

Lady Jackets hosting donation drive for hurricane relief today

October 7, 2024 | Sanford Herald, The (NC) Author: THE SANFORD HERALD| Section: Archives | 80 Words OpenURL Link

The Lee County volleyball team is hosting a special event for Tuesday evening to help those in western North Carolina who were affected by Hurricane Helene in late September.

The team is collecting items for donation during its match against Scotland today. Items accepted for donation include coats, blankets, socks, adult diapers, kid diapers, water testing kits and water purification tablets.

Anyone donating any item on that list may attend the game for half of the usual ticket price of \$10.

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Helene survivors struggle to get cell service - Storm's damage leads to preparedness questions

October 7, 2024 | Star, The (Shelby, NC) Author: Trevor Hughes and Chris Kenning; USA TODAY Section: News | 932 Words Page: A3 OpenURL Link

BURNSVILLE, N.C. – The ongoing loss of cellphone service in Hurricane Helene-impacted areas raises questions for survivors about safety, missed emergency warnings and the inability to reassure far-flung friends and family.

Helene knocked out power to wide swaths of the South with both high winds and flooding. The destruction also destroyed cellphone towers, severing communication for potentially millions of people. The lack of service is obvious across the region, as frustrated residents cluster near the few sites offering Wi-Fi or spotty cell service.

In the storm's aftermath, the town of Red Hill's 355 residents couldn't call to check on loved ones. They couldn't get news about road closures, who had gasoline or generators, and who needed help.

"No one knew if we were dead or alive," said Kacie Smith, 28, who runs the Red Hill general store.

Cellphone companies have a wide variety of emergency replacement systems they can deploy, but they require physical access to disaster areas, which is still being restored.

"There's a feeling of real disconnect, no pun intended, when cellphone service goes out," said Jonathan Sury, a senior staff associate at the National Center for Disaster Preparedness at Columbia University's Climate School.

One major challenge: disasters are happening more frequently, and when they do, they cost more on average to recover from. That means higher costs for governments and corporations like cellphone providers AT&T, Verizon and T-Mobile.

Experts have warned for years that American infrastructure, from cellphone towers to electric service, highway bridges and drinking water systems, is vulnerable to disasters.

According to federal officials, the United States since 1980 has suffered nearly 400 weather and climate disasters costing more than \$1 billion each, totaling more than \$2.8 trillion in damages. That doesn't include Helene or July's Hurricane Beryl.

"The downside is we're having more storms," said Shannon Weiner, the Monroe County, Florida, director of emergency management. "The upside is that we're getting better at responding to them because of the partnerships."

Weiner, whose county includes the Florida Keys, has worked in emergency management for 20 years. She said Monroe County began including cellphone companies as part of annual regional planning exercises following 2017's Hurricane Irma, which knocked out phone service, severed electrical lines and destroyed roads.

Helene, which hit Florida on the night of Sept. 26 before moving inland, severed power from Florida's Big Bend up through Georgia, North Carolina and South Carolina, Tennessee and into Virginia. More than 200 people were killed as a result of the storm, and that number could climb as searches continue.

Hampering the efforts to tally the deaths: A lack of cell service is making it hard for people who survived to check in. At one point, authorities said around 1,000 people were missing, but that was because many of them were simply out of communication.

Recognizing the loss of connectivity, federal officials sent 40 Starlink internet terminals to the area to assist. Small enough to fit in a backpack and easily powered by a generator or SUV's power outlet, the terminals provide high-speed Wi-Fi service via a constellation of privately owned satellites.

T.H.O.R. and other equipment

Among the solutions that providers like Verizon are deploying into the Helene disaster area are trucks like T.H.O.R., a behemoth mobile cell system officially called the Tactical Humanitarian Operations Response vehicle.

Built on a Ford truck chassis, the T.H.O.R. system has two satellite antennas, two collapsible cellphone towers and waist-high tires. It even has a drone that operators can fly into the sky to send cell signals further. Workers have also mounted a Starlink satellite terminal on a battery-assisted mountain bike to access areas where vehicles can't go.

T.H.O.R. wasn't deployed to Helene in part because the roads are so damaged, and Verizon instead sent in 70 other pieces of equipment, including tethered drones that act as extra-tall temporary cellphone towers. Verizon has a small army of workers restoring service, including more than 1,000 contractors helping clear roads, the company said.

Other mobile phone companies have similar equipment. AT&T, for instance, built a custom 45-foot-long landing craft after it had to use a barge following 2022's Hurricane Ian to float cellphone equipment out to serve Sanibel Island off Florida's coast.

And retailers like Home Depot stockpile plywood, generators and other recovery materials around the country. Home Depot earlier this summer also announced new partnerships to better assist Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands during this year's hurricane season.

What being prepared looks like

Most cellphone towers are equipped with emergency generators that can run independently for several days, and electric utilities across the country have been working to "harden" power lines against disasters.

Florida Light & Power, for instance, says it has put 76% of its main lines serving critical communities and services underground or otherwise toughened them against storms, and replaced nearly all of its major transmission support poles with steel or concrete structures.

Still, days after Helene passed, thousands of residents of Florida's Big Bend area remained without electricity.

Sury said many utilities are lagging in their preparations, because that might require charging customers more money or cut into profits. He said local governments and some states are also unwilling to adequately fund preparations in an era of cascading disasters. Helene, for instance, knocked out power but also wiped out drinkingwater systems in parts of North Carolina.

"We've not made many of the upgrades we know we need to make in this country," Sury said. "There is a fundamental lack of readiness that is present and doesn't show any real signs of changing. Being prepared costs money."

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Governor discouraging tourism in western NC

October 7, 2024 | Star, The (Shelby, NC) Author: Will Hofmann; Asheville Citizen Times | Section: News | 507 Words Page: A5 OpenURL Link

ASHEVILLE, N.C. – As peak leaf season approaches in the mountains of North Carolina, Gov. Roy Cooper told the Citizen Times that tourists are not wanted as the region copes with crises after the floods caused by Tropical Storm Helene.

Cooper said he wants only people who are dedicated to response efforts coming to the area.

"We don't want you here unless you are directly helping," Cooper told the Citizen Times on Thursday. "So we're continuing to ask people not to come. And that's tough for an area that was about to enter its peak season for tourism economy. But I've talked with people in the Chamber of Commerce. They understand that meeting people's immediate needs, saving lives, is first."

Cooper said the goal is to continue to expand rescue and recovery efforts, which would be hindered and strained by the additional resources and road space required to maintain tourists.

"We want to keep those roads open for utility trucks, for rescue personnel, for medical people, for supplies, for fuel – all of this transportation that is 10 times more than you would normally need ... just to bring in basic necessities for people who don't have them," Cooper said.

Various tourism entities agreed.

Visit North Carolina, the state's official marketing organization, issued a travel advisory warning to all potential tourists: Do not travel to the region as cities and towns continue to battle power and water outages.

"People have always been drawn to Asheville and the mountains of Western North Carolina. We know many people around the country care deeply and want to support our community. It's not just about what's happening now, but about planning for the months and years ahead," the Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority and Explore Asheville said Thursday in a statement to the Citizen Times.

"Right now, the focus is on taking care of area residents and workers and servicing the many first responders who have answered the call from all over the country – helping those impacted and addressing the economic and emotional toll at hand," the statement continued.

VisitNC has been working to address visitor displacement throughout the region, fielding 7,300 calls about the topic, according to the advisory.

Many attractions are currently closed, including the Biltmore and the Blue Ridge Parkway. Whole districts of Asheville, like the River Arts District – a beloved tourism district near the French Broad River – remain in ruins.

"Traditionally, fall is the most vibrant time of year for us, both visually across the Blue Ridge Mountains and for our economic vitality," the county tourism authority said. "This is definitely going to hurt. Our hearts and minds are focused on supporting our community right now and starting to lay the foundation for recovery."

The organization encouraged those who want to support the region to donate to the Salvation Army of Asheville, MANNA FoodBank or United Way of Asheville and Buncombe County.

Contributing: Chris Kenning, USA TODAY

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Disaster politics a staple for elections - Responses have helped make or break careers

October 7, 2024 | Star, The (Shelby, NC) Author: David Jackson; USA TODAY | Section: News | 951 Words Page: A1 OpenURL Link

WASHINGTON - Another presidential election blown around by a hurricane.

In terms of politics, Vice President Kamala Harris and President Joe Biden are hoping that recovery from Hurricane Helene will resemble the federal government's response to Hurricane Sandy in 2012 – a fairly smooth process that did credit to the last Democratic-led White House in a presidential election season.

Former President Donald Trump, meanwhile, is trying to turn the latest natural disaster to strike the U.S. during an election year into the Harris-Biden version of Hurricane Andrew in 1992 – a slow and sloppy response that sealed the political fate of defeated President George H.W. Bush.

"There's nobody that's handled a hurricane or storm worse than what they're doing right now," Trump said to supporters Thursday night in Saginaw, Michigan.

Trump's indictment has included falsehoods – he claimed that federal disaster money went to migrants and that Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp, a Republican, had trouble reaching Biden, but neither were the case – and the 2024 Republican nominee for the White House has been accused of playing politics with disaster relief during his presidency.

