

In battleground North Carolina, Helene damage creates challenges for Trump and Harris

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Western North Carolina damage from Hurricane Helene may shake up the presidential election in the critical battleground state, which could have national implications, state politics experts say.

State officials have confirmed more than 50 deaths in North Carolina, a number that's expected to rise, and President Joe Biden declared a major disaster in 25 counties. Hundreds of thousands were still without power as of Tuesday as power crews, the North Carolina National Guard and other relief workers tried to reach areas cut off by impassable roads.

The general public is more focused on helping others and surviving in Helene-devastated communities than a race where state polls show Republican former President Donald Trump leading Democratic Vice President Kamala Harris by less than one percentage point, experts say.

"It's just not a priority right now," said Susan Roberts, a political science professor at Davidson College.

But a drop in turnout due to the storm could swing the presidential race.

"It affects so many people that it will certainly have an effect on the election," said Eric Heberlig, a political science professor at UNC Charlotte. "... Those small changes in turnout could very much make a difference in who wins and who loses."

Voter demographics in Western NC

Trump in 2020 won 23 of the 25 counties now included in the federal disaster declaration for Helene, most of them by double digits, on his way to a narrow victory in North Carolina. Biden carried just two — Buncombe County, home to Asheville, and Watauga County, which includes the town of Boone.

The heavy Republican lean in the western portion of the state is a cause for concern for the Trump campaign, Heberlig said.

"If this damage significantly depresses turnout in most areas out there, that's more likely to have an impact on the Republicans than the Democrats," he said.

The population differences between many of those rural, red counties and more liberal population centers such as Asheville complicates the electoral math, Heberlig added.

"You can have a 10% drop in turnout in many of the rural counties, but a 10% drop in Asheville has a lot larger numerical impact, just because it has many more people," Heberlig said.

Roberts said the situation probably doesn't give Harris a chance to pick up many votes in the affected areas, but she could benefit from lower turnout in rural areas.

"The rural vote has been decidedly for former President Trump ... Should Trump lose North Carolina by 1% or less than 1%, then it's all going to come back to, were there free and fair elections in Western North Carolina?" she said.

Shaking up campaigning and election planning

The devastation in Western North Carolina is so severe people may struggle to cast their ballots, even if state officials give voters and election boards flexibility, Roberts predicted.

"It's not all going to be solved by making exceptions for absentee ballots," she said.

Election officials face a short window, with Election Day on Nov. 5 and early voting scheduled to start even sooner, to address disruptions to the postal service, destruction of polling places and voters with missing or damaged IDs.

"It's a huge logistical feat to put on an election under normal conditions, let alone under these," Heberlig said.

The campaigns will also have to adjust their strategies, he added.

"Any kind of grassroots door-knocking or mobilization activities that were planned in those counties, those plans are severely disrupted," Heberlig said.

A likely point of emphasis for both campaigns, according to Heberlig: finding ways to reach affected voters and educate them about their options for casting ballots.

Both campaigns also have to be careful to avoid creating a backlash by appearing insensitive to the loss of life and property in their next moves, Roberts said. That means not getting in the way of emergency response and avoiding a lot of negative messaging, she said.

"The last several weeks prior to an election is when you see more of a deluge, if you will, of negative ads. Would that be the wise choice for the Asheville media market now? I'm not sure that it would," she said.

Will Helene impact NC election results?

In addition to Republicans and Democrats' turning out their respective bases in Western North Carolina, there's also the question of how unaffiliated voters — North Carolina's largest affiliation — will react to the storm, Roberts said.

"The natural disaster may mean that those people just won't show up to the polls ... It might be too inconvenient," Roberts said.

In a state where unaffiliated voters are critical to winning elections, a natural disaster can be a real blow to turnout, Heberlig said.

"People who are marginally interested in politics anyway are hard to turn out, but when you have a home and family to worry about, that's obviously going to take precedence," he said. "So for lots of people, worrying about the election is going to be No. 47 on the list of things that they want to worry about."

More could happen to change the dynamics of the presidential race in the last month of the campaign, but Heberlig predicts Helene's aftermath "is big enough" to "certainly affect turnout."

"Our statewide races tend to be so close that just about anything can swing it one way or another," he said.

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Levine Foundation gives \$5M after Helene, other big Charlotte donors also help Western NC

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The Charlotte-based Leon Levine Foundation committed \$5 million this week to Hurricane Helene relief efforts in the devastated North Carolina mountains — the latest big donation from a foundation, company or individual based in or with a strong presence in Charlotte.

"This is a time our broader community must come together to help those in need," Tom Lawrence, Leon Levine Foundation president and CEO, said in a statement.

Helene killed at least 143 people in the Southeast, CNN reported Tuesday afternoon. Authorities confirmed 57 deaths in Buncombe County, home of Asheville, Sheriff Quentin Miller said Tuesday. The storm erased downtown Chimney Rock and other areas of the mountains and left thousands homeless..

An initial \$1 million went to the Community Foundation of Western North Carolina to help in 18 counties, Lawrence said. The foundation also has accelerated payments of scheduled 2025 grants and given more grants to its nonprofit partners in the mountains, he said.

Leon Levine, founder of the first Family Dollar store in Charlotte, established the foundation in 1980.

asheville_donations1.jpgColumbus residents drop off supplies Tuesday afternoon at the Columbus, Georgia Convention & Trade Center for delivery to residents in Asheville, North Carolina impacted by Hurricane Helene. 10/01/2024

Other big donations to help Helene victims

On Tuesday, American Airlines, which has a hub at Charlotte Douglas International Airport, announced that AAdvantage members have donated more than \$2 million to American Red Cross Helene relief.

And wireless provider Spectrum committed \$1 million to Helene relief in the Carolinas, Florida and Georgia.

