

## HURRICANE HELENE ONE OF THE DEADLIEST IN US HISTORY

October 6, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC) Author: JEFF ROBERSON, Associated Press | Section: B | 105 Words Page: 3 OpenURL Link

Falling trees and raging floods from Hurricane Helene killed at least 200 people after it made landfall late last week as a Category 4 storm in the Big Bend area of Florida's Gulf Coast. Helene then plowed through the Southeast as one of the deadliest storms in U.S. history. People died in six states: Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia. The powerful storm left a wide path of destruction, including downed trees and power lines, massive flooding and water outages. Above, Anne Schneider, right, hugs her friend Eddy Sampson as they survey the damage left in Helene's wake Tuesday in Marshall, N.C.

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#### • Citation (aglc Style)

JEFF ROBERSON, Associated Press, 'HURRICANE HELENE ONE OF THE DEADLIEST IN US HISTORY', *Winston-Salem Journal* (online), 6 Oct 2024 3 <a href="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C0974EB8424C48">https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C0974EB8424C48</a>



# Ask SAM: How small businesses affected by the disaster can get help from the SBA - Ask SAM: How small businesses affected by the disaster can get help from the SBA

October 6, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC) Section: A| 516 Words Page: 2 OpenURL Link

Q: A friend's family was severely impacted by Hurricane Helene. Thankfully they are safe, and their home was spared. However, their family business lost equipment, supplies and buildings due to the flooding. They didn't have flood insurance, living in the mountains, sounds like you wouldn't need it. What kind of help is available to folks in this situation? Are there federal funds to help pay for the things ruined by the flooding? If federal funds are available, how is the money distributed? Does any money going to victims go to state and local agencies? What do they need to do to recoup some of their losses? D.P.

Answer: Much of Western North Carolina is included in the Tropical Storm Helene disaster declaration that President Joe Biden issued on Sept. 28.

Because of that declaration, the U.S. Small Business Administration has disaster loans that are available for businesses that have been affected by Tropical Storm Helene.

The three types of disaster loans that are available are:

"Business Physical Disaster Loans - Loans to businesses to repair or replace disaster-damaged property owned by the business, including real estate, inventories, supplies, machinery and equipment. Businesses of any size are eligible. Private, non-profit organizations such as charities, churches, private universities, etc., are also eligible.

"Economic Injury Disaster Loans (EIDL) - Working capital loans to help small businesses, small agricultural cooperatives, small businesses engaged in aquaculture, and most private, non-profit organizations of all sizes meet their ordinary and necessary financial obligations that cannot be met as a direct result of the disaster. These loans are intended to assist through the disaster recovery period.

"Home Disaster Loans - Loans to homeowners or renters to repair or replace disaster-damaged real estate and personal property, including automobiles."

The residents of Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Clay, Cleveland, Gaston, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Lincoln, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes, Yancey and the Eastern Cherokee Reservation and Off-Reservation Trust Land may be eligible for the loans.

Other North Carolina counties that may have been affected: Cherokee, Graham, Iredell, Mecklenburg, Surry, Swain, and Yadkin residents may apply for Economic Injury Disaster Loans only.

The loans cover uninsured or uncompensated losses caused by the disaster.

Unless used for business, secondary homes, pleasure boats, airplanes, RVs and other similar property are not eligible.

Applicants must have an acceptable credit history and show the ability to repay the loans.

On Friday, the SBA opened Business Recovery Centers in Asheville and Boone.

The Buncombe County office is at the Asheville Chamber of Commerce, 36 Montford Ave.

The hours are 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday, and closed Sunday.

The Watauga County office is at the Appalachian Enterprise Center, 130 Poplar Grove Connector, Boone.

The hours are 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday, and closed Sunday.

Loan applications and more information are available online at SBA.gov or call 800-827-5722.

The deadline for physical damage loans is Nov. 27. The deadline for economic injury is June 30, 2025.

Email: AskSAM@wsjournal.comWrite: Ask SAM, 418 N. Marshall St., #100, Winston-Salem, NC 27101 © Copyright 2024, Winston-Salem Journal, Winston-Salem, NC

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'Ask SAM: How small businesses affected by the disaster can get help from the SBA Ask SAM: How small businesses affected by the disaster can get help from the SBA', *Winston-Salem Journal* (online), 6 Oct 2024 2 <a href="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C0974F32BE4BA0">https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C0974F32BE4BA0</a>



#### AFTER THE STORM

October 6, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC)

Section: C 802 Words

Page: 1 OpenURL Link

You can learn a lot about people when they are under stress. We see them at their best - or worst. Hurricane Helene is revealing both.