During his tour of ravaged areas of Georgia, Florida, North Carolina and South Carolina, Biden urged people to put politics aside and try to help as many storm victims as possible.

"When you do that, I hope we begin to break down this rabid partisanship that exists," Biden said during a visit to Ray City, Georgia. "I mean that sincerely. There's no rationale for it."

This election's hurricane debate is particularly fierce in Georgia and North Carolina, storm-damaged swing states that were the recipients of candidate visits last week.

In Augusta, Georgia, Harris did not mention Trump by name but told residents that "we are here for the long haul. ... The coordination that we have dedicated ourselves to will be long-lasting to get families, to get residents, to get neighborhoods back up and running."

Disaster politics nothing new

Disaster politics is a staple of presidential politics, from the flu epidemic of 1918-1920 to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. After all, fall campaigns take place in the heart of flu season, although any disaster – and the government response to it – can change the shape of American politics.

During the Great Mississippi River Flood of 1927, President Calvin Coolidge appointed a prominent official to head up relief efforts: Commerce Secretary Herbert Hoover.

Already famous for getting food supplies to Belgium during World War I, Hoover rode flood relief all the way to the White House.

"Presidents – as chief executives and the only leaders selected by the entire country – are expected to take actions that will protect and help Americans," said political scientist Lara Brown, author of "Jockeying for the American

Presidency: The Political Opportunism of Aspirants."

"When disasters occur," she said, "Americans look to presidents to see how closely their promises of compassion, protection and assistance match their deeds."

Andrew as cautionary tale

The cautionary tale is President George H.W. Bush. Seeking reelection in 1992, Bush already faced trouble from a slumping economy and a fierce challenge from Democrat Bill Clinton.

Then came August and Hurricane Andrew, which smashed the southern coast of Florida.

In his biography of the elder Bush, historian Timothy Naftali wrote that "it took too many days for the U.S. government to respond adequately."

Bush wound up losing the election, although the incumbent Republican did carry Florida (barely).

'A damaging period'

His son, Republican George W. Bush, took care to look on top of things when four hurricanes hit Florida in a six-week period during the 2004 hurricane season, another presidential election year.

The next year, after winning a second term, Bush suffered for a sloppy response to Hurricane Katrina, an example of what not to do.

In his memoir, Bush said his mistakes with the Katrina response added to existing burdens: "The aftermath of Katrina – combined with the collapse of Social Security reform and the drumbeat of violence in Iraq – made the fall of 2005 a damaging period in my presidency."

Cooperation after Sandy

Incumbent President Barack Obama fared better in October of 2012 when Superstorm Sandy gutted the New Jersey coast. Obama promoted cooperation with New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, a prominent Republican, and the Democratic president sailed to victory over GOP nominee Mitt Romney.

When Christie ran for president in 2016, Republicans criticized him for working with Obama. Trump, then a primary opponent of Christie, mocked the New Jersey governor by saying, "he was like a little boy: 'Oh, I'm with the president.'"

Mike DuHaime, a former aide to Christie, said voters in his home state of New Jersey loved Christie for working with Obama, and overwhelmingly reelected him governor in 2014.

Republican presidential caucus and primary voters, however, "punished" Christie when he ran for president, DuHaime said, "as if somehow working with the federal government during the largest natural disaster in the history of the state was wrong."

He added: "Somewhere along the line, compromise and bipartisanship became dirty words among the far right and far left."

'A political lens'

As Trump tries to criticize Harris and Biden over Hurricane Helene, some of his own former administration officials said he played politics with disaster relief while he was in the Oval Office.

Trump hesitated to provide disaster aid to areas he believed were Democratic-leaning, including California as wildfires raged, said a report from Politico's E&E News that cited interviews with a pair of ex-Trump aides.

Trump campaign spokesman Steven Cheung called the story "fake news" that never happened. "None of this is true and is nothing more than a fabricated story from someone's demented imagination," Cheung told USA TODAY.

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Neighbor helping neighbor - Shelby schools hand out lunches as storm recovery efforts continue

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Author: Diane Turbyfill; Shelby Star | Section: News | 240 Words

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While students weren't able to go to school last week, organizers made sure they were still able to have access to lunch.

Lunches were prepared and handed out each day at drive-throughs at Shelby Middle, Crest Middle, Fallston Elementary and Kings Mountain Intermediate schools.

Schools remained closed to students due to massive power outages, with Thursday and Friday serving as optional teacher workdays.

By Friday, most of Shelby's power had been restored, with at least 1,000 outages still being reported in the county by Duke Energy.

Cleveland County Schools reported Friday that they hoped to return to a regular schedule Monday.

Meanwhile, efforts continue around the county to support those in need in Cleveland County and for neighbors to the west. Drop off locations for essential items have been posted to social media and are being delivered to Western North Carolina via truck, plane and helicopter.

Residents who have suffered damage from Hurricane Helene and want to apply for federal assistance can do so by calling 800-621-3362 or going to disasterassistance.gov.

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Statesville to welcome Cycle NC riders, raise money for hurricane relief

October 7, 2024 | Statesville Record & Landmark (NC) Author: Donna Swicegood| Section: Local | 507 Words OpenURL Link

The Statesville Convention & Visitors Bureau announces a special partnership with Downtown Statesville Development Corporation and the local hot air balloon pilot community to raise funds for Spruce Pine Main Street during Statesville's hosting of the Cycle NC Mountains to Coast Ride today.

The community is invited to participate in this unique event, with all proceeds benefiting the recovery of Spruce Pine after the devastating effects of Tropical Storm Helene.

Spruce Pine, originally slated to be this year's host city and the starting point of the Cycle NC ride, was hit hard by Hurricane Helene. The town received 24.12 inches of rain, causing the North Toe River to flood and devastate the downtown area.

Spencer Bost, executive director of Downtown Spruce Pine, said floodwaters reached up to 10 feet in some areas, destroying the town's lower street and severely damaging local businesses. This disaster has left the community in dire need of recovery efforts, and this fundraiser will help support their rebuilding process.

To support these efforts, local balloon pilots have donated their balloons to offer tethered rides 5:30-7:30 p.m. at Broad Street United Methodist Church, located at 315 W. Broad St., and the Statesville Housing Authority, 110 W. Allison St. Weather permitting, rides will be available for a minimum donation of \$10 per person, with all proceeds going to Spruce Pine's recovery.

To streamline the fundraising process, tickets can be purchased on-site by credit card only, and rides will be offered on a first-come, first-serve basis.

In addition, there will be a static balloon from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. with a glow at dark on the front lawn of Mitchell Community College, offering a visual experience for the entire community. This static balloon is for glow only and will not include tethered rides.

Attendees can also enjoy a hot air balloon selfie station located in front of the Holland Building, 117 S. Center St., which will soon be home to the Statesville Historical Collection. Firefly Balloons will offer a specially made hot air balloon basket set up for easy access and photo opportunities against a scenic backdrop, providing a way for everyone to capture their own ballooning moment during the event.

"Spruce Pine is a treasured part of our state, and we are committed to supporting their recovery after such a devastating event," said Cindy Sutton, executive director of the Statesville Convention & Visitors Bureau. "This partnership allows us to host a memorable event for the Cycle NC riders while helping to lift up a community that needs our help."

In addition to the ballooning event, Statesville will host nearly 1,000 cyclists as part of the Cycle NC Mountains to Coast Ride. Downtown businesses are encouraged to remain open from 1 to 8 p.m. to welcome the participants, who will be staying overnight in area hotels and camping at Purple Heart Homes. Cyclists and community members alike are invited to enjoy the ballooning festivities and contribute to the cause.

For more information on the event or how to support Spruce Pine, please contact the Statesville Convention & Visitors Bureau at 704-682-7756 or by emailing cindy@statesvillenc.com.

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Helene - Blue Ridge Parkway in Asheville, WNC remain closed

October 7, 2024 | Times-News, The (Hendersonville, NC) Author: Karen Chávez; Asheville Citizen Times | Section: News | 474 Words Page: A5 OpenURL Link

ASHEVILLE - The Blue Ridge Parkway — the most treasured site in the National Park Service — remains closed indefinitely, according to park officials, a week after the wrath of Tropical Storm Helene tore through Western North Carolina Sept. 27.

The storm brought record amounts of rainfall and ferocious winds to the mountainous region, resulting in flood that washed away entire towns and as of Oct. 4 had left 115 dead in WNC, including 72 in Buncombe County alone.

The entire length of the 469-mile parkway in North Carolina and Virginia remains closed as crews continue to assess Helene's damage through its Eastern Incident Management Team. The team brings specialized skills and resources to support the parkway with employee emergency needs, emergency stabilization of affected park resources, and damage assessments, NPS spokesperson Mike Litterst said in an Oct. 3 statement.

Officials initially closed the parkway Oct. 26.

As of Oct. 3, 250 NPS employees from 32 states and the Washington D.C., are working with parkway staff in the recovery efforts, he said.