The Connecticut-based company will donate \$50,000 each to the NC Disaster Relief Fund, OneSC Fund and Volunteer Florida Foundation, the company announced Tuesday.

Spectrum will give an additional \$100,000 to local organizations in areas hardest hit by Helene, including in and around Asheville; Spartanburg, South Carolina; Georgia and the west Florida coast. Spectrum is giving \$750,000 in free public service announcements to the organizations.

Last Saturday, the foundation headed by the owners of the Carolina Panthers and Charlotte FC committed to an initial donation to Helene relief in the Carolinas. The David and Nicole Tepper Foundation, and the Teppers' two local sports organizations, announced an initial pledge of \$3 million.

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When does hurricane season end? What to know, how to stay prepared in NC after Helene

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Though Helene has come and gone, hurricane season is far from over.

With dozens of people killed and many still unaccounted for and recovery likely to take years, the storm is considered one of the worst to ever hit the southeast, the Associated Press reported. But more storms could cause problems this year.

RAL_092922-HURRICANE-HELENE-TEL-16.JPGA washed out bridge over the Swannanoa River in Black Mountain on Sunday, Sept. 29, 2024. The remnants of Hurricane Helene caused widespread flooding, downed trees, and power outages in western North Carolina.

The Atlantic Hurricane Season runs from June 1 to Nov. 30.

This hurricane season has already been active, as forecasters from NOAA's Climate Prediction Center previously predicted in its mid-season hurricane outlook update. The 2024 season is expected to rank as one of the busiest ever.

Forecasters predicted this season to see 17 to 24 named storms, including four major hurricanes.

noaa august hurricane outlook update2024 Atlantic Hurricane Season Outlook update from NOAA's Climate Prediction Center.

When is peak hurricane season?

According to the North Carolina Emergency Management agency, the peak of hurricane season is from mid-August to late October.

And although Helene caused damage far inland, the Tar Heel state's coast "is one of the nation's most vulnerable areas to a direct hurricane strike because its coastline extends out into the ocean," says NC Emergency Management.

Helene3_092924_TEL.JPEGA search and rescue team out of Atlantic Beach, N.C. examines a van swept into the river in Swannanoa, N.C. by flooding from Helene. They were assisting in the community, Sunday, Sept. 29, 2024.

See photos and video from Helene's devastation in the mountains of western NC

With this being a greater risk for strong storms, here's what NCEM recommends to stay prepared during and after a hurricane.

How to stay prepared during a hurricane

If a storm is likely in your area:

Listen to the radio or television broadcasts for information. Secure your home. Turn off gas, water and power if you are told to do so, along with propane tanks. Make sure to have a supply of water and preparations to keep food

safe. Evacuate if you are told to do so by police or in a mobile home, temporary structure, high-rise building or on the coast.

If you are unable to evacuate, you should secure external doors and take shelter indoors on a floor under a table or another sturdy object.

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

lakelurechmineyrock_26.JPGA destroyed house with a car under it in Chimney Rock, N.C. on Sunday, September 29, 2024.

How to stay prepared after a hurricane:

After a hurricane has passed:

Stay tuned to radio or television broadcasts for updates. Stay alert for extra rainfall and additional flooding. Watch out for flooded roads, weakened bridges, roads and sidewalks. Avoid downed electrical wires or loose power lines. Return home when officials say it is safe. Do not drink or make food with tap water until you are sure it's not dirty.

You can find more information about hurricane season online at readync.gov.

How Apple, T-Mobile & Verizon customers can access Wi-Fi & phone signals after Helene

There's new storm activity in the Atlantic and Gulf. Could any of them affect NC?

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As residents dig out of the mud, they know Helene has forever changed their NC town

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Fran Randall peered into a comic book and board game store in downtown Marshall.

"This is the kind of business we never thought we'd have," he said, studying the damage inside.

Randall, 61, is a sixth-generation native of Marshall, a Madison County town with fewer than 1,000 people. He grew up on a hill just over downtown, which had bloomed since 2008 or so into an "artsy" sort of place, he said. There was a bike shop, a bar with live music, art galleries and even a tattoo parlor.

RAL_100124-HURRICANE-HELENE-TEL-10.JPGResidents and volunteers clean up on Tuesday, Oct. 1, 2024 after the French Broad River flooded downtown Marshall. The remnants of Hurricane Helene caused widespread flooding, downed trees, and power outages in western North Carolina.

But the old Western North Carolina character was still there, like a place to buy bib overalls.

"It's kind of weird being in that generation that saw old and new," he said Tuesday. "Now, I'm about to see what's next."

RAL_100124-HURRICANE-HELENE-TEL-08.JPGResidents and volunteers clean up on Tuesday, Oct. 1, 2024 after the French Broad River flooded downtown Marshall. The remnants of Hurricane Helene caused widespread flooding, downed trees, and power outages in western North Carolina.

Downtown Marshall lies between cliffs and the French Broad River. Like other areas on that river, it was devastated by Helene last week. Police and barricades blocked every way into downtown Tuesday morning. But shop owners, their friends and family met up.

The job was big but straightforward: dig out mud that caked the streets and buildings.

Help for Western North Carolina has come from local law enforcement, the federal government and volunteers. Recovery for some towns will take a long time, though.

Randall donned a fishing hat and a shovel. As he walked along the muddy road, he checked in on friends and neighbors.

Others downtown shared their stories with him and a reporter.

RAL_100124-HURRICANE-HELENE-TEL-14.JPGKen Garrison of Marshall helps clean up downtown on Tuesday, Oct. 1, 2024 after the French Broad River caused catastrophic flooding. The remnants of Hurricane Helene caused widespread flooding, downed trees, and power outages in western North Carolina.

Jaime Perkins talked about putting up barricades around a church before the storm.

Jackson Massey was shoveling mud out of his grandparents' shop on his 15th birthday; he'd get his learner's permit to drive soon, his grandfather said.

