

How to help people and volunteer in NC in Hurricane Helene aftermath

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In Western North Carolina, many are dead, missing and cut off from the outside world - and help - in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene.

The Category 4 hurricane made landfall in northern Florida and was still a raging tropical storm when it passed over the Carolinas. The storm flooded North Carolina towns, wiped neighborhoods away and killed at least 11 across the state.

President Joe Biden Saturday approved Gov. Roy Cooper's request for FEMA help in 25 counties, and federal aid flocked to Asheville and Charlotte Sunday. Crews set up base camps, waiting for some of the 280 closed roads to reopen, as Red Cross planes and helicopters searched for people stranded in the towns near the Appalachian Mountains, said American Red Cross Vice President of Disaster Response Jennifer Pipa Sunday.

Floods severed towns from nearby roads, and emergency services struggled to reach those suffering without using aircraft.

How to help people affected by Helene

If your organization would like to be added to this list, please email news@charlotteobserver.com with the subject line "How to Help NC."

"Cash is best," according to FEMA's website. It's the most effective, flexible way to aid organizations. FEMA recommends donating to verified organizations directing money to on-the-ground groups that know what communities need. A list of organizations can be found on the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster website. Those same organizations accept volunteers, too.

FEMA cautions people to not self deploy to affected areas - especially any still-flooded areas.

How to volunteer to help

You can find more information about volunteer opportunities with VolunteerNC and meal assistance with local food banks.

Hurricane Helene GoFundMe

GoFundMe, a crowdfunding platform that allows individuals to create their own fundraisers, launched a Hurricane Helene Relief page with verified fundraisers Friday. As of Sunday, it had nearly 400 fundraisers on the verified landing page.

In Charlotte, a tree struck down during Helene fell onto a Hoskins home and killed a man inside. That man, according to a GoFundMe page set up by his nephew, was Anthony "Tony" Taylor. His wife and four children survived, but he did not.

Neighbors said half the tree fell onto another home months before. It should have been cut down already, they said.

"For some time, we had been trying to get the tree removed, but since it wasn't on our property, there was little we

could do," wrote Taylor's nephew, Stephen Taylor, in the post.

Also in Charlotte, a group of pilots is asking for money to help air-drop supplies to those in communities surrounded now by water instead of roads.

"We believe that small aircraft can deploy resources faster because we don't need to wait for roads to be cleared. We'll use funds to purchase supplies like nonperishable foods, hygiene items, and baby supplies," wrote Benjamin Spells.

In Swannanoa, host to some of the state's worst flood scenes, a couple and their children - ages 2 and 7 - took refuge in their attic as orange floodwaters moved sludge and debris through their neighborhood. The Zara Family last frantically called family at 11 a.m. Friday, after hours without contact. A neighbor with a kayak rescued them and their home was destroyed.

Jessica Allred, the wife's sister, is asking for funds to help The Zara Family. Hundreds of more families with harrowing stories are listed on GoFundMe.

More ways to help

We've put together more ways to help and send donations in this story.

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Trying to reach a missing person impacted by Helene in NC? What to do and whom to call

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Author: Chyna Blackmon; Staff Writer | Section: News | 275 Words

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Days after Hurricane Helene swept through the southeast, recovery efforts are still underway for North Carolinians stranded without food, water and other supplies in the western part of the state.

According to Governor Roy Cooper, first responders have received hundreds of calls for rescue and more than 1,000 requests for welfare checks, with that number expected to rise.

How to report missing person or request welfare check

As crews work alongside local governments, state and federal partners and volunteer organizations to support victims impacted by the storm, officials say 911 calls should be made for emergencies only.

If you need to report a missing person or request a welfare check on someone potentially in danger, you should call NC 211 (1-888-892-1162), a information and referral service provided by United Way of North Carolina.

Available in most languages at all times in every county, NC 211 is used to provide residents verified resources across the state for basic needs, including housing, food and healthcare, its website says.

When disaster strikes, like Hurricane Helene, the service is part of the State's Emergency Plan for updates, storm-related issues or non-emergency related questions. Residents can dial 2-1-1 and speak to a trained Community Resource Specialist or use the online NC 211 search tool at nc211.org.

If you're struggling to contact someone who may need assistance, you can add loved ones to the United Way of North Carolina's search and rescue efforts by submitting a missing persons request, welfare check or rescue request online at unitedwaync.org.

Requests can also be made by texting 'PERSON' to 40403.

You can find more information about Helene-related information and resources, including power outages, open shelters and crisis cleanup,online at ncdps.gov/helene.

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How Helene's destruction could affect voting in - North Carolina's election

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Author: Kyle Ingram; Staff Writer | Section: News | 1095 Words

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In the aftermath of Hurricane Helene's destruction in Western North Carolina, concerns have emerged about whether residents affected by the storm will be able to cast their ballots in the November election.

Disruptions to the postal service, destruction of polling places, missing or damaged IDs and more could all pose challenges to voters with only 36 days left until the election.

"This is all a cascading series of disasters," Gerry Cohen, a member of the Wake County Board of Elections, said.

Disruptions to postal service

On Sunday, the U.S. Postal Service announced it had temporarily suspended services in much of Western North Carolina, including any areas with ZIP codes starting with 286, 287, 288 and 289.

It also listed 39 post offices whose operations would be suspended until conditions are safe.

These closures could present challenges to voters in Western North Carolina seeking to vote by mail.

So far, nearly 250,000 North Carolinians have requested an absentee ballot for this year's election. Nearly 10,000 requests have come in from Buncombe County, which was severely impacted by Helene.

Corinne Duncan, Buncombe County's election director, said the county's main focus now is life, safety and basic needs.

"Personal safety of election services staff is currently our top priority," Duncan said in an email. "We are working to account for all staff and board members. Some are stranded due to road blockage."

She added, however, that the post office is running and election staff were able to drop 200 ballots in the mail on Monday.

Phone lines for several of the counties hit hardest by Helene were down on Monday as The News & Observer attempted to contact board of elections offices.

The absentee voting period has already been reduced this election.

While mail-in ballots were supposed to be sent to voters on Sept. 6, most were delayed another 18 days by a court order after third-party presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. sued to get his name off the state's ballot.

Most absentee ballots went in the mail just a few days before Helene hit Western North Carolina.

"I suspect if these things were in people's mailboxes Thursday and Friday, a lot of these counties, you can see stuff just completely washed away," Cohen said.

In addition to that, voters now have a shorter deadline to get their absentee ballots in. State lawmakers passed a bill last year that requires all mail-in ballots to be received by the county board of elections office by 7:30 p.m. on Election Day.

Previously, any ballots that came in within three days after the election would still be counted, so long as they were postmarked by Election Day.

Voters concerned about postal delays can deliver their absentee ballot in person at their county board of elections office. A voter who has requested an absentee ballot may also choose to vote in person instead, so long as they do not return the absentee ballot.

Polling places for early voting

Flooding and destruction may make polling places unusable as election workers prepare to begin in-person early voting on Oct. 17.

Duncan said that Buncombe County has not yet completed site assessments at polling locations. The facilities where election staff work, however, were not damaged but are currently without access to water.

Changes to a county's early voting plans can still be made, but state law sets out certain limitations.

Previously, the executive director of the State Board of Elections could exercise emergency powers to respond to the impact natural disasters might have on elections.

Last year, however, state lawmakers stripped the director of that power and instead gave it to the State Board of Elections itself. That board is currently comprised of three Democrats and two Republicans, who would have to use these emergency powers in an open meeting.

There also isn't much time left to make changes to early voting sites.

State law requires all early voting sites within a county to be open for the same number of days. That would appear to make any changes to polling sites difficult after Oct. 17.

Having usable polling sites isn't the only concern for counties conducting early voting. With many residents displaced by Helene, counties may have difficulty staffing polling sites.

"It's gonna have a likely enormous impact if all these polling places have been washed away and early voting sites are not available and poll workers are not available," Cohen said. "So I don't know what the solution is, but there's not much time to figure it out."

Voter ID

For the first time in North Carolina's history, voters will have to present photo identification to vote in a presidential general election.

However, state law provides an exception to this requirement for voters affected by natural disasters.

Anyone affected by Helene can fill out an affidavit, either in-person at a polling place or via absentee ballot, saying that they have been a victim of a natural disaster and are unable to produce their ID.

They will then cast a provisional ballot, which will be reviewed by the county board of elections before being accepted.

What can be done to help?

Counties could face heavy financial burdens as they attempt to recover polling places, fix damaged equipment and prepare for voting after Helene.

This also comes after counties were forced to foot the bill to reprint millions of ballots following the state Supreme Court's decision in Kennedy's lawsuit allowing himto withdraw his candidacy.

Cohen said the legislature, which will be back in session next week, should reimburse counties for those costs.

A law passed last year prohibits the use of any private donations for election administration.

Counties are also still accepting volunteers to work the polls during early voting and Election Day.

State grants flexibility to election workers facing closures, power outages

In an emergency meeting on Monday, the State Board of Elections voted to give local election workers greater flexibility in processing absentee ballots in the coming weeks, as western counties reel from Helene's impacts.

Executive Director Karen Brinson Bell said 14 of the 22 western counties contacted by the board reported that their elections offices are currently closed and could be for several more days.

"Our hearts really do go out to these people that we consider elections family," she said. "... At this time, many of them still don't have contact with family members. They're facing damages, some total losses at their own personal properties, and so we are trying to be as responsive as we can to what their needs are."

County election boards are typically required to meet every Tuesday to receive and process absentee ballots, but the state board's resolution will allow them to reschedule those meetings.

Brinson Bell also said the state is currently in the process of creating a webpage to answer questions about the hurricane's impact on elections.

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Biden, planning North Carolina visit Wednesday, defends Cooper's Helene response from Trump

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WASHINGTON President Joe Biden will travel to North Carolina on Wednesday to see firsthand the devastation wrought over the weekend by Hurricane Helene, a storm that ripped through the Southeast with unexpected ferocity, leaving over 100 people dead and 600 still unaccounted for across 10 states.

Biden announced his plans to visit the storm-battered state on Monday as he repeatedly briefed the press about the emergency response to the storm, vowing to deploy the federal resources necessary for "as long as it takes" to help communities recover.

He also addressed claims by his predecessor, Donald Trump, that disaster aid was being withheld from Republicanleaning areas of the state by the Democratic governor of North Carolina - a key battleground in the November election.

"He's lying, and the governor told him he was lying. The governor told him he's lying. I've spoken to the governor, spent time with him, and he told him he's lying," Biden said during a video conference call with Cooper and others in the Oval Office.

The president added: "That's simply not true, and it's irresponsible."

REALITY CHECK: Biden says Trump is lying about Cooper, NC Helene response. Here's what's really happening.

Biden told Cooper during the video conference call - seen by reporters in the room - that he planned to land in Raleigh for a meeting with the Emergency Operations Center on Wednesday, followed by an aerial tour of the damage. He will try to make similar trips to Florida and Georgia, he said.

"Thank you, Mr. President, we appreciate the resources that are coming our way," Cooper said, noting that FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell was in North Carolina. "This has been a devastating storm, as you know, and we're grateful to have had Administrator Criswell here on the ground all day today, making sure we serve assets into the area to get people food and water and get power back on. And obviously, we are grateful to the search and rescue teams as well."

READ MORE: Helene's North Carolina death toll is rising, but incomplete. What we know so far

The Category 4 hurricane made landfall in Florida on Thursday. But inland, mountainous Appalachian communities with little experience dealing with hurricane conditions faced a perfect storm in Helene, which barreled through the Gulf of Mexico and Florida's Big Bend with enough speed, breadth and intensity to bring devastation deep into the Southeast.