"National Park Service assessment teams are still completing their initial inspections of the parkway, acquiring the data they will need to analyze the full impact of (Tropical Storm) Helene. Based on what the teams have seen so far, significant, and in some cases catastrophic, damage has occurred along the parkway," Litterst said.

The damage is particularly devastating from Milepost 280 near Boone to Milepost 469, the terminus of the parkway in Cherokee at the entrance to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, he said.

This is the WNC section, which winds directly through Asheville and Buncombe County.

The assessment teams will use their inspection data to determine the full extent of the damage including the timeline and cost estimates for repairs."

"A projected reopening date of any section of the Blue Ridge Parkway in North Carolina has not yet been established; assessment crews are finishing their work in Virginia," Litterst said.

Visitors from across the world descend on the parkway each October for its spectacular leaf color, and significantly boosting the local economy. In 2023 visitors to the parkway contributed \$1.4 billion, according to data released by the National Park Service

The parkway is the most visited site of the more than 400 NPS units, drawing, with 16.7 million visitors in 2023, according to the NPS. The most visited months of the year are July and October — with some 2 million visitors each of those months. N.C. Gov. Roy Cooper has told tourists to stay away from Western North Carolina this year.

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Barnardsville residents wonder how to begin rebuilding after Helene

October 7, 2024 | Times-News, The (Hendersonville, NC) Author: Sarah Honosky; Asheville Citizen Times | Section: News | 1100 Words Page: A2 OpenURL Link

BARNARDSVILLE – Standing on her porch, fearing she had lost everything, Tammy Hensley spoke on the phone with an accountant, trying to navigate the tangle of federal aid available to her and her neighbors after Tropical Storm Helene tore through the region, bringing devastation to the small, Buncombe County community.

Right now, it feels insurmountable.

"We're making it, but it's hard," she said Oct. 3. She lives off Barnardsville Highway and manages Big Ivy Mobile Home Park, next to the house.

Ivy Creek curls around the northern edge of the property. Its base flow of around three feet spiked to a staggering 15.4 feet, per the National Weather Service, as Helene surged through, bringing historic flooding to Western North Carolina and mass devastation in its wake.

Where Ivy Creek met the highway, near its intersection with Sugar Creek Road, water was still flowing hard. A tangle of trees was swept up against the bridge, debris piled against the metal curve of the guardrail, whole appliances caught in the tangle. A shed was half dangling over the creek.

Upon closer review, it seemed the building hadn't moved — the earth and its concrete platform had just collapsed beneath it.

Hensley, 58, has lived in Barnardsville her entire life, and never had she imagined the water could get so high. Her brick 1970s one-story house was destroyed. Some mobile homes had jumped their foundations. Stray porches splintered across her front yard. She said everything inside was coated in layers of mud.

Four trailers, a barn and a shed were gone, she said — swept down the creek.

"None of these trailers are livable," she said. Of the property's 14 trailers, all residents had gotten out safely, but two were still living there, despite the wreckage. There's "nowhere else to go."

'Just trying to survive'

Barnardsville is a small unincorporated community in Buncombe County, with a population of about 600, near Pisgah National Forest and the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Moving through the community, along newly traversable roads, many of the stories of loss were echoed in the experiences of others — families who had lost everything, standing among wreckage, trying to imagine what it might look like to rebuild.

Like Dena Banks, 41, lingering near the steps of her home on Dillingham Road Oct. 3, which was impassable for several days, she said, until people forged a way through. Mud-caked belongings scattered the porch and ground. Furniture had been shunted out of the house; the yard was stripped of grass.

"It's just super devastating, we lost everything," Banks said. "The house has got to be knocked down because it was waist deep. And just start from scratch again. Forty years invested, washed down the stream."

When the storm came, she and her fiancé barely got her 80-year-old father out, she said, ushered through a back door and up the hill to a small building they have there. She pointed to a faint waterline, halfway up the siding of the house. Still, there's no water, no power. Cell service is spotty.

It's been the longest five days of her life, Banks said. "They've been horrible to say the least. I'm just trying to survive really. That's all you can do."

Family friend Harvie Coates arrived as she talked, carrying a plastic bag of groceries. He was making the rounds to check on folks and had been doing so for days — from Pensacola to Burnsville and Marshall. After he left Barnardsville, he was headed back for Marshall to help clean up. Coates described it as a "wasteland."

There were still nearby areas that were cut off entirely, he said. In places, Ivy Creek had redrawn its banks, carving fresh lines through the landscape. Paved roads abruptly ended in overhangs of asphalt, new roads of dirt and gravel created to circumvent the scenes of disaster.

He described trying to go wherever he could to lend a hand, the words caught in his throat.

Community-led response

As Banks said, it was amazing to see the way community pulled together, distributing food and water. She had even gotten a hot meal at the old firehouse on Barnardsville Highway, where volunteers had organized a massive response.

A billboard, built out on plywood, compiled information gathered over the last six days. The work began, said volunteer Chloe Lieberman, almost as soon as disaster struck.

"The thing that speaks to, to me, is that we are the local community," Lieberman said. "We have the capacity to care for ourselves immediately because we are here. And part of the reason why this is working as well as it is, is because of existing relationships and existing skillsets."

Food, water and supplies were distributed from the firehouse, a hub of activity the morning of Oct. 3. A semi-circle of metal chairs was set out for the morning's community meeting, and volunteers were quick to step forward any time a need was voiced. There was a whiteboard to note down needed tree removal, carpentry, cleanup or road repair. Numbers to call to apply for disaster relief, to report someone missing or if "stressed out" and looking for someone to talk to.

Short of delivering a baby, which Lieberman said they likely also had capacity for, the response has been wide ranging. Teams of volunteers had rebuilt bridges, offered first aid care, cleared roads and made welfare checks, at times connecting to people who had been cut off for days.

"Pretty much 100% of what we've seen here is human kindness, generosity and cooperation," Lieberman said.

Also on the ground was Brock Mountain Land Co., whose owner is from the town, and used company equipment to bust holes through the debris and clear roads.

Banks expects to apply for federal aid, but what comes next is uncertain.

"This is home and it's not anymore. It's hard to swallow," she said. In the immediate, she is concerned with getting a roof over her head. She's just looking for a way to recover, she said. "Trying to pull the pieces together."

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

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Helene's aftermath - LENDING A HAND - Franklin football, volleyball teams aid recovery efforts

October 7, 2024 | Times-News, The (Hendersonville, NC) Author: Zachary Huber; Asheville Citizen Times | Section: Sports | 702 Words Page: B1 OpenURL Link

FRANKLIN — The Franklin volleyball team members hugged one another and cried as they began to reunite in the school gym on Monday. They were happy to see each other after surviving Tropical Storm Helene, which swept through Western North Carolina on Sept. 27.

Then they asked: What can they do as a team to help?

Enter sophomore Kamden Reis and her family, who suggested the volleyball team make wound kits for emergency workers and the WNC community.

The volleyball team isn't the only Franklin team to lend a helping hand to WNC. The football team had players help load a trailer with donations, and others have volunteered across the area.

Reis and her family bought supplies for the team to assemble in the gym on Tuesday.

"It felt great, especially since we didn't really get hit hard here," Reis said. "But Asheville is really close to us. We felt sad for everyone there, too, and we wanted to do something for them."

The volleyball team had assembled with 200 wound packages when the supplies were exhausted.

Reis said the packages are essential because workers could get cuts while clearing debris.

"Just think about moving branches and hitting things and walking through stuff; little nicks with dirty, muddy water can turn into very big things," coach Bekah Brooks said.

Macon County and Franklin were among the few areas in WNC spared by Tropical Storm Helene. Franklin has even begun the return to normalcy, with school having resumed Thursday.

Reis was thankful her hometown wasn't impacted as much but said the team understood it would take a while for other areas to rebuild.

"We knew it's gonna take everywhere else a long time to eventually get back to normal," Reis said. "We just thought people would appreciate this."

The volleyball team will also collect donations for their community when it hosts Smoky Mountain on Friday.

Brooks said half of it will go to Macon County, the rest to other counties in need, and Franklin will accept all donations.

Franklin football answers the call

Football coach Josh Brooks, volleyball coach Bekah Brooks' husband, said they received a call that a semi-truck was coming to the Macon County Airport to take donations and transport them to other WNC communities on Thursday. But they needed help loading the truck.

Josh Brooks asked principal Blair King if the varsity football team could leave school at 1 p.m. to pitch in. King excused the team, and they went and loaded the truck for two hours. They then went to the Kmart parking lot in Franklin on Thursday night and did it again with the volleyball team.

Freshman Garrett Young has been working in Henderson County for his father's tree service company since Friday morning and hasn't come home since, according to Josh Brooks. He said sophomore Damion Bowles also worked with a restoration and cleanup company in the area.

Junior Addix Sutton and his brother, freshman Paxton Sutto,n volunteered to aid recovery efforts in Franklin. Senior Avery Carpenter, juniors Brock Bradley and Payton King and sophomore Lance Parker helped clean up a flooded campground.

Senior Maveric Waldroop has been a volunteer firefighter for two years. He helped find missing people, performed wellness checks on other residents and cleaned up debris from Helene.

