

After Helene's destruction, Boone wonders what's next - After Helene's destruction, a mountain town reliant on fall tourism wonders what's next

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Author: MAKIYA SEMINERA Associated Press | Section: A | 1085 Words

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BOONE - Freddie Pell helps lift a vintage wooden chair off the sidewalk and back inside his art gallery. It's starting to rain in downtown Boone, and he doesn't want it to get soaked - again.

Inside, vast muddy puddles spread across the room as workers use mops to push the water out the door. A thin dark line on the wall - about a foot up from the floor - shows how high the water rose when Tropical Storm Helene came barreling through on Friday, Pell said.

"Luckily, most of our art is on the wall," Pell said Monday, gesturing to the vibrant paintings and prints crafted by local artists.

In the days after Helene razed much of western North Carolina, some store owners in downtown Boone have a lot of cleanup to do and don't know if they'll see much business at all for the foreseeable future - a critical problem for a town of about 19,000 people that relies on tourism, especially in the fall.

Like many towns that dot the Blue Ridge Mountains, Boone sees flocks of visitors eager to witness the cascade of vivid colors from the changing autumn leaves starting in October. Many also come to cheer on various sports teams at Appalachian State. The rush of tourists brings millions of dollars to the town, as well as the state.

But Helene's devastation throws that all into question.

Across Watauga County, where Boone is located, many residents have no power or cell service. Several roads are washed out, leaving people trapped or forced to find another way out. Emergency service personnel worked nonstop to rescue people.

On the highway that snakes up toward downtown Boone, downed trees precariously lie upside down on the mountainside along the road. In some places, power lines sag under them like a slingshot.

Once on King Street - the main road that slices through downtown Boone - the sidewalks' dull muddy sheen is a reminder of the rushing murky waters that engulfed the street as the storm plowed through.

Some people roam the sidewalk, curious about what businesses they can enter. Many were still closed Monday, and it's unclear when they'll reopen.

The back door of Melanie's, a brunch spot on King Street, floods during a normal downpour, co-owner Paul Tuttle said. After seeing the "apocalyptic" damage from Helene, Tuttle expected the worst when he ventured to town on Saturday.

He walked in to find the building - which dates back to the early 1900s - largely unscathed. A mat Tuttle propped up against the door to seal it had surprisingly stopped water from seeping in, he said.

The restaurant reopened on Sunday, but he wasn't concerned about making money just then. Despite having no internet and operating under a boil water advisory, Tuttle said he wanted to stay open for storm victims in need of a hot meal.

That doesn't mean he isn't nervous about what the coming weeks will bring for the cafe. Tuttle is already having conversations with his business partner on what to expect. Most of the restaurant's profit is made between July and October - with October being the second-best month for business, he said.

"I don't know if anyone wants to come up here if they were normally coming to look at one of the prettiest places in the whole country, and now they're coming to look at devastation," Tuttle said.

Some are noticing warning signs that could spell trouble for tourism in Boone and surrounding mountain towns.

Kurt Kaunath, 60, rode out the storm with his wife in their camper overlooking Watauga Lake in Tennessee. They had no cell service, and at one point, he said he was worried the winds would topple the camper into the lake - but the couple made it out safely.

When they returned to his home in the outskirts of Blowing Rock - about 8 miles south of Boone - on Sunday, there was still no power. His job as a part-time paramedic in downtown Boone has become a refuge - giving him access to running water and air conditioning.

But Kaunath said there's been "cancellation after cancellation" for an Airbnb he owns in the area. It was almost fully booked for October before the storm hit. he said.

"That's when all these businesses make their money, and that's when all the people are here supporting the hotels and all the infrastructure that's here," he said. "And that's not going to happen."

October is the busiest time of year for Lililu on King, a clothing boutique in downtown Boone that was undamaged, manager Kim Greene said. The store didn't have internet access to run their cash register on Monday, so Greene spent her time packing up sale items to donate to storm victims with employee Sarah Jackson.

But there's still a lot of uncertainty about when they can reopen - and if they'll have enough employees to run the shop.

Some shops like Lililu on King mainly employ students from Appalachian State, which canceled classes until at least Friday. With students heading home, store owners will have to manage without them for now.

"It's down to the two of us," Greene said, mustering a smile before adding, "if we do open back up, and we can do that when we're able."

The university, which has more than 20,000 students, seemed largely empty Monday. The university's arena, Holmes Convocation Center, has been converted into a Red Cross emergency shelter with donations piling up outside the entrance. Some students who lived in off-campus apartments don't have housing after flooding.

Aidan Mullane, a 19-year-old ASU sophomore, is doubtful classes will resume at all this semester. He received an email Monday from a professor who said their house experienced "significant damage" and would limit their ability to respond to students. Mullane said his professor is one of many facing the same problem.

"I don't know where we go from here," Mullane said. "If professors can't live here, what do you do?" © Copyright 2024, Winston-Salem Journal, Winston-Salem, NC

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Study: One hurricane kills thousands over years - Study: Hurricanes like Helene are deadly when they hit and keep killing for years after

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Hurricanes in the United States end up hundreds of times deadlier than the government calculates, contributing to more American deaths than car accidents or all the nation's wars, a new study said.