Biden said that over 3,600 personnel had already deployed to the region, including 1,000 officials from FEMA and the Army Corps of Engineers, to help restore cell service as quickly as possible, hopeful that many of those who remain unaccounted for are still alive. FEMA is also working with Starlink, a satellite internet company owned by Elon Musk, to install receivers across Western North Carolina in the coming days, hoping to boost communication capabilities.

Two million people remain without power, officials said.

"I've directed my team to provide every, every available resource as fast as possible to your communities to rescue, recover, and to begin rebuilding," Biden said.

READ MORE: 'Apocalyptic' damage: Helene kills at least 30 in Western NC, severs power, water, roads

"This is an historic storm. It's devastating. They've never seen anything like this before," he added.

All-of-government response

Towns in Western North Carolina, southern Georgia and rural Kentucky are still faced with flooding from the storm, forcing FEMA and the Defense Department to airlift supplies like meals, fresh water and tarps to those hardest hit. Power is still down in many communities that, because of the damage, remain largely inaccessible and practically isolated.

RELATED CONTENT: A new storm could form in the Caribbean this week. Florida should watch it

The crisis has prompted an all-of-government response from the Biden administration. On Monday, Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas canceled planned travel to Mexico to focus on the emergency response.

At the White House on Monday, the president's homeland security adviser, Liz Sherwood-Randall, told reporters that the administration understands that there "are 600 who are either lost or unaccounted for."

"That's the number we're tracking right now," she said. "Unfortunately, we know that the first information is often wrong."

FEMA officials have said that rainfall totals in North Carolina, in particular, were "absolutely extreme" and exceeded expectations. The Department of Health and Human Services has declared a public health emergency throughout much of the Southeast warning of threats to the region's water systems.

READ MORE: Hurricane Helene left thousands without power in Kentucky. How long until it's back on?

Biden said he spent hours on Sunday speaking with local leaders, including Republican Gov. Brian Kemp of Georgia, Cooper of North Carolina, and local officials in affected regions of Florida, South Carolina and Tennessee.

"I want them to know: We're not leaving until the job is done," Biden said.

Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis of Florida, where the storm first made landfall, told reporters at a news conference on Monday that he missed a call from Biden while he was on a plane Sunday. He did not say whether he attempted to call the president back.

For now, Florida has the situation "handled," DeSantis said, encouraging federal officials to direct resources to North Carolina.

Election-eve storm

Trump, who is running again for the presidency this year, has criticized the federal response and attempted to tie his Democratic rival, Vice President Kamala Harris, to the fallout in battleground states.

The former president visited Valdosta, Georgia, on Monday, to survey the damage. Later that afternoon, Harris visited FEMA headquarters in the afternoon to thank federal personnel there for working around the clock to expedite care to emergency zones.

She said she plans on traveling to the region as soon as possible - "but as soon as possible without disrupting any

emergency response operations, because that must be the highest priority and the first order of business."

"Entire neighborhoods have been destroyed, major roads have been blocked or damaged, leaving entire towns inaccessible at this very moment," Harris said. "To everyone who has been impacted by this storm, and to all of those of you who are rightly feeling overwhelmed by the destruction and the loss: our nation is with you."

"We will continue to do everything we can to help you recover and to help you rebuild," she added, "no matter how long it takes."

Miami Herald reporter Ana Ceballos and Lexington Herald-Leader reporter David Catanese contributed reporting.

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Helene's devastation: A look at counties in western NC

October 2, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The (NC)

Author: Drew Jackson, Richard Stradling and Evan Moore; Staff Writer | Section: News | 1543 Words

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The toll of the tropical storm that was once Hurricane Helene continues to unfold in North Carolina. The state's picturesque and mountainous western region was inundated with historic rainfalls, flooding, land and mudslides.

We're gathering what we know of the damage in each county in Western North Carolina. Here is an evolving snapshot of that toll as new information becomes available.

We'll update this in the coming days with more counties and specific details.

Alexander County

About 8% of the 19,000 homes and businesses in Alexander County remain without power as of Tuesday morning.

The Alexander County Sheriff's Office said 7 main roads remain closed, including the Highway 16 bridge, which passes over Lake Hickory near the Oxford Dam, which saw water spill over its top during Friday's rainfall.

The county reports that phone, internet and cell service have improved and have been restored in most government buildings.

Alleghany County

About 22% of the 9,835 homes and businesses in Alleghany County remain without power as of Tuesday morning.

Road closures include large sections of the Blue Ridge Parkway in this rural county along the Virginia border.

Ashe County

About 45% of the 21,778 homes and businesses in Ashe County remain without power as of Tuesday morning.

A long stretch of Highway 18 along the eastern border of Ashe County is closed. The New River State Park is currently closed.

The New River crested at 18.27 feet, higher than the 18-foot crest during the Great Flood of 1916. The historic record, though, for the Jefferson water station is 22.5 feet, from 1940.

Avery County

About 56% of the 1,803 homes and businesses in Avery County remain without power as of Tuesday morning.

Three major road closures remain and many others are impassable in this mountainous county along the Tennessee border.

Grandfather Mountain, which includes Avery, Caldwell and Watauga counties, is closed until further notice.

Five shelters have been set up in Banner Elk, Beech Mountain, Ingalls, Newland and Minneapolis.

Curfew is in place from 8 p.m. to 5 a.m. to keep roadways clear.

Buncombe County

Buncombe County officials said Monday afternoon that 40 people have been found dead in that county alone.

So far Buncombe, which is home to Asheville, has the most reported Helene deaths in the state.

Buncombe County Register of Deeds Drew Reisinger said Monday that his office has received 11,000 requests from people seeking help to locate their loved ones amid the spotty cell service and destroyed roadways.

Burke County

About 49% of homes and businesses are without power as of Tuesday morning.

The Burke County Office of Emergency Services said the number of fatalities and injuries are still being assessed.

The west-bound lane of Interstate 40 is entirely closed to travelers, but is open for emergency vehicles.

Boil advisories are in place for Morganton, Valdese and Icard Township.

Burke County's 911 system, which was down since the Friday storm, has been restored.

Caldwell County

About 39% of the 42,228 homes and businesses in the county remained without power as of Tuesday morning.

The Caldwell County Sheriff's Office reports the county's emergency system received 1,594 calls to 911 during Friday's storm.

A shelter remains open at West Caldwell High School in Lenoir.

Catawba County

Around 12% of the county's 82,391 homes and businesses remained without power Tuesday morning.

The westbound lane of Interstate 40 is closed to non-emergency traffic throughout the county. The Oxford Dam bridge on Highway 16 also remains closed.

Clay

All of the power has been restored to homes and businesses in Clay County.

Cleveland

Around 53% of the 48,385 homes and businesses in the county remain without power.

An emergency shelter remains open at the Cleveland County Health Department in Shelby.

At least four main roads remain closed around the Shelby area.

Gaston

Around 4% of the 115,000 homes and businesses in the county remain without power as of Tuesday morning.

At least eight roads remain closed throughout the county.

Haywood

There have been four deaths, according to the Haywood County Sheriff's Office.

Around 26 percent of the 39,200 homes and businesses in the county remain without power as of Tuesday morning.

A large section of Interstate 40 is closed in the county, as well as numerous roads and highways.

A curfew remains in place from 9 p.m. to 7 a.m.

The Haywood County fair has been canceled for 2024.

McDowell County

Around 65% of the county's 30,262 homes and businesses remained without power Tuesday morning.

County offices will remain closed through Friday, October 4. Offices will reopen on Monday, October 7.

The westbound lane of Interstate 40 is closed to non-emergency traffic throughout the county.

The county has set up a donation site for water and emergency supplies at 634 College Dr. in Marion.

Mitchell County

About 39% of homes and businesses in Mitchell County are without power as of Monday evening.

Numerous roads throughout Mitchell County are impassable, and "a good bit of the county infrastructure has been either damaged or destroyed by floodwaters and uprooted trees and downed power lines," according to the county. Bakersville, the county seat along Cane Creek, has been particularly hit hard.

The Red Cross opened a shelter at Mitchell High School in Ledger, while another opened at First Baptist Church in Spruce Pine. There's a county-wide curfew from 8 p.m. to 7 a.m.

A quartz mine in Spruce Pine owned by Sibelco has been temporarily closed due to flooding and damage in the storm.

Polk County

About 66% of homes and businesses in Polk are without power as of Tuesday morning.

The county has set up a phone line with a recorded message for those seeking information, at 828-722-5086. Polk County High School in Columbus is serving as a shelter, and the county is seeking places to distribute food and water.

In the meantime, it's asking people to "please stay at home or in a safe location."

Among the roads closed, the westbound lanes of U.S. 74 east of Columbus are expected to reopened until next week.

Rutherford County

About 63% of 44,499 homes and businesses in Rutherford County are without power as of Tuesday morning.

There is widespread damage throughout the county, including in Chimney Rock. The Lake Lure Dam, once thought in danger of failure, has stabilized.

The town of Lake Lure said firefighters and town workers went door to door over the weekend rescuing people in the most affected area, many on foot or via helicopter because of closed roads. The top of the lake was covered in debris, including floating propane tanks, that the Broad River swept up on its way through Chimney Rock.

Town officials have advised residents to leave town, if possible, and ask nonresidents to stay away.

"Please do not come to Town unless you absolutely need to be here as this is an ongoing rescue situation and the roads are not safe," town officials wrote Monday afternoon. "Your absence will allow first responders to focus on rescue operations."

A resource center with food, showers, restrooms, a tool trailer, charging stations and wifi will be available for residents at the Ingles on N.C. 9 Tuesday at 5 p.m.

Transylvania County

About 73% of the 24,008 homes and businesses in Transylvania County are without power as of Tuesday morning.

The sheriff's office said Sunday that Transylvania County had "received catastrophic damages, and we have still not been able to access all parts of the county." Phone and cell service was out in many places, and power may take two weeks to restore in some areas.

Roads that were closed due to downed trees had been at least partially reopened on Monday, but several roads remain closed due to slides and are expected to be closed for an extended period of time. Among the roads closed Monday were U.S. 276 in Brevard and U.S. 64 throughout the county.

The county has a curfew from 8 p.m. to 8 a.m.

Watauga County

About 40% of 29,118 homes and businesses in Watauga were without power on Tuesday morning.

Numerous homes and businesses were flooded in Boone, and the town's water pipes were broken in several places. Residents have been told to boil drinking water before consuming it.

The Red Cross is running a shelter for residents and Appalachian University students whose off-campus homes were damaged.

More than 100 roads were closed or partially closed in the county as of Sunday evening. On Monday, N.C. 105 near Boone was impassable, and U.S. 321 near Banner Elk and the Tennessee state line was closed.

County and local officials ask all leisure travel to the area be postponed.

Wilkes County

About 9% of 38,691 homes and businesses in Wilkes County were without power as of Tuesday morning.

A county official told MyFox80, a local TV station, that between 150 and 200 homes are inaccessible because of blocked roads. A landslide had closed N.C. 18 between Wilkesboro and Sparta, and the road will likely be closed for about a month, said Jason Reavis, the Emergency Services Director.

The county got up to 16 inches of rain, Reavis said, but wasn't as hard hit as others.

"We caught the side of it pretty much," he said. "We are very fortunate and very blessed."

A Red Cross shelter was opened at West Wilkes Middle School in Wilkesboro for those displaced or needing a meal or place to charge devices.

