Church Road is closed due to downed trees and powerlines, Herman said.

Roughly 60% of Alexander County residents were without power at one point. Herman said 11,300 people was the peak number of residents without power due to the storm. As of 11:30 a.m. on Monday, only one person remained without power in the county, according to PowerOutage.us.

No deaths or injuries were reported relating to the storm. Alexander County 911 Communications dispatched 580 calls for assistance. The county received 190 emergency calls and 1,559 other calls throughout Sept. 26-27, Herman said.

Caldwell County

Caldwell County is still assessing damage to homes, according to Caldwell County Public Information Officer Paige Counts.

As of Monday morning, county inspectors had not visited some of the hardest hit areas in Wilson Creek, Mortimer, Edgemont, Globe and Collettsville.

Counts said the county received 3,539 calls for service from the time a state of emergency was declared on Wednesday at noon through Friday. More than 1,800 of those were 911 calls.

Counts said the county communications center typically answers 90 to 100 calls per day.

The donations center at 2145 Norwood St. in Lenoir is no longer accepting donations as of Monday afternoon, Counts said, because the center is full.

No fatalities have been reported in Caldwell County.

Over 600 customers were still without power in the county Monday afternoon, according to PowerOutage. us.

Six roads in Caldwell County are closed due to Hurricane Helene, according to DriveNC.gov

Brown Mountain Beach Road and Waterfalls Road are not expected to reopen until January 2025, according to DriveNC.gov

Iredell County

Two families were displaced in Iredell County due to Hurricane Helene, Iredell County Manager Beth Milton said.

A total of seven homes were damaged due to the storm. None of the homes were a total loss, Milton said.

Milton said the Central Fire region was the most impacted in the county due to flooded roads and bridges. The Central Fire region is southeast of Love Valley.

No deaths or injuries were reported. The Iredell County Emergency Communications Center received a total of 2,511 calls. That number includes non-emergency calls and routine transfers, Milton said.

Approximately 3,500 homes in Iredell County were left without power, Milton said. As of Monday, there were only six Iredell County customers without power, according to PowerOutage.us.

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Medicaid, food stamp adjustments for hurricane relief efforts

October 10, 2024 | McDowell News, The (Marion, NC) Author: RICHARD CRAVER Staff Reporter | Section: News | 670 Words OpenURL Link

The state Department of Health and Human Services has issued several logistical updates on serving western North Carolina residents with food and Medicaid/Medicare benefits as they attempt to recover from Hurricane Helene.

The state Medicaid program has been granted additional temporary changes to help with continued care during recovery efforts. The changes will remain in effect until the end of the Hurricane Public Health Emergency declaration for North Carolina.

The changes allow hospitals, including psychiatric hospitals, to treat patients who need emergency care at locations other than the hospital where needed. It allows hospitals to use additional spaces in their building to provide patient care.

For critical access hospitals, they can temporarily exceed their maximum of 25 beds, as well as keep patients for more than 96 hours and establish surge locations outside of rural areas. Inpatient rehabilitation facilities can serve people who need care as a result of the emergency.

Hospitals can allow new doctors to practice before the credentialing and privileging process is completed.

In addition, out-of-state practitioners who are licensed in another state can provide care as long as they are enrolled in Medicare, have a valid license and are not excluded from practice in North Carolina.

Hospitals in affected counties that participate in Medicare and are approved to provide post-hospital skilled nursing facility care can do so for patients who no longer need acute care. They can provide this care for patients who are unable to find placement in a skilled nursing facility.

Nursing homes can admit new residents who have not completed typical preadmission screenings and instead can complete those screenings postadmission so that people can get the care they need more quickly.

Long-term care acute hospitals do not need to follow the 25-day average length of stay requirement for patients who need longer stays due to the emergency. This will help people who may no longer have a safe place to transition to due to the emergency.

Intermediate care facilities for individuals with intellectual disabilities can use additional spaces like activity rooms as resident rooms.

To replace damaged medical equipment, prosthetics, orthotics and supplies more easily, people will not need a face-to-face appointment or a new physician's order. Lost or damaged drugs covered by Medicare Part B can be refilled.

Food stamp benefits

DHHS said that more than 200,000 residents in 23 counties that include Alleghany, Ashe, Watauga and Wilkes who are enrolled in the federal Food and Nutrition Services assistance program have access to replacement benefits on their Electronic Benefit Transfer cards.

The U.S. Agriculture Department has approved residents in the 23 counties to receive 70% of their total monthly September benefit back on their EBT card. The benefit replacement totals more than \$24 million.

The funds were transferred into their accounts Sunday.

Food and Nutrition Services provides low-income families the food they need for a nutritionally adequate diet. Benefits are issued via Electronic Benefit Transfer cards. More than 1.6 million North Carolinians benefit from the program, also known as food stamps.

Kody Kinsley, the state's health secretary, said the replacement benefits are crucial "in light of the fact that due to power outages and worse, many families have lost their food."

Other counties included are Alexander, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Cleveland, Gaston, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Lincoln, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Transylvania and Yancey counties.

The replacement benefits comes after DHHS gained USDA permission for FNS participants to use their benefits through Nov. 3 to purchase hot food, including food prepared for immediate consumption, from authorized EBT retailers using their EBT card.

WIC benefits

A third DHHS update involves working with USDA to receive federal authority to operate a Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. D-SNAP allows more people impacted by Hurricane Helene to qualify for food assistance benefits who are not already FNS recipients.

DHHS said the more than 250,000 N.C. participants in the federal Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children who can't live in their homes currently can go to any NC WIC agency to have a new eWIC card issued, or to request replacement of breastfeeding supplies, breast pumps and food purchased with current WIC benefits.