"It felt amazing knowing people were OK and that we could find them," Waldroop said. "And that we knew that we just got in contact with those people. It was really relieving."

Josh Brooks and Franklin aren't done yet. They hope to take some players this weekend to other areas east of Franklin impacted by Tropical Storm Helene.

"There's power in numbers," Josh Brooks said. "The devastations that y'all are suffering in that area, we can't comprehend it because we didn't get that kind of damage. It's just nice to see everybody pulling together to try to help those in need, even if they don't know them."

Zachary Huber is a high school sports reporter for the Asheville Citizen Times and Hendersonville Times-News. Email him at zhuber@gannett.com or follow him on X @zacharyahuber.

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Great Smoky Mountains National Park mostly open after storm

October 7, 2024 | Times-News, The (Hendersonville, NC) Author: Douglas Soule; Asheville Citizen Times | Section: News | 356 Words Page: A10 OpenURL Link

CHEROKEE - Despite the destruction wrought by Tropical Storm Helene in parts of Western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee, the Great Smoky Mountains National Park is open with limited closures.

The entrance to the Blue Ridge Parkway, for example, was blocked off the evening of Oct. 3. The parkway, aka "America's Favorite Drive," - the most visited unit in the National Park Service, is closed indefinitely due to Helene damages.

There were multiple other road closures in the Smokies as well Thursday evening, according to a National Park Service webpage.

Here's the latest list of closed roads:

Balsam Mountain, Cataloochee, and Big Creek areas, campgrounds and roads

Foothills Parkway East near Cosby

Lakeview Drive

Parson Branch Road (due to Flint Gap Fire)

Despite the closures, the park was busy Thursday, with passing cars and motorcycles bearing license plates from multitudes of states.

Jinnifer and Ben Johnston drove in from the Nashville area. They were checking out the outside of Mingus Mill late Thursday afternoon, which isn't far north of the Oconaluftee Visitor Center.

That center and the road leading past it had been closed due to limited staffing and resources following the storm but were open as of Thursday.

"We did a lot of research before we left, because our initial thoughts were to cancel our trip," Jinnifer said, who was staying near Pigeon Forge, Tennessee. "But the place we were staying was open, Dollywood was open, Gatlinburg was open, and Pigeon Forge was open. We were like, 'Well, we'll just go and see what we can do.'"

It turns out they were able to do a lot — Jinnifer said they'd been all around the park over the last couple of days and hadn't seen any damage.

"It's been beautiful, and the trees are starting to turn," she said.

This reporting content is supported by a partnership with Freedom Forum and Journalism Funding Partners. USA Today Network-Florida First Amendment reporter Douglas Soule is based in Tallahassee, Fla. He can be reached at DSoule@gannett.com. On X: @DouglasSoule.

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Harris visits NC to see Helene response

October 7, 2024 | Times-News, The (Hendersonville, NC) Author: Will Hofmann; Asheville Citizen Times | Section: News | 879 Words Page: A10 OpenURL Link

Telling an Asheville volunteer leader "we're here for the long haul," Vice President Kamala Harris visited North Carolina on Saturday to be briefed on the damage the state suffered from Tropical Storm Helene and meet people dealing with the aftermath of its catastrophic flooding.

The record high water tore apart major districts of Asheville and ripped through small towns like Swannanoa, Pensacola, Chimney Rock and Lake Lure. Rapidly rising floodwaters along the French Broad, South Toe and Cane rivers, among others, washed away trees, cars, buildings and homes.

Harris, the Democratic presidential nominee, flew to Charlotte Douglas International Airport from Joint Base Andrews outside Washington, D.C. Greeted her on the tarmac were North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper, state Attorney General and Democratic gubernatorial hopeful Josh Stein, Federal Emergency Management Administrator Deanne Criswell, North Carolina Democratic U.S. Reps. Alma Adams and Jeff Jackson and Charlotte Mayor Vi Lyles.

She also met during her visit with Asheville Mayor Esther Manheimer, who later released a series of video statements, saying they discussed how the government can support small businesses impacted by the floods and what supplies Asheville needs to get through the next few months.

"We also talked about the long-term need to rebuild and that effort and what it's going to look like," Manheimer said, including "building back a more resilient" Asheville.

Harris commended local officials and North Carolinians who are responding to the crisis.

"I've been seeing and hearing the stories from here in North Carolina about strangers who are helping each other out, giving people assistance in every way that they need, including shelter, food and friendship and fellowship," Harris said.

"I think that these moments of crisis bring out some of the best of who we could be and who we are," she added.

Harris at one stop on her visit joined staff from NC Counts Coalition member organizations who were assembling care packages for Western North Carolina storm victims. She told NC Counts Regional Director Angelica Wind of Asheville that she plans on continuing to support the WNC region.

Wind said that she and her family had come to Charlotte for a respite from the lack of power, water and communication services at home.

"We're just surviving," Wind said. "I've got my daughter and her friend who came so we could try to get a couple of days of normalcy."

Harris assured her that "we're here for the long haul. And I've been meeting with the governor and the administrator from FEMA is here on the ground."

Disaster response could

be pivotal in presidential race

North Carolina is viewed as one of a handful of swing states in the Nov. 5 presidential voting. The speed and effectiveness of the Biden administration's response efforts could have ramifications on the race between Harris and the Republican nominee, former President Donald Trump.

Trump visited Helene victims in another swing state, Georgia, on Sept. 30. Harris also has visited Georgia, speaking to victims in Augusta Oct. 2 as President Joe Biden was taking an aerial tour of the WNC damage with Manheimer.

Securing congressional aid for recovery from the disaster is one of the major sticking points as the 2024 presidential race enters its final weeks.

In a Friday night letter to congressional leaders, Biden warned that the Small Business Administration's disaster loan program is set to run out of funds in a matter of weeks. He also said FEMA's disaster relief funds could face a shortfall by the end of the year and called on Congress to provide additional resources.

But Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson has suggested Congress can wait until after the election to pass Hurricane relief measures.

Meanwhile, the recovery effort is expected to be long and arduous. Cooper has called for tourists to not come to the region, saying, "We don't want you here unless you are directly helping with the response."

During Harris' visit, he cited the current North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services count of deaths attributed to Helene, 68. But local officials say their count is now 115.

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Including other states, at least 214 deaths have been attributed to Helene, with 72 in Buncombe County, the most populous in WNC. Other counties, like Yancey and Madison, also have been devastated by floods, leaving rural residents isolated and small businesses to dig themselves out of the mud.

FEMA aid statistics

As the region continues to battle water, power and cell phone outages, here's what the federal government has provided, according to the White House:

\$26 million in housing and other types of assistance to more than 25,000 households in North Carolina.

More than 5,400,000 meals and 6,300,000 liters of water.

700 FEMA staff members on the ground.

More than 1,200 urban search-and-rescue personnel, who had rescued or supported more than 3,200 survivors as of Saturday.

It also says 74% of power outages have been restored.

Will Hofmann is the Growth and Development Reporter for the Asheville Citizen Times, part of the USA Today Network. Got a tip? Email him at WHofmann@citizentimes.com. Consider supporting this type of journalism with a subscription to the Citizen Times.

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Inside the race to alert WNC residents of Helene's wrath

October 7, 2024 | Times-News, The (Hendersonville, NC)
Author: Rick Jervis, Chris Kenning and Daniel Dassow; USA TODAY NETWORK Section: News | 2375 Words Page: A1
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ASHEVILLE, N.C. — If she had known the rivers would swallow whole towns and neighbors would be swept away, Lindsey Miller would have better prepared – or left her home altogether.

Her home near Boone, North Carolina, survived but there was no power, cell service or water. Some neighbors filled buckets from a nearby river to flush toilets and washed children with bottled water.

Miller recalled hearing the ping of emergency phone warnings early on the morning of Sept. 27, just hours before the water rushed in. By then it was too late.

"We knew there was a storm coming, but we didn't know it was going to be quite like that," she said. "We really weren't prepared at all."

Rescue teams continued to comb rivers and towns for victims or survivors of the massive floods that pounded western North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Georgia. The death toll as of Thursday afternoon was at 200 across the Southeast and expected to climb. In Buncombe County, the epicenter of the devastation that includes Asheville, officials so far have counted at least 72 dead.

Authorities also will begin the process of studying the alert system that warned residents of the incoming floods, triggered by remnants of Hurricane Helene, and how the system could improve.

Interviews with residents, experts, meteorologists and local officials paint a picture of a storm rapidly intensifying, barrelling farther inland than usual and stunning many residents and officials with its ferocity.

The historic disaster also presented unique challenges to emergency officials trying to evacuate and safeguard residents in a mountainous region assailed by multiple floods and tropical-storm winds.

Residents from Tennessee to North Carolina complained they weren't given enough warning – or any warning at all – of the floodwaters that overtook their homes and the dams nearing their breaking points.

"There was no warning," said Sunday Greer, a high school counselor at Sullivan East High School in Bluff City, Tennessee. "Basically, we did not receive anything officially."

The emergency planning and response to the floods, from forecasts to evacuations, will be studied in the weeks and months ahead, said Russ Strickland, Maryland's emergency management director and president of the National Emergency Management Association.