Yancey County

81% of the 14,610 homes and businesses in Yancey County were without power as of Tuesday morning.

N.C. 97 partially collapsed near Burnsville and NC 80 collapsed south of Burnsville. Both roads are closed.

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Tree that killed I when Helene hit Charlotte should've been cut down already, neighbor says

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A person died inside a home in northwest Charlotte's historic Hoskins neighborhood when a tree busted through the roof as Tropical Storm Helene pushed through North Carolina - the fifth state it passed through.

There was a crashing bang, silence, then sirens.

According to the Charlotte Fire Department, another adult was trapped with the person who died. That person was rescued, and two children inside weren't harmed.

My dad's suffocating, the victim's adult son told a neighbor at about 5 a.m. Friday. He'd just come out of the Brookway Drive home that now had a gaping hole in its side.

That neighbor described the large-trunked tree as two trees joined at the base. Months before Hurricane Helene started barreling toward the United States, the other half of that tree had crashed onto another house. It's had a blue tarp on its roof and a hole in its side ever since.

The tree probably should've been chopped down then, the neighbor said.

The neighbor, a purple-shirted woman who has lived two doors down from the affected home since the 1970s, didn't want to give her name. She'd already spoken to television news, and too many people were calling to check on her, she said.

As she spoke with The Charlotte Observer, two people in a green Kia Soul slowed in front of her brick home. The lawn was decorated with 20 potted plants, an angel bird bath, yellow bird houses and a bench held up by two stone squirrels.

"I heard the news, I just had to come check on you," the passenger said.

"Oh, I'm all good, honey. It's the house over there we should be worried about," the neighbor replied.

The home, a block away from a Baptist church and a tobacco shop sharing borders with railroad tracks, still had branches inside, downed powerlines on the lawn and a sign from the fire department in the window:

"This building has been deemed unsafe."

The family who lived inside can't come back, according to the fire department. "Occupancy is prohibited."

A few houses down, another massive, uprooted tree sprawled its branches across a yard. It was feet away from knocking into the home's vinyl siding. A few top-level leaves touched its brick foundation.

The man killed was identified as Tony Taylor, 62, a Charlotte father of four who treated everyone he met like family, his nephew, Stephen Barbour, said. "Uncle Tony was a friend to everyone," Barbour recalled on the GoFundMe he started for Taylor's wife, Sandy Lucille Taylor, and the couple's children.

Although Taylor's wife and four children survived, "the loss of such a kind and loving man has left a profound void," Barbour said on the GoFundMe site.

"For some time, we had been trying to get the tree removed, but since it wasn't on our property, there was little we could do," he said. "Now, we are left not only to mourn the loss of a man whose smile could light up any room but also to support his grieving family through this incredibly difficult time," Barbour said.

A woman donated \$100 with this message to the family: "I will be praying to Jehovah God our Heavenly Father to provide you comfort and peace in your time of grief and loss."

Barbour started the site Friday to help pay for his uncle's funeral expenses and repairs to the home, and to replace the family's belongings. Donations also would help pay for a temporary place for the family to stay and to assist with day-to-day expenses, Barbour said.

"We are asking for any contribution to help support his wife and children as they rebuild their lives in the wake of this unimaginable loss," Barbour said.

Observer staff writer Joe Marusak contributed to this story.

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Julia Coin, Staff Writer, 'Tree that killed 1 when Helene hit Charlotte should've been cut down already, neighbor says', *Charlotte Observer, The* (online), 2 Oct 2024 7A https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?
p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BF7CF9CAE22DB8>



Western North Carolina communities hope for 'some sort of lifeline' after Helene damage

October 2, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The (NC) Author: Ryan Oehrli; Staff Writer | Section: News | 744 Words Page: 2A OpenURL Link

SWANNANOA A long stretch of Swannanoa is no more.

Businesses and homes along the Swannanoa River were destroyed by Helene, which hit Florida as a Category 4 hurricane before it dumped historic rain totals in western North Carolina as a tropical storm. At least 30 people have died in Buncombe County alone, Sheriff Quentin Miller announced in an afternoon press briefing.

People in Swannanoa, a community east of Asheville along Interstate 40, scrambled for water, gas and other basic supplies this weekend. Help began arriving this weekend from the National Guard and others traveling from across the region.

Meanwhile, North Carolina received a major disaster declaration for 25 counties that will provide quicker help to those who need it. The federal government also says it will reimburse local governments, state agencies and nonprofits for repairs.

Rescue workers will navigate their way through a maze of impassible roads and debris caused by Helene. Roads became rivers. Lakes filled with debris. And in many communities, there's just nothing left.

The situation is dire. Many of North Carolina communities haven't had fresh water, internet or cell service for multiple days.

"It seems like there would be more people here by now," said Dustin Ebert, whose home is about 200 yards away from the main stretch of road that got destroyed in Swannanoa.

His floors got flooded, and he has three kids in the house. Around him, the roads were covered in dirt and dark mud. Old U.S. Highway 70 was fragmented and broken apart, much of it landing in the ravine below.

"But you know: What else can you do?" he asked.

More help wasn't coming, he was certain.

"Where is FEMA at when we need it?" Angela McGee asked as she walked along that road while searching for her mobile home that wound up far from its usual spot.

McGee said she heard about a mandatory evacuation late, and she's currently living with her kids in her car.

"We are down here in a disaster and no one is helping us out," she said.

She wants more than a federal agency to show up. She needs water, cell service, shelters and food. Everything she's learned has been through word of mouth, and she's "infuriated," she said.

For about a year Shemsuddin Millard prepped to open Black Mountain Improvisational Theater next door to Swannanoa. In another two months, he could've started lessons and workshops for people who want to do unscripted theater.

The question for him as he stood by his destroyed hopes: what's next?

"Maybe the hard part is hoping that there's some sort of lifeline and wondering if that's there, but then kind of being faced with the reality that: No, there is not," he said. "Might as well just f-ing laugh about it. Because, you know, what else is there? I already cried."

NC National Guard

National Guard humvees rolled through Black Mountain and Swannanoa on Sunday. Helicopters buzzed by every so often. A slew of law enforcement agencies and the National Guard handed out water bottles at an Ingles in Black Mountain. The grocery store's lot was filled.

Atlantic Beach Fire Department Deputy Chief Casey Arthur was "clearing" a van that had fallen into the river with some National Guardsmen in Swannanoa early Sunday afternoon, "making sure nothing's inside."

They'd finish that job and keep moving down the river, he said. Searches started to taper off as cellphone service returned in spurts in corners of the county.

"These guys in Swannanoa have been running constantly," he said.

Western NC cell phone service

Not being able to call others has been among the biggest problems for survivors. Panicked family members can't reach their loved ones in communities devastated by the storm.

Families wondered: Are they alive?

Karen Morris worried about a relative in the county who needed to be cared for at home. She got a text Sunday morning: that relative had no power, no water and her oxygen was no longer working.

"We tried to get (family) to get ahold of 911," Morris said. "We don't know yet whether they were able to do that."

Gov. Roy Cooper said during an interview on CNN Sunday that families who can't reach their loved ones can contact North Carolina's 211 service to ask for a welfare check. The United Way, which operated the service, also has a form on its website to request one.

Ryan Oehrli: @oehrli

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Charlotte businesses rally - to aid Helene victims in NC

October 2, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The (NC)

Author: CharlotteFive staff; Staff Writer | Section: Features | 1733 Words

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As thousands of people are picking up the pieces from the aftermath of Hurricane Helene, several businesses around Charlotte are working to support those affected by the storm across the state.

Along with several nonprofit organizations accepting donations to provide food, water and other emergency supplies for victims, local restaurants, bars, boutiques and other businesses that have set up fundraisers and donation drop-offs to give back to the communities around North Carolina heavily hit by the storm. Here is a list, and we will update it on our website at CharlotteFive.com as we learn more:

Arrichion

Location: 125 Winona St, Charlotte, NC 28203

Arrichion's yoga and circuit training studio in Charlotte will be hosting a special donation-based mystery stone class Oct. 5 at 10 a.m. with proceeds going to Red Cross of North Carolina. The studio is asking for a \$15 minimum donation for the class open to all members and nonmembers.

Artisan Vegelato

Location: 301 W John St #5356, Matthews, NC 28105

At Artisan Vegelato, 10 percent of all sales will be donated to Western North Carolina and Eastern Tennessee hurricane relief.

Blaze Pizza

Location: Multiple

Blaze Pizza's Asheville team members have been affected by the storm, and the team is launching a GoFundMe to help them. The pizzeria has been part of the Asheville community for 10 years and has ties to Charlotte - and entrepreneur Jimmy Sierra is the franchise owner for Blaze Pizzas in the Charlotte, Gastonia and Asheville markets. Details are incoming and we'll update this story online at CharlotteFive.com when they are available.

Canteen at Camp North End

Location: 1824 Statesville Ave #100, Charlotte, NC 28206

The Canteen at Camp North End is able to purchase supplies at a wholesale rate. Venmo donations to @good-company-noda and owners Joey Hewell and Scott Lindsley will use the money to purchase supplies and take it to people who need it in Western North Carolina.

Coffee Republic

Location: Multiple

Coffee Republic is collecting donations at any of its North Carolina locations, including Huntersville, Denver,

Mooresville, Cornelius, Matthews and Ballantyne. Suggested items include baby formula, children's medicine, diapers, pet food, flashlights, batteries and more.

The Cowfish Sushi Burger Bar

Location: 4310 Sharon Rd, Charlotte, NC 28211

The Cowfish Sushi Burger Bar in Charlotte will be collecting donations until Thursday, Oct. 3 to deliver to victims in Western North Carolina. The restaurant is accepting nonperishable food, pet food, cleaning supplies, toiletries, tarps, plastic utensils, sunscreen and more.

Duckworth's Grill & Taphouse

Location: Several locations in the Charlotte area

Duckworth's, The Cellar at Duckworth's and Link & Pin are donating 5 percent of total sales across all Duckworth's andLink & Pinlocations to Hearts With Hands beginning Wednesday, Oct. 9.

Additionally, The Loft at Duckworth's will also be donating 5 percent of total sales, beginning Thursday, Oct. 10.

EEZ

Location: 16925 Birkdale Commons Pkwy F, Huntersville, NC 28078

EeZ Fusion & Sushi in Birkdale Village is accepting donations until Thursday, Oct. 3 for victims in western North Carolina. The Lake Norman restaurant is collecting nonperishable food, cleaning supplies, toiletries and more.

The Evening Muse

Location: 3227 N Davidson St, Charlotte, NC 28205

The Evening Muse and Tosco Music are donating all the money from open mic nights on Sept. 30 and Oct. 1 to hurricane relief in Western North Carolina. Bring items to donate as well when you come out for open mic.

Fred & June's Books

Location: 248 N Main St, Mooresville, NC 28115

At Fred and June's Books, 10 percent of in-store sales this week will be donated to the N.C. Relief fund.

GoodVets Charlotte

Location: 1713 Central Ave, Charlotte, NC 28205

At GoodVets Charlotte's Plaza Midwood location, drop donations of pet items, including pet food, collars, leashes, carriers, blankets and first aid or human needs, including nonperishable human food, blankets, feminine hygiene products, water and first aid.