Connie Molland shared some good news: Most of the art in Flow Gallery survived.

Randall's town will change more after Helene, he knows. There's some melancholy in knowing that. But then again, that's just the way it is. New people will come in. The collective memory won't hold onto the damage Marshall saw in September 2024.

RAL_100124-HURRICANE-HELENE-TEL-23.JPGIan Downes strums his guitar while taking a brief break from cleaning up in downtown Marshall on Tuesday, Oct. 1, 2024 after the French Broad River caused catastrophic flooding. The remnants of Hurricane Helene caused widespread flooding, downed trees, and power outages in western North Carolina.

"The buildings will be gone, a lot of them," he said. "But new things will come in. It'll be a further turn of the page, of the old generation of people that's been here to a new generation."

Fran Randall in MarshallFran Randall points out some landmarks across the French Broad River in Marshall on Tuesday, Oct. 1, 2024, after Helene devastated the town. He knows Marshall is now a changed place.

IMG_6676.jpgDennis Rector and his grandson Jackson Massey digging mud out of their family's general merchandise store in downtown Marshall. The store has been in their family since the 1950s and was among the oldest businesses in town.

RAL_100124-HURRICANE-HELENE-TEL-13.JPGJoe Freeman of Marshall helps clean up downtown on Tuesday, Oct. 1, 2024 after the French Broad River caused catastrophic flooding. The remnants of Hurricane Helene caused widespread flooding, downed trees, and power outages in western North Carolina.

RAL_100124-HURRICANE-HELENE-TEL-30.JPGResidents and volunteers clean up on Tuesday, Oct. 1, 2024 after the French Broad River flooded downtown Marshall. The remnants of Hurricane Helene caused widespread flooding, downed trees, and power outages in western North Carolina.

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After Helene, can NC businesses and tourist sites restore 'the magic of Asheville'?

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Jessie Dean, her sister Melissa and the Asheville Tea Company team spent all of last Thursday, Sept. 26, preparing their production center for Hurricane Helene.

The facility beside the Swannanoa River and down the road from Biltmore Village in Asheville is where the group blended and packaged their tea bags for the past eight years. For hours, Dean said the team raised as many items as they could off the ground, anticipating that some water from the river would seep into the building.

AshevilleTea.jpgWhat the Asheville Tea Company's production center looked like before the destruction caused by Hurricane Helene.

Some water quickly turned into unprecedented flooding.

Most everything near the Swannanoa River was swept away, including Asheville Tea's facility. The river rose more than 26 feet on Sept. 27, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Hurricane Helene raged through western North Carolina, destroying homes, local businesses and thriving tourist areas from Asheville to the town of Chimney Rock.

While local, state and federal agencies are focused on search and rescue operations, and delivering necessary supplies to the area, local communities are starting the long road to rebuilding and facing whatever the economic fallout may be.

"I was able to get to higher ground on Friday to try and see the state of the building and it was gone. It was just all water and it was completely gone," Dean said. "Everything was in that building. Everything is gone...

"Then we started seeing pictures of where the building was, and then a video of our building floating down the Swannanoa and it getting cut in half by a pole."

ATC_Hurricane Helene.jpgInside the circle lies the remains of Asheville Tea Company's production center in Asheville, North Carolina. It was destroyed during Hurricane Helene.

Economic impact of the storm

The fall season is a busy time for areas in western North Carolina, "both visually across the Blue Ridge Mountains and for our economic vitality," said Luisa Yen, director of public relations with ExploreAsheville, the city's tourism guide. Many people come to gaze at the colors of the fall foliage, for instance.

Tourism is one of the area's biggest economic drivers, particularly for Asheville and Buncombe County. And last year was record-breaking. About 14 million people visited the region, spending about \$3 billion, according to a local Tourism Economic Impact Report produced by the county tourism agency.

But as of now, Asheville and Buncombe County are isolated, with numerous roadways destroyed. And many attractions remain closed, including the historic Biltmore Estate. Or some have been completely swept away, like Main Street in the town of Chimney Rock.

RAL_092922-HURRICANE-HELENE-TEL-10.JPGA rescue team paddles down the Swannanoa River on Sunday, Sept. 29, 2024. The remnants of Hurricane Helene caused widespread flooding, downed trees, and power outages in western North Carolina.

According to AccuWeather, total damage and economic loss from the storm is totaling between \$145 billion and \$160 billion for the states. And that figure could increase as more damage across the Carolinas, Florida, Georgia, Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky and Ohio are assessed.

"This is definitely going to hurt. Our hearts and minds are focused on supporting our community right now and starting to lay the foundation for recovery in the days and months ahead," Yen said in an email interview with The Charlotte Observer.

The Biltmore Estate after Helene

About 70% to 80% of the arts buildings in the popular River Arts District were "compromised," according to Heather Divoky, marketing co-chair for the historic creative hub.

RAD2.jpegSeen here in May 2023, one of the many colorful storefronts in Asheville's River Arts District. The district was ravaged by the impact of Hurricane Helene.

The district sits near the French Broad River, which crested close to 25 feet on Sept. 27. It's a popular area to visit and explore the work of local artists.

While some of the buildings experienced minimal flooding, the art was still compromised, Divoky wrote in an email, noting that humidity will eventually cause mold, and some artwork is on paper.

"We have 355 artists and organizations in the (district), and in one way or another all of our creative lives have changed," Divoky wrote.

USATSI_24335223.jpgThe French Broad River reached over 16 feet by 11 am on Sept. 27, flooding most of the River Arts District, seen here from the Haywood Road bridge.

Biltmore Village is another popular destination filled with local boutiques and history. It also has suffered heavy damage from the storm. Like Asheville Tea Company, it sits along the Swannanoa River and remains very inaccessible.