The average storm hitting the U.S. contributes to the early deaths of 7,000 to 11,000 people over a 15-year period, which dwarfs the average of 24 immediate and direct deaths that the government counts in a hurricane's aftermath, the study in Wednesday's journal Nature concluded. Study authors said even with Hurricane Helene's growing triple-digit direct death count, many more people will die in future years partly because of the storm.

"Watching what's happened here makes you think that this is going to be a decade of hardship on tap, not just what's happening over the next couple of weeks," said Stanford University climate economist Solomon Hsiang, a study co-author and a former White House science and technology official.

"After each storm there is sort of this surge of additional mortality in a state that's been impacted that has not been previously documented or associated with hurricanes in any way," Hsiang said.

Hsiang and University of California Berkeley researcher Rachel Young looked at hurricane deaths in a different way than previous studies, opting for a more long-term public health and economics-oriented analysis of what's called excess mortality. They looked at states' death rates after 501 different storms that hit the United States between 1930 and 2015. They found there is a "bump" in death rates after each storm.

It's a statistical signature that the researchers see over and over, Hsiang said. Similar analyses are done for heat waves and other health threats like pollution and disease, he said. Pre-storm periods are compared and adjusted for other factors that could be causing changes in death rates, he said. Complicating everything is that the same places keep getting hit by multiple storms, so there are death bumps upon death bumps.

Just how storms contribute to people's deaths after the immediate impact is something that needs further study, Hsiang said. But he theorized it includes the health effects of stress; changes in the environment, including toxins; people not being able to afford health care and other necessities because of storm costs; infrastructure damage; and government changes in spending.

"When someone dies a few years after a hurricane hit them, the cause will be recorded as a heart attack, stroke or respiratory failure," said Texas A& M University climate scientist Andrew Dessler, who wasn't part of the study but has done similar studies on heat and cold deaths. "The doctor can't possibly know that a hurricane contributed/triggered the illness. You can only see it in a statistical analysis like this."

Initially, Hsiang and Young figured the storm death bump would go away in a matter of months, but they were surprised when they examined hundreds of bumps and found they stretch out over 15 years, Hsiang said.

It's "almost like a trickle of mortality, like each month we're talking about five to 10 individuals who are dying earlier than they would have otherwise," Hsiang said.

These people don't realize that 10 or 15 years later their health issues are associated with a storm in some way, but Hsiang said it shows up in the data: "They would not have died at those times had the storm not arrived. And so essentially, these storms are accelerating people's deaths."

The numbers were so high that the researchers kept looking for mistakes or complicating factors they had missed. "It took years for us to really fully accept that this was happening," Hsiang said.

How big are the numbers?

Storms are a factor in between 55,000 to 88,000 excess deaths a year, the study concluded. So for the 85 years studied, the team calculated between 3.6 million and 5.2 million people died from the effects of storms. That's more than the 2 million car accident deaths over that period, the study said.

Before now, the public looked at storms "as an inconvenience that is tragic for a small number of community members," Hsiang said. But they really are "a major threat to public health," he said.

Hsiang said he and Young saw a trend of increasing hurricane-connected deaths, predominantly because of population growth. Starting in 2000, there's been a big jump in the total volume of storms hitting large populations, he said.

Three scientists not connected with the study said the research made sense.

"It seems like what they're doing is reasonable," said University of Albany hurricane expert Kristen Corbosiero. "The numbers are really staggering."

Texas A& M's Dessler said study is important because it brings home the deadly nature of climate change and extreme weather. He said he and his fellow climate scientists have been accurate in their warnings of the physics of what climate change would mean, but failed to emphasize enough how it would hurt people.

"Reading this, it's clear that humanity is very vulnerable to weather shocks, even in an incredibly rich country like ours," Dessler said in an email.

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Deadly floods a reminder of area's risk from storms - Shock of deadly floods is a reminder of Appalachia's risk from violent storms in a warming climate

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HENDERSONVILLE - Hurricane Helene dumped trillions of gallons of water hundreds of miles inland, devastating communities nestled in mountains far from the threat of storm surge or sea level rise. But that distance can conceal a history of flooding in a region where water races into populated towns tucked into steep valleys.

"We almost always associate flood risk with hurricanes and coastal storm surge in Florida, Louisiana and Texas," said Jeremy Porter, head of climate implication research at First Street, a company that analyzes climate risk. "We don't think of western North Carolina and the Appalachian mountains as an area that has significant flood risk."

More than 160 people have died across six Southeastern states. The flood waters carved up roads, knocked out cell service and pushed debris and mud into towns.

Parts of the Blue Ridge Mountains where fall colors are just starting to peek through were hit especially hard. In tourist-friendly Asheville, officials warned that it might take weeks to restore drinking water. Brownish orange mud stands out on river banks, a reminder of how high rivers swelled.

Hurricanes moving inland with heavy rainstorms have created disaster before. In 2004, for example, four people were killed in western North Carolina from a debris flow caused by as much of a foot (30.5 centimeters) of rain that fell from Hurricane Ivan.

It's difficult to quickly determine the exact role climate change played in specific disasters like Hurricane Helene although one quick analysis found it likely increased rainfall totals in some areas.

Scientists say global warming is helping some big hurricanes become wetter.

Plus, a warmer atmosphere can hold more water, fueling intense rainstorms, although mountainous Appalachian terrain complicates the interaction between weather events and climate change, according to Jim Smith, a hydrologist at Princeton University.