Great Wagon Road Distilling Co. NoDa and local breweries

Location: 610 Anderson St, Charlotte, NC 28205

Great Wagon Road Distilling Co., in partnership with other Charlotte-area breweries, is collecting supplies for victims in Western North Carolina. Water, first aid supplies, toiletries and other essential items can be dropped off

at the following locations in addition to its NoDa location:

Great Wagon Road Distilling Co. Waxhaw: 122 W North Main St, Waxhaw, NC 28173

Divine Barrel Brewing: 3701 N Davidson St Suite #203, Charlotte, NC 28205

Town Brewing Company: 800 Grandin Rd, Charlotte, NC 28208

Triple C Brewing Company: 2900 Griffith St, Charlotte, NC 28203

Resident Culture in Plaza Midwood: 2101 Central Ave, Charlotte, NC 28205

Grow Cafe

Location: 5342 Docia Crossing Rd Suite B & C, Charlotte, NC 28269

Grow Cafe is collecting money and items including nonperishable food, sunscreen, children and adult diapers and more. Drop off your donations at the cafe for them to be distributed to families in need after Hurricane Helene.

Higher Grounds by Manolo's

Location: 1501 Queens Rd, Charlotte, NC 28207

At Higher Grounds by Manolo's, 10 percent of all sales will be donated to Western North Carolina and Eastern Tennessee hurricane relief.

The Hunter Farm

Location: 13624 Providence Rd, Weddington, NC 28104

The Hunter Farm in Weddington has set up a donation bin to collect items for storm victims in Western North Carolina. You can drop off water, protein bars, diapers, baby formula, sports drinks powder, blankets and ready to eat meals at the front desk to be given to Fleetwood Volunteer Fire Department in Ashe County to distribute.

Josh's Farmers Market

Location: 630 Brawley School Rd, Mooresville, NC 28117

For the weeks to come, there will be drop-off bins set up at Josh's Farmers Market in Lake Norman to be sent off to storm victims. The farmers market team is requesting food, bottled water, contractor-size trash bags, blankets, first aid supplies, feminine hygiene products, diapers and baby clothes, hand sanitizer, toilet paper, paper towels and more.

NoDa Brewing Co. and other local breweries

NoDa Brewing Co., Birdsong Brewing, the NC Brewers Guild and other local breweries are coming together to can drinking water to make regular shipments to the mountains, according to WCNC. Local breweries in the mountains will distribute the water from there.

Manolo's Bakery

Location: 4405 Central Ave, Charlotte, NC 28205

At Manolo's Bakery, 10 percent of all sales will be donated to Western North Carolina and Eastern Tennessee

hurricane relief.

Murto Made

Location: 11941 Ramah Church Rd, Huntersville, NC 28078

Location: 166 N Main St, Mooresville, NC 28115

Murto Made is collecting donations at both of its distilleries during operating hours or via its GoFundMe. Items include gas (for people's generators) and nonperishable food items.

PIE.ZAA

Location: 1440 South Tryon St, Charlotte, NC 28203

Asheville-based PIE.ZAA has set up a GoFundMe to gather supplies and support rebuilding efforts for storm victims around the mountain area. The local pizza restaurant's online fundraiser can be accessed online at gofundme.com/f/together-we-rise-help-asheville-recover.

Queen City Animal Hospital

Location: 920 Belmont Ave, Charlotte, NC 28205

Queen City Animal Hospital is gathering supplies to help pets in need after Hurricane Helene. Items in need include dog/cat/small mammal/reptile dry food, plastic or aluminum bowls, crates/cat carriers and cat litter. Please don't bring liquids or chemicals, as the plane is unable to transfer those.

Suffolk Punch Brewing and SouthPark Mall

Location: 4400 Sharon Rd Space G23D, Charlotte, NC 28211

Via The Independence Fun, people can drop supplies off at Suffolk Punch Brewing at SouthPark now until 9 p.m. on Wednesday, Oct. 2. Suffolk Punch Brewing SouthPark is offering a 10% discount (one per family) on any purchase for those who donate bottled water, non-perishable food, PPE, cleaning supplies, hygiene items for adults and children diapers and wipes, children's books and toys, or items such as sleeping bags, can openers, solar device chargers, flashlights, batteries, buckets, shovels, and rakes.

Tita's Cake House

Location: 115 E Innes St, Salisbury, NC 28144

At Tita's Cake House, 10 percent of all sales will be donated to Western North Carolina and Eastern Tennessee hurricane relief.

Vaulted Oak Brewing

Location: 3726 Monroe Rd. Charlotte, NC 28205

Vaulted Oak Brewing is collecting donations for the Asheville Humane Society as well as Brother Wolf Animal Rescue, which has lost all of its buildings, vehicles and resources - and has 137 foster animals to care for. Add your donation to your tab and Vaulted Oak will split the total to help the two organizations.

Vestique

Location: 1532 East Blvd, Charlotte, NC 28203

Location: 717 Atando Ave Suite G, Charlotte, NC 28206

Vestique will be collecting nonperishable supplies at its warehouse and flagship store in Charlotte until Friday, Oct. 4 to be delivered to victims western North Carolina. The boutique team will be collecting bottled water, nonperishable food, contractor-size trash bags, blankets, first aid supplies, feminine hygiene products, diapers, hand sanitizer, toilet paper and paper towels.

White Duck Matthews

Location: 131 E John St Suite A, Matthews, NC 28105

White Duck's Matthews location is raising money to give to MANNA FoodBank in Asheville. Each dollar you donate will enter you into a raffle at the restaurant, with prizes including a \$100 gift card, merch and more. The raffle will run through Oct. 8 and winners will be announced on Oct. 9.

The Wing King Cafe

Location: 13209 Carowinds Blvd, Charlotte, NC 28273

Location: 200 N Dobys Bridge Rd, Fort Mill, SC 29715

Location: 8356 Charlotte Highway, Indian Land, South Carolina

The Wing King Cafe will be collecting supplies for storm victims at all three of its locations around the Charlotte area through Oct. 5. Nonperishable food items, toiletries and other essential supplies will be accepted for victims in the North Carolina mountain areas.

Wooden Robot

Location: 1440 S Tryon St UNIT 110, Charlotte, NC 28203

Location: 416 E 36th St STE 100, Charlotte, NC 28205

Wooden Robot is asking for supply donations to bring to shelters in Western North Carolina. The breweries are seeking emergency supplies, including water, baby needs, hydration packets, toiletries, new socks and underwear - "the things you notice first when they're gone," the team stated on Instagram. Daily trips will be made to Asheville area with donations.

Donations can be brought to either of Wooden Robots locations or to other local dropoff spots:

Thrift Pony in Plaza Midwood: 1110 Morningside Dr Suite E, Charlotte, NC 28205

Compleat Kidz Belmont Clinic: 54 Myrtle St, Belmont, NC 28012

Alchemy Co-Working, Gastonia (available Monday): 121 W Main Ave, Gastonia, NC 28052

Patagonia Charlotte (Monday-Saturday 11 a.m.-7 p.m. and Sunday 11 a.m.-6 p.m.): 101 W Worthington Ave #180, Charlotte, NC 28203

Common Market Oakwold (Sunday-Monday: 8 a.m. -8 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday: 8 a.m.-10 p.m.) 4420-A Monroe Rd, Charlotte, NC 28205

SEAC Village (Monday-Friday) 500 Bradford Dr, Charlotte, NC 28208

Carolina Migrant Network (Monday-Friday 8 a.m.-5 p.m.) 3400 Shamrock Dr, Charlotte, NC 28215

Central Law Group (Monday-Friday) 6769 Albemarle Rd STE B, Charlotte, NC 28212

Did we miss a local business providing support to storm victims in North Carolina? Let us know at charlottefive@charlottefive.com.

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Western NC needs our help now and long after the waters recede

October 2, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The (NC) Author: Issac Bailey | Section: Editorial/Opinion | 707 Words

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The headlines will fade. Our focus will return to the presidential and North Carolina gubernatorial races.

The water will recede. Rivers will return to usual levels and flows. The tears will dry.

It's then residents of western North Carolina and other areas hit hard by Hurricane Helene will need our help most, for us to not forget their suffering.

They need an enormous amount of help today, too, of course, to just be able to survive. The rescues, the treecutting, the restoration of basic infrastructure - roads and electricity and schools and the like - must continue. Prayers and good will from those who can't assist directly are also invaluable.

But it's over the long-haul the suffering will need our help the most, just as the state's and nation's attention will once again be pulled in a thousand different directions.

I saw it happen as a high school student in the aftermath of Hurricane Hugo, which nearly wiped my native St. Stephen, S.C., off the map 35 years ago. At least that's the way it felt the morning after the storm passed. It took our house and kept us out of school for weeks as we tried to re-establish what little we had. My fondest memory are the hot meals we received from the American Red Cross. They remain the best thing I've ever eaten.

The rest of the world seemed to just get on with other more important things, things more important than us. That's the way it felt. Intellectually, I understood why it had to be that way. The Earth doesn't stop rotating on its axis because a group of vulnerable people are struggling. It still felt cold, though, made us in a sense feel forgotten.

I saw a repeat a decade later when I was a journalist covering the aftermath of Hurricane Floyd. There was the initial rush to help, to pray, to prioritize community above politics and partisanship. But as the Waccamaw River returned to its banks, that collective spirit began fading. Even the short drive between Myrtle Beach and Conway felt like leaving one country for another, the damage that starkly different. Helene left a similar haphazard path of damage.

In Asheville, flood waters nearly reached the roof of a Wendy's restaurant and dislodged a house from it foundation, sending it down the river until it crashed into a tree. There were reports from small communities such as Banner Elk in Avery County, Black Mountain and beyond that they were effectively cut off from the rest of the state.

Rescuers had to leave bodies behind to get the living to safety.

There was more death and extreme destruction in Florida, where Helene came ashore. In South Carolina, Greenville residents reported tree lines in their backyard being knocked over.

In my part of North Carolina, there was no death and little destruction. On the morning after Helene, I saw a large uprooted by the storm. It had been removed within hours. Oh, our power went out, for maybe 30 minutes.

That's typical of natural disasters. They don't care if we plan to vote for Kamala Harris or Donald Trump, don't care about the size of our house, how important the roads we need to get to work.

They are unimpressed by our business acumen or the number of degrees hanging on our walls.

They don't discriminate even if we do.

We are all always in the path of natural disasters. It's just that Helene's chosen path was through western North Carolina rather than the eastern part of the state - this time.

That's why this is a time to remember the fellow human beings who got hit hard will need our help long after we've begun debating who won Tuesday night's vice presidential debate.

The next Hugo, Floyd or Helene might come knocking on our door, if not knocking over our homes.

We should wise enough to want a strong infrastructure in place to help us when our time come. Because that time is likely coming.

Issac Bailey is a McClatchy opinion writer in North Carolina and South Carolina. Here's how to help flood and hurricane victims in North Carolina.

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Helene takes massive toll on Chimney Rock, Lake Lure

October 2, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The (NC)

Author: Martha Quillin; Staff Writer Section: News 892 Words

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CHIMNEY ROCK For a while on Friday morning, it looked as if Chimney Rock and Lake Lure had been spared the worst of Hurricane Helene.

And then worse than the worst happened, as a wall of water came rushing down the Broad River, wiping out most of the structures along Main Street - and Main Street itself - in the Village of Chimney Rock, and straining the dam that holds back Lake Lure.

"I've never seen concentrated damage like we've seen here," said Chris Murray, an emergency manager in Pamlico County who came to help lead teams of rescuers as soon as Rutherford County could send an S.O.S. "There's nothing left."

"The village? There's just nothing left."

'Not so bad' at first

For a couple of days, the wreckage left the two communities as isolated as they were a century ago.