Biltmore Estate, which is south of the village, will remain closed through Oct. 3. It's unclear whether one of the state's most popular attractions, a Gilded Age, 175,000-square-foot home built by George Washington Vanderbilt II, sustained any damage.

But it sits closer to the French Broad River. A Biltmore Estate official could not be reached for comment Wednesday.

Other lodging sites, including the upscale, historic Omni Grove Park Inn and Wrong Way River Lodge & Cabins, which is known for its A-frame cabins, are also closed. On social media, Wrong Way said it sustained significant damage and the Omni said it is without water or power.

East of Asheville, the town of Chimney Rock, another popular tourist destination, was mostly wiped away by rising water from the Broad River.

Next steps after Helene

For all of these communities, next steps include a search for funding to help them rebuild.

Yen said ExploreAsheville has a list of organizations on its website that people can support, including MANNA FoodBank. Divoky said the River District is taking donations that will directly go to artists affected by the damage. Arts North Carolina, a nonprofit that supports the art industry in the state is also accepting donations for creatives.

"Our next step is to create a path forward," wrote Jeffrey Burroughs, president of the district. "We are only just beginning to communicate via text as of (Monday). We are looking to raise money for our artists, clean up, and building support...It will take a great effort to rebuild, but we are artists, we live to create and are up for the task at hand."

RALhelene1234.JPGFlooding on the French Broad River in the River Arts District in Asheville on Friday, Sept. 27, 2024 as the remnants of Hurricane Helene caused flooding, downed trees, and power outages in western North Carolina.

For Asheville Tea, Dean said the team is "committed to the long ride" of rebuilding and helping out the community. Asheville Tea is also asking for donations, as well as looking into federal aid.

It's unclear what the economic landscape will look like for western North Carolina. Dean said the road to normalcy will be long but the community already knows how to stick together.

"Neighbors are out and helping each other. Cooking for each other and going into their friends' properties and trying to help restore anything that can be restored," Dean said. "There's just a huge immediate outpouring of love and effort within Asheville and that's really special.

"The magic of Asheville will rebound, it's just going to take a long time."

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Flight restrictions for Biden's NC visit include Helene relief exceptions

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While President Joe Biden's Wednesday visit to the Carolinas prompted flight restrictions, they included an exception for civilian aircraft delivering Helene relief.

Flight restrictions were in place near the Greenville-Spartanburg and Asheville airports from 12:30 p.m. to 3:15 p.m. There were also flight restrictions near Raleigh. However, the restrictions allowed for Helene relief exceptions if coordinated before departure.

A previous version of this story omitted a reference to the exception.

One of the main relief efforts, Operation Airdrop, was founded in Texas in 2017 in the wake of Hurricane Harvey. According to its website, people can get involved by signing up to fly a plane, making donations, volunteering to organize, partnering with the nonprofit and sharing its mission online.

Biden was expected to survey damage in South Carolina before taking an aerial tour of western North Carolina. In North Carolina at least 32 people have died as a result of the storm, with many more unaccounted for.

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Pilot makes emergency landing at Hickory, NC, airport during Helene supply runs

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A pilot made an emergency landing at Hickory's airport Wednesday afternoon, shortly after Ivanka Trump visited the airport to deliver Hurricane Helene disaster relief supplies.

Pilot Jordan Seth Faught, 41, of Lenoir, escaped injury after his single-engine Cessna experienced a mechanical failure as he returned from flying supplies to storm-damaged Avery County in the North Carolina mountains, State Highway Patrol Trooper Christopher Casey said in a statement.

Faught made the emergency landing on the airport runway at about 12:45 p.m., Casey said.

Troopers secured the scene, and the FAA will investigate the cause of the failure, Casey said.

Trump, daughter of former president Donald Trump, flew to the Hickory airport earlier Wednesday to deliver 300 Starlinks to be flown to western North Carolina. The devices will help Helene flood victims connect to high-speed internet.

This is a developing story that may be updated.

Hickory airport locator map embed

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Helene flooding damages Mountain Island Lake homes. Some blame Duke Energy for it

October 2, 2024 \mid Charlotte Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (NC) Author: Gavin Off, The Charlotte Observer Section: local \mid 839 Words OpenURL Link

Few people in Mecklenburg County suffered more from Hurricane Helene than residents whose homes border the Catwaba River south of Mountain Island Lake.

Floodwater there covered streets. It gushed into homes and filled backyard out buildings with near ceiling-level brown water. A preliminary assessment found four homes to be total losses, said Paige Grande, a spokesperson for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Emergency Management. People living in about 100 houses were displaced.

Lake Drive resident Erik Jendresen, who's sued Duke Energy before over flooding, says the power company shares the blame.

Jendresen lives just downstream of Mountain Island Lake, where water levels were above Duke Energy's target in the days leading up to Helene's arrival, according to the company's website.

Water levels at Lake Norman, just north, were near target levels but above minimums, data show.

Jendresen questioned why the power company didn't release some water — at Mountain Island Lake and others — in anticipation of the influx of water streaming down from the mountains. Lowering the water levels ahead of time and increasing the lake's storage capacity would have prevented the lake from sending so much water over the spillway at once, Jendresen said.

A smaller spill means a smaller impact on communities downstream.

"They could have taken steps well in advance to drastically lower levels at all lakes in the 11-lake system to the bare minimum they're allowed to," said Jendresen, 64. "There's a perception that Duke is like the evil empire. They've earned it."

In an email to The Charlotte Observer on Wednesday evening, Ben Williamson, a Duke Energy spokesperson, said all of the company's lakes were at or below target levels when the hurricane's flood waters reached them.

He said Lake Norman's large size makes it difficult to lower the reservoir quickly, since all of the released water must flow through the much smaller Mountain Island Lake.