Dave Marshall, executive pastor at First Baptist Church in Hendersonville, North Carolina, said he was "totally shocked" by the storm's destruction that overwhelmed local services. On Tuesday he was overseeing a busy donation center that offered essentials such as propane and food, remarking that he had expected some rain and maybe a day or two without power.

"Nobody was prepared," Marshall said. "We are shocked and devastated. Everybody knows a friend or family member that has lost a loved one."

Porter, the climate risk researcher, said the Federal Emergency Management Agency's flood maps used to determine the riskiest areas where certain homeowners are required to purchase flood insurance have their limitations. He said the maps consider a specific range of flooding and underestimate flood risk in some areas - and that the problem is especially pronounced in parts of Appalachia.

"It's happening more and more often that we're seeing these heavy precipitation events occur, exactly the type of events that this region is susceptible to," Porter said, adding that flood zones on FEMA maps aren't capturing these changing conditions.

FEMA recently updated how it prices flood insurance to factor in more types of flooding to accurately base cost on flood risk. The agency says flood maps are not meant to predict what areas will flood. Instead, they help define the riskiest areas for planning and insurance needs, FEMA said.

"Flooding events do not follow lines on a map. Where it can rain, it can flood," said Daniel Llargues, a FEMA spokesperson.

Before Helene, federal forecasters told residents in western North Carolina flooding from the hurricane could be "one of the most significant weather events to happen" since 1916. That year, a pair of hurricanes within a week killed at least 80 people, and the community of Altapass received more than 20 inches of rain in a 24-hour span.

"This is not a big surprise," said Smith. "But what happened in Helene happened in 1916."

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App State explores moving home football games - Appalachian State ponders moving home football games to Wake Forest in aftermath of Helene

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As athletics director at Appalachian State, Doug Gillin has spent part of the last week trying to help some of his student-athletes find housing after flooding caused by Hurricane Helene displaced them from their apartments. He's also looking to help the football team find a potential home for the rest of the 2024 season, and Wake Forest and Charlotte could provide a solution.

With Boone still in recovery mode from the effects of flooding that has closed the school for at least two more weeks, the football team is looking for alternatives to playing games at Kidd Brewer Stadium. While Gillin said the press box leaked and some of the suites were soaked by rain, the Mountaineers could play there. But he said it's not the stadium that's the problem.

"The thought process is, is it safe to do it here?" Gillin said on Thursday. "And we really don't know the answer yet."

Gillin said he's hesitant to have people come to Boone because he doesn't want fans taking hotel rooms away from people who can't stay in their own homes, or from emergency responders and others addressing the problems associated with Helene's aftermath.

"When you start thinking about playing a football game, there's a lot that goes around it when you're in active recovery and relief operation," he said.

Options

In case Boone isn't an option when the Mountaineers are scheduled to play Georgia State at home on Oct. 26, Gillin said the program has been in talks with Wake Forest and Charlotte about playing home games there.

For example, on that weekend, the Demon Deacons will be playing at Stanford, meaning Allegacy Stadium would be free for a game. Same thing for Nov. 2, when the Mountaineers are scheduled to host Old Dominion and Wake Forest has a bye, and on Nov. 23, when the Mountaineers are to face James Madison and Wake Forest will be at Miami.

As for Charlotte, the 49ers will be at Memphis on Oct. 26 and have a Oct. 31 game against Tulane and won't be in their stadium on Nov. 2. They're also on the road for Florida Atlantic on Nov. 23.

"Had conversations with both athletic directors," Gillin said. "You know, in a lot of darkness, one of the rays of sunshine is people being willing to help. And that includes our colleagues at Wake Forest and Charlotte and across the country.

"Quite frankly, you know the amount of outpouring and checking in, the Sun Belt Conference and other schools helping us raise money for western North Carolina has been really good to see in a really bad situation.

John Currie, the athletics director at Wake Forest, said his door is open.

"Our hearts ache for all whose lives have been disrupted by Hurricane Helene," Currie said in a statement. "I have been in touch with Appalachian State AD Doug Gillin since last weekend to offer our assistance, including the use of Allegacy Federal Credit Union Stadium to host Mountaineer home football games if needed."

Mike Hill, the Charlotte AD, wasn't immediately available for comment on Thursday.

East Carolina's response to Hurricane Floyd

This isn't the first time a North Carolina college football team has had to change venues because of a hurricane.

After Hurricane Floyd ravaged eastern North Carolina with flooding rains in 1999, East Carolina was faced with a dilemma. It had just played at South Carolina, where it pulled off a 21-3 upset. However, because of the floods, the team couldn't return to Greenville. Given the upset, the Gamecocks weren't the least bit generous when ECU asked if it could borrow their facilities to practice ahead of the upcoming game against Miami. That forced the Pirates to gc to a high school field to get ready for their next game.

And because the team couldn't get back to Greenville, the Pirates had to face the Hurricanes at NC State's Carter-Finley Stadium. ECU came back from a 23-3 halftime deficit to take a 27-23 victory in front of approximately 45,900 fans. Eventually, the Pirates returned to Greenville to finish the season, but then-coach Steve Logan said the changes had an impact. Just like what happened at Appalachian State, some players were forced to find alternative housing after they returned to find their apartments had been flooded.