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Old Fort early voting precinct closed; Elections officials work to help voters impacted by storm

October 10, 2024 | McDowell News, The (Marion, NC) Author: Sharon McBrayer smcbrayer@morganton.com| Section: Elections | 674 Words OpenURL Link

With early voting for the November election starting next week and multiple counties in western North Carolina still reeling from the effects of Hurricane Helene, election officials are working to make sure people get to vote.

In Burke County, one Election Day precinct was damaged in the storm, while McDowell County will not hold early voting in Old Fort because the early voting site there is unsafe after damage from the storm.

On Monday, the North Carolina State Board of Elections approved a resolution to exercise emergency powers in 13 counties affected by the storm to conduct an election. McDowell County is one of the 13 counties. The other counties are Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Haywood, Henderson, Madison, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Transylvania, Watauga and Yancey.

The state elections board said infrastructure for elections administration and voters' accessibility to polling places and mail service in those counties remain severely disrupted as a result of the storm and will continue to be disrupted throughout the election.

The resolution gives those counties the ability to establish Election Day precincts in other counties, potentially in a neighboring county. Those counties can also establish more than one voting location in a precinct.

The resolution allows local boards of elections to make other changes for the general election, including reassigning poll workers to other locations, appointing emergency Election Day assistants and appointing registered voters of other counties to be election officials for early voting and Election Day voting sites.

The state board said the storm forced some voters to relocate to other parts of the state or outside the state, which will increase demand for absentee voting among voters who are not used to voting that way.

Voting absentee after Hurricane Helene

Kenny Rhyne, director of elections for Burke County, said voters living in those 13 counties who have been displaced by the storm can drop off absentee-by-mail ballots to any board of elections office in the state. That board of elections office will be responsible for time-stamping it and getting it to the voter's home board of elections before deadline on Election Day, he said.

Rhyne said he had someone come into his office from Buncombe County but is staying in Burke County who wanted to vote in Burke. Because the person hadn't lived in Burke County for 30 days, the person couldn't vote in Burke but Rhyne helped the voter request a mail-in-ballot from Buncombe. The deadline to request an absentee ballot is Oct. 29.

If someone, for instance, is from Caldwell County but is living in Burke because of the storm, and it hasn't been more than 30 days, they will need to vote at their regular precinct in their home county on Election Day. Or go to an early voting site in their home county, Rhyne said.

The same is true for someone who was living in Morganton but was displaced by the storm and is living at another address in the county. If it has been less than 30 days, the voter will need to return to their regular precinct to vote on Election Day, Rhyne said.

People can register to vote or update voter registration before the election until 5 p.m. on Friday. People also can register and vote during early voting.

People can register to vote online or in person at the DMV. People living in Burke County also can register at the Burke County Board of Elections, located at 2128 S. Sterling St., Morganton.

Those living in McDowell County can register at the McDowell County Board of Elections, located at 2458 N.C. Hwy. 226 S., Marion.

McDowell County Board of Elections has made the decision to eliminate the early voting site in Old Fort due to the damage suffered in the town, according to Deputy Director Jane Propst. Propst said the county emergency manager said it was not safe to vote at the Old Fort site, which was the Old Fort Depot.

Early voting will be held at the McDowell County Board of Elections office, located at located at 2458 N.C. Hwy. 226 S., Marion.

Early voting starts Thursday, Oct. 17, and ends Saturday, Nov. 2.

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Water restrictions relaxed

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The city of Marion said water levels in the city's water system improved significantly over the weekend.

"As a result, we are now able to ease some of the previously imposed water restrictions," the city said in a Facebook post Monday. "Residents may resume typical water use for daily needs; however, restrictions on unnecessary outdoor watering, and any other form of excessive water consumption remain in effect."

The city's water system was without power after the remnants of Hurricane Helene hit McDowell County on Sept. 27. The water intake lost power after the storm.

"While this marks an important step toward normalizing water usage, we still require some level of conservation to ensure that water levels continue to improve," the city said. "We remain optimistic that full water usage will be restored soon, but your continued cooperation is essential in helping us achieve that goal. Thank you for your ongoing eff orts and understanding."

In a Facebook comment, the city said customers can wash their vehicles now.

"Restrictions are currently set at no unnecessary outdoor watering such as irrigation of lawns via sprinklers or automatic irrigation systems," the city said in a release. "We are making progress, but if an influx of extreme water use occurs, then tighter restrictions may have to be re-implemented until all water intakes are back to operating at full capacity."

Rapid assessments

Workers with the McDowell County building inspections department and the North Carolina Office of State Fire Marshal were out Monday doing rapid damage assessments of businesses, McDowell County said in a release.

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Students returned to class Wednesday

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McDowell County Schools students returned to school on Wednesday.

Superintendent Tracy Grit made the announcement about classes resuming late Monday afternoon.

Classes will be on a two-hour delay all week, Grit said as the schools work toward a regular schedule following Hurricane Helene which ripped up roads, damaged homes and left almost all of the county all of the county without power.

He added that Old Fort Elementary Students will return to school in a new location in a staggered entry beginning Monday.

"Limited bus routes will be different for each of our schools, based on the road conditions throughout our community. Please know that each of the roads in the district has been checked and verified with local officials to ensure which roads our buses can travel. In areas that had significant roadway damage, we will provide community stops," Grit said.

On Tuesday, principals of each school conducted call-outs to ensure that parents are familiar with the bus routes and community stops, Grit said.

"Parents, please know that safety is our primary concern for the return of our students, please do not take any unnecessary risks in getting a child to school. McDowell County Schools is committed to working with those families affected by roadway washouts and other hardships during this time of need. Should you have a situation that requires additional services, please reach out to the principal of your child's school," the superintendent said.

Grit also took time to praise emergency workers who have worked to make a return to school possible.

"We are forever grateful for the service and dedication to get our students back in school," he said.

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Marion mayor: Kindness, compassion, cooperation getting McDowell County back on its feet

October 10, 2024 | McDowell News, The (Marion, NC) Author: Marion Mayor Steve Little| Section: Government Politics| 422 Words OpenURL Link

Thank you to all who have shown kindness and compassion to your neighbors during the past 12 days.