"Due to the size of Mountain Island Lake and the historic amount of rainfall from this event, any additional storage that would have been created in the lake would not have prevented the flooding associated with the storm," Williamson wrote to The Observer. "If Duke Energy began aggressively moving water downstream before a reliable or accurate forecast was available, it could have risked the entire region suffering severe water shortages (including drinking water) if the storm missed the region, or dry weather persisted."

Flood of record

Brandon Jones has been the Catawba Riverkeeper since 2018. He's never seen the river flood like it did last week. It's likely no one else has, either.

"This will be the flood of record," Jones said. "We talk about the great flood of 1916. This is bigger. This has more

damage. This is more catastrophic."

Helene dumped nearly two feet of rain on some parts of Western North Carolina. Eighteen inches fell onto part of McDowell County, which sits in the Catawba River basin, according to North Carolina State University.

The river, which changes to the Wateree River in South Carolina, starts in the Blue Ridge Mountains and runs 225 miles through 26 counties across the Carolinas.

Jones said one of the river's bottlenecks is the Mountain Island Lake dam. Unlike other dams along the Catawba, the one south of Mountain Island Lake doesn't have flood gates. Water can only move through the dam's spillway or hydroelectric turbines, Jones said.

"The important thing to remember is Duke is not able to quickly move water through the system," he said. "They need a long run-up time because the reservoirs were not designed for flood control. So when the forecast changes quickly or worsens, they are unable to adjust."

Jones said Mountain Island Lake's turbines can move about 10,000 cubic feet of water per second — or about 75,000 gallons per second. He said the influx of water into the lake peaked at about 100,000 cubic feet per second.

"I would expect this to be a 1,000-year flood," he said. "It's terrible. And all of these people just recovered from the last flood in 2019."

Catawba River flooded homes in 2019

In June 2019, after three days of rain, Duke released what was then the largest amount of water ever from Lake Norman. Water poured into more than 100 homes, including many on Lake and Riverside drives near Mountain Island Lake.

The rush of water filled Jendresen's home with about five feet of the swollen, muddy river.

He and roughly 40 other families sued Duke Energy. They accused the power company of negligence and negligent infliction of emotional distress and settled the lawsuit last year.

Jendresen rebuilt after the 2019 flood, but he did so on 12-foot pilings. He told the Observer on Tuesday that his home was 8 inches away from flooding again. He said his house was one of only a few on Lake or Riverside drives that wasn't harmed by the recent surge.

Many weren't so lucky.

"Nobody got hurt," he said. "But there's a lot of hurt feelings and a lot of ruined lives."

Grande, with Mecklenburg County Emergency Management, said an official assessment of the damage on Lake and Riverside drives will begin Wednesday. The assessment, she said, would take about a week.

Charlotte Reality Check Editors Note embed

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How Michael Jordan, NASCAR owners and teams are joining Hurricane Helene relief efforts

October 2, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (NC) Author: Shane Connuck, The Charlotte Observer | Section: nascar_auto_racing | 729 Words OpenURL Link

Prominent NASCAR figures around the Charlotte area have been joining Hurricane Helene relief efforts.

Michael Jordan and his 23XI Racing team have made a \$1 million donation, which will be evenly split between Second Harvest of Metrolina and the North Carolina Disaster Relief Fund.

The campgrounds at Charlotte Motor Speedway in Concord have been open for evacuees seeking refuge. Duke Energy has been using its property to stage lift trucks and crews from multiple states to dispatch where needed to restore power.

"Our hearts go out to everyone suffering from Hurricane Helene's devastation," Jordan said in a statement. "23XI Racing and I are honored to support the NC Disaster Relief Fund and Second Harvest of Metrolina as they help rebuild lives, restore hope and ensure that those affected receive the assistance they need.

"While the process of recovery will take a long time, as a proud North Carolinian, I know firsthand the strength and resilience of the people in this state we call home. ... We will get through this together."

Greg Biffle, NASCAR teams fly helicopters to western NC

As he's been posting on social media, Greg Biffle has been using his personal helicopter to get supplies to western North Carolina.

Biffle, now 54 and regarded as one of NASCAR's top 75 drivers of all time, posted on X that three pallets of Starlink satellite systems and multiple generators were donated to people in the region who remained without wireless service.

"This is huge," Biffle wrote in a post on X. "I've seen the impact first hand for 3 minutes of WiFi and I'm so thankful for the connections of friends to be able to get this done."

Hendrick Motorsports and Joe Gibbs Racing have also been flying their helicopters to areas in western North Carolina.

JGR collected water and non-perishable food items at its race shop in Huntersville, and they were loaded onto one of the team's haulers and delivered to the Asheville area on Tuesday afternoon. JGR posted on social media that it is continuing to accept financial donations online, which should be titled as "Hurricane Relief."

Hendrick's aviation team has been flying out to western North Carolina to support hurricane relief efforts since Sunday and plans to continue as long as the critical needs exist. HMS has been working with organizations like Samaritan's Purse and Atrium Health to distribute resources to the people who need them most urgently, and had trucks, trailers, volunteers and donations at the Charlotte Motor Speedway event on Wednesday.

NASCAR teams are still accepting donations at shops

Several NASCAR teams will continue accepting donations to take to western North Carolina throughout the week.

23XI Racing is accepting hurricane relief donations at Airspeed, the team's new facility on nine acres of land in Huntersville, through Friday. Donations can be dropped off between 7:30 a.m. and 5 p.m. in the lobby. Its address is 12311 Airspeed Drive, Huntersville.

The team is accepting the following items: baby formula, baby wipes, sanitation wipes, water, Pedialyte, electrolyte powder and tablets, feminine products, sunscreen, bug spray, first-aid kits, toothbrushes, toothpaste, batteries and deodorant.

JR Motorsports, the NASCAR team in Mooresville owned by Dale Earnhardt Jr. that competes in the Xfinity Series, will match all donations.

Supplies can be dropped off in the front lobby of the race shop or retail store by end of day on Wednesday, and the team says it will match all supply donations. The shop's address is 349 Cayuga Drive, Mooresville, NC, 28117.