My family has experienced what it is like to be without power, water and refrigeration, with mud and debris in your home. You feel alone, overwhelmed and sad. We have also rejoiced when strangers we never met come to help muck out the house, haul out furniture and belongings that must be discarded, do carpentry work and saw tree limbs. Their biggest contribution is to provide comfort.

We can't thank these heroes enough. But they aren't looking for thanks. They see this as their responsibility, a calling to help another in times of distress.

These are the people the musical group Alabama sang about in their wonderful song, Angels among us:

I believe there are Angels among us,

sent down to us from somewhere up above.

They come to you and me in our darkest hours

To show us how to live, to teach us how to give.

To guide us with the light of love.

We are blessed by many angels. But times of distress also show the worst side of some.

We all remember when President Trump went to Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria. His response to th devastation was tossing paper towels into the crowd. It took him weeks to release federal funding for the territory.

His response to Helene wasn't much better. Trump instructed his staff to find a place where the storm had ransacked a business, and it was surrounded by rubble. With cameras rolling he declared his visit wasn't political, then started criticizing Gov. Roy Cooper for doing a terrible job and "going out of their way to not help people in Republican areas."

The claim was totally fabricated. It was disgusting political pandering. This is no time for politics.

As has always been the case, there will be scammers preying on the elderly or those desperate for help, charging them outrageous prices. It is sometimes hard to distinguish between genuine helpers and those trying to make a quick buck. True volunteers won't ask for money. As much as you might need help, be cautious.

Those devastated by Helene are wondering why it is taking so long for help to arrive. Our federal and state governments could perhaps have been better prepared to respond. They knew by that Wednesday, Sept. 25, that Helene was going to impact western Carolina and forecasters predicted it was going to be bad.

But no one could ever have imagined just how devastating this storm was going to be. Not since 1916 has the western part of our state had an event so destructive.

By that Friday afternoon and evening on Sept. 27, when it was obvious how bad the damage was going to be, it was too late to put resources in place without potentially endangering their lives. Surging waters and sheets of rain destroyed roads, landslides demolished buildings and houses were swept away ... some with people inside. The death count is far greater than is being reported.

Media coverage has been uneven. Reporters, photographers and news crews were not allowed into many rural areas because of potential danger. Even so, most of the news coverage has focused on Asheville. It had great damage, but the media have largely neglected a great deal of suffering in smaller communities like Linville, Spruce Pine, Banner Elk, Swannanoa and less populous counties.

Folks are desperate for basic needs. They urgently need water - to drink, to wash themselves and flush toilets. Wipes, toilet paper, paper towels and even diapers are needed, along with nonperishable food like pop-top tins of chicken, tuna, beans, apple sauce, fruit and peanut butter. Granola and protein bars and crackers are very welcome. Candles and flashlights with batteries are essential.

Our western neighbors need the right-here, right-now kind of help. Saying help is on the way when you are thirsty, alone and in darkness doesn't help with immediate basic needs.

There are many ways you can help. But please don't just hop in the car and head west. The state Department of Transportation says heavy traffic on damaged roads is overwhelming efforts to repair roads. But groups of people can band together, accumulate supplies and transport them to coordinated safe staging areas, where they can be transferred to areas of most need. Have a plan for where you take supplies. Recognized charitable organizations will also welcome help.

Money is also badly needed. Fortunately, our state has several billion dollars in "rainy day funds," and the federal government will also provide large amounts of funding. But it is going to take more than money to help restore life for those affected. Regardless of your beliefs, praying for their safety and well-being will help.

We are North Carolina, the "goodliest land," with the goodliest people. Let us all do our best to help our neighbors. © Copyright 2024, Winston-Salem Journal, Winston-Salem, NC

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'AFTER THE STORM', *Winston-Salem Journal* (online), 6 Oct 2024 1 <a href="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?">https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?</a> p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C097503ABABAAO>



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# Groups push to extend voter registration deadlines - Civil rights groups ask to extend voter registration deadlines in hurricane-ravaged states

October 6, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC) Author: AYANNA ALEXANDER Associated Press | Section: A | 427 Words Page: 10

OpenURL Link

WASHINGTON - With registration deadlines looming, Democrats and civil rights groups are asking election officials in the states ravaged by Hurricane Helene to give voters more time.

A judge in South Carolina on Friday extended that state's deadline to Oct. 14, but prospects are uncertain in the other hard-hit states.