Hundreds of people from Marion, all parts of McDowell County, many other cities and counties from eastern and piedmont North Carolina, and from other states have volunteered in many places and in many ways.

Our overall condition in Marion and in McDowell County is much better, much sooner, than we expected a week ago. A lot of this is due to the tireless work of all the volunteers.

You may see EMS ambulances and firetrucks with the names of dozens of different cities or counties. If you see a volunteer with a different city or county logo on their shirt or jacket, or a member of the National Guard, please thank them for coming to help us.

A team of 60 people from FEMA is already here and has been here for almost a week. (FEMA provides financial, equipment and people support. FEMA is not "taking over" and they are not taking ownership of any land or any other property of any kind. They are providing us with needed help.)

Teams of specialized search and rescue personnel from many states are here. People from many churches have provided food, distributed supplies and offered prayers and other help. Chainsaw teams still are hard at work. The left-behind debris will be picked up throughout McDowell County as a result of a contract between McDowell County and the state.

Each day brings more progress but it will still take a very long time to do the remaining work. As of Wednesday morning, there are still 2,519 Duke Energy customers in McDowell County with no electricity. On Sunday, Sept. 29, there were 18,263 Duke customers with no power. The areas with the most damage to the power lines and systems are N.C. Highway 80, Old Fort and Little Switzerland. There still are places in Marion with no power.

There has been unflinching cooperation between and among leadership and employees of Marion, Old Fort, McDowell County, our public schools, McDowell Tech, Mission McDowell Hospital, the sheriff's office, police departments and many churches. The McDowell County EMS, led by William Kehler, are strong, skilled, talented public servants. Each agency is working tirelessly with each other to help all the people, businesses and industries of our county. It is the cooperation of all these groups that has produced the great progress of improvement we have seen.

Thank you for your continued patience and compassion for each other and especially for those who suffered huge losses from Hurricane Helene.

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FEMA workers going door-to-door in NC hurricane-damaged spots

October 10, 2024 | McDowell News, The (Marion, NC) Author: Billy Chapman wchapman@hickoryrecord.com| Section: Government Politics| 1256 Words OpenURL Link

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) teams are providing resources to western North Carolina.

FEMA teams are going door-to-door to make sure people and structures are safe and to sign people up for federal assistance after the remnants of Hurricane Helene devastated the area.

FEMA Media Relations Specialist Nate Custer said the teams are marked with official FEMA identification badges and carrying tablets to sign people up on the spot.

FEMA spokesperson Jann Tracey added that agents are accompanied by local officials.

Custer said the agency is currently in response mode. During this stage, the agency is conducting search-and-rescue operations, getting utilities up and running and getting roads passable.

Custer is assigned to provide information for Catawba, Burke, McDowell and other western North Carolina counties.

Tracey is providing information about Alexander, Caldwell and northwestern North Carolina counties.

"We work closely with faith-based organizations, community partners," Custer said. "FEMA administers and is in charge of the various federal agencies, but we're only part of the equation. We don't come in and, so to speak, run the show. We're invited in and requested in by the governor.

"We work closely with state emergency management and local emergency management. We have an element that works with voluntary organizations. Often there are partnerships and task forces created to solve some of these long-range housing problems.

"There's going to be an awful volume of these this time around," Custer said.

What is FEMA doing in western North Carolina?

Tracey said FEMA comes in when local and state officials need assistance.

If a need cannot be met by local and state officials, FEMA jumps in to meet the need, using resources from all over the country.

"FEMA and the state work hand in glove," Tracey said. "Even before a disaster hits, we're trying to anticipate needs and get resources where they are needed."

Custer said FEMA is in all of the 27 federally declared disaster counties and in lands of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians in North Carolina in some capacity.

Custer said the teams going door-to-door are essential for making people aware of resources available to them.

"In a typical disaster, communications are an issue, and it's worse in this one," Custer said. "Usually there are some cell phone outages, but nothing like this in how we're (having difficulty) getting the word out to people."

Custer continued, "A lot of people are in a state of shock. They don't know what's going to happen the next day.

They might not be aware they need to register with FEMA. If they register with their local emergency management or Red Cross, that does not get them into the FEMA system."

A release from Oct. 6 from the White House said there are more than 1,000 FEMA staff in North Carolina with more arriving daily. The release said there are 1,500 military personnel in the state assisting with disaster response.

Over 1,200 search and rescue personnel are in the area. Teams have rescued more than 3,200 people as of Oct. 6.

Tracey said FEMA has contributed over 5 million liters of water and 7 million meals since the disaster began.

"When people don't see someone in a FEMA shirt distributing, that doesn't mean it wasn't contributed by FEMA," Tracey said.

How can people apply for assistance?

Custer said people can apply for assistance by calling 800-621-3362. Those able to access the internet can also apply for assistance by going to disasterassistance.gov.

FEMA also has an app that can be downloaded and used to apply for assistance.

Custer said FEMA will soon open disaster recovery centers.

Tracey said recovery centers would likely be in every county included in the federal disaster declaration.

Custer said individuals do not have to live in a county where a disaster center is located to use a center.

Staff members at disaster recovery centers will be able to help people who have previously applied for assistance and sign people up for aid.

One disaster center is currently open in North Carolina. The center is located at A.C. Reynolds High School in Asheville.

FEMA's website said the deadline to apply for assistance in North Carolina is Nov. 27.

What do you need to apply for assistance?

Proof of ownership of a residence

A list of people permanently living at a location

Social Security number

Estimated annual income

Insurance information, if available

Custer said it takes about 10 minutes to provide this information over the phone.

More information is coming for people who have lost a driver's license and other documents, Custer said.

"That happens in virtually all these situations. Key documents get swept away," Custer said. "There's avenues people can use to recover documents."