Townspeople and visitors awoke Friday morning after a restless night to more of what they had seen the day before: tree branches falling in heavy rain and wind as the remains of what became Tropical Storm Helene cut through Western North Carolina. Power had been out since Thursday.

Tracy Stevens had left her house in Chimney Rock Thursday night and gotten a room at the Lake Lure Inn, which had a generator and was staying open through the storm. The two towns, both popular tourist destinations, are walking distance to one another, joined by a bridge across the Broad River in the mountains of Rutherford County.

"I got up around 7 and went down to the lobby and got a cup of coffee," Stevens said. "I was looking at the lake out the window of the inn, and I thought, Is that all? OK. This is not so bad."

But when she checked again, it looked like the lake had risen. The next time she looked, she was sure the water was coming up. And by 8:30 a.m., it was several feet higher, nearly covering the door of a small building next to the lake.

The National Weather Service reported that in some places just west of the two communities, more than 19 inches of rain fell. And it kept falling, down the mountainsides and into the creeks and rivers.

Broad River rises

No official source has said yet how deep the water rose in the Broad River, normally so tame that bars and restaurants on that side of Main Street in Chimney Rock serve drinks and meals on patios overlooking the stream.

Some of those buildings had stood since at least the 1950s. A few had gotten wet during historic floods such as one that followed a pair of hurricanes in 1996, "but this is 10 times worse," said Patrick Bryant, a Lake Lure town commissioner who lives in Chimney Rock.

"This is Katrina-level damage," Murray said.

With the help of teams from many other North Carolina counties and some from outside the state, Murray said rescuers had fetched more than 150 people by sundown Saturday who had been stranded by the rushing water.

As the water plowed through, it carried the buildings and their contents with it, slamming all that material against the concrete bridge between Chimney Rock and Lake Lure with such force that it exploded refrigerators and trees.

It took a day of heavy equipment and chainsaw work to make one lane of the bridge passable to emergency vehicles and residents who wanted to leave Chimney Rock.

Meanwhile, water completely took out another bridge across the Broad River, this one to Chimney Rock State Park. The park was closed.

Wall of water

On Lake Lure, the water relocated the marina docks and all the boats that had been moored on them. Sunday, the boats seemed to sit on top of a spilled box of toothpicks, some of the remains of the structures swept in from Chimney Rock.

Search-and-rescue teams Sunday were reaching more remote places, and were still finding survivors, including one woman and her dog who appeared to have been pulled from a collapsed home on the riverbank.

Officials have not said whether there were deaths or if anyone still was missing by midday Sunday. Across Western North Carolina, at least 30 people were reported dead and that number was likely to climb, Gov. Roy Cooper said.

While rescuers looked for people, the N.C. National Guard and local chainsaw-wielding volunteers began cutting trees to allow people to leave their homes and neighborhoods. Power was expected to be out in Chimney Rock and Lake Lure for several days at least, but with trees cleared to open at least one lane, residents whose cars weren't too damaged to drive began making their way out.

Word spread quickly about spots outside of Lake Lure where there might be a cellphone signal, and people congregated in those, calling relieved relatives or reaching out to insurance adjusters with bad news.

Nick Stamper, who lives in Green River Cove, a few miles from Chimney Rock and Lake Lure, had to make some difficult phone calls Saturday night. His house was moved several feet off its foundation by what he estimated was a 20-foot wall of water that came down the Green River, normally more than 100 yards from his house.

He counted 13 other homes that disappeared in the flood.

"Washed completely away," he said. "Just, gone."

He was calling the owners to let them know.

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Martha Quillin, Staff Writer, 'Helene takes massive toll on Chimney Rock, Lake Lure', *Charlotte Observer, The* (online), 2 Oct 2024 1A https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BF7CF92CCC79B0



Biden says Trump is lying about Cooper, NC Helene response. Here's what's really happening.

October 2, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The (NC) Author: Dawn Baumgartner Vaughan and Danielle Battaglia; Staff Writer Section: News 1364 Words Page: 8A OpenURL Link

RALEIGH Former President Donald Trump complained about North Carolina's disaster response on social media on Monday, claiming without evidence that Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper isn't helping Republican-leaning areas of the state impacted by Hurricane Helene.

President Joe Biden told reporters on Monday that Trump is lying.

The Republican presidential candidate targeted Cooper in a social media post about how he was going to Valdosta, Georgia, "in order to pay my respects and bring lots of relief material."

He goes on to say that he "was also going to stop into North Carolina, which has really been hit hard. I have a lot of supplies ready for them, but access and communication is now restricted, and we want to make sure that Local Emergency Management is able to focus on helping the people most affected, and not being concerned with me. I'll be there shortly, but don't like the reports that I'm getting about the Federal Government, and the Democrat Governor of the State, going out of their way to not help people in Republican areas. MAGA!"

In reality, federal, state and local governments are working together on relief. And relief is also coming from other states.

Trump did not explain where he was getting "reports" of some people not being helped because of their political party affiliation. In general, urban areas like Asheville have concentrations of Democratic voters while Republican voters are in rural areas.

Biden, asked Monday about Trump's comments on Cooper's Helene response, angrily interjected before a reporter finished asking the question, according to the White House pool report.

"He's lying, and the governor told him he was lying. The governor told him he's lying. I've spoken to the governor, spent time with him, and he told him he's lying. I don't know why he does it ... that's simply not true, and it's irresponsible," Biden said.

Cooper surveyed the damage Monday, joined by FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell and leaders of the departments of transportation, public safety and Health and Human Services, which are part of his Cabinet.

"People are working around the clock to provide help to them right now - food, water, working hard to make sure that we've got shelters open all across this area, and working to get power back on," Cooper told reporters in a press briefing at the Asheville airport on Monday, when asked about the speed of the response. "When you have a situation where communities are completely cut off, when first responders can't even get in, because water is still there, and rivers are rising right now, as we speak."

"A lot of work is done. What we want to tell people is that more help is on the way, and help is continuing. This is our main mission right now, and this is a massive coordinated effort to help this area, both in the short term and in the long term," Cooper said.

Rep. Edwards, Speaker Moore survey damage

Also at the briefing in Asheville with Cooper were Republican U.S. Rep. Chuck Edwards and Republican N.C. Sen.

Tim Moffitt.

Edwards and Republican House Speaker Tim Moore surveyed damage via a helicopter on Monday, Edwards said in a news release.

"We've had a very disappointing response from FEMA, and a very disappointing response, initially, from the North Carolina Emergency Management services," Edwards, who represents far western North Carolina, said in an interview with McClatchy.

"But we're seeing resources start to show up. Today, the governor has given us assurances that there will be more and I think we're on our way to a good solid recovery."

Edwards said he was frustrated because the storm ended at 10 a.m. Friday in the western part of the state.

"I'm only seeing resources brought into Western North Carolina today," Edwards said. "We lost, I'm going to say 80 hours - and we knew the storm was coming, so 80 hours ago we should have seen FEMA deploying resources to the perimeter of where we expected the storm to hit. But instead it looked like folks took the weekend off. They're just showing up today."

"The people in this district are hurting, and they're really disappointed with the response from the federal government, and our state government."

Edwards said it was Cooper's responsibility to oversee North Carolina Emergency Management, which is responsible for the initial response in a disaster.

"I had a call from the White House earlier today, saying, Congressman, we know that the response from FEMA has been slow, but tell me what you need me to do," Edwards said. "And my response is, 'I don't need people to continue to ask me what I need them to do. I need people to do things."

Edwards said to White House officials' credit, they told him to put together a list of immediate needs and promised to help check things off that list.

Edwards asked for temporary cellphone towers, unprecedented amounts of water, meals ready-to-eat, a communication center and a grocery distribution warehouse to replenish stores.

"I'm giving the White House a chance to live up to their promise that they'll help us get the things on that list," Edwards said.

Republican Senate leader Phil Berger said Monday that he had been "briefed by Emergency Management officials on the impacts of Hurricane Helene and the emergency response efforts. This was an absolutely devastating storm."

"The General Assembly is evaluating what a disaster recovery package could look like and what other steps we can take. North Carolina has a healthy savings account that will help us respond to the catastrophic nature of this storm," Berger said on social media.

'Major access challenges'

N.C. Emergency Management Director William Ray said that state officials are using ground routes to distribute water and food that they can access "reliably and safely," including through Interstate 40 and Interstate 26.

"We know there are many areas of the western part of the state that still have major access challenges, which is why we put in place the operation you see here of moving, using aircraft to move commodities into those impacted areas," Ray said at the Asheville airport.

"Right now, we are trying to surge as much of the commodities into the entire impacted region. Yesterday as an example, either via ground or by air, 30 counties had commodities delivered to them yesterday," he said.

"We know that we're not going to be able to meet right now, out of the gate, the universal need that everyone has, that's why we are surging up both our distribution so we're putting additional drivers on, to be able to get more trucks on the road, to get commodities in faster," Ray said, as well as aircraft.

Emergency Management officials have 40 trailers a day of food and water they are trying to distribute to the "entire impacted area," he said.

National Guard response

Cooper activated more than 400 service members in the N.C. National Guard. The National Guard has rescued 422 people since the storm, out of more than 500 total rescues that includes search and rescue teams from 27 states and 18 federal teams. Of those rescued, 42 were critically injured people and four were infants. There were 64 animals rescued as well.

The Guard has also delivered 306 pallets of water and 230 pallets of food.

Republican U.S. Rep. Virginia Foxx of Banner Elk said Monday she wanted to see more from Cooper's office. Only six members of the National Guard were on the ground in Avery County, she said.

"We don't have enough National Guard," Foxx told McClatchy. "Last night, they had sent out 400 National Guard for 25 counties. That's a very small number."

The North Carolina Department of Transportation posted several times on social media and on its website that "all roads" in Western North Carolina are closed and the only travel on them should be for emergencies, over the weekend and on Monday. NCDOT is a Cabinet agency of Cooper's administration.

On Saturday, the North Carolina National Guard shared photos of the work they had already begun, joined by other states' National Guard soldiers from Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Iowa and Maryland to support relief efforts by air.

NC Reality Check is an N&O series holding those in power accountable and shining a light on public issues that affect the Triangle or North Carolina. Have a suggestion for a future story? Email realitycheck@newsobserver.com

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'We've lost everything.' Western NC town of Clyde is rebuilding - again - after Helene

October 2, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The (NC) Author: Ryan Oehrli; Staff Writer | Section: News | 431 Words Page: 7A OpenURL Link

CLYDE People in Clyde were rebuilding Saturday - again.

For many residents, it was their second time getting hit by a storm and having to start over. For some, it was the third. In 2021, Haywood County got hit by Tropical Storm Fred. Before that, Ivan in 2004.

But neither compared to what they saw after Helene, residents told The Charlotte Observer. Helene, which struck Florida as a Category 4 hurricane before dumping historic rain totals on western North Carolina as a tropical storm, washed out roads and brought untold damage to a swath of the state. Cellular networks and internet access remained limited.

The water line from flooding nearly reached the ceiling of a home on Broad Street in Clyde, where Brandon Patterson raked mud and trash out of his stepfather's home.

Patterson's stepfather, Tomas Quiroz, bought the house after Fred flooded it in 2021, hoping to fix it up.

Now he is back to square one, and his family says they will rebuild there.

Others on Broad Street were dealing with the same, familiar issues.

"We lost everything in the house just about," said Denise Dean, who lived just a few doors down from Quiroz, and who's lived on Broad Street for about eight years.

Unlike Quiroz, she's moving somewhere with higher ground. She's staying across the Pigeon River from her home after the storm. Her family has been in a hotel.