Kaulig Racing, the Cup and Xfinity Series team based in Welcome, is also accepting donations. The team encourages anyone who lives nearby — the shop's address is 105 Austin Lane, Welcome, NC 27374 — to stop by with water, boxed non-perishable food items, tarps and other supplies.

Modified race at North Wilkesboro postponed

The NASCAR Whelen Modified Tour race initially scheduled for this weekend at North Wilkesboro Speedway has been postponed.

In further support of recovery efforts amid the hurricane, the track in Wilkes County will host a hurricane relief drive and serve as a collection site for the following: Non-perishable food items, cleaning supplies, disinfecting wipes, paper towels, mops, buckets, gloves, bottled water, batteries, portable chargers, hygiene items, diapers and wipes, baby formula.

Donations can be dropped off at North Wilkesboro Speedway (381 Speedway Lane, North Wilkesboro, N.C. 28659) between the hours of 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. every day this week, through Sunday. Items will be distributed through Wilkes County Emergency Management and Samaritan's Purse to communities in need.

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Ivanka Trump flies to Hickory, NC, to help donate Starlink devices for Helene victims

October 2, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (NC) Author: Julia Coin, The Charlotte Observer | Section: north_carolina | 221 Words OpenURL Link

Ivanka Trump flew into Hickory on Wednesday morning to deliver 300 Starlinks to be flown out to western North Carolina. The devices will help flood victims connect to high-speed internet.

Medic Corps, one of at least four organizations running relief operations out of the Hickory Regional Airport, coordinated the visit. One group, Operation Airdrop, is flying supplies by helicopter to people in western North Carolina.

The daughter of former President Donald Trump took photos with pilots, airport staff and volunteers who have been organizing the five truckloads of supplies delivered from nearby communities.

The White House on Monday announced dozens of Starlink satellite systems would be launched to provide highspeed internet access in North Carolina.

"Since the Hurricane Helene disaster, SpaceX has sent as many Starlink terminals as possible to help areas in need," SpaceX CEO <person value="APIN:2621757612">Elon Musk wrote in a post on the social platform X. "Earlier today, @realDonaldTrump alerted me to additional people who need Starlink Internet in North Carolina. We are sending them terminals right away."

Ivanka Trump in Hickorylvanka Trump visited the Hickory Regional Airport on Wednesday, Oct. 2, 2024, where Starlink devices for internet connection were donated to Hurricane Helene victims.

Ivanka Trump in HickoryIvanka Trump visited the Hickory Regional Airport on Wednesday, Oct. 2, 2024, to donate Starlink devices for internet connection to Hurricane Helene victims in North Carolina.

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Julia Coin, The Charlotte Observer, 'Ivanka Trump flies to Hickory, NC, to help donate Starlink devices for Helene victims', Charlotte Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (online), 2 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BF5E6AC4CDD008>



Helene prompts evacuation of 2,000 inmates from NC mountain prisons. Where are they?

October 2, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (NC) Author: Joe Marusak, The Charlotte Observer| Section: weather_news | 454 Words OpenURL Link

Buses and some vans evacuated at least 2,000 inmates this week from five prisons in the North Carolina mountains, after Hurricane Helene damaged community water and electrical utility systems that serve the prisons, state prison officials said.

On Monday, about 400 women were bused from Western Correctional Center for Women in Swannanoa and the Black Mountain Substance Abuse Treatment Center for Women in Black Mountain to other correctional facilities for women, according to the N.C. Department of Adult Correction.

On Tuesday, 841 men incarcerated at Avery-Mitchell Correctional Institution in Spruce Pine were taken to seven other prisons across the state on Department of Adult Correction buses, department officials said.

And more than 800 men were bused Wednesday from Mountain View Correctional Institution in Spruce Pine and Craggy Correctional Center in Asheville, officials said.

The 248 men in Craggy Correctional were taken to Alexander Correctional Institution in Taylorsville, while the 557 men in Mountain View were bused to six prisons in central and eastern parts of the state, according to the department.

The six prisons are Granville Correctional Institution in Butner; Maury Correctional Institution in Maury; Neuse Correctional Institution in Goldsboro; Pender Correctional Institution in Burgaw; Warren Correctional Institution in Manson; and Pamlico Correctional Institution in Bayboro.

"All offenders are safe, and (the department) is taking appropriate steps to ensure continued health and safety of staff and offenders," officials said in a news release.

Family and friends should not call the prisons where people were moved, officials said. Inmates were able to make phone calls after they arrived.

Check the department's online Offender Locator site to confirm your loved one's new temporary location, prison officials said. The site will be updated with a person's new location within 24 hours of their move.

Officials decided Sunday to evacuate the facilities based on the damage, according to the announcement.

Some of the 360 minimum-custody inmates at Western Correctional Center for Women were moved to Anson Correctional Institution in Polkton, and others to North Carolina Correctional Institution for Women in Raleigh.

The 45 people receiving in-patient alcohol and drug treatment at the Black Mountain treatment center are now at the North Piedmont Confinement in Response to Violation facility in Lexington.

Inmates at Avery-Mitchell Correctional Institution were taken to Scotland Correctional Institution in Laurinburg; Tabor Correctional Institution in Tabor City; Nash Correctional Institution in Nashville; Eastern Correctional Institution in Maury; Southern Correctional Institution in Troy; Maury Correctional Institution in Maury; and Harnett Correctional Institution in Lillington.

It's unknown how long repairs to the prisons will take.

"There's a very long time frame for those repairs – particularly for water," Keith Acree, spokesman for the Department of Adult Correction, told The Charlotte Observer on Thursday. "Our understanding is that Spruce Pine, Asheville and Swannanoa are not expected to have water restored for weeks."