In North Carolina, one of the most fiercely contested presidential battlegrounds, election officials aren't planning to extend the Oct. 11 voter registration deadline, North Carolina State Board of Elections spokesperson Patrick Gannon said. That could change when the Legislature meets next week to consider adjustments to state election laws.

The storm and the floods unleashed by Helene devastated a wide area around the mountain town of Asheville, leaving dozens dead and wiping out roads and bridges.

Gannon said election offices will process voter registration forms mailed by the deadline and received by Oct. 16. Eligible voters also are allowed to register during North Carolina's in-person voting period that starts Oct. 17.

In Georgia, the other major presidential swing state in the storm's path, at least 40 advocacy groups wrote Gov. Brian Kemp and Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, both Republicans, urging them to extend the registration deadline in the affected counties by at least a week beyond Monday's deadline.

The groups said the devastation severely limits Georgia voters' ability to register for the upcoming presidential election, whether online, in-person or by mail.

"If there are any circumstances that would merit extending the deadline, these are those circumstances," said Amir Badat, a voting rights lawyer for the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, one of the groups requesting the extension.

The Georgia Secretary of State's office said it's evaluating what effects the hurricane had on elections offices around the state and is making sure polling places are fully functional for voters, spokesperson Mike Hassinger said. As of Friday, there was no move to alter the registration deadline.

The NAACP Legal Defense Fund sent a similar letter Friday to Florida officials, including Gov. Ron DeSantis and Secretary of State Cord Byrd.

DeSantis, a Republican, has issued an executive order making some storm-related election modifications for the 13 counties affected by the hurricane, including changes to early voting sites. But the order did not include an extension for voter registration.

Friday's decision in South Carolina came after a lawsuit filed by the state Democratic Party. The South Carolina Election Commission said it needed the judge's order because it didn't have the authority on its own to change the voter registration deadline.

Associated Press writers Jeffrey Collins in Columbia, South Carolina, and Gary Robertson in Raleigh, North Carolina, contributed to this report.

## • Citation (aglc Style)

AYANNA ALEXANDER; Associated Press, 'Groups push to extend voter registration deadlines Civil rights groups ask to extend voter registration deadlines in hurricane-ravaged states', *Winston-Salem Journal* (online), 6 Oct 2024 10 <a href="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C0974FE9240350">https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C0974FE9240350</a>



# 'Now it's all gone' - 'Now it's all gone' - Rural mountain town faces big challenges as parts of Old Fort lie in ruins

October 6, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC)

Author: CONNOR MCNEELY Staff writer | Section: A | 1539 Words

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A brown fog of dust and dirt billowed through Old Fort, NC, as Amy Davis served chicken and dumplings to every person who wearily climbed the steps of her country store.

By her rough estimation, it seemed as if half the town of about 820 had become homeless by the end of Hurricane Helene's devastation. The wind and water had tossed mobile homes hundreds of yards and washed away cars into the Catawba River, leaving the town's residents to wait for the restoration of cell service and the arrival of help from across North Carolina.

In the days after the flooding, the sun beat down on Old Fort and froze a thick layer of mud and muck around the houses, stores and churches that residents and visitors from surrounding counties now worked to break up and clear.

Power and running water had become an afterthought. Everyone who remained either walked the streets of the town in a daze, worked feverishly to clear debris, or a bit of both.

Davis positioned a "check-in" list on a posterboard near the stairs of her store, which collected names of individuals and families from the edges of the town to then post on the Old Fort Facebook page as "safe."

There were still many families and elderly couples unaccounted for in the outer edges of the town. Feeding the rescue workers and wandering Old Fort residents was how Davis figured she could make the biggest difference.

With her family and fellow neighbors, they had spent the weekend following the storm clearing the streets and cutting down trees until they reached the country store. When they realized the building was still intact, Davis and her family started putting together plans for free meals.

"It's not just that they're getting hot food and a hot meal, but that they know the family that's making it, and they know that we're from here," Davis said. Her husband's family traced their lineage to the mid-1700s, when English and Scottish settlers had arrived in the area, before it became a fort in the Revolutionary War.

As the lunch hour arrived Wednesday morning, construction workers climbed the stairs in grime-soaked t-shirt and pants. With about a dozen others, they cleaned a number of properties that lined the town's main street, Catawba Avenue, including the Hillman brewery, which had only opened in 2020.

The brewpub is one of two breweries in Old Fort, which is a dry town situated in the dry McDowell County. It was only relatively recent state laws that allowed breweries across North Carolina to serve beer, wine and cider in dry counties, but only what they made themselves.

Residents felt a deep sense of connection to the brewery as a new kind of meeting place that attracted tourists traveling from Charlotte to Asheville.