"This one came with greater strength than they anticipated," he said. "Before it's all over, there will be some very serious conversations with NOAA, the forecast office of NHC, state officials. Did they miss something? Was there an indication?"

Dire early warnings

As Helene gathered strength in the warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico, Buncombe County officials began taking phone calls from meteorologists as they tracked the storm's path and intensity.

Helene was several days away from making landfall near Florida's Big Bend. But a cold front had recently swept through western North Carolina, unleashing storms and dumping more than six inches of rain in the mountainous region, swelling streams and saturating the ground. Helene was a large, strong, fast-moving storm – heading right at them and promising to dump more water.

The situation looked so dire that by Wednesday, Sept. 26, Buncombe County officials declared a local state of emergency for low-lying areas, such as Asheville and Montreat, the county's director of communication, Lillian Govus, told USA TODAY.

Later that day, they stood up an Emergency Operations Center in the county emergency services building just north of Asheville. County manager Avril Pinder, Assistant Emergency Services Director Ryan Cole and law enforcement and fire officials, among others, gathered to digest the data and forecasts and decide what to do with all of it.

"CATASTROPHIC FLASH FLOODING POSSIBLE," warned a post on the Buncombe County Facebook site that day, repeating the warning in Spanish for its nearly 22,000 Latino residents.

No evacuations were ordered.

'This is really about to get bad'

Around the same time, Clay Chaney, a meteorologist at the National Weather Service's Weather Forecast Office in Greer, South Carolina, settled into his workspace and began tracking Helene's activity in the Gulf. Responsible for upstate South Carolina, western North Carolina and parts of Georgia, Chaney sensed mountain flooding would be the biggest threat to his region.

He was all too aware of the thunderstorms raking the region. Known as "predecessor events," the storm created dangerous conditions for Helene's path. A hydrologist in his office mulled over river gauge readings and other data to forecast flood threats.

By Tuesday, Sept. 24, Chaney and others began holding daily webinars, hour-long virtual chats with local and state emergency management officials in his region, including Buncombe County. At 3:30 p.m., more than 230 people dialed in, as Chaney talked through a series of slides showing Helene's path, wind speed and the potential of severe flooding as it reached the Appalachian range.

Low-lying areas needed to be ready for "worst-case scenarios," he told those on the call. Chaney patiently answered questions as the webinar stretched to nearly an hour.

The next morning, Wednesday, Sept. 25, Chaney reached his office and his heart leapt – the rainfall totals from the earlier thunderstorms were as high as feared, up to 9 inches in some places. Fresh rains could create historic floods, he and others predicted. That day, rain from Helene's outer bands began dropping in the region.

"We were like, 'Oh crap, this is really about to get bad," he said.

Rivers rise to historic highs

At the Sept. 25 webinar with emergency officials, Chaney stepped up the rhetoric, comparing the upcoming floods to those of the "Great Flood of 1916," a deluge that overran towns, killed at least 80 people in Buncombe County and destroyed homes, factories and railroads.

His office also released posts on social media sites with dire predictions.

"*URGENT MESSAGE*," it began. "This will be one of the most significant weather events to happen in the western portions of the area in the modern era. Record flooding is forecasted and has been compared to the floods of 1916 in the Asheville area."

The post added: "We cannot stress the significance of this event enough. Heed all evacuation orders from your local Emergency Managers ..."

Throughout the region, river gauges were heralding unprecedented rises and forecasting historic highs. The gauge at French Broad River at Asheville showed the river rise more than 2 feet an hour, from 2.31 feet at 3 p.m. Wednesday to 10.19 feet at 9 a.m. Thursday.

"By Thursday, we're pretty much forecasting the worst-case scenario," Chaney said, "and letting our partners know about it."

Not everyone was tuned in to the impending storm. Denia Zuniga, 44, a native of San Pedro Sula, Honduras, living about 10 miles east of Asheville in Swannanoa, had worked back-to-back shifts cleaning homes and had not been following the news.

As she left work late Thursday, a co-worker told her a hurricane was coming, but didn't say where. She didn't think much of it.

That night, it rained but otherwise nothing seemed out of the ordinary. She fed her kids, Estefany, 10, and Anthony, 18, and went to sleep with husband, Pedro Rivera Hernandez, 43, also from Honduras.

Her smartphone never rang with alerts.

'Take action now'

In Buncombe County, officials were heeding forecasters' warnings.

At 4 p.m. Thursday, officials from Buncombe and Henderson counties, as well as the North Carolina Highway Patrol, held a virtual news conference over Zoom, broadcast over several official social media sites, to warn residents of the forecast of "catastrophic" and "historic" flooding and suggested, for the first time, that residents in flood-prone areas should evacuate.

Pinder, the county manager, warned an estimated 15,000 homes in flood-prone areas could be impacted by flooding.

"We cannot stress enough the seriousness of this situation," she said. "If you live in a flood prone area ... you should take action now – right now."

As Helene's outer bands strummed into western North Carolina late Thursday and early Friday, dumping rain over the region, rivers swelled, quickly overflowing in some areas. At about 4 a.m., lights started to flick off across the county, as power outages swept the region.

Emergency personnel reported rivers in Buncombe County overtaking their banks and rushing down roads.

'Niagara Falls for five hours straight'

At 5:30 a.m. Friday, Sept. 27, Chaney dispatched an urgent warning to Buncombe County: "FLASH FLOOD EMERGENCY FOR SWANNANOA RIVER VALLEY BELOW NORTH FORK RESERVOIR ..."

The message buzzed cell phones throughout the county as Wireless Emergency Alerts, the same alerts that warn residents of incoming tornados.

Forty-five minutes later, at 6:15 a.m., Buncombe County issued its own emergency warning: a mandatory evacuation order that beeped into phones via the Integrated Public Alert & Warning System, or IPAWS, FEMA's

system for local emergencies. The county didn't need approval from the state to order the mandatory evacuation, Govus said.

But at that point, it was too late to get out, Chaney said.

"By the time you get a flash flood emergency, it's way too late to evacuate," he said. "At that point, your only option is to go to higher ground."

Zuniga woke up early Friday morning as winds pounded the walls of her home. She peeked outside and saw a thin layer of water covering the yard and street outside. She shook her husband awake and checked her phone: No signal.

By the time she threw on clothes and stepped outside to warn a neighbor, the water had risen nearly to her knees, she said. Everywhere she looked, water rushed around her. It was time to go, she thought.

She grabbed her kids and their passports and Hernandez drove them off in his truck. Within a few hours, floodwaters had completely swallowed their home. The water rushed up so fast that many of her neighbors were trapped in their homes and had to be rescued, Zuniga said.

"We lost everything," she said later at a shelter where she and her family retreated to in nearby Fletcher. "Everything we owned was in that house."

She wished she'd had an earlier warning.

"We would've evacuated," Zuniga said. "Knowing what was coming, we would've left."

All that Friday, walls of muddied water rushed down roads and highways, tossing houses off foundations, mauling bridges and sweeping residents into the torrent.

By afternoon, the French Broad River at Asheville had crested at 24.67 feet, breaking its record from the 1916 flood by more than a foot, according to NOAA. Another French Broad River gauge at Fletcher, marked its crest at 30.31 feet – more than 10 feet higher than its record crest in 2004.

Govus said they relied on river readings to decide when to evacuate. But the sheer scope and destructive force of the floods took everyone by surprise.

"It was like being hit by Niagara Falls for five hours straight," she said.

'Nowhere to get out of the way'

As other communities dug themselves out of the flood's rubble, other residents and officials complained they weren't given enough warning.

In East Tennessee, dams owned and operated by the Tennessee Valley Authority, the nation's largest public power provider, provided a critical mechanism for slowing the flow of Helene's historic floodwaters as they tore down mountains across the state line.

Flooding upstream of the dams was devastating in some places, prompting a dramatic airlift evacuation of 62 people from a hospital rooftop in Unicoi County. The Nolichucky River, which turned the hospital into an island, flowed with nearly twice the volume of Niagara Falls over a small TVA dam downstream.

Eleven flooding deaths were confirmed in Tennessee by Oct. 2, and officials expected the number to grow.

By the time the first flash flood emergency warnings buzzed into Kriston Hicks' phone at 9:20 a.m. on Friday, Sept.

27, the water already had muscled into her home in Hampton, Tennessee, that she shared with her 78-year-old grandfather and six dogs.

Deciding to evacuate, she waded through water to retrieve her grandfather and carry him to her van.

"No one came to tell me," Hicks said. "There is no siren in Hampton."

Though her home was destroyed by the flood and torn down on Wednesday, Hicks was reunited with four dogs.

Other residents received the alerts – but didn't heed them. In Erwin, Tennessee, Zully Manzanares saw the warnings that began the night of Sept. 26, but didn't grasp the scope of the disaster headed her way.

"We've gotten them before," she said.

But she never thought the warnings would lead to the devastation she saw.

Manzanares, a Head Start program coordinator and bilingual Spanish speaker, helps immigrants in Erwin's Hispanic neighborhoods. At least three members of the community who worked at the Impact Plastics on the Nolichucky River have been confirmed dead or missing.