"You just had to adjust your way through it. It took a long time to get back on track, you know, of any kind of rhythm," Logan said this week. "It took well over a month before things were halfway back to manageable."

Logan said he can understand the troubles Appalachian State Head Coach Shawn Clark and his players are going through.

"I don't know what all Appy State is dealing with," he said, "but it ain't going to be fun, I can tell you that much."

App State taking one day at a time

For now, Appalachian State is proceeding with its season. The Mountaineers will bus to Marshall for Saturday's game, then fly to its game at the University of Louisiana in Lafayette on Oct. 12, with an open date on Oct. 19.

"In terms of traveling a football team to an away game, this week is manageable because we're driving east and north," Gillin said. "We feel like the roads going in those directions are safe and that we can find a safe route to go."

Gillin said the team will fly out of Hickory for the Louisiana game.

At some point during the two road trips, Appalachian State will have made a decision on where it will finish the home portion of its 2024 schedule. Right now, playing in Kidd Brewer doesn't appear to be on the table because the town of Boone will still be in recovery mode. But as football coaches might tend to say, it's a day-by-day process.

"We really need to get through Saturday," Gillin said. "The good news is the recovery and relief operations are ongoing. ... And then, maybe, probably once we get through Louisiana, because of some of these places were we could play, they need two to three weeks to get ready, so we'll have to make this (decision) a couple of weeks out."

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Paying it Forward - North Forsyth, West Stokes come together to support Hurricane Helene relief efforts

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Author: MARC PRUITT Staff Reporter | Section: B | 934 Words

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North Forsyth and West Stokes may be competing against each other on Friday night in King in a Mid-State 2A clash, but the schools have come together in a joint effort this week to aid relief efforts in Watauga County in the aftermath of Tropical Storm Helene.

Throughout the week, both schools have admitted fans to all athletic events on their campuses for free if they bring five non-perishable items to donate to the relief effort. Friday night is homecoming at West Stokes, and Jason Sammons, the school's athletics director, said the response from both school communities has been tremendous.

"We've had a tractor trailer posted at the Pinnacle Fire Department all week that has been getting filled up,"
Sammons said. "We may end up having a couple of more because the response has been so big, and it feels like it's getting bigger and bigger."

Sammons said he's gotten calls about people planning to bring truck- and trailer-loads of donations. He said the plans are to move the trailer from the fire department to school on Friday near the football field and continue collections at the game that night.

Adding that local businesses are offering to add rental trucks to the effort, Sammons said they also will be taking financial donations at the game on Friday night in lieu of any admission fees, with all of those proceeds also going to the North Carolina Disaster Relief Fund.

"We won't be keeping any of the proceeds from the game," Sammons said. "This is one of those things where we feel a strong need to help others who are in need right now. And we are so fortunate because of our community support. The King/North-Winston-Salem/Rural Hall areas have always been close knit. And working with North Forsyth and Coach (Sean) Vestal has just been over-the-top phenomenal with this."

Vestal said he and a few other athletics directors in Forsyth County started brainstorming ideas last weekend of things that they could do to help with the relief efforts.

"I reached out to Coach Sammons since we were playing them Friday night and said, 'Hey, let's wrap our brains around this and figure out what we can do to help,'" Vestal said. "He told me they had already been having their own discussions about doing something, and we just decided that we should bring these two communities together since we are so close to each other. We've had a great relationship with them for all these years. So many of us have connections to the Boone-area and we decided that's where we wanted our donations to go. We want to do everything we can to help all those lives that have been impacted in Western North Carolina."

Sammons said that the Wildcats' football coach, Trent Loman, approached him with the idea to get the ball rolling.

"Coach Loman had done something similar a few years ago when the state of Kentucky had some massive flooding," Sammons said. "And when Coach Vestal called me last Sunday with the idea of working in conjunction, it all came together pretty quickly. Coach Loman has so many contacts in the Boone area, and the coordination with everything has really come together."

In addition to what the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County schools have done with their collections and donations, there are several other schools and teams that are having their own collection drives. Several schools and teams have

even adopted schools in Western North Carolina to send their collected items to.

The Mount Tabor and East Forsyth football game at Mount Tabor on Friday also will be taking non-perishable donations, with the plan for those to be sent to Burke and Buncombe counties.

One of the schools that will benefit from those donations is T.C. Roberson High School in Asheville.

"Glenn Alford, who was an assistant athletics director and teacher here at East for several years, is at Roberson now," said Allen Plaster, the athletics director at East Forsyth. "When I was in the hospital for 80 days back in 2016, he really kept our athletics program running smoothly here. I owe that man quite a bit, and this is the least we can do for that school and that community."

West Forsyth will play at Glenn on Friday night, and both schools have been taking donations throughout the week that will be shipped to Mitchell High School.

Joe McCormick, the athletics director at Glenn and former wrestling coach, has a close relationship with the Mitchell wrestling coach.

Football teams at Reynolds and Walkertown have also been actively seeking donations this week, as has the Reagan boys' soccer team and the Oak Grove athletics program.

North Surry has adopted Ashe County High School and has been taking non-perishable donations to "Fill the Bus" to support relief efforts there.

"In the world we live in right now, it's great to see how our communities can come together for the same joint effort," Vestal said. "We're just trying to do what's right, and we're doing the things that we've always been taught and trying to pay that forward. It's just devastating what our friends in Western North Carolina are going through. We're just trying to do our little part to help in whatever way we can."