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Joe Marusak, The Charlotte Observer, 'Helene prompts evacuation of 2,000 inmates from NC mountain prisons. Where are they?', *Charlotte Observer, The: Web Edition Articles* (online), 2 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BF64128EE76A18>



In NC's tiny 'Dogtown,' Hurricane Helene's fury left these close cousins worlds apart

October 2, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (NC) Author: Théoden Janes, The Charlotte Observer | Section: weather_news | 2297 Words OpenURL Link

As Penny Turner lay safe in her bed early Sunday morning in Charlotte, all she could think about was her sister Jeannette and her cousin Jo Anne, whom she kept picturing in varying degrees of peril — or, most chillingly ...

She shivered. She tried not to even go there.

But by then, the 65-year-old grandmother of eight hadn't heard a word from either of them in more than 48 hours, since before Hurricane Helene started ravaging western North Carolina cities and towns like the one in Avery County where all three of them had owned second homes for years.

What worried her most about Jeannette was her health. At 72, Penny's sister had advanced heart failure and advanced lung disease, and relied on electricity to power medical devices, including a heart monitor, a CPAP machine and an oxygen concentrator.

What worried her most about her 70-year-old cousin Jo Anne, meanwhile, was the fact that she was alone in a house barely 75 feet from the edge of the North Toe River. She imagined it was threatening to sweep away Jo Anne's home, if it hadn't already.

Overnight, she got a text from someone telling her the roads from Newland — a slightly larger but still tiny town about five miles east of Minneapolis, where she and her husband Craig also had a vacation home — were finally clear.

She and Craig were on the road by 6:30, Penny with a pit in her stomach.

"I just didn't —" she paused as she recounted the story on Monday. "I was scared for what I was going to find."

'The river has become an animal'

Jo Anne Biser — alone in the riverside Minneapolis house that once served as her parents' second home — was trying to remain calm as Helene moved into position.

She had been successful at it on Thursday, mostly because the forecasts weren't predicting the apocalypse. So she thought she was doing her due diligence by baking muffins and bread, pulling up water from the well, getting out all the batteries and the lamps she owned, and securing outdoor things that could blow away.

She was still calm after she lost power early Friday morning, and only slightly unsettled by cellphone service faltering.

But the rain kept falling, the wind kept blowing, and the North Toe River's edge went from 75 feet from her doorstep to 50 to 25 to, eventually, zero.

At one point mid-morning, she looked out her window and noticed the two gigantic old willow trees were gone. Not long after that, she saw a 500-gallon propane tank float by. Then a fence. Then a shed. Then a roof. A little later, she realized her neighbors' house — just upriver on the opposite bank — simply wasn't there anymore.

By midday, the water was starting to seep through her front door. Jo Anne's efforts to remain calm were starting to fail her.

The river has become an animal, Jo Anne thought to herself, and it's eating up everything.

Finally, around 2 p.m., she got scared enough to call 911.

The operator told her to get to an upstairs room, which Jo Anne did, despite her fear that the one remaining big tree in the front yard might topple over and punish the second floor.

She wished she could just jump in her truck and drive the five hours back home to her main residence in the southeastern N.C. town of Hallsboro, near Lake Waccamaw. She'd only come up, earlier in the week, to do a little prep work for some renovations planned for the place.

But the raging river wasn't even going to let her out of the driveway.

She also wished she could hike the hundred yards up the hill separating her home on Carter Lane from Old Toe River Road. If she could, she might be able to reach her cousin Jeannette and Jeannette's husband John — whose own house was less than a thousand feet away.

But that hill was essentially a mudslide now.

And as Jo Anne waited upstairs to see what the water would do next, she could only wonder: Were Jeannette and John OK?

Cut off from the outside world

John Bledsoe has a law firm in Hartsville, S.C., but he's only there three days a week now. The rest of the time, he and his wife Jeannette are 4-1/2 hours to the northwest, in the mountain house they've owned for the past 25 years now.

Penny and Jo Anne in particular are anomalies in these parts, in that Minneapolis is not tourist-driven like nearby Banner Elk and Grandfather Mountain. Minneapolis consists of three churches, a post office and an inn. That's about it. According to Census data, the entire population could fit inside a Cracker Barrel. In fact, Minneapolis' nickname — "Dogtown" — was bestowed on it because back in the 1930s residents estimated there were more dogs living in the community than people.

The Bledsoes live much higher above the North Toe's banks, but the deluge that pounded the mountain behind them overnight Thursday to Friday sent waves of runoff down onto their property.

Enough of their driveway washed away that they couldn't get a car out. The roof of their tobacco shed collapsed onto their tractor — which otherwise might have been able to carry them to safety — and onto their generator — rendering it incapable of supplying the backup power needed to keep her medical devices running.

IMG_9967.jpegThe roof collapse of John and Jeannette Bledsoe's tobacco shed blocked their tractor and a car, and destroyed their generator.

Jeannette spoke with Jo Anne on Thursday. By Friday morning, though, all forms of communication were cut off.

Unlike Jo Anne, 911 didn't work for Jeannette. She and John even tried their car's OnStar Crisis Mode, which was designed for scenarios like this. After several failed attempts, they finally got through to an operator who tried unsuccessfully to put a call through for them.

But Jeannette wasn't worried about her own well-being. She'd been living with her health problems for a while, and

was resigned to whatever fate might be in store for her. Her primary concern was Jo Anne, who was so close both literally (she was not even a quarter-mile away) and figuratively (since they were little girls, they'd behaved like sisters).

By Saturday morning, with still no power and no line of communication, John set out to try to hike down to check on her

He only made it a couple hundred feet before sinking so deep into a patch of pluff mud that he couldn't get himself out. A neighbor passing on foot was able to free him, but John quickly realized there was no safe way to get to Jo Anne's.

When he walked back through the door, Jeannette's heart sank.