The Tennessee Bureau of Investigation has opened an investigation into the incident, including allegations that employees were told to stay at work during the floods. The company has denied the allegations.

The flooding continued beyond the dams, too. Some downstream residents, like Greer, the Bluff City high school counselor, said they were not warned of continued flooding as the utility released record amounts of water through spill gates.

"They're ... saying they've got to prepare for the next storm," Greer said. "They didn't prepare for the first storm."

On Thursday, Sept. 26, the day before the floods, Watauga County, North Carolina, officially declared a state of emergency. County officials sent out wireless alert warnings via cell phones, but with cell phone service down, many of those alerts never reached phones, said William Holt, the county's emergency services director.

As Helene approached and conditions deteriorated, Holt said emergency officials struggled with where residents could be safely evacuated – if there was such a route. An initial city shelter flooded and had to be moved, he said. Two people in the area died in landslides.

"The last thing we would want to do is to move someone from one area to another just to put them in harm's way," he said, and added: "There was nowhere to get out of the way in this type of event."

Jervis and Kenning reported from North Carolina, Dassow reported from Tennessee. Reach Jervis on X: @MrRJervis.

More inside

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Helene's aftermath - 'Take action now' - Transylvania, Polk get aid to remote communities in wake of Helene

October 7, 2024 | Times-News, The (Hendersonville, NC) Author: Deirdre Funcheon; Asheville Citizen Times | Section: News | 728 Words Page: A1 OpenURL Link

Scott and Andrea Senff, proprietors of 6-1 Hauling and Junk Removal, moved to Western North Carolina six years ago after living in Palm Beach County, Fla. "We moved here to get away from hurricanes," Andrea said.

But at 4 a.m. Friday, they were stirred awake by firefighters who said a bridge in their community of Turkey Pen Gap was about to wash out. They were essentially told to "get out now or die," according to Andrea.

The couple loaded their four children and animals into their car, but winds were so strong that it was impossible to drive. They rode out the storm in the car and eventually made it to their church, then an Ingles parking lot, and finally to a friend's house. Since returning to their home Sunday, they have served as liaisons between their neighborhood and first responders to coordinate needs and supplies.

During a press conference Thursday afternoon, Transylvania County Manager Jaime Laughter announced that county staff restored access to the community after roads had washed out, with help from volunteers, including Lake Toxaway Grading and Carmen and Kyle West.

In Transylvania County, there have been no storm-related deaths from Hurricane Helene reported, and there are currently no missing persons reports, per county officials. An estimate of damage is expected later this week.

Shelters remain open at the Transylvania County Parks and Recreation Center and the Ag Center at the Asheville Airport, but staff were connecting people with resources so they could move out of the shelter and into more permanent housing. Wellness checks can be requested through the state's 211 hotline.

"As of today, Emergency Management has distributed 140,000 bottles of water and 51 pallets of MREs," Laughter said. The department was providing fire departments with Starlink satellite communications systems and fuel for chainsaws.

Duke Power is expected to restore power to the majority of locations by midnight Friday.

In the Town of Rosman, power had been restored to schools, and water service restored to the community, although a boil water advisory remained in effect. MREs and bottled water are available at Rosman Town Hall. Anchor Baptist Church in Pisgah Forest is also distributing supplies.

Transylvania County Sheriff Chuck Owenby announced that I-40 to Tennessee remains closed and that drivers should be careful traveling on 276 South between Island Ford and the Connestee Main Gate, See Off, Becky Mountain and lower end of East Fork. "We have about 40 roads here in this county that have been shut by my officers," he said, adding that many are still obstructed by trees or power lines. Courts and schools are closed through Friday at least. The landfill is open.

Rachel Kelleher, an accountant and avid whitewater kayaker, set up the website HurricaneHeleneWNC.com to coordinate needs and donations for remote communities in Transylvania and Polk Counties. She said a tight-knit group of outdoor recreation enthusiasts, among them Chris Wing of the H20 Paddling School in Saluda, were banding together to pool resources.

"People have kayaked in supplies to areas that would otherwise involve hiking in several miles, since roads and

bridges are devastated," Kelleher said.

Kelleher's group teamed up with Asheville's French Broad River Academy independent middle school and was able to accept donations and procure supplies through its Salamander Fund. Kelleher reached out to Sawyer Products and secured donations of water filtration systems. "It is not sustainable to schlep 16-oz. water bottles to communities every day," she said. Sawyer's donations will provide a more long-term solution.

Kelleher also secured two-way backcountry radios from Rocky Talkie, a company whose product is popular among climbers and mountain bikers.

Headwaters Outfitters, a fly-fishing shop and guide service in Rosman, was also coordinating donations. The company lost some land at its campground and had to close its fly shop and taproom and cancel paddling trips for the month of October. Shop manager Hannah Myers Overgaard said that people from her team would be helping at Rosman Town Hall.

Jessica Whitmire, Director of Operations at Headwaters Outfitters was among those handing out water and supplies there Thursday. She noted that Rosman is the headwaters of the French Broad River and said there were still pockets without power and water. Residents of Balsam Grove, Lake Toxaway and Rocky Bottom in South Carolina were among those who'd been seeking help. "This community has really in the last six days moved mountains, literally," she said.

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North Carolina bear experts: Potential for increased clashes following Helene

October 7, 2024 | Times-News, The (Hendersonville, NC) Author: Iris Seaton; Asheville Citizen Times | Section: News | 669 Words Page: A8 OpenURL Link

"We do have concerns that, with the number of damaged homes, it provides a lot of opportunity for bears to gain easy access to homes."

Colleen Olfenbuttel

A black bear biologist for the NCWRC

ASHEVILLE — Bear-human conflict may increase in Western North Carolina following Tropical Storm Helene, the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission is warning.

Colleen Olfenbuttel, a black bear biologist for the NCWRC, told the Citizen Times that, though there had been no reports of bear attacks as of Friday, an increase in reports of bear sightings led the commission to issue the warning in an attempt to avoid potential problems.

"We do have concerns that, with the number of damaged homes, it provides a lot of opportunity for bears to gain easy access to homes," Olfenbuttel said.

BearWise, a consortium of bear biologists including the NCWRC, offers this advice:

Keep windows and doors closed and latched if bears are observed in your area. If you are unable to secure them due to damage, consider setting out an "unwelcome mat" made of plywood and nails.

If you have an outdoor refrigerator or freezer, consider installing a padlock on the door to keep bears from accessing any food inside.

Secure food, garbage and recycling. This may be more difficult with many trash services suspended in areas of WNC. The NCWRC recommends making every effort to store garbage in a bear-resistant structure, such as a shed, garage or home until it can be collected.

Add bear-resistant measures to your trashcans using instructions from BearWise at bearwise.org under the heading "Keep Bears Out."

If you need to report bear behavior and activity, contact the NC Wildlife Helpline at 866-318-2401 or HWI@ncwildlife.org. The Wildlife Helpline receives calls from 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday -Friday.

See the full NCWRC news release on the agency's blog at ncwildlife.org/blog/2024.

Did any bears die in Tropical Storm Helene?

Olfenbuttel said there had been only one report to the NCWRC of a bear possibly injured in the storm, and none of bear deaths. She added that's likely in part due to their natural instincts.

"Compared to other wildlife, bears are remarkably adaptive to a whole host of conditions, including storms like this," she said. "Even though they don't have TVs or radios like us, they are wild animals that kind of can sense when a storm is coming, and they know to take shelter. We've received videos of bears going up in trees to escape

floodwaters and to ride out the storm, which is kind of their natural behavior."

The recent warning from the NCWRC also said that bears are not experiencing a shortage of natural food sources in the wake of Helene and, as always, should under no circumstances be offered food.

Are bears attracted to human feces?

Olfenbuttel said the rumor that black bears may be attracted to human feces left outdoors during water outages and issues with sewage systems in WNC could have some basis in reality.

"We certainly know that one component of trash that can attract certain bears — not all bears necessarily, you know; bears have sometimes have individual tastes just like us — but we do know certain bears, boy, when they find trash with a dirty diaper, they love it," she said.

But avoiding attracting bears with makeshift outdoor toilets is likely easier than avoiding attracting bears with garbage and food. Olfenbuttel said her advice is the same she would give regardless of bear activity.

"If you're having to use the bathroom outside, if it's possible, use a shovel, make a hole in the ground, use it, and then put the TP in there and cover it with dirt. And doing that will go a long ways in assuring that it doesn't become attractive," she said.

Iris Seaton is the trending news reporter for the Asheville Citizen Times, part of the USA TODAY Network. Reach her at iseaton@citizentimes.com.

"We do have concerns that, with the number of damaged homes, it provides a lot of opportunity for bears to gain easy access to homes."