Jeff Parker, the landlord that owned the property in addition to many others in the downtown area, said the brewery had become the social hub of the Old Fort community.

But now the building's upcoming Oktoberfest decorations were caked in mud. A twisted smell of yeast rose from

sludge of the taproom, where dozens of kegs were stacked on top of one another.

"It's all concrete masonry and stainless steel," Parker said of the building. "It's going to be a lot of work, but we're not giving up."

In the streets of the town, employees from the NC Department of Transportation, Old Fort residents, members of the Coast Guard, and others cleared away trees and debris. Caravans of military jeeps, semi-trucks, and police vehicles filled the faded parking lots. Helicopters thundered overhead about every hour, a strange sight for Old Fort.

Chuck Aldridge, a local bed and breakfast owner, pointed to the surrounding buildings with a warning: the sewer system needed to be replaced, and it wasn't something the town could do without help from the state.

What they could do was take care of their own. On Monday, days after the storm had passed, Old Fort's police chief called Bo Cooper, who managed a Columbia Forest Products warehouse, and asked if the town could use it as a distribution center for supplies.

By the next day, Cooper was driving a forklift in the warehouse, surrounded by dozens of others who carried food and supplies to trucks and waiting families.

Residents drove pick-up trucks with stacks of water bottles and toilet paper loaded into their beds and drove them down the streets and avenues of Old Fort.

At the edge of mud-covered parking lot of the Old Fort Elementary School, which was a mere 3 years old, two sister teachers reunited with three of their students who had brought them flowers and cards with well wishes.

"We love you, we'll be praying for you," one of the cards read. "We have Old Fort pride deep inside."

"That's the truth! We'll come back," Lindsay Rowland Latham said. "That hurricane will spit out the Rowland girls."

Her sister, Anna Rowland, stared ahead at the old white house she had grown up in. She had been staying in the house with their mother, Emily, and her sister Lindsay, as the flood waters rose around it.

When they left the house and reached higher ground near the school, their family watched a couple with a 10-month-baby clinging to its mother's chest wade in knee-deep water to break into the school windows. The man had grabbed a tree-limb and broke the glass to get his family in after the waters swept away their car, Rowland said.

Rumors abounded about what would happen to their classes. Both Rowland and Latham worried about many of their students who lived further out from town and mulled over potential meeting places at nearby churches.

"They don't want to split the kids up but what are you going to do?" Latham said.

Inside their elementary school, there was already a strong stench of sewage that choked the hallways. Filth streaked across the terrazzo floors and masked construction crews sawed open the floor of the basketball gym, where the water had buckled and ruined the seams of the hardwood. Outside, the recess yard was an endless field of dried mud.

The surrounding rows of houses and mobile homes was worse. The structures stood on lower-lying land now filled with mounds of silt and packed dirt that cracked and sunk around feet, exposing tree roots, fractured fences, tarps, and plastic bottles.

Glass scattered across the rooftop of a house, where its owner had punched out a window to escape the rising flood. Back in front of the elementary school, Emily Rowland stood with Belinda Wright, a neighbor from down the street.

Wright said she was asleep Friday morning when she heard a knock on the door. She grabbed pictures, the ashes of her mother and granddaughter, and left. The next thing she knew, the flood waters were slapping up on the porch and her daughter was pushing her out of the house.

"We got out about as far as the Old Fort exit, and we watched our life float away," Wright said. "Every last bit of it."

Rowland turned her gaze over to the house her family had built and lived in for the last 20 years.

"That's all they knew," Rowland said of her daughters. "They walked across the street every day for work, and now it's all gone."

After a pause in conversation, the two glanced at each other with small smiles hinting on their faces.

"I'm just glad you're OK honey," Rowland said, pulling Wright into an embrace.

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## A flood of lies - Our view: After the storm, a flood of lies

October 6, 2024  $\mid$  Winston-Salem Journal (NC) Section: C $\mid$  721 Words Page: 2

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#### **OUR VIEW**

As if there weren't already enough muck to be cleared in the aftermath of Helene, Donald Trump alleged last week, with no evidence, that Gov. Roy Cooper and the Biden administration have conspired to withhold assistance from Republican areas.

Among those who have endorsed Trump's allegation: disgraced Sandy Hook shooting conspiracy promoter Alex Jones, which should tell you all you need to know.

"Exclusive: Victims of Hurricane Helene Confirm The Federal Government is Purposely Blocking Rescuers and Stealing Aid In an Attempt to Keep Deep Red Areas From Voting," posted the man who appears as immune to reality as he is to any sense of remorse on conscience Thursday on X.Trump also claimed falsely that "a billion dollars was stolen from FEMA to use it for illegal migrants," instead of areas ravaged by the storm's remnants.