Who can apply for FEMA assistance?

U.S. citizens, non-citizen nationals and qualified non-citizens are eligible to receive assistance according to FEMA's website.

Applicants will also need to provide a Social Security number to prove their identity.

What happens after applying for assistance?

Custer said the time to process an application varies.

"We have already approved more than \$37 million in housing and other types of assistance for over 28,000 North Carolina households," Custer said on Oct. 8.

On Oct. 9, FEMA's website said nearly \$60 million in housing and other assistance had been approved for almost 52,000 North Carolinians.

After applying for FEMA assistance, applicants will receive a letter explaining what type of grant they have been awarded or advising them their application is incomplete and more information is needed.

If someone is not satisfied with the grant they received, an appeals process exists. Custer said specialists at disaster recovery centers can assist applicants with the appeals process.

FEMA's website also says appeals can be made online through accounts registered with disasterassistance.gov.

Custer said FEMA may call applicants from any number, so if someone has applied for assistance they need to answer their phone even if it is from an unknown number.

Does FEMA help with unemployment?

Custer said those out of work due to the disaster may apply for disaster unemployment.

"There is disaster unemployment," Custer said. "It is mostly funded by FEMA. but it is run by the state unemployment office."

What does FEMA pay for?

Custer said the \$750 many applicants have received is for food, medicine, diapers and other essential needs.

FEMA can also pay for emergency home repair if a home is repairable.

FEMA also pays for temporary housing.

We've got about 1,400 people in 125 hotels in North Carolina, Custer said.

FEMA may also assist with providing funds for equipment used for work or school, such as tools or computers, on a case-by-case basis.

Does FEMA assistance have to be paid back?

Custer said FEMA assistance does not have to be paid back because they are grants.

Custer said FEMA aids individuals. The Small Business Administration (SBA) provides loans to businesses, homeowners and renters to deal with home and personal property losses.

People can apply for FEMA grants and SBA loans.

Are conspiracy theories hurting FEMA?

"There's things out there like FEMA is confiscating items or supplies, there's no truth at all to that," Custer said, referring to a rumor that FEMA is taking donated items and not disbursing them to affected communities. "We always say, particularly for people outside the affected area, a cash contribution is the most effective way (to help)."

Custer said people should give to the Red Cross or other established organizations.

Custer also said well-intentioned deeds may not be helpful.

"People get a pick-up, get a few neighbors, get a few supplies in a truck and head on down to western North Carolina," Custer said. "That's difficult with the roads, they're not sure where to go, there's a problem in not knowing exactly where to drop those (donations off)."

Can people apply to work for FEMA?

Custer said people can apply, but FEMA is not at the point where they have requested additional aid workers.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Billy Chapman wchapman@hickoryrecord.com, 'FEMA workers going door-to-door in NC hurricane-damaged spots', *McDowell News, The* (online), 10 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?
p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C1F4A3477D1188>



On a mission to feed the masses, Eight Days of Hope rolls into Canton

October 10, 2024 | Mountaineer, The (Waynesville, NC) Author: Becky Johnson| Section: Hurricane Helene | 479 Words OpenURL Link

Hopping from one disaster to the next, Darren Bellanger can't always keep track of the storms. Fresh off Francine, he found himself in Canton — where a hurricane had made its way to the mountains.

"What was the name of this one again? Oh, that's right, Helene," he said.

When it comes to the menu, however, Bellanger knows his stuffing.

"Today we are making a chicken stuffing casserole and green beans on the side," Bellanger said. "Gravy's made, stuffing is mixed, we just add the chicken."

He opened an upright oven, slid a metal serving pan out and peeled back the aluminum pan. It looked delicious, but that's to be expected from mostly Southern volunteers, hailing from Mississippi, Louisiana and Georgia.

"We do comfort food," volunteer Eva Go chimed in.

They also do plain old comfort.

"The first two things you need in a disaster are food and water. When people have lost everything and they have nothing left, that's why we are here," Bellanger said. "We want to share the love of Jesus. We just want to love on people and feed them."

Eight Days of Hope can roll into any disaster site, unfold their industrial-caliber kitchen on wheels and start whipping up hot meals. Once the trays are done in the oven, they're transferred to hot boxes — the opposite of coolers — then taken out on location.

"They can't get to us, so we're bringing the food to them," Bellanger said.

He waltzed down the galley and skimmed a wire basket into a steaming vat.

"This is about 200 servings of green beans right here," he said.

Eight Days of Hope responds to disasters across the country with mass feeding operations. Since last week, they've been in Canton, using the IP Sports Complex as an operations base. They've had free showers along with meals — which are served on site but also taken on location.

The team's presence in Haywood was coordinated through the county's emergency management team and works with local churches.

N.C. Gov. Roy Cooper encountered the ministry during a swing through Haywood County last Friday. The volunteers implored him to try their chicken stuffing, but he declined, much to their chagrin. It looked scrumptious, he admitted. But there was a gaggle of media following the governor, and the optics of taking food from flood victims wouldn't have been good.

Cooper did share a prayer with servers, however.

"Please, allow me," Cooper said when Go asked to pray with him.

"No doubt about it God has put you in the right spot right here," Cooper told the volunteers.

Go then offered a prayer of her own.

"Father, may the goodness of people and your awesomeness continue to raise up this community in a mighty way and restore them by your hand," Go said.

Pastor Farron Duncan and the congregation of Plains Methodist Church in Canton have helped provide volunteers for the effort.

Hot meals are served on site from noon to 5 p.m. daily.

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Listening Circles offer emotional help amid Helene aftermath

October 10, 2024 | Mountaineer, The (Waynesville, NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: Briefs | 132 Words OpenURL Link

Big events can hit us hard and affect us in many ways. Join a listening circle through zoom from noon to 1 p.m. every day through October 18 to discuss the emotions Hurricane Helene caused and how to cope.