Nearby, husband and wife Lora and Mitch Nelson shoveled mud out of Lora's salon and barber shop, Superior Cuts, on Depot Street.

"That building never flooded before, if that tells you anything. They said FEMA and the National Guard are coming. But people've got livelihoods," said Mitch Nelson.

Lora Nelson's shop is plastered with mud. It's surrounded by buildings trashed by Helene. She's not sure how she'll be self-employed.

"It's devastating," she said.

There were some silver linings Saturday for people in Clyde.

Amy Russell and Lisa Monteith had about a dozen customers who, without any phone calls possible, just showed up to help.

Their pet food and dog training business flooded heavily - so much so that a bag of dog food found its way into someone's house on another street. They had the store for about three years, and already dealt with the "little flood," said Russell. There wasn't so much water then.

"We weren't expecting this," she said. "It's so heartbreaking."

Russell said they're planning to reopen the smaller shop for dog grooming and training, just around the corner, and move the retail inside that location.

Her customers helped to clean out both locations.

"Lisa says that a customer becomes a friend before a friend becomes a customer," Russell said.

Ryan Oehrli: @oehrli

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Baptists on Mission among helpers at work in Western NC after Helene devastation

October 2, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The (NC) Author: Martha Quillin; Staff Writer | Section: News | 458 Words Page: 9A OpenURL Link

Until last week, Bill White had the kind of home in Arden, just south of Asheville, that real estate agents would describe as park-like, with a lot so dense with trees it was hard to see the house from the road.

Then destructive remnants of Hurricane Helene came through and did some unwelcome landscaping, dropping at least 10 mature trees, including a four-trunk oak that landed on the house.

White, 86, was just about to climb onto the roof and size up the damage Monday afternoon when a trio of men from the N.C. Baptists on Mission pulled into his driveway and started unloading chainsaws and limb loppers.

"This is unbelievable," White kept saying, his sea-blue eyes filling with tears. "It's unbelievable that they do this."

Craig Schomburg, John Miller and Mark Cantrell have been doing this together for years. They know each other from Apex Baptist Church, and now that they're retired, they have the time to travel to the places where people are the most relieved to see them.

Between them, they have done disaster relief in several states, and regularly volunteer at the Baptist on Mission's Rose Hill outpost, where workers still are rebuilding homes lost in Hurricane Florence n 2018.

This week, they're working with teams based at Biltmore Baptist Church, where several disaster-relief efforts have converged in response to the widespread need Helene created.

The Baptists have set up two of their mass-feeding kitchens behind the church and have been preparing meals for students and faculty at UNC-Asheville, a nursing home in Asheville and some of the shelters around Buncombe County where people are staying-because their homes are uninhabitable.

Feed the Hunger has delivered thousands of bags of pre-mixed rice and pasta meals that church volunteers were giving away Monday along with donated bags of ice and cases of water. Inside the church more volunteers were sorting gifts of baby diapers, formula and other items displaced residents will need.

Drinking water has been an urgent need since the storm. The city of Asheville had to shut off water to make repairs to its system and those on wells in rural communities need electricity to power pumps.

Biltmore Baptist's pastor, Jason Gaston, who used to serve Raleigh's Summit Church, has been working with Raleigh sources to bring in some of the water and other supplies. Monday afternoon, a line of cars wrapped around Biltmore Baptist's parking lot as residents rolled through and volunteers placed the items in their trunks or back seats.

The campus bustled with the work of more than 100 volunteers Monday.

"Hope showed up today," Gaston said. "Hope has been here, of course, but hope showed up tangibly for our community today."

Watching the chainsaw crew work in his yard a few miles away, Bill White agreed.

"It's here," he said.

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Helene shuts down Spruce Pine mine that is pivotal to world's semiconductor supply

October 2, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The (NC) Author: Brian Gordon; Staff Writer | Section: News | 550 Words Page: 9A OpenURL Link

The remnants of Hurricane Helene ripped through the Western North Carolina mountain town of Spruce Pine last week, disrupting a quartz facility integral to the global production of solar panels and semiconductor chips.

The largest Spruce Pine mine is owned by Sibelco, a private Belgium mineral company that is Mitchell County's top employer. Sibelco told The News & Observer Monday that the company has "temporarily halted operations at the Spruce Pine facilities" since Sept. 26.

"The hurricane has caused widespread flooding, power outages, communication disruptions, and damage to critical infrastructure in the area," the emailed statement said. "Many people in the area, including our employees and their families, are facing displacement and significant disruptions."

As of Saturday morning, the storm had dumped more than 2 feet of rain on the town, submerging its downtown buildings and overwhelming area roads, railways, utilities, and homes.

Sibelco's mines are north of downtown in an area called the Spruce Pine Mining District. From above, they look like giant white sandy beaches. The area is set back from the local North Toe River, which flooded.

But news reports indicate surrounding Mitchell County has experienced extensive damage to roads and rail lines, which could impact workers' ability to get to the site and the company's ability to transport materials.

The town is home to the purest quartz on the planet, a byproduct of continental formations that occurred more than 380 million years ago. High-purity quartz is essential to making the silicon wafers that get cut into chips. While there are other sources of quartz, the purity many producers demand is only found around the mines of Spruce Pine.

"It is rare, unheard of almost, for a single site to control the global supply of a crucial material," wrote Ed Conway in his 2023 book "Material World." "Yet if you want to get high-purity quartz - the kind you need to make those crucibles without which you can't make silicon wafers - it has to come from Spruce Pine."

Nowhere else matches the purity

Facility issues have hindered the global supply chain of quartz before. In 2008, a fire at a Spruce Pine quartz refinery "temporarily brought production to a halt and impacted the market," reported Global Risk Intel, a Washington D.C.-based consulting firm.

Throughout the 20th century, local miners extracted mica and feldspar from the Mitchell County sites, yet, in the past 30 years, escalating demand for newer technologies has made high-purity quartz one of North Carolina's most important exports. Last year, Sibelco announced it would invest \$200 million into the site by 2025 to double production. The company sells its quartz under the brand name IOTA.

"I've been sent to Brazil, I've been sent to Australia, and nothing matches the final purity of the Spruce Pine quartz," local geologist Alex Glover said during an interview last March.

More recently, a second company named The Quartz Corp has invested in mines around Spruce Pine. On Tuesday, the company announced it too had stopped operations on Sept. 26, adding "we have no visibility on when they will

restart."

"This is second order of priority," The Quartz Corp said in an online post. "Our top priority remains the health and safety of our employees and their families."

Compared to Sibelco's sites, The Quartz Corp location is closer to the North Toe River, aerial images on Google Maps show.

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Displaced Mountain Island Lake residents can't go home

October 2, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The (NC) Author: Jeff A. Chamer; Staff Writer | Section: News | 523 Words Page: 1A

OpenURL Link

Storm recovery efforts continued in Mecklenburg County on Monday after people in about 100 homes were displaced following flooding near Mountain Island Lake and the Catawba River last week.

Efforts will go on for the next few weeks, said Paige Grande, a spokesperson for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Emergency Management, but residents will not be able to return home until the damage to their home has been assessed and repaired.

And that will depend on how long it takes for water in the area to recede.

"We're still waiting on the waters to recede in order for it to be safe to begin to do initial assessments and damage reports so that we can make sure that we are getting people what they need," Grande said.

If some homes only saw flooding in the basement, for example, residents won't have to wait very long. But if damage is more extensive, and water damaged multiple floors of a home or electrical wiring, then the wait will be much longer.

"We're prioritizing safety at this time, so working with residents individually to determine when they are safe to move back." Grande said.

Power had been mostly restored in Mecklenburg County.

Duke Energy also tracks lake levels, and said normal full pond at Mountain Island Lake elevation is 96 feet. The company reported Sunday morning that Mountain Island Lake was at 103.6 feet. The company pushed water through its system and into South Carolina after Helene hit on Friday morning, which threatened to increase flooding.

Grande said because a local and state emergency was declared, money will be available to people and will be able to get financial assistance to help with home repairs. But may take a while because heavily-damaged western North Carolina is being prioritized, she said.

On Saturday, residents gathered at the end of Harwood Lane on Mountain Island Lake alongside first responders from the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department and the Charlotte Fire Department watching the water rise.

Multiple residents said they were not prepared for flooding this bad. Susan Covington, a resident of Lake Drive, called the flooding a catastrophic event.

"I'm so sad. I'm devastated. I had just bought my house in 2018 and spent the year remodeling when the last flood happened. I moved in in 2019 and lived in the house for three weeks when the flood happened in June," she said. "We blame Duke Energy for that one, but this is a catastrophic event."

Jeff Brooks, a spokesperson for Duke Energy, said in a video posted to X the company was working with local emergency management teams to manage the large amounts of water dropped by the storm.

"There is a significant amount of water in our system right now because of the heavy rainfalls," he said while standing in front of the Cowans Ford Dam. "What we're doing now is trying to manage those water levels by moving

water through the system in a controlled capacity." Brooks urged residents to stay updated on lake levels and alerts by local county officials.

Observer staff writer Nora O'Neill contributed to this story.

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Cut off by Helene in Western NC, Rep. Foxx calls for more aid for her district

October 2, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The (NC)

Author: Danielle Battaglia; Staff Writer | Section: News | 1609 Words

Page: 13A OpenURL Link

Rep. Virginia Foxx's husband used his last match on Monday morning to light a candle in their Banner Elk house.

Tropical Storm Helene had ripped through Western North Carolina, sending flash floods, mudslides and devastation throughout the region.

The storm didn't spare the Foxx family.

"My own husband is trapped because our driveway washed away," the Republican congresswoman said Monday in a phone interview with McClatchy. "He has no power, and he didn't have cell reception for a long time."

But if you thought a washed-out driveway was enough to stop the feisty 81-year-old congresswoman, you don't know her very well.

Foxx said she walked from her property until she could get into a car and drive around her district Saturday to assess the damage.

"The roads were closed everywhere," Foxx said. "I had to keep taking detours and detours. I drove under power lines, barely getting around fallen trees, over fallen trees and power lines down everywhere. And then, DOT trying to clear the roads, but being stuck in traffic, in what should have taken 10 minutes, for an hour and a half. It's a really bad situation."

For three days, Foxx worked from her office making calls to anyone she thought could help, from the White House to the National Guard to the Governor's Mansion.

News coverage has largely focused on areas in North Carolina's11th Congressional District to the west. There, photos and videos show two tourist destinations - Chimney Rock and Asheville - damaged by the storm.

"We know it's bad in Asheville, we know it's bad west of us, but it's very bad here in the High Country: Ashe, Avery, Watauga," Foxx said. "Watauga, particularly has been hit very, very hard."

For 19 years, Foxx has represented in Congress the counties around her Banner Elk home. Her 5th Congressional District currently encompasses Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Caldwell, Davie, Forsyth, Mitchell, Stokes, Surry, Watauga, Wilkes, and Yadkin counties.

Hurricane Helene reached the U.S. Thursday, near Perry, Florida, as a Category 4 hurricane. When it reached North Carolina, on Friday, it had been downgraded to a tropical storm, but dumped tens of inches of rain on the mountains.

As of Monday, at least 120 people had died from the storm throughout the Southeast. And many others remain unaccounted for. It is unclear if that's because they're isolated, have no means of communication or are dead.

Over Foxx's house, 2 feet of rain fell, she said. Banner Elk is home to Lees-McRae College, and has a population of just over 1,000 people.

The most rainfall was measured at Busick Raws in nearby Yancey County, where 29.5 inches fell, The News &

Observer reported.

