



WALT UNKS, WINSTON-SALEM JOURNAL

A high water mark is visible on the Silver Creek Restaurant near the intersection of U.S. Highway 64 bypass and Carbon City Road in Morganton on Saturday as floodwaters from the Catawba River and remnants of Hurricane Helene, a tropical storm by the time it reached North Carolina, begin to recede.

## Helene

From A1

Sigmon. “Therefore, patience is requested during the process. Once the direction is (given) to begin gradual usage, customers are reminded that our system remains under a boil water advisory.”

In a separate statement Saturday, Sigmon said it could be three to five days before some Morganton residents have their power restored.

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

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

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

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

So many roads were in states of disrepair, the North Carolina Department of Transportation said all roads in western North Carolina should be considered closed



JASON KOON, THE NEWS HERALD

Volunteers help cut a tree up on U.S. Highway 70.



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Mimosa Hills shopping center at the intersection of U.S. Highway 64 bypass and Carbon City Road in Morganton was flooded on Saturday from the Catawba River and remnants of Hurricane Helene.

unless you are traveling for an emergency or to escape danger.

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

Wind speeds were as high as 51 mph in Hickory. In Asheville,

Outlaw said wind speeds were as high as 46 mph.

“This will be one of the most significant weather events that happened in the modern eras,” Outlaw said. “The flooding was compared to Tropical Storm Fred in August of 2021. It’s certainly one of the most historically sig-

nificant storm events that we’ve ever had.”

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

Burke County Public Schools Superintendent Mike Swan an-

nounced in an alert from Burke County 911 that schools would be closed in Burke County at least through Wednesday, Oct. 2.

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## Damage

From A1

Management. The city is working with Duke Energy to restore power to the Buck Creek water intake, but it may take time, the release said.

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

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

Non-essential water use was prohibited.

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

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

### Distribution centers

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

The distribution centers are located at:

■ Woodlawn: Hicks Chapel Church, 6008 U.S. Hwy. 221 N

■ North Cove: North Cove Elementary, 8153 U.S. Hwy. 221 N

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

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

The county has opened a third shelter at the YMCA in Marion on Sunday, emergency management



DAN CRAWLEY PHOTOS, THE MCDOWELL NEWS

A home on Buck Creek near Marion is partially submerged by rising floodwaters from Tropical Storm Helene.



U.S. Highway 70 in Marion closed due to rising floodwaters from Tropical Storm Helene.

said in a release. The county had three shelters as of Sunday afternoon:

■ Glenwood Baptist Church—155 Glenwood Church Rd., Marion.

■ Senior Center in Marion—100 Spaulding Rd., Marion.

■ YMCA of Marion, 348 Grace Corpening Dr., Marion. (Opening Sunday night at 7 p.m.)

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

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

### Calls for help

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

Management.

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

It took time for emergency management to respond, because

multiple areas in McDowell were inaccessible to emergency personnel in the days after the storm, emergency management said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

### I-40 mudslide

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

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