Listening circles help name what is most difficult and practice tools that can help with the stress, right now.

If you are feeling overwhelmed, anxious, or upset; if you saw or responded to something hard; or if you are looking to connect with others in the community; join the online community to lean on one another and highlight what is getting us through this difficult time.

This meeting is free for anyone affected by Hurricane Helene. No sign up needed.

The zoom link is bit.ly/WNCListens. The meeting ID is 847 0135 3002. Or call (646) 876-9923.

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Local swimmers hit the pool again

October 10, 2024 | Mountaineer, The (Waynesville, NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: Sports | 414 Words OpenURL Link

Smoky Mountain Aquatic Club's short course season is back on track after Hurricane Helene paused training. Helene devastated many areas along Richland Creek, but fortunately, the storm spared the Waynesville Recreation Center. The facility reopened with limited hours on the Monday after the storm.

"The town staff have been incredible throughout the aftermath of the hurricane" said John Ammons, chair of SMAC's non-profit board. "We know all the town employees had their own personal challenges to face after the storm and we are so thankful they were able to open so our athletes and others could maintain some normality during a tough week."

It is important for competitive swimmers to maintain a consistent practice schedule. This is particularly true in October, when short course season is ramping up. Missing a week or more of practice can derail a swimmer's progress for months and even increase their risk of injury when they return. That's why it was so important for the swimmers to have a little time in the pool, even if the practices weren't quite as demanding as they usually are.

"There was definitely a little more Marco Polo and Sharks and Minnows than a normal practice," said Head Coach Dan McGuire. "We had all ages in the pool during our limited hours so we couldn't have practices tailored to specific training groups. Still, it was great for the younger and older swimmers to spend some time together in the water and build some bonds and forget about Helene for a little while."

The Waynesville Recreation Center expanded its hours of operation this week, now opening at 8am and closing at 8pm on weekdays.

"We're just thankful we can continue to serve our members during this difficult time" said Luke Kinsland, Waynesville's Parks and Recreation Director. "The department has a lot of challenges ahead with many of our facilities after the flooding, but thankfully the Rec. Center is not one of them."

This season, SMAC will host two local meets at the Waynesville Recreation Center and attend away meets in Asheville, Greensboro, Greenville, Kingsport and, for qualifying swimmers, national level championship meets at locations to be determined. In addition to the two sanctioned USA Swimming meets at home, SMAC has multiple intrasquad meets scheduled this fall and winter at the Rec. Center.

Registration remains open to swimmers age five and older. Space is limited, so if practice groups fill, the team will offer a wait list.

For more information or to register, visit www.gomotionapp.com/team/smacnc/page/home. Specific questions may be emailed to smacwnc@gmail.com.

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Staff Writer, 'Local swimmers hit the pool again', *Mountaineer, The* (online), 10 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C20791ECC27B18



Welcome to 'hurricane alley': Building back must look different this time

October 10, 2024 | Mountaineer, The (Waynesville, NC) Author: Becky Johnson | Section: News | 348 Words OpenURL Link

A stark realization has sunk in after the fourth flood in two decades swept along the Pigeon River in Haywood County: building back must be different this time.

"We were told it was a once in a lifetime storm in '21, but here we are. It seems Western North Carolina sadly is in hurricane alley," Canton Mayor Zeb Smathers said during a joint press conference with Gov. Roy Cooper on Friday. "So our mentality now has to change."

Cooper pledged that state resources would pour into the affected regions of Western North Carolina — not just in the immediate aftermath, but for the long haul.

"We've never seen the devastation that's occurred all across Western North Carolina. It's unprecedented, but we are working together to provide an unprecedented response," Cooper said.

But like Smathers, Cooper said the recovery can't be limited to mucking out and returning to life as normal. After the back-to-back floods of 2004, Haywood County was hit again in 2021. And now again in 2024.

"Three years later, we have seen another vicious storm, so we can expect them in the future. We must plan and rebuild in a more resilient way, understanding that nature can do that to us again," Cooper said.

Simply rebuilding won't be enough this time, he said.

"As we rebuild our roads and bridges and our homes and our public buildings, we have to make sure they are more resilient," Cooper said. "That is going to be challenging, that is going to cost more up front. But Western North Carolina is worth that investment."

Building resiliency into both the electric and cell phone grids, which were sidelined during Hurricane Helene, must also be a priority, he said.

It's a message Smathers has been preaching since the day Helene ravaged his town. As he walked the streets of Canton the Friday evening following the storm — surveying the aftermath and offering words of hope to others wandering among the destruction — Smathers was already thinking about the future.

"The game has changed. We have to rethink everything, every part of any type of vision. All bets are off," Smathers said.

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Curfew hours reduced in time for Friday Night Lights

October 10, 2024 | Mountaineer, The (Waynesville, NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: News | 124 Words OpenURL Link

The curfew in Haywood County will be modified starting Friday — just in time for the return of Friday night football after two weeks of canceled games due to Helene.

On Monday, it was announced that Tuscola and Pisgah would both hold home football games on Friday. Pisgah will play on the Bethel Middle field due to flood damage to Pisgah Memorial stadium.

There was just one problem: a curfew has been in effect from 9 p.m. until 7 a.m. since the storm. Starting Friday, the curfew will be modified to 1 a.m. until 6 a.m.

With power restored across Haywood County, communications functioning again and emergency responders no longer taxed with search-and-rescue efforts, the county would likely have been ready to reconsider the curfew anyway.

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New date set for County Clash football game

October 10, 2024 | Mountaineer, The (Waynesville, NC) Author: Aarik Long | Section: Sports | 281 Words OpenURL Link

The annual County Clash football game between Tuscola and Pisgah high schools has a new date — Friday, Nov. 8. The game was originally scheduled for Friday, Oct. 18.