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NC election faces 'daunting' level of uncertainty - Key swing state election faces 'daunting' level of uncertainty after storm ravages multiple counties

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ASHEVILLE - North Carolina election officials say they will do everything in their power to ensure that voters in the crucial presidential swing state will be able to cast their ballots despite the devastation of Hurricane Helene and the destruction of basic infrastructure only about a month before the November election.

Karen Brinson Bell, the executive director of the state's election board, said Tuesday that 12 county election offices in the hard-hit western part of the state remain closed after the storm unleashed "unprecedented" damage. Absentee ballots, some of which already have been mailed to voters who requested them, also face obstacles, from U.S. Postal Service delays to road and residential damage that could render them undeliverable. The viability of early and Election Day voting sites remains unknown, she said.

She described the storm as causing a "daunting" level of uncertainty, with early in-person voting scheduled to start in just over two weeks on Oct. 17. Still, she said the state is prepared to help voters navigate the emergency.

"We've battled through hurricanes and tropical storms and still held safe and secure elections, and we will do everything in our power to do so again," Brinson Bell told reporters during a media call. "Mountain people are strong, and the election people who serve them are resilient and tough, too."

Helene, which battered large swaths of the Southeast late last week with torrential rain and strong winds and massive storm surges along the Gulf Coast, caused devastation "beyond belief" in the popular mountain city of Asheville and other parts of western North Carolina, Gov. Roy Cooper said during a media briefing Tuesday.

"This disaster is unlike anything our state has ever experienced," he said.

The level of destruction could have far-reaching implications beyond the immediate damage to the flooded communities, especially if it has any impact on voting. North Carolina is among seven swing states being hotly contested by Vice President Kamala Harris, the Democratic nominee, and former President Donald Trump, the Republican nominee. Trump barely defeated Democrat Joe Biden in the state four years ago, winning by about 74,500 votes out of 5.5 million cast.

Asheville is the most populous city in the 25-county region under a disaster declaration and sits in the one county - Buncombe - where registered Democrats outnumber Republicans. Michael Bitzer, a politics professor at Catawba College in Salisbury, North Carolina, said the disaster area includes "significant blue dots in a very red sea," making it difficult to predict how the storm might affect voter turnout and election results.

On Tuesday, emergency workers were still engaged in rescue efforts across the broad swath of the Southeastern U.S. that bore the brunt of the storm. Election officials in Florida, Tennessee and the presidential battleground of Georgia were assessing the damage and the potential impacts to mail balloting, early voting and Election Day operations.

Georgia election workers have returned to work even as some offices face power outages, limited internet and infrastructure damage. Absentee ballots are scheduled to go out on Oct. 7 as planned, said Robert Sinners, communications director for Georgia's secretary of state. In Tennessee, two county election offices had water damage and at least six polling locations in the northeastern part of the state have been damaged or are inaccessible, said Doug Kufner, spokesman for the secretary of state's office.

North Carolina officials said they are considering moving or combining voting locations if some are unusable or inaccessible.

More urgently, state officials are offering guidance and some special accommodations for absentee voters, who may not receive their ballots because of evacuations, suspended Postal Service operations or residential mailboxes swept away in the storm.

Paul Cox, general counsel for the North Carolina State Board of Elections, said displaced voters can contact their county election office to request that their absentee ballot be spoiled and sent to a different location.

Those voters also have the option of waiting to cast a ballot in person, either during the early voting period of Oct. 17 to Nov. 2 or on Election Day, Nov. 5, Cox said. State law requires all voters to show voter ID, but those who are from a county under a disaster declaration and have lost their ID can fill out an exception form so they can cast a ballot.

Officials are still weighing whether to take further steps to accommodate voters, such as extending the absentee ballot deadline or allowing more people to cast ballots through an online portal already used by military, overseas and visually impaired voters, Brinson Bell said.

Fewer residents casting mail ballots or voting early will "put more stress on Election Day," said Chris Cooper, a political science professor at Western Carolina University in Cullowhee, North Carolina. He also worries about college students' ability to vote if universities temporarily go online, as well as the disproportionate impact on lower-income voters who will be especially hard-hit by the storm.

Kelly Godfrey, who has lived in Asheville for over three years, is one of the few voters who returned their absentee ballot before the storm hit. In Buncombe County, which includes Asheville, nearly 9,990 voters had requested absentee ballots as of Tuesday - 85% of them Democrats or voters who are not affiliated with any party, according to Associated Press election research. Only about 170 had been returned.

Godfrey said she hopes rules and procedures will be adjusted to make it easier for voters who were displaced by the storm. But she also worries that any changes could lead to misinformation and false claims of voter fraud after the election.

"It's going to be spun a lot of different ways," she said.

For now, though, voting feels "so far out in the distance," Godfrey said. "Right now, people are thinking food and water."

It's not just voters being affected. In Buncombe County, some election staffers were evacuated after their homes sustained extensive damage and the office's staff has been unable to contact poll workers for training that normally would be taking place now, said Corinne Duncan, director of the county's election services.

The full impact of the storm on election operations is not yet fully known, she said, and damage assessments on polling sites are continuing.