And Trump said on Monday that Georgia Republican Gov. Brian Kemp was having trouble reaching President Biden, despite Kemp having said the exact opposite the day before.

"He just said, 'Hey, what do you need?'" Kemp told reporters of a phone conversation with Biden. "And I told him, you know, we got what we need."

Closer to home, Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson, the Republican nominee for governor in North Carolina, attacked the state's relief efforts, including a post that only private aircraft were flying relief missions to the heavily affected areas in western North Carolina. Last week, the state's National Guard reported flying 57 missions and rescuing more than 400 people.

Robinson also posted that the state of Florida was repairing roads damaged in North Carolina by floods and landslides.

"No sir," wrote Ardis Watkins, the State Employees Association of North Carolina's legislative affairs director, on X. Watkins added that the state Department of Transportation "is going to rebuild the roads in N.C. like they do every time we have a disaster. They have been busting butt for days. Our folks at DOT will appreciate the help from neighbors but how dare you want to lead them as a cabinet agency and say something like this!"

Among other myths that were swirling in a torrent of falsehoods:

FEMA was confiscating donations.

FEMA was withholding body bags, forcing hospitals to stack bodies.

The government was planning to condemn the town of Chimney Rock so it could take control of a nearby lithium mine.

And, of course, there was Georgia U.S. House Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, who suggested in an ominous post: "Yes, they can control the weather. It's ridiculous for anyone to lie and say it can't be done."

It was not clear who "they" in the post were. A cartel of Bond villains? A legion of Marvel Cinematic Universe alien invaders? Greene, who has previously suggested that space lasers caused a California wildfire, did not say.

Nor was it clear whether she was wearing a tinfoil hat at the time.

With an air of exasperation, a Republican lawmaker from western North Carolina pleaded for honesty and reason.

"Friends can I ask a small favor?" state Sen. Kevin Corbin of Macon County posted Thursday on Facebook. "Will you all help STOP this conspiracy theory junk that is floating all over Facebook and the internet... Please don't let these crazy stories consume you."

To address the surging misinformation, FEMA has created a "rumor response" page to share verifiable information and to help dispel rumors. Gov. Cooper also released a statement responding to false reports.

And, while the state and federal governments' handling of this disaster are fair game for critical evaluations, those assessments should be based on facts, not fabrications or reckless speculation.

So, can we please take a timeout for sanity and compassion?

People are hurting. It does not help anyone to poison the air with malicious falsehoods and wild-eyed theories.

In the hours after Helene rampaged through the Southeast with wind and rain, people didn't care about politics and parties. They cared about each other.

There's no appealing to reason from some fringe elements. And maybe not from Marjorie Taylor Greene. Or Mark Robinson.

But is it too much to ask if the man who would be president - for a second time -would be honest and decent for at least a short, precious while?

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# Tropical storm Milton forms, could threaten Fla. - Tropical storm Milton forms, could threaten Fla.

October 6, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC) Author: Associated Press | Section: B | 234 Words Page: 1

OpenURL Link

MIAMI - A storm system brewing Saturday in the Gulf of Mexico strengthened into Tropical Storm Milton, with forecasters warning it could intensify into a hurricane headed to Florida this week.

Tropical Storm Milton was about 220 miles north-northeast of Veracruz, Mexico, the National Hurricane Center in Miami said in a 1:25 p.m. EST advisory.

Though no coastal watches or warnings were in effect, the hurricane center said the Florida Peninsula, the Florida Keys, Mexico's Yucatan peninsula and the northwestern Bahamas should monitor the system's progress.

The storm is forecast to strengthen and bring the risk of life-threatening impacts to portions of Florida's West Coast this week, with hurricane and storm-surge watches likely being in effect Sunday. Parts of Florida were expected to have heavy rainfall beginning Sunday. The rainfall will bring the risk of flash, urban, and areal flooding, along with some river flooding.

Meanwhile, Hurricane Kirk remained a Category 4 major hurricane, and its swells were expected to spread to the East Coast of the United States, the Atlantic Coast of Canada and the Bahamas on Saturday night and Sunday. Forecasters warned the waves could cause life-threatening surf and rip current conditions. Kirk was expected to weaken starting Saturday, the center said.

The storms churned in the Atlantic as rescuers in the U.S. Southeast continued to search for people unaccounted for more than a week after Hurricane Helene left a trail of death and catastrophic damage.

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