Colleen Olfenbuttel

A black bear biologist for the NCWRC

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Iris Seaton, Asheville Citizen Times, 'North Carolina bear experts: Potential for increased clashes following Helene', *Times-News, The* (online), 7 Oct 2024 A8 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?
p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C0EC60F6AFB9B0>



Mobile ER in Asheville sees 300 patients in 5 days

October 7, 2024 | Times-News, The (Hendersonville, NC) Author: Jessica Van Egeren; Milwaukee Journal Sentinel | Section: News | 694 Words Page: A3 OpenURL Link

ASHEVILLE - Chainsaw injuries, poison ivy, strains and sprains: These are among the storm-related injuries the medical staff is now seeing as Asheville residents dig out from Tropical Storm Helene.

But rather than receiving treatment at HCA Healthcare's Mission Hospital Emergency Department, these types of injuries now are being treated in a mobile emergency room that is staffed by medical volunteers, located in four tents in the ER's parking lot.

The team's presence has had an immediate impact.

Mission's emergency department has 94 beds. On Sept. 27, the first full day after Tropical Storm Helene arrived in Asheville, roughly 500 people came to Mission's ER. That is double the 250 patients it typically sees in a day, said Nancy Lindell, a spokesperson with HCA Healthcare.

"Our role is to decompress that number of patients by bringing those types of patients — the lacerations, puncture wounds, dehydration patients — down here so Mission staff can treat the patients with higher, more critical diagnoses," Richard Hess, a registered nurse, told the Citizen Times Oct. 4.

"This is why they were overloaded right after the storm."

Hess is among the 40 medical professionals with the National Disaster Medical System currently working in the mobile emergency room. He and other members of the disaster medical system are managed by the Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response, the federal agency that provides and sets up all the tents and medical equipment.

The responders work 12-hour shifts for 14 days straight.

The team's presence allows Mission staff to triage patients. Those with serious conditions, such as heart attacks, strokes and life-threatening injuries, are treated in the hospital. Patients with less-severe medical needs go to the mobile tents for care.

Upon arrival, they have their blood pressure, heart rate and other vital signs checked. The mobile ER has two X-ray machines and the ability to process blood work.

Dehydration is an issue when an area like Asheville is cut off from tap water. Dehydrated patients are led to an area of one of the tents to receive intravenous fluids.

Blood work to determine a host of metabolic conditions, such as diabetes, also is conducted in the mobile ER. Hess said people who rely on insulin found themselves in need of medical care post-Helene.

"Insulin needs to be refrigerated and many people still don't have power," Hess said. "That's a huge problem."

The mobile ER has the all the equipment, tools and drugs that a hospital "crash cart" holds, meaning staff can treat patients who unexpectedly begin to suffer cardiac arrest or other immediate life-and-death emergencies.

'Getting the best care'

Asheville resident Sally Carter, 77, is among the patients who have been treated at the tent hospital, which began operating the night of Sept. 30. Four days later, she was recovering in a hospital bed in the mobile ER.

Carter slipped on her kitchen floor and fell against the refrigerator. She thought she had broken her finger. When she arrived at Mission Hospital's ER, she was redirected to the mobile medical unit.

There, her fingers were X-rayed. One on her left hand was dislocated.

"This is fascinating," Carter said of the tent hospital. "These doctors and nurses are from all over. I'm getting the best care."

The medical and emergency staff deployed to treat patients in the wake of natural disasters and other crises remain on-site until they are no longer needed, said Pete Cassell, an Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response spokesperson.

"We don't anticipate that happening anytime soon," Cassell said Saturday.

(This story was updated to add a photo.)

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WHERE TO FIND HELP - Resources available in Henderson County Free water, food and supplies

October 7, 2024 | Times-News, The (Hendersonville, NC) Author: Hendersonville Times-News | Section: News | 437 Words Page: A4 OpenURL Link

Food, toiletries, baby items and other essential are available at these six Resource Hubs, which open at 9 a.m. daily:

Etowah Elementary School, 320 Etowah School Road, Etowah.

Rugby Middle School, 3345 Haywood Road, Hendersonville.

East Henderson High School, 150 Eagle Pride Drive, East Flat Rock.

North Henderson High School, 35 Fruitland Road, Hendersonville.

Mills River Town Hall, 124 Town Center Drive, Mills River.

Fletcher Town Hall, 300 Old Cane Creek Road, Fletcher

Showers and phone charging

Mills River Town Hall, 124 Town Center Drive, Mills River. Bring your own toiletries and towels.

Curbside storm debris removal

Free to Henderson County residents. Push waste to the right of way of a property for pickup. Storm debris includes tree branches, leaves, logs, building materials, furniture, paint, etc. It should be separated from household garbage, construction debris, vegetative debris, large appliances, electronics and hazardous waste.

Shelter

WNC Agricultural Center, 1301 Fanning Bridge Road, Fletcher. Phone (828) 687-1414. Has phone charging and wifi.

Edneyville Elementary School, 2875 Pace Road, Hendersonville. Has bathroom facilities, hot meals and shelter for pets.

Hot meals

Salvation Army of Hendersonville is serving breakfast at 9 a.m. and dinner at 4 p.m. 239 Third Ave. E., Hendersonville.

East Henderson High School, 150 Eagle Pride Drive, East Flat Rock. Hot meals available at noon and 5 p.m. daily.

North Henderson High School, 35 Fruitland Road, Hendersonville. Hot meals available at noon and 5 p.m. daily.

Etowah Elementary School, 320 Etowah School Road, Etowah. Hot meals available at noon and 5 p.m. daily.

Mills River Town Hall, 124 Town Center Drive, Mills River. Free hot meals also available at noon and 5 p.m.

Pharmacies

CVS/pharmacy, 2001 Spartanburg Highway, Hendersonville. 828-693-7244.

Etowah Pharmacy, 6527 Brevard Road., Etowah. 828-890-0022, or 828-577-9508.

Harris Teeter Pharmacy, 636 Spartanburg Highway, Hendersonville. 828-696-9713.

Ingles Pharmacy, 1980 Asheville Highway, Hendersonville. 828-698-1116.

Ingles Pharmacy, 2901 Hendersonville Road, Fletcher. 828-684-2838.

Ingles Pharmacy, 625 Spartanburg Highway, Hendersonville. 828-694-3746.

Ingles Pharmacy, 3643 Howard Gap Road, Hendersonville. 828-698-2592.

Ingles Pharmacy, 220 Highland Lake Road, Flat Rock. 828-692-0546.

Pardee Rx — Fleming, 1027 Fleming St., Suite A, Hendersonville. 828-435-8140.

Publix Pharmacy, 635 Greenville Highway, Hendersonville. 828-393-6925.

Sam's Club, 300 Highlands Square Drive, Hendersonville. 828-698-6282.

Walgreens, 1148 Asheville Highway, Hendersonville. 828-693-8934 or 828-693-8308.

Wal-Mart Supercenter Pharmacy, 250 Highlands Square Drive, Hendersonville. 828-696-8021.

How to help

Donations may be dropped off at 118 McAbee Court, Flat Rock. Needed: Non-perishable food, especially meal-type canned goods, plus cleaning supplies, tarps, plasticware, paper plates, cups, flashlights and batteries. Not needed: diapers, perishable food, clothing items at this time.

For more information

Henderson County's call center handles non-medical requests for information. Call 828-771-6670 or email Helene-info@hcem.org. For emergencies, call 911. For more, visit www.visithendersonvillenc.org/helene-relief.

Churches, businesses and nonprofit groups offering services: https://www.hendersoncountync.gov/em/page/community-involvement

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Stone Mountain News

October 7, 2024 | Tribune, The (Elkin, NC) Author: Ola K. Norman Onorman@wilkes.net| Section: Lifestyles | 251 Words OpenURL Link

Stone Mtn State Park will be closed at least until Oct. 31 so Garden Creek Baptist Church will not be able to have services until they open back up. The church survived Hurricane Helene though the parking lot will need some work.

The Blue Ridge Parkway will be closed indefinitely so we may not get to enjoy the fall colors there.

Wayne McMeans, with the ICGH substance recovery mobile unit is at the Traphill Branch Library on the 1st and 3rd Tuesdays, from 10 a.m. until 3 p.m.

The Reading Trap will meet at Traphill Branch Library on Thursday, Oct. 10 at noon. This month they are reading "Thank You, Jeeves" by P.G. Wodehouse. Even if you've not read the book, come and let them know what you are reading.

Happy birthday wishes go to William Kennedy on Oct. 7, Terrie McGuire and Kaleb Dunn on Oct. 8, Jimmy Ray Hutchinson on Oct. 9, Robert McDaniel and Bob Johnson on Oct. 10, Jeanie Woodie and Steve McCarter on Oct. 11, Cameron Brown, Anita Bauguess, Joshua McGrady and Rylen Michael Bare on Oct. 12, and Sonda Harris on Oct. 13.

Happy anniversary wishes go to Joshua and Heather Bryant Sidden who celebrate their 15th anniversary on Oct. 9 and to Brandon and Rebekah C. Loredo who celebrate their third anniversary on Oct. 9.

Traphill had a low temperature of 64 degrees on Oct. 5 and a high temperature of 80 degrees on Oct. 2. There was .3 inch of rain during the week of Sept. 29-Oct. 5.