Brinson Bell said officials were not aware of any physical damage to election offices or the voting equipment or ballots stored inside them, but they are in close communication with tabulation machine vendors should any machines need to be repaired or replaced.

Some of the county boards whose offices remain closed or are dealing with outages have been given special emergency kits from the state, which were initially intended for use in case of a ransomware attack, she said. The kits are equipped with laptops, cellphones, Wi-Fi hotspots and other essentials to allow election operations to continue even without power, phone or internet service.

• Citation (aglc Style)

ALI SWENSON, CHRISTINE FERNANDO and JEFFREY COLLINS; Associated Press, 'NC election faces 'daunting' level of uncertainty Key swing state election faces 'daunting' level of uncertainty after storm ravages multiple counties', *Winston-Salem Journal* (online), 4 Oct 2024 6 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BFF045232ABF20>



NC state parks cancel nearly all programming statewide for Oct. - Amid disaster, NC state parks cancel nearly all programming statewide for October

October 4, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC) Author: JESSIE POUNDS Staff Reporter | Section: A | 371 Words Page: 6 OpenURL Link

The N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation announced Wednesday it is canceling almost all events and programs at state parks across the state through Oct. 31 to focus on assistance to Western North Carolina.

That includes all programs and events in the greater Triad area. Only three events at parks in the eastern part of the state are set to continue: Dismal Day, Oct. 12, at Dismal Swamp State Park; Fear at the Fort, Oct. 18-19 and 25-26, at Fort Macon State Park; and a Schools in Parks training, Oct. 26, at Carolina Beach State Park.

The move to cancel events is meant to help free up state parks employees with relevant skills to help with the disaster.

Many state park rangers are sworn law enforcement officers, are certified as emergency medical responders, hold a commercial drivers license, or are trained to operate chainsaws and large equipment.

"The devastation brought by Helene in many communities across western North Carolina has been profound," said State Parks Director Brian Strong, as quoted in a Division of Park and Recreation news release. "The entire division wants to provide whatever assistance we can to our neighbors and to these areas that were hit hardest. We want to prioritize our resources, both staff and equipment, towards immediate and lifesaving needs."

After meeting vital needs, the plan is for staff to help out with getting Western NC state parks back in shape to welcome visitors. All parks west of Interstate 77 will be closed entirely for the rest of the month, the division also announced. Those parks include Chimney Rock, Crowders Mountain, Elk Knob, Gorges, Grandfather Mountain, Lake James, Lake Norman, Mount Mitchell, New River, South Mountains, and Stone Mountains state parks, as well as Mount Jefferson State Natural Area and Rendezvous Mountain.

The state has canceled and fully refunded all reservations for camping, picnic shelter rentals and the like, the news release said. The division hopes that the move to close the western parks will help limit travel to Western NC while roads and other infrastructure are replaced.

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JESSIE POUNDS; Staff Reporter, 'NC state parks cancel nearly all programming statewide for Oct. Amid disaster, NC state parks cancel nearly all programming statewide for October', *Winston-Salem Journal* (online), 4 Oct 2024 6 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BFF0448B932A50



What's inside

October 4, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC) Section: A 179 Words Page: 1 OpenURL Link

East Forsyth, Mount Tabor square off for Central Piedmont supremacy. Sports, B1

Boone, heavily reliant on tourist dollars, grapples with what's next. News, A3

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'What's inside', *Winston-Salem Journal* (online), 4 Oct 2024 1 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BFF044CA5B2750>



Triad jobless rate remains near 3-year high of 4.6% in August - Triad jobless rate remains near three-year high of 4.6% in August

October 4, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC) Author: RICHARD CRAVER Staff Reporter | Section: B | 721 Words Page: 4

OpenURL Link

The Triad's jobless rate remained at a near three-year high of 4.6% during August, the N.C. Dept. of Commerce reported on Wednesday.

The last time the Triad rate was higher was 4.7% in August 2021.

By comparison, the 3.3% rate in December represented the lowest for the 10-county region in more than 23 years.

It's likely the August jobless rate reflects the annual contract renewals and hirings of public school teacher and staff contracts for the 2024-25 school year. Teachers and staff are listed as unemployed until their next contract begins, typically in August.

It may be until the October jobless report before the employment impact from Hurricane Helene shows up in the rates for the northwest N.C. counties of Alleghany, Ashe, Watauga and Wilkes.

Those counties are among 25 that have been declared eligible for federal disaster unemployment assistance benefits, the N.C. Division of Employment Security said Tuesday.

The eligibility is a byproduct of the Biden administration's declaration of a state of emergency in North Carolina from the devastating rainfall and flooding caused by the remnants of Hurricane Helene.

The disaster unemployment assistance covers individuals who are unemployed as a direct result of Hurricane Helene. Business owners and self-employed individuals affected by the storm also may qualify for benefits.

Benefits would be made retroactive to Sept. 29 and may last for up to 26 weeks. Eligible individuals have until Dec. 2 to file an application for disaster unemployment assistance at des.nc.gov or the DUA Hotline at 919-629-3857.

"Regarding the disaster in Western North Carolina, ironically the large amount of federal and private funds that are likely to be spent in the region on both cleanup and rebuilding could result in new economic growth that will counter the growth lost from local businesses being shut down," N.C. State economics professor Michael Walden said. "However, the recovery will likely take years - and in some cases - decades."