Pisgah announced on Thursday that the game will be moved to the final week of the season. The game will be played at Pisgah Memorial if the stadium is ready. If it is not, the game will be played at Western Carolina University's E.J. Whitmire Stadium.

That game, which typically draws more than 10,000 fans, is supposed to be hosted by Pisgah this season based on the annual rotation. Flooding after Helene brought significant damage to Pisgah Memorial Stadium.

"We are diligently working to make all necessary repairs and considering an alternative date," said Haywood County Schools Superintendent Dr. Trevor Putnam. "We are considering all options."

Typically, preparations for the game begin weeks in advance. Tickets go on sale in-person the Monday before the game, but are typically available online before that. This year, ticket sales have not yet begun.

On top of that, food for the concession stand must be purchased and schools have to figure out which staff are working the game. If the game had stayed on the Oct. 18 date, getting everything together would have been a logistical challenge.

In 2021, Pisgah was put in a similar situation following Tropical Storm Fred. The repairs needed at Pisgah Memorial Stadium after that storm kept the Bears off their home field for the entire 2021 and 2022 season.

Pisgah last hosted the rivalry game in the spring of 2021, but that game was with limited capacity due to the Covid pandemic. The last full capacity County Clash played at Pisgah Memorial Stadium was played in 2018.

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November date set for County Clash football game

October 10, 2024 | Mountaineer, The (Waynesville, NC) Author: Aarik Long | Section: Sports | 256 Words OpenURL Link

The annual County Clash football game between Tuscola and Pisgah high schools has a new date — Friday, Nov. 8. The game was originally scheduled for this coming Friday.

Pisgah announced on Thursday that the game will be moved to the final week of the season. The game will be played at Pisgah Memorial if the stadium is ready. If it is not, the game will be played at Western Carolina University's E.J. Whitmire Stadium.

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Maggie Valley motel owner rescues two guests

October 10, 2024 | Mountaineer, The (Waynesville, NC) Author: Paul Nielsen| Section: News| 675 Words OpenURL Link

A local motel owner donned his hero cap Friday morning as flood waters inundated the Meadowlark Motel on Thursday evening.

Motel owner Joseph McElroy helped evacuate two women from a 14-room section of the motel at 2878 Soco Road as a 3-foot wall of water swept into the rooms.

Around 9 a.m. Friday morning, McElroy said he carried one elderly woman while escorting another woman out of danger through rushing water.

"That was my hero moment of my lifetime," McElroy joked.

Ironically, the flood waters did not come from the extensive flooding on Jonathan Creek. Instead, McElroy's hotel was hit by a flood of water thanks to a clogged culvert running under Soco Road that normally funnels stormwater from a smaller stream.

"It came through there like a flash flood," McElroy said. "It overwhelmed us. Because they were blocked, all that water across (Soco Road) created a 3 to 4-foot surge that flooded all of those rooms."

McElroy said he urged the two women at around 7 a.m. to relocate to the adjacent main building, saying that the units could flood, but they did not heed his warnings.

"For some reason they wouldn't get out of there," McElroy said. "I came knocking on the door and I said, 'It's starting to flood. You can come up here and have breakfast.' She moved the car and then she went back. I think they thought they could hole up and nothing would happen."

Two hours later as the water continued to rise, McElroy "waded down" to the room to rescue the two women. He said when he entered there was already standing water in the room.

"The old woman had oxygen, and I had to literally carry her," McElroy said. "Then the other woman was not-toosteady on her feet, and she falls down and I had to pull her out of the water. It was three-feet of rushing water. She could have died."

The force of the flood waters coming off Soco Road was so strong that it broke open the doors to several of the units in that section.

The back of the Meadowlark was flooded as lawn furniture was swept away but McElroy said the water came close to the rear of the 14-room section that was flooded, which lies about 50 yards from Jonathan Creek. Water came within an inch of the restaurant and bar in the rear of the main building but never entered.

"It never got up to the 100-year flood plain, which is at the edge of this building," McElroy said. "It did take away our dumpsters and a lot of our furniture."

Flood waters from Jonathan Creek impacted several businesses that sit on its banks. The restaurant and bar at the Smokey Falls Lodge was flooded, and the nearby Five Star Inn on Soco Road also sustained damage.

McElroy said the force of the flood waters on J-Creek have permanently rerouted the creek behind the Meadowlark.

Several large trees on both banks of the creek were washed away.

"It's probably over 10 to 15 feet," McElroy said while pointing to the opposite side of J-Creek across from the motel. "We now have new land."

Motel staff have already restored five of the 14 units and McElroy expects to have the remaining units available for guests in two weeks. The water, however, did damage the furniture in some of the rooms, which will have to be replaced.

"There was mud in all the rooms," McElroy said. "We have to clean out the mud, and we have to replace some of the doors."

McElroy is hopeful that Maggie Valley will recover enough to again welcome guests for the peak of leaf season later this month.

"We were fully booked for this weekend, and that was a good chunk of change," McElroy said. "I think they will start coming back next weekend."

Soco Road at the east end of the business district was closed for part of the Friday that Helene swept through thanks to flood water from J-Creek and the surrounding ridges. Later that afternoon officials were able to reroute traffic on to Moody Farm Road and back to Soco Road.

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NC lawmakers to pass \$273M Helene relief bill

October 10, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC)

Author: Dawn Baumgartner Vaughan and Kyle Ingram; Staff Writer | Section: News | 1289 Words

Page: 1A OpenURL Link

RALEIGH North Carolina's lawmakers are ready to rush the first round of Hurricane Helene relief to the western part of the state devastated by flooding caused by the storm.

The General Assembly is expected to pass a \$273 million bill that leaders describe as a "first step."

Back in Raleigh for a one-day session Wednesday, Republicans, who control the legislature, released the bill Wednesday about an hour before it was expected to pass both the House and Senate quickly and be sent to the desk of Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper. The bill, called the Disaster Recovery Act, replaces the previous version of House Bill 149, and only requires a yes or no vote, without any amendments.