That's close to Mount Mitchell, the highest peak in the Appalachian Mountains and east of the Mississippi River in the continental United States.

Helene's devastation

Rep. Chuck Edwards, a Republican representing the 11th Congressional District, also spoke with McClatchy on Monday about the devastation Helene left in its path through the state.

"It begins with the fact that so many roads are closed and impassable," Edwards said.

Edwards said traffic has to be routed around the region. Smaller roads and bridges have been washed out.

"We've got communities here in the mountains that are severed from civilization, and they also have no power, and they have no cell service. They literally are cut off from the rest of the world."

People who can get out lined up for more than three hours to get gas, and he worries that the region will run out. A few grocery stores can run on generators but their food supplies are low.

And then there are those who can't be reached.

"There's several we have not heard from yet," Edwards said. "We don't know their condition. Cell service is sporadic at best."

Cellphone outage

Foxx's cell phone cut in and out, and then cut off, as she spoke about the devastation.

She called back, sounding exasperated.

"One of the biggest problems that we have here is phone service," Foxx said. "We have people isolated, all over, who don't have phone access."

Foxx said she's been begging federal and state agencies to get her counties access to Starlink, a satellite internet company owned by SpaceX, that offers mobile broadband. On Monday, the White House announced that every emergency operations center in North Carolina would be sent Starlink satellite systems. On Monday afternoon, FEMA announced they delivered 40 Starlink systems to the state.

Foxx said lack of working cellphones was one of the biggest frustrations among lawmakers, first responders and residents. They aren't able to communicate about problems throughout the area.

In the 11th District, Canton Mayor Zeb Smathers posted on social media his "frustration and anger" with cellphone providers, saying they failed his community when they needed them the most.

"It is unacceptable and disgusting that in our time of need, cellular service for the entire region is blocked out," Smathers told The Charlotte Observer. "There's no excuse for that. I mean, we knew the storm was coming."

Canton, a town with fewer than 4,500 people, is located 17 miles west of Asheville.

In Foxx's district, she said, an information technology employee in Ashe County was able to connect to Starlink. But other counties had not.

And that concerns Foxx, where she says there there are places with no access to the outside world - like Beech

Mountain, home to around 700 people.

"The only way to get to Beech Mountain is by helicopter," Foxx said. "We've got communications with the manager up there, but it is a big issue, being able to talk to people and getting supplies to them."

Missing people

Mid-conversation, Foxx's other phone rang.

"I don't need to take that one," she said. "That is somebody calling to tell me they're worried about me and praying for me."

That's a constant for people living in Western North Carolina.

And something Foxx says she really appreciates right now.

When Foxx isn't assessing the damage, she's been in her office making calls.

Foxx and other members of Congress were among those who wrote to Biden asking for him to declare a major disaster. On Saturday, Biden announced he had approved the declaration, which offers grants for temporary housing and home repairs, low-cost loans to cover uninsured property loses and programs to help individuals and business owners.

On Monday, Biden announced in a news conference that FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell would be staying in the Asheville area for the foreseeable future. He said he, too, plans to travel to North Carolina on Wednesday.

There's been some criticism that Congress left town Wednesday after passing a temporary funding measure but not the 12 appropriation bills needed to fund the federal government. Edwards noted how close Congress came to another government shutdown and where his district would be today, had that happened. Congress plans to be out until after the November election.

On Monday, Biden said he is considering calling Congress back into session. But Foxx said there's more Biden can do without Congress, like spending unused COVID-19 relief money on storm relief efforts.

Foxx said she wanted to see more from Gov. Roy Cooper's office.

In Avery County, only six members of the National Guard were on the ground, she said Monday.

"We don't have enough National Guard," Foxx said. "Last night, they had sent out 400 National Guard for 25 counties. That's a very small number."

She urged Cooper, a Democrat, to do more.

On Sunday, the North Carolina National Guard said more than 500 soldiers and airmen had been deployed. The U.S. National Guard said over 5,500 had been deployed from 11 states.

Edwards was also frustrated by the response.

"The people in this district are hurting, and they're really disappointed with the response from the federal government, and our state government," Edwards said.

He said he was only seeing federal and state resources brought into the region beginning Monday.

Volunteering

But Edwards added that Western North Carolina communities are resilient.

One of his own businesses was devastated in the storm, and it will take months to get it back up and running, but he said that it's nothing compared to what some of his neighbors are dealing with, with homes and businesses lost for good.

"I certainly see the community coming together," Edwards said. "Folks in the mountains are prideful and resilient. Our law enforcement and first responders are coming together in a big way. We're seeing more and more neighbors helping one another, checking on neighbors, seeing that they've got some of the basic things they need, sawing trees out of the way, so that their neighbors' cars can get by."

That uplifted Edwards, despite his frustration with state and federal leaders.

Next on Foxx's schedule was to go to Samaritan's Purse, a humanitarian aid organization based in Boone. There volunteers had come from across the country to help with relief efforts and she wanted to thank them for their work.

"We've very grateful to Samaritan's Purse," Foxx said. "It's one of the most effective relief organizations anywhere in the world, maybe the most effective. When Samaritan's Purse in on the ground, then we all feel better."

And Foxx said people looking to come to Western North Carolina tohelp should find an organization to volunteer with like Samaritan's Purse. She warned that people should not try to help on their own.

"We don't need people just going out on their own and trying to help because they don't know the situation here, and it's really dangerous for people to be trying to do things," Foxx said. "Roads are still caving in everywhere, and so it would be better for them to work through an established organization."

She suggested contacting the local emergency management agency where a person wanting to volunteer lives, to ask that county what is needed.

And she urged those wanting to help to donate to a reputable organization, and call their legislators or members of Congress to encourage the White House and Cooper's office to do everything needed.

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Helene damage could affect NC prep playoff schedule

October 2, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The (NC)

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

Page: 1B OpenURL Link

Eight years ago, the N.C. High School Athletic Association pushed back the start of its football playoffs due to Hurricane Matthew.

NCHSAA commissioner Que Tucker said that could be a possibility again this year after the devastation brought to the western part of the state by Hurricane Helene.

Tucker said any decisions about the playoffs would come from the NCHSAA Board of Directors, which she expects will meet via Zoom sometime later this week.

"With the devastation they have had," Tucker said Monday. "I'm not sure one week would do it. But that's a decision that has to be made by our board members. As a staff we want to huddle up and look at what we have found and see what we can come up with to present to the board, but we want to make sure our board members (from the regions most affected) can be on the Zoom with us because they have boots-on-the-ground knowledge, and we need to get their perspective."

Tucker said in her talks with coaches and athletic officials in the mountains that the damage is excessive and that schools in all four of the NCHSAA's classes have been affected.

So the association will not be able to delay one or two classifications in the playoffs, she said.

Tucker also doesn't expect that many football games, or any sports, will be played in that region this week. She noted she saw a photograph of the football field at Morganton's Freedom High School showing it almost completely submerged.

"Even if we thought one school could play, well, who would they be playing?" Tucker asked. "How can they get there? That's the crazy part. We talked to a coach at Mountain Heritage and he had been out with a chainsaw trying to help. He stopped long enough and found a spot with cell service and said it may be two months before they can get back to school; that they are using the school building to house the workers and everybody."

The NCHSAA playoffs are scheduled to begin in about two weeks, with girls' tennis (Oct. 14), volleyball (Oct. 19), girls' golf (Oct. 21) and cross-country (Oct. 26) up first.

Football playoffs are scheduled to begin Nov. 8.

"Until we can get a true assessment to when schools can return to play, and just be able to open up school, we can't make decisions at this point," Tucker said. "But I do know our board will be as far as equitable as when they were dealing with situations (brought on by past weather events) in eastern North Carolina."

Tucker said she is worried about how to get the playoffs going, knowing they are important so many schools and athletes and families. But seeing the images of the damage done, she said, is heartbreaking.

"It's a lot to think about," Tucker said. "Some people don't have drinking water. But you have to have hope, and hope brings about renewed excitement to push through. We know when we get to the other side, we'll play again, and we don't want to act like we don't have hope. But we have to be patient and try to keep it all in perspective as we try to do things that are in the best interest of everyone."

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Grant Williams has seen everything with the Charlotte Hornets, ready to 'commit to winning'

October 2, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The (NC) Author: Shane Connuck; Staff Writer | Section: Sports | 855 Words Page: 8B OpenURL Link

Grant Williams feels he has seen Spectrum Center flip.

The 25-year-old forward entering his second season on the Charlotte Hornets remembers attending games during the franchise's 7-59 season in 2011-12. It felt as though fans just wouldn't even be inside the building, or casual basketball spectators would fill seats while donning different teams' jerseys.

Williams, who grew up in west Charlotte and won a state championship at Providence Day, initially sat courtside for the first time in his life during a Hornets game against the Golden State Warriors. With J. Cole sitting behind Williams, Stephen Curry dropped more than 40 points on Charlotte, and the crowd had its cheers for the local talent.

Williams has seen it all.

He attended a Hornets-Warriors game during the following season, and remembers watching Kemba Walker - who's now on Charlotte's staff as a player enhancement coach - "whooping that tail."

It wasn't just that the NBA team that represents the city in which he grew up was starting to play well. The Hornets were gaining support, and that was something he wanted to help sustain.

"I know that happens quickly," Williams said Monday at the Hornets' preseason media day. "We just have to do our job as players to really commit to winning."

Hornets donate \$1 million to Hurricane Helene relief efforts

The Charlotte Hornets Foundation announced that it has committed \$1 million to aid the American Red Cross and Second Harvest Food Bank of Metrolina in their ongoing Hurricane Helene relief efforts.

Most of the Hornets began their remarks at media day with a message for those affected by the hurricane.

Williams, the former Tennessee star who became one of four local high school basketball players named All-Observer player of the year twice, noted that he has grandparents who are turning 89 and 90, respectively. Still being able to regularly play in front of them is a blessing.

"Whether it's your time, whether it's your efforts, volunteering your finances to the victims: They're right there in our backyard," Williams said. "People I know in Charlotte, Asheville, family members of mine across the way have been affected.

"Just the community here. I know the importance of basketball in the state of North Carolina. I know the importance of the Charlotte Hornets and Carolina Panthers, because I've been here, and when we're at our best, the city's at its best."

Seth Curry, the Charlotte Christian graduate whom the Hornets quickly re-signed in the offseason, offered a similar sentiment.

"I'm worried about everybody affected by Hurricane Helene in the western part of the state," Curry said. "It's been a

rough past week, so I just want to say our thoughts and prayers are with everybody trying to get everything they need to recover from this awful, awful tragedy."

Hornets will 'do everything we can as an organization'

New head coach Charles Lee said he's already been noticing how the city of Charlotte rallies and bands together.

For example, Spectrum Center has been going through renovations, and spaces inside the arena are moving amid the construction. He's noticed how they've had to "figure it out," even if it's as simple as knowing when to walk down a different hallway.

"Living in Charlotte and hearing about all the devastation that took place in all the Carolinas, just want them to understand that they are in our thoughts and prayers," Lee said. "I know there's already been a message from the Hornets' organization sent out to everybody, and our ownership group is trying to help financially in the relief efforts.

"The videos are pretty devastating, and it's a tragic situation. Having a family myself and knowing what you have to go through to lose your home, power and all those things, it's really tough."

Jeff Peterson, the Hornets' executive vice president of basketball operations, kicked off all the news conferences on Monday morning by acknowledging the devastating impact that Hurricane Helene has had on the Carolinas.