Monthly rate reviews

The unemployment rate usually is affected by workers being hired or their jobs being eliminated and North Carolinians voluntarily leaving the workforce, which means they are no longer counted as unemployed.

The five-county Winston-Salem metro area remained unchanged during August at 4.3%, while the three-county Greensboro-High Point metropolitan statistical area dropped from 5% to 4.9%.

Among the 14 counties in the Triad and northwest North Carolina, eight experienced an increase from July to August, while five had a decrease and one was unchanged.

Both the Triad's labor force and unemployed data continued to reflect month-over-month movement during July.

The Triad had a decrease of 5,240 in its labor force to 808,859, along with a 627 decline in those considered as unemployed to 36,861.

From July to August, there was no net gain private-sector jobs in the Winston-Salem area of Davidson, Davie, Forsyth, Stokes and Yadkin counties, along with a gain of 1,700 government jobs.

There has also been a year-over-year net gain of 1,900 private-sector jobs and a loss of 300 in government.

Education and health services had the most net gains with 1,300, followed by professional and business services at 900, construction at 600 and leisure and hospitality at 500.

The biggest job losses were 700 in trade, transportation and utilities, and 300 in manufacturing.

By comparison, the Greensboro-High Point metro area of Guilford, Randolph and Rockingham counties had a month-over-month loss of 1,100 private sector and a gain of 8,500 government jobs.

The biggest private-sector net gains were 200 each in construction and in education and health services. There was a loss of 700 trade, transportation and utilities, 400 in leisure and hospitality, and 300 manufacturing.

Over the past year, the Greensboro-High Point metro has had a net loss of 1,700 private-sector and 2,600 government jobs.

There was an overall gain of 500 in construction and 400 in other services.

Meanwhile, there was a loss of 1,400 in manufacturing, 900 in professional and business services, 500 in trade, transportation and utilities, and 400 in financial activities.

"The numbers are consistent with a modestly slowing economy in North Carolina," Walden said. "It is important to recognize 'slowing' doesn't imply a recession. It means economic growth has moderated compared with what it was in recent years. The long-run impact of relatively high interest rates is one reason for the moderation."

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RICHARD CRAVER; Staff Reporter, 'Triad jobless rate remains near 3-year high of 4.6% in August Triad jobless rate remains near three-year high of 4.6% in August', *Winston-Salem Journal* (online), 4 Oct 2024 4 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BFF045442C5818>



Death toll reaches 200 - Death toll reaches 200

October 4, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC) Author: JEFF AMY, ERIK VERDUZCO and BRITTANY PETERSON Associated Press| Section: A| 367 Words Page: 7 OpenURL Link

Severe weather

BLACK MOUNTAIN, N.C. - Hurricane Helene's death toll reached 200 on Thursday and could rise higher as searchers made their way toward the hardest to reach places in the mountains of western North Carolina, where the storm washed out roads and knocked out electricity, water and cellular services.

Officials in Georgia and North Carolina added to their states' grim tallies, padding an overall count that has already made Helene the deadliest storm to hit the U.S. mainland since Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

In remote mountain areas, helicopters hoisted the stranded to safety while search crews moved toppled trees so they could look door to door for survivors. In some places, homes teetered on hillsides and washed-out riverbanks.

Electricity is being slowly restored, as the number of homes and businesses without power dipped below 1 million for the first time since last weekend, according to poweroutage.us. Most of the outages are in the Carolinas and Georgia, where Helene struck after barreling over Florida's Gulf Coast on Sept. 26 as a Category 4 hurricane. Deaths were reported in Florida, Georgia, Tennessee and Virginia, in addition to the Carolinas.

Thursday marked the seventh day of search and rescue operations, said Avril Pinder, an official in Buncombe County, adding the county doesn't have an official tally of people who are unaccounted for or missing.

President Joe Biden spoke with survivors and first responders and surveyed damage Thursday in Keaton Beach, Florida, walking past mountains of splintered wood, demolished homes and massive pieces of siding crumpled.

The president also was scheduled to visit Georgia on Thursday. Biden flew over the devastation in North and South Carolina on Wednesday.

The administration announced a federal commitment to foot the bill for debris removal and emergency protective measures for six months in North Carolina and three months in Georgia. The money will address the impacts of landslides and flooding and cover costs of first responders, search and rescue teams, shelters and mass feeding.

Hospitals and health care organizations in the Southeast mostly stayed open despite dealing with blackouts, wind damage, supply issues and flooding. Many hospitals halted elective procedures, while only a few closed completely.

In Florida, officials turned to "low-risk" state prisoners to help clear the mountains of debris left behind.

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JEFF AMY, ERIK VERDUZCO; and BRITTANY PETERSON; Associated Press, 'Death toll reaches 200 Death toll reaches 200', *Winston-Salem Journal* (online), 4 Oct 2024 7 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BFF0449D612610>



• Vinegar

Ask SAM: Hurricane supply donation site

October 4, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC) Section: A 542 Words Page: 2 OpenURL Link

The N.C. Department of Agriculture will be accepting the following items for hurricane relief from 7 a.m. to 6 p.r	n.
through Sunday at the Piedmont Triad Farmers Market, 2914 Sandy Ridge Road in Colfax:	

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Hurricane relief donation site
The N.C. Department of Agriculture will be accepting the following items for hurricane relief from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m through Sunday at the Piedmont Triad Farmers Market, 2914 Sandy Ridge Road in Colfax:
• First-aid kits
• Bottled water
Feminine products
Diapers (infant and adult)
• Baby wipes
Manual breast pumps
Baby formula (ready to use)
Baby spoons
• Paper plates
• Plastic utensils
• Paper towels
• Batteries
• Flashlights
• Candles
• Lighters
Manual can openers
Shelf-stable food (pop-top cans preferred)
• Dog/cat food
• Bleach

Cleaning supplies

Q: Where is Star Conner, who used to be the Saturday morning weekend anchor for WXII? G.M.