Senate leader Phil Berger said in a news conference that the bulk of the money will go to state agencies for spending flexibility, rather than specific earmarks to districts. Berger and House Speaker Tim Moore announced there will be another legislative session on Oct. 24 to pass another round of funding.

"This is not all of it, not by a long shot," Berger said about the state money. He said the federal government will be providing most of the relief.

Lawmakers will work to figure out what FEMA is paying for, and what it's not, when they come back for the additional session later in the month, said Sen. Kevin Corbin, a Republican whose district spans seven Western North Carolina counties.

Corbin was among several Republican lawmakers who spoke at the news conference about the damage and response in their districts.

"We're in a long-term recovery," said Sen. Ralph Hise, a Spruce Pine Republican, who represents a devastated area. Hise said "there's a lot of distrust in the areas I have."

Sen. Tim Moffitt, who represents Henderson, Polk and Rutherford counties, said the bill is "a first chapter of a very long book to rebuilding the mountains."

Asked about Democrats' involvement in the bill, Berger and Moore said they had met with the Cooper administration, Senate Democratic Leader Dan Blue and House Democratic Leader Robert Reives.

New Helene Fund

The bill creates a new Hurricane Helene Fund with \$273 million from the state's saving reserve fund.

* \$250 million will go to the Department of Public Safety, Division of Emergency Management, to provide the state's match to federal disaster relief funds.

The bill says "a portion" of the money will be used to establish a revolving loan program to help local government and state agencies with cash flow while they are waiting for reimbursement from the federal government.

Moore said they expect the federal government to pay 90% to the state's 10% in storm relief, and "don't want to supplant those federal dollars with state dollars if we're not required to. And then there's language in the bill, too,

that points out that we want to be careful on how the money is spent, that we don't forfeit the ability to get those federal dollars."

Help on schools, infrastructure, IDs

Here's what else the bill does:

- * \$16 million to the Department of Public Instruction for "lost compensation of school nutrition employees due to school closures resulting from Hurricane Helene."
- * Grants school calendar flexibility to public schools by allowing them to make up or mark as completed any number of the days or hours missed. It also allows the schools to use up to 30 remote instruction days towards required instructional days.

However, the bill did not grant other funding requests from the education agency.

- * Provides flexibility for infrastructure projects. Berger said the flexibility should not "impair the health, the safety, the required building requirements" but "a lot of it has to do with procurement and the way that you decide how to deploy the dollars to someone so something could get built."
- * Allows the governor to waive fees assessed by the Division of Motor Vehicles for things such as obtaining a duplicate driver's license, obtaining an identification card and more.
- * Provides \$2 million for grants to the North Carolina League of Municipalities, the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners and the North Carolina Association of Regional Councils of Governments "to provide technical assistance with local recovery funds. In providing this assistance, these entities shall prioritize grants to counties with a population of less than 250,000." The Office of State Budget and Management will run the program.

What the bill does about Election Day

The bill also includes \$5 million for the State Board of Elections, plus a variety of temporary election law changes to make it easier for residents of Western North Carolina to vote.

"The hurricane has dealt a serious blow to what may very well be the ability to conduct elections in the disasterrelated counties," Berger said.

The bill would allow the western counties hit by Helene to change polling sites that were rendered unusable by the storm, give counties more flexibility in how they hire election workers and give affected voters more options to get absentee ballots in.

Most of the bill's election measures codify changes already approved by the State Board of Elections on Monday. However, while the board's resolution only applied to the 13 counties hit hardest by the storm, the bill includes all 25 western counties in the federally declared disaster area.

Any changes to early voting or Election Day polling sites would require a bipartisan majority vote of the county board of elections.

The state's election appropriation is nearly \$3 million more than what the state board requested.

Moore said that, in addition to helping the state carry out the election, the money will also go to county governments attempting to hire election workers and secure new polling sites.

"You have poll sites that literally no longer exist," Moore said. "... A fire department or church or community building - that building is no longer there."

The money would also be used to conduct outreach efforts to voters in western counties and establish a voter hotline.

The bill does not change the deadline for counties to receive absentee ballots, which is 7:30 p.m. on Election Day. However, it will allow voters from the affected counties to turn in their absentee ballot in any county in the state.

What Gov. Cooper requested for Helene relief

The Office of State Budget and Management, which is part of Cooper's administration, sent its proposal on Monday to Berger, Moore and others.

Cooper requested the \$250 million that the bill provides for the Helene Fund.

The proposal, sent in a letter from Budget Director Kristin Walker, also says that the state has "already obligated tens of millions of dollars in the first week of response," and while "much of that will be reimbursed by FEMA," the state needs to be able to move money quickly and "without red tape or unnecessary delay."

The budget proposal to legislative leaders also included:

- * Up to \$100 million to the Department of Transportation from the State Emergency Response and Disaster Relief Fund to deal with more than 600 roads closed and "catastrophic" damage to transportation networks.
- * A request to amend the Emergency Management Act to "facilitate necessary executive response to emergencies so that a state of emergency can extend as long as necessary to respond to the emergency without enactment of a general law by the General Assembly."

In response to Cooper's emergency management request, the bill extends the statewide declaration that Cooper already issued until March 1. That order had concurrence from the rest of the Council of State, which is made up of 10 statewide elected officials. State law changed to limit the duration of states of emergency after Cooper issued a continuing series of orders during the coronavirus pandemic.

Reporter Luciana Perez Uribe Guinassi contributed.

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Speaker Johnson please don't play politics with Helene aid

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Speaker of the U.S. House Mike Johnson's time would be better spent reconvening Congress to consider more disaster aid than surveying Hurricane Helene damage in western North Carolina this week. The speaker should not wait until after the election, as he reportedly plans to do.