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Ola K. Norman Onorman@wilkes.net, 'Stone Mountain News', *Tribune, The* (online), 7 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C14B668032F6E0



Floods of '40, '16 still the kings of the beasts

October 7, 2024 | Tribune, The (Elkin, NC) Author: Stephen Harris Contributing Columnist| Section: Yadkin | 737 Words OpenURL Link

Such a helpless, odd - yet tinged with awe - feeling for those standing on the Gwyn-McNeil Bridge - the only physical connection these days for Elkin and Jonesville - who gawked at choked, brown, roiling floodwaters passing over Standard Street and its adjoining businesses in Elkin.

And there was nothing anyone could do about it. But watch.

Those who made it to downtown during flooding from the storm Helene got a fresh reminder of the power of nature and the inability of mankind to tame the untamable beast.

And yet the waters that crept up to as far as Elkin Antiques on South Bridge Street rank only fourth among the Hometown's worst floods.

The 24.11-foot crest of the Yadkin River in Elkin during the latest storm fell far short of those of the legendary 1940 and 1916 floods, and even fell short of a 1983 flood, which reached 24.88 feet, according to the National Water Prediction Service of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

When we hear about floods Back in the Hometown we tend to think of the historic 1916 flood that took out the South Bridge Street bridge at the time. But the 36-foot '16 flood here actually was bested by the 1940 flood that reached 37.50 feet above flood stage.

As evidence I offer a remarkable photo from '40 taken by a second cousin of mine, the late Lester Luffman. It shows folks standing on the north sidewalk of East Main Street, looking at the flood-covered road with the old Smithey's store/now Yadkin Valley Community School building with its familiar rock walls standing in water.

Here is an updated list of top 10 downtown Elkin floods:

37.50' - Aug. 16, 1940

36.00' - July 8, 1916

24.88' - April 10, 1983

24.11' - Sept. 27, 2024

23.52' - Aug. 10, 1970

22.80' - Aug. 17, 1994

22.64' - June 21, 1972

22.52' - Oct. 29, 2020

21.81' - Nov. 12, 2020

21.21' - April 21, 1992

Source: National Water Prediction Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. For the top 60 Elkin floods, see https://water.noaa.gov/gauges/elkn7 on the internet. Flood stage is considered at 18 feet. Normal is around eight feet.

I remember most vividly the 1970 flood (No. 5 on the list). Dad drove me down to Big Elkin Creek on Preacher Field Road north of Elkin, and we marveled at the flood-covered bridge and the brown, rushing water that made us turn the car around and head back up to high ground, back to home.

There, Dad bailed water with our one, metal bucket at the basement sump pump (and I toted bucket loads outside for dumping) that was overwhelmed by uncoated, leaking cinder blocks that served as the house's foundation.

After the latest storm I returned home to find in that same basement only rugs soaked and a puddle at the low point of the basement floor. A drainage system installed some two decades ago averted the exasperation that I once saw in my father's face.

Now a new generation will have their own, vivid memories of, say, the flooded Heritage Center parking lot or maybe Crater Park or Elkin Park along Big Elkin Creek and will comment to others: do you remember the flood of '24?

"I've seen the football field flooded and the park but never anything like this," Matt Settle, a neighbor of mine and member of that new generation, told ABC45 TV news (internet address: https://abc45.com/news/local/residents-in-elkin-shocked-over-historic-flooding-jonesville-helene-north-carolina-surry-county).

"This is just such a great community," the new Hunt's Homestyle restaurant co-proprietor Matt Ponce de Leon, who's also a minister, also told ABC45, "a community where the love of God is absolutely present. We definitely have faith in the Lord that we will be able to do what he will have us do." The Standard Street restaurant flooded.

The floods of '40 and '16 will never be revisited upon us thanks to the 1962 installation of a flood-control dam on the Yadkin west of Wilkesboro, the W. Kerr Scott Dam and Reservoir. It protects us from the worst of floodwaters from upriver drainage systems like the Yadkin headwaters starting at Blowing Rock, Buffalo and Kings creeks in Caldwell County, and Elk and Beaver creeks and Lewis Fork in western Wilkes.

Think of the mess we would have had a couple of weeks ago if not for the reservoir.

But we must contend still with floodwaters downriver from the dam like those from Reddies and Roaring rivers and Big Elkin Creek.

Let us never ignore the roar of the untamable Yadkin. Always keep an eye out for the beast.

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The great floods of 1916 and 2024

October 7, 2024 | Tribune, The (Elkin, NC) Author: D.G. Martin| Section: Yadkin | 728 Words OpenURL Link

One of Miss Letitia Currie's favorite topics in her history class in the 1950s at Davidson Junior High School was the Great Flood of 1916.

Miss Currie was the daughter of a Davidson College professor.

Many of her students also knew what she was talking about because their parents had experienced that 1916 flood and talked about it whenever rain poured down hard.

Today, many of Miss Currie's students, their parents and grandparents, great grandparents, and their children and grandchildren are having a similar experience dealing with the flooding that followed Hurricane Helene.

And they will be talking about it for the rest of their lives, calling it "The great flood of 2024."

"News of Davidson," the news outlet in my hometown, published the following account by Gatewood Payne Campbell, granddaughter of Davidson professor Gatey Workman and niece of the late, great opera singer William Workman. Gatewood and her husband Johnny live near Black Mountain.

"Life has stopped. We don't know dates or times. Sirens are 24 hours a day. It's relentless. Helicopters invade our sky. Chainsaws sound nonstop and we run outside in hopes it's in our neighborhood. ...

"Let me back up. We awoke around 6 Friday morning without power. The storm was loud and pounding but we didn't know where we were in the storm. We could not get updates. Around 8:30 we lost internet across cell lines. I called a friend and got her to look at radar and let me know an ETA on rain ending. That was the last call I was able to make. By 9:30 ALL cell signal was completely lost. The rain was increasing. We could see the creek rising. Johnny stepped outside under the porch and was soaked from head to toe after 30 seconds.

"Around 11 we felt like we could go out and survey the neighborhood. We began to feel the weight of the destruction, yet we had NO clue. The creek had turned into a river greater than 50 yards wide. The noise of water heaters, propane tanks, bikes, grills, construction supplies and yard equipment banging on the rails of our bridge to Black Mountain was deafening. We saw two neighbors with trees on their homes and knew they were taking on water."

Meanwhile in Asheville, Bryan King and his wife Angela Koh are assessing the damage to their 12 Bones Smokehouse on Foundry Street in the River Arts District. As I wrote in my book, "North Carolina's Eateries," "Even if 12 Bones had not been made famous by Barack Obama's visits there, it would be a 'must-do' in Asheville." When I first visited 12 Bones several years ago, it was located closer to the French Broad River. Had Bryan and Angela not moved the restaurant few blocks up the hill it would have been completely washed away. At its current location they may be able to repair and survive.

Angela's sister writes, "As the floodwaters recede, we see catastrophic damage to homes and businesses, including the River Arts District, where 12 Bones was founded. Entire livelihoods have been lost. In nearly every direction you look, everything is caked in mud and scattered debris. Broken wood and mangled wiring now stand where intersections once existed."

Coincidentally, on October 15, the publisher Blair is releasing "River Road," a book of poems by mountain author Wayne Caldwell. His fine poetry describes the power of the flooding waters on the French Broad as shown in the

following excerpt:

SELECTION FROM "RIVER ROAD" BY WAYNE CALDWELL

The French Broad, being a river, floods.

How many times over the millennia has it left its banks

and moved whatever was swept up in it

To some far away (and sometimes ridiculous) place?

Perhaps thousands. And each time it returned to its placid face.

The worst (in the last century) was in July 1916.

Asheville's Riverside Park was washed away.

Parts of which one could have seen rushing by my house

Had it been there then. (Even this relatively high ground

Would have been inundated for several days.)

Only a half dozen people died in Asheville,

Which I'd consider a small miracle. Thanks to the telephone,

Warning came to Marshall, and only two or three drowned,

Even though the courthouse was about the only thing left

On Main Street. Fifty-Three houses disappeared.

From high ground one could have seen rushing by

Bales of cotton, houses, mules, gas tanks,

Vehicles, sheds, chickens, roosting on pieces of roof,

Tires, fences, trees, pigs, dogs, cats,

Anything thing not tied down -- and many things that were.

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Trail volunteers needed in Polk County

October 7, 2024 | Tryon Daily Bulletin, The (NC) Author: Staff Reports | Section: Community | 132 Words OpenURL Link

Clean-up required after Helene

POLK COUNTY—In the aftermath of Tropical Storm Helene, Polk County Parks and Recreation needs trail volunteers to help clear the county's trails.

"All of our trails need some cleanup work," Polk County Trails said in an email. "If you are willing to bring a bobcat or small tractor for debris removal, that is desperately needed."

The group asks that anyone available at any point during the week of October 14 email organizers at recreation@polknc.org or leave a message at (828) 894-8199.

Polk County Trails will coordinate with the maintenance department and reach out to potential volunteers.

"Thanks for all the help," the email continued. "Our goal is to have our trails safe to open for everyone to enjoy."

The post Trail volunteers needed in Polk County appeared first on The Tryon Daily Bulletin.

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