Answer: Conner left the station in September, said Michelle Butt, the president and general manager of WXII.

"Star's last day with us was Sept. 11th. She's a lovely woman and we wish her nothing but the best," Butt said.

Shredding events

Riverwood Therapeutic Riding Center will hold its annual fall shredding fundraiser from 9 a.m. to noon Saturday at The Children's Center, 2315 Coliseum Drive, Winston-Salem. A donation of \$5 per bag/box is requested.

VFW Post 5352, 618 Edgewood St., Kernersville, will have a shredding event from 9 a.m. to noon on Oct. 12. It is sponsored by VFW Auxiliary to Post 5352. Donations will be accepted, and net proceeds will benefit veterans' projects.

Mount Carmel Global Methodist Church, 4265 Ebert Road, Winston-Salem, will have a shredding event from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Oct. 12 in the back church parking lot. Suggested donations are \$5 per bag or file box. Checks may be made payable to Mount Carmel Global Methodist Church mission fund. No metal other than paper clips and staples, no plastic or CDs. Proceeds will benefit local community outreach.

The Bermuda Run Garden Club will have a shredding event from 9 a.m. to noon - or until the truck is full - Oct. 19 in the Bermuda Run Town Hall parking lot, 120 Kinderton Blvd., Bermuda Run. The Town Hall is off U.S. 158 just west of the entrance to Truist Soccer Park. The cost is \$5 (cash only) per paper grocery bag or equivalent-size box. For more information, call 336-650-5518. Proceeds will benefit Davie County community programs.

West Bend Masonic Lodge #434 will have a community shredding event from 9 a.m. to noon, Oct. 19, at Lewisville Elementary School, 150 Lucy Lane, in the bus parking lot. Proceeds are used to support the Bikes for Books reading programs at Lewisville and Morgan Elementary schools. A \$5 per bag/box donation is suggested.

New Philadelphia Moravian Church, 4440 Country Club Road, Winston-Salem, will have a shredding event from 9 a.m. to noon on Oct. 19. The cost is \$5 per bag or box. For more information, call 336-765-2331. Proceeds will benefit New Philadelphia's outreach ministries.

If your group is planning a shredding event and you want to be included on the list, you can email the information to asksam@wsjournal.com or mail it to Ask SAM, 418 N. Marshall St., #100, Winston-Salem, NC 27101. Greensboro, High Point, and Guilford County groups are also invited to send in their shredding events.

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

• Citation (aglc Style)

'Ask SAM: Hurricane supply donation site', *Winston-Salem Journal* (online), 4 Oct 2024 2 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BFF04527A22228



WSSU receives nearly \$4M for research center on housing issues - WSSU receives nearly \$4 million from HUD for research center on housing issues

October 4, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC) Author: JOHN HINTON Staff Reporter | Section: A | 415 Words Page: 4 OpenURL Link

Winston-Salem State University has received nearly \$4 million from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to establish a research center to study housing issues in the region.

The money will be used to create a Research Center of Excellence at the university. To that end, WSSU will conduct and share research on housing and community development needs for under-resourced rural communities with historically marginalized people.

During a news conference on Thursday at WSSU, Adrianne Todman, the acting HUD secretary, said the grant is part of an initiative "to make sure we are accessing some of the brilliant minds at HBCUs (historically Black colleges and universities) across the country."

The agency also announced Thursday that it has awarded about \$1 million to Tennessee State University to establish their own Research Center of Excellence at that school's Nashville campus.

Todman said HUD's grant money to WSSU and other schools is designed to increase the housing supply across the United States "to make sure that we are stabilizing rents" and to help first-time homeowners.

"This research will contribute to that in the long run," Todman said. "This is not easy. (WSSU officials) competed for these funds. I can't wait to see how these funds are deployed."

WSSU Chancellor Bonita Brown said that the grant is a tremendous honor for the university "to lead a game-changing effort focused on rural housing and development." The university educates many first-generation and rural students, and "WSSU understands the barriers that housing can present to aspiring students looking to take that next step in their journey."

Before the announcement was made, Todman conveyed her sympathies for the U.S. residents and North Carolinians affected by Hurricane Helene as it tore a path through the Southeast.

The storm's survivors "are suffering through tremendous challenges right now. Some of them have lost their home, some of them have lost their loved ones (and) some of them have lost whole communities," Todman said.

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JOHN HINTON; Staff Reporter, 'WSSU receives nearly \$4M for research center on housing issues WSSU receives nearly \$4 million from HUD for research center on housing issues', *Winston-Salem Journal* (online), 4 Oct 2024 4 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BFF044B3634DD0



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October 4, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The (NC) Charlotte, North Carolina

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