"Our hearts and thoughts and prayers are going out to them," Peterson said. "We're going to do everything we can as an organization to make it a little bit better. We know it's not perfect, and we just want to continue to let them know that we're thinking about them."

'We want to be a consistent, relevant contender'

Peterson, who begins his first season in his new role, joked about how he even had his clothes laid out ahead of his first media day.

He's been excited about the ways in which new owners Rick Schnall and Gabe Plotkin have built this roster - taking immense pride in character and bringing in the most competitive group it can.

"We wanted to take a holistic approach in terms of just having sustainable success," Peterson said. "It's not one of these things where we want to make the playoffs one year, and then we're out for another four years; Or make the play-in game one year, and then we're out for five. We want to be a consistent, relevant contender.

"You don't do that overnight, right? It takes time. You have to build it the right way. You can't skip steps. We're very strategic in every move to see if that's possibly going to impact that goal, knowing it's the north star."

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Buncombe County, NC, - to provide food and water - as thousands remain cut off

October 2, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The (NC) Author: Jeff A. Chamer; Staff Writer | Section: News | 1177 Words

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Buncombe County will begin distributing food and water for people Monday afternoon at four sites, and the distribution will continue as long as there are supplies, County Manager Avril Pinder said.

Distribution will be done by drive-through or walk-ups beginning at 2 p.m.:

William W. Estes Elementary School, 275 Overlook Road, Asheville

Sand Hill Elementary, 154 Sand Hill School Road, Asheville (Please enter via Acton Circle)

North Windy Ridge Intermediate School, 20 Doan Road, Weaverville

Fairview Elementary School, 1355 Charlotte Highway, Fairview

Over 100 deputy sheriffs from areas outside Buncombe County have arrived there to help in the devastation after Helene. At least 40 people have been killed in the county because of Helene, and officials are struggling to get food and water to people.

The sheriff said there's been looting and confrontations over the lack of supplies.

Pinder said three tractor trailers of drinking water had arrived and the county was taking steps to get an unlimited supply of drinking water from a private company.

Pinder made her announcement during a 10 a.m. news conference Monday that was streamed on Facebook. Buncombe County officials will hold news conferences every day at 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.

Diapers would be available at the sites, but not baby formula, Pinder said. Additionally, county leaders are trying to figure out how they can deliver food and water, she said.

An unknown number of people are unaccounted for in Buncombe County, the sheriff said.

How to get water in Asheville

In addition to the four sites, the city of Asheville Fire Department said water would be distributed to residents at Pack Square Park beginning at 1 p.m. Monday and go until dark or when supply runs out. Each person must bring their own container to 70 Court Plaza, where they will be provided one gallon of water, with a maximum of five gallons per family.

Buncombe County spokesperson Lillian M. Govus said almost every resident who is on the city's water system is without water. (People with wells and septics have also been impacted because of power outages, she said.)

"Restoring service to this system could potentially take weeks," Assistant City Manager Ben Woody said Monday afternoon. "As repairs progress, as we make progress, we will begin to see service return, but that's going to happen slowly, and it's going to happen in some areas before others."

A deputy sheriff assisting with storm response died, Miller said.

"Devastation does not even begin to describe how we feel," he said.

The Associated Press reported that at least 107 people have died across six states impacted by Hurricane Helene.

According to Duke Energy, nearly 88,000 customers were still without power in Buncombe County on Monday.

Some homes and roads in the region were completely wiped out by the storm, and the Lake Lure Dam came close to collapsing. North Carolina Emergency Management instructed people to not attempt to travel to western North Carolina.

"It is truly the worst storm we have faced, and not just us, but our friends across the mountains," said Canton Mayor Zeb Smathers. "The word I keep coming back to ... is apocalyptic."

Officials warn against misinformation

The Buncombe sheriff asked people not to spread misinformation because it delays needed assistance.

Pinder said some people showed up at the Swannanoa Fire Department to say an engineer told them a dam was getting ready to breach Sunday night. The county evacuated hundreds of people, only to learn it was a hoax.

"We had to take time away from searching and rescuing people to go out and investigate if that was true," Pinder said. "The dam is not in imminent failure, there was nothing to that report, other than being malicious."

During the livestreamed press conference Monday, people posted comments on Facebook to ask about friends and family they haven't been able to get in touch with. They said places that are open only accept cash, but not many people have cash on hand, and they asked how much water they would be able to get. Others asked about how to donate supplies.

Pinder said a provisional agreement had been made between Asheville and Verizon to install a temporary satellite for cell phone service in the parking lot of 35 Woodfin Street. It will provide cell phone reception for several blocks, Pinder said.

How to volunteer in Buncombe

Drew Reisinger, register of deeds, said the county has organized door knocking efforts to check on people. People can submit a request on a Google Form about loved ones they haven't been able to contact.

People can volunteer to help if interested, he said. The county has received over 11,000 wellness check requests so far.

He also asked that people email the register's office to let them know if they have made contact with friends or family so they can help speed up wellness checks.

Pinder said that because shelters are getting busy, the county is working on opening a third. Shelters provide overnight lodging, and food and water. The state website ReadyNC.gov lists all shelters open in western North Carolina.

Efforts are also being made to get non-potable water to the county, as well as port-o-johns, Pinder said.

Additionally, county officials announced:

Signs will be printed to let residents know about the distribution sites.

The daily press conferences will be translated in Spanish, and the county is working with community partners to reach Spanish-speaking residents.

Interstate 26 is now fully open.

Hospitals, nursing facilities, and the detention center all have power from generators and the county is supplying diesel to keep them running.

Shelters also have consistent power from generators and backup generators.

Donations can be made at helenedonations@buncombecounty.org

People can reach out about volunteering by emailing helenevolunteers@buncombecounty.org

To let the register's office know if contact has been made with loved ones, email register@buncombecounty.org

Residents salvage food and water

"Is that a lamp? Oh, there's two of them! We'll have light tonight!"

It was a brief personal victory for Amanda Son as she searched for supplies at a trashed produce store in Swannanoa on Sunday. She said she would bring food, clothes, blankets and shoes to Buncombe Community High School to give away.

People were scrounging together what they could with plans to distribute it.

"With it being an emergency - and this place is destroyed - we're trying to salvage what we can," she said.

She said she had money but there was no one to pay. And some shop owners had unlocked their doors, opening them up to the public to take what they could, she said.

Other county residents discovered a tractor-trailer at the edge of Swannanoa filled with hundreds of cases of water.

Soon, a massive, impromptu line of cars formed. Volunteers carried cases to people's cars.

Members of Black Mountain Presbyterian Church were among those collecting the cases, with plans to give them to the community. "Thank you. More than you know," one woman said as a volunteer handed her cases to bring home.

Police officers later showed up and made people disperse, The Washington Post reported. "You are stealing!" an officer yelled at them.

Babies being born, post-storm

HCA Healthcare's Mission Hospital in Asheville treated more than 700 patients on Monday, said Greg Lowe, the hospital president. Thirty babies have been delivered since Helene hit, he said.

Observer staff writer Ryan Oehrli contributed to this story.

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The Panthers showed promise vs. Bengals, but it wasn't enough on 'a day of near misses'

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The home fans at Bank of America Stadium saw another loss Sunday for the Carolina Panthers, and there was nothing unusual about that.

But the way the Panthers lost? That was actually encouraging. Yes, the Panthers have fallen far enough that they are allowed to have encouraging losses, and that's what Cincinnati's 34-24 win over Carolina was.

"A day of near misses," Carolina head coach Dave Canales would call it later, and that's true. But it was the right type of near misses, the "you did the right thing and it still went wrong" sort of errors that you can live with - especially if you're a supporter of a team that went 2-15 and looked hopeless throughout 2023.

The Panthers went for it on fourth-and-inches inside the Cincinnati 1 on their first drive. Didn't make it. They called a fake punt and had a first down all but assured after punter Johnny Hekker threw a great pass. Reserve tight end Feleipe Franks dropped it.

"I loved the mindset, the mentality," quarterback Andy Dalton said.

And yet despite those critical fourth-down misses, the Panthers kept coming. And in doing so, a little of their fraught relationship with their fans was repaired.

"The energy is just different," said Panthers wide receiver Diontae Johnson, who scored one touchdown but had his hands on another that he said later he should have caught as well. "To me, I feel like it's a different team."

After the Panthers got bombarded with boos in their home opener Sept. 15 - a 26-3 loss to the L.A. Chargers that was also the last game Bryce Young started at quarterback - this time the Carolina fans were far more positive with Dalton in charge. And they should have been.

In danger of being blown out when they went down 31-14 in the late in the third quarter, the Panthers instead scored 10 straight points.

Then, with the deficit cut to 31-24, Carolina forced a punt and got the ball back. With 4:42 to go, the ball was in Dalton's hands - albeit at the Panthers' 8-yard line - with a chance to tie the game if Carolina could go 92 yards.

Alas, that's where it fell apart. Jonathan Mingo dropped an easy 7-yard pass on first-and-10. Then Dalton threw two more incompletions and the Panthers punted when Canales chose to trust the defense instead of go for a fourth-and-10 at his own 8 with 4:31 to go. Cincinnati ran the clock down and kicked a game-clinching field goal, and that was that.

Still, much like last week and the win in Las Vegas, there was some hope for Carolina.

Dalton threw for 220 yards and two touchdowns, including the first career TD for rookie Xavier Legette and a dart of a 21-yarder to Johnson. Chuba Hubbard rushed for 100-plus yards again behind a steady offensive line that also didn't allow a sack. Dalton's only interception came when left tackle Ickey Ekwonu allowed Cincinnati defensive end Trey Hendrickson to hit the quarterback's arm as he threw, resulting in a flutterball that was easily picked off.

Otherwise, though, the offense was pretty good. The Panthers scored 24 points and none of them came cheap. All

three of their TD drives covered at least 65 yards. Except at the 1-yard line, they ran the ball well again. "This is exactly my dream of how this thing works from an offensive standpoint," Canales said.

It was the defense and the fourth-down misses that let Carolina down in this one.

The Bengals scored touchdowns on four straight drives spanning the second and third quarters, On one remarkable play, wide receiver Ja'Marr Chase pinballed through and around three Carolina defenders for a 63-yard TD that made all the Bengals fans in attendance (and there were a lot of them in the lower deck) roar in glee.

Panthers safety Xavier Woods had the most egregious missed tackle on that play, as he lowered a shoulder and hit Chase, but didn't wrap him up. The Panthers saw their fundamentals lacking on several similar plays. Woods would make up for some of that, however, by intercepting Joe Burrow in the fourth quarter and returning the ball 33 yards to set up a field goal.

Of course, nothing that happened on a football field in Charlotte matters a bit compared to what's going on in western North Carolina right now. It was an incongruously sunny day where football seemed secondary after the devastating flooding and loss of life caused by Hurricane Helene in the Carolinas over the past several days. Canales acknowledged that tragedy at the beginning of his news conference.

But if you're only talking about football, the Panthers lost one the right way Sunday. If they had scored on that first drive, as they should have - they ran four straight plays at the Cincinnati 2- or 1-yard line - things might have been different. My only quibble is that fourth-down play was run out of the shotgun when they only needed a few inches. Still, Carolina should have been able to bang that one in.

"That's going to haunt me tonight,"Panthers offensive guard Robert Hunt said.

The belief in this team is there," Canales said. "But we just have to pair it with our execution."

That's right. The Panthers hit rock bottom a couple of weeks ago, getting outscored 73-13 in their first two games.

At least, for now, they've stopped digging.

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