That's a mistake. A huge mistake.

Americans suffering from billions of dollars in damage don't need another politician smiling in their faces. This is not a slight against politicians who show up in the aftermath of natural disasters. Such visits can be reassuring and put a spotlight on vulnerable areas that need the attention. Democrats President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris, Republican former President Donald Trump, and a bevy of other officials have made such trips the past two weeks.

Johnson's trip would be in line with those, which serve the dual purpose of politicking and serving constituents in need. That's not the problem. The problem is unnecessarily waiting to recall the nation's leaders to begin legislation that will fund the next stages of recovery. The urgency has increased as yet another historically-strong storm lurks in the Gulf of Mexico and is forecast to hit Florida - a state also reeling from Helene - sometime this week. Hurricane Milton, which has become one of the strongest hurricanes ever, had scarily-fast 160 miles per hour sustained winds at the time of this writing.

The damage from Helene and Milton will be several billion dollars. Johnson reportedly said Congress can wait until after the election because we don't yet know the price tag. But we don't have to know a precise number to understand the need. Every day of delay could lead to more hardship.

The Biden-Harris administration has warned Johnson the Small Business Administration's disaster relief program may run out of money before Congress returns from recess, which could mean forgoing "longer-term recovery activities in favor of meeting urgent needs."

House Republicans turned down requests from the administration for disaster relief funding after the Maui fires, the collapsed Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore and tornadoes that hit multiple states. I don't know why. I'll assume Johnson and other Republicans had good reason to deny that funding. I don't want to believe they would play partisan politics with such important decisions.

I'm going to assume Sen. Thom Tillis didn't attack Harris on X, formerly Twitter, just to get in a political jab instead of remaining focused on what's best for Tar Heels who remain in harm's way. I'll assume Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis has decided not to return Harris's phone calls for reasons that aren't political. I'm going to believe it has nothing to do with what happened to Gov. Chris Christie in 2012 when he warmly greeted President Barack Obama after Superstorm Sandy hit New Jersey a week before the 2012 election. His once-promising career as a Republican was effectively ended because of an imaginary "hug" with a Democrat.

In a moment like this, I'm trying to refuse to think the worst of people, including everyday Americans who have spread so much misinformation that it has affected relief efforts, and elected officials who have short- and long-term incentives to politicize a natural disaster that has killed more than 230 people and left an unknown amount of damage in its wake, which could worsen in coming days if Hurricane Milton makes landfall.

I have to refuse to think of the worst of people. To believe otherwise is to think a nation that holds itself as great is

so broken, its social fabric so tattered and strained at the seams, it may never be able to repair itself.

We can't be so far gone that though we are staring in the face death and destruction on a Biblical scale we remain locked in partisan corners even as our brothers and sisters suffer and need our help.

That's why I won't assume Johnson is refusing to reconvene Congress early because he doesn't want to give the Biden-Harris administration a political "win" before the election.

That simply can't be. It must not be.

Issac Bailey is a McClatchy Opinion writer in North and South Carolina.

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NCHSAA extends football season after Hurricane Helene

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Author: Langston Wertz Jr.; Staff Writer | Section: Sports | 540 Words

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The N.C. high school football season will extend a week after Hurricane Helene caused severe damages to many schools in the western part of the state.

The N.C. High School Athletic Association announced the change Wednesday, which was approved by its board of directors. The playoffs will begin on Nov. 15 and end with state championships on Dec. 20-21.

Originally, the playoffs were set to start on Nov. 8 and conclude on Dec. 13-14.

In addition, the NCHSAA board approved pushing most playoffs for fall sports back and approved one additional contest for all sports with a season limit. But that additional game - which could be added to avoid an open week at the end of the regular-season - must be approved by the NCHSAA.

That additional game cannot exceed daily or weekly game limit rules. It must also exceed the season limit for both participating schools. Lastly, that additional game cannot be entered into MaxPreps and will not count towards postseason qualifying.

The NCHSAA also said that, effective immediately, a minimum of 72 hours must occur between football games, a move that could allow schools to make up some missed contests.

"Changes to the fall calendar are difficult as well as complex but necessary," said NCHSAA President Dr. Stephen Gainey and NCHSAA Commissioner Que Tucker in a joint statement. "Keeping our student-athletes safe as we try to minimize risk of injury was central to any decisions made. We commend the work of the NCHSAA staff in its research, the Board of Directors in making time to consider these changes and the willingness of our host partners to accommodate any changes and make their venues available."

Other changes announced:

- * The reporting deadline for boys' soccer was pushed back a week to 11:59 p.m. on Nov. 6. The first round will be Nov. 7, followed by rounds on Nov. 9, Nov. 12, Nov. 14 and Nov. 16. The regionals will now be played Nov. 19 with state finals on Nov. 22-23.
- * For girls' golf, the minimum number of 9-hole scores require to qualify for regionals was revised from five to three.
- * The girls' tennis regionals reporting deadline was extended to 11:59 p.m. on Oct. 14. Originally, that deadline was 3 p.m. Regional play is scheduled for Oct. 18-19. State finals are scheduled for Oct. 25-26.
- * The dual team tennis reporting deadline was moved from Oct. 10 to Oct. 17. The first round will begin Oct. 18 with state finals now on Nov. 9.
- * The volleyball reporting deadline was moved back to 11:59 p.m. on Oct. 19, instead of Oct. 16. The first round will now begin Oct. 22, instead of the original Oct. 19 date.

The remaining rounds will play on a more condensed schedule: Oct. 24, second round; Oct. 26, third round; Oct. 29, fourth round; Oct. 31, regional round.

The state finals will be held Nov. 2 as originally scheduled.

* Cross-country reporting deadline for regional qualifying was moved back to 11:59 p.m. on Oct. 22. It was originally scheduled for Oct. 19. The regionals will be held Oct. 26 with state finals Nov. 2.

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