Getting a sense of the bigger picture

The water had begun receding not long after Jo Anne had called 911. But she couldn't safely venture out yet.

So she spent an exceedingly dark, unbearably lonely Friday night, then woke up to another shock: Much of her yard was gone, turned into a massive swath of rocks and sand that reminded her of a North Carolina beach.

The good news was that the coast was clear enough for her to walk down Carter Lane to try to reestablish contact with — someone. Anyone.

Jo Anne made it to the home of a friend who received her with a hug and a cup of coffee produced by electricity from her friend's generator. The friend's grandson was there, and he shared reports he'd heard of deaths, missing persons and many others stranded in and around the area.

It was the first time she had any sense of the scope of the hell Helene had wrought.

In the afternoon, she said goodbye and headed back to begin doing some post-storm cleanup. With these fresh horror stories now swirling around in her head, Jo Anne was as worried as she could get about Jeannette; but the steep hill that separated their houses was still far too messy to navigate.

She spent another night alone, in the dark, not knowing when she might see anyone in her family.

But help was on the way.

'I'm going to check on my people'

Penny and Craig Turner parked along the side of Highway 19E near the base of Old Toe River Road.

From that spot, they could have hit their own house with a pitching wedge. But when Penny had asked Craig if he wanted to go check on their place first, he replied, matter-of-factly: "No. I'm going to check on my people."

With that, they started heading southeast down the gravel road on foot.

Although they didn't see much damage for the first few minutes, within a few hundreds yards, they encountered all kinds of destruction: downed trees, downed power lines, landslides, mudslides, crevasses. It was like a tornado had picked up half the mountain and vomited the remains back out onto the road.

217B9351-2370-4160-BB2A-A761E2541FC1.jpegA portion of Old Toe River Road that was hit by a mudslide. Trees blocking it had just recently been cleared by locals using their own equipment and fuel.

When they finally reached Jeannette's house, they saw the gutted driveway, the tobacco shed's collapsed roof. No

sound of a generator purring.

Penny had been thinking it all along, but now it was really hitting her: I hope she's not dead.

But she and Craig walked through the door and they all felt a wave of joy and relief. Penny and Jeannette wrapped each other in a warm hug, then Penny told her to get dressed and start packing.

Craig didn't stay long. Within a few minutes, he was winding his way down the hill and dodging mud on his way to Jo Anne's.

When he reached the house, she was trying to clean up the mud and debris that had collected in the vestibule. She started sobbing as soon as she saw him, and collapsed into his arms. At first, Jo Anne said she couldn't leave the house. Craig looked at her sternly. "If you don't come, you're gonna have the wrath of all of your children and my wife on you.

"So load it up — we're going."

A celebration — along with some survivor's guilt

Craig helped Jo Anne up the hill to Old Toe River Road, then guided her through the gauntlet back toward his and Penny's car on 19E.

Once they got through the mess to the short stretch that was in good shape, they ran into some locals — two men on a four-wheeler, and a third in a truck. "Okay, what needs to be done here?," one of them asked.

The guy in the truck offered to drive Jo Anne out so Craig could hurry back to retrieve the others. The pair on the four-wheeler set off to remove trees and limbs from the road. "It wasn't like the Department of Transportation or anything," Jo Anne said by phone from Hallsboro on Monday. "You hadn't seen them. These were just locals with the biggest hearts of all and coming in (and saying), 'We'll get it done.'"

Meanwhile, Craig retraced his steps and found Penny, John, Jeannette and the couple's Golden retriever Posey back at the Bledsoe house, ready to roll.

Given Jeannette's assorted ailments, they knew it wasn't going to be easy to guide her to safety. But "she held my hand so tight," Penny recalled Monday, her voice shaking, "and I felt the Holy Spirit wash over us. ... This beam of sunlight shone through the leaves — the canopy of the leaves — and I knew we were going to be OK."

They took it slowly. Off the road, up the mountain, through the mud, over the trees, around the power lines. Jeannette had to stop several times.

More than an hour later, Jeannette, Jo Anne and Penny were safe, sound, and successfully reunited.

On the drive back to Charlotte, they saw miles and miles of devastation from Avery County down to Morganton. Their phones finally found a working cell tower again shortly after that, meaning they could finally get word to friends and other family that they were out of danger.

In Hickory, they stopped at Burger King — "probably the best thing they've ever eaten," Penny said, laughing — and received a hero's welcome back in Charlotte, along with a party at which champagne was served.

IMG_4913.jpegJeannette Bledsoe hugs her great-niece Olivia back in Charlotte, after being evacuated from her home in Minneapolis, N.C.

But it was twinged, they say, with what felt like survivor's guilt.

By then, Jo Anne and Jeannette had seen news coverage that had given them a fuller picture of Hurricane Helene's brutality. And while leading their own little rescue operation in Minneapolis, Penny and Craig had come across plenty of suffering that they knew was still ongoing as they hugged their loved ones and raised glasses for toasts.

Several days removed from the storm, Facebook remains flooded with western North Carolinians looking for lost friends and family, pleading for help as food and water runs low, wondering how, or if, they'll ever be able to rebuild and recover.

"The people up there need food," Jo Anne said. "Food and water, paper goods, cleaning stuff. ... And they need it sooner rather than later. ... I had thought we would see help quicker."

"I've left all of these people that I care so much about," Jeannette said, "and I've gone (home), and I can turn on the Braves. That feels horrible."

"That community is just in dire need," Penny said, as she fought back tears. "I mean, it was so hard leaving all those people behind. ... There's so many people that are isolated because there's so many creeks and rivers, and all the bridges are gone."

On Monday, she said her family was willing to do whatever it could to help. In fact, she said, Craig was already back in Avery County, driving around the Minneapolis area with a car that had left Charlotte full of food, water and supplies.

She fully expected it would return home empty.

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Still no cell service in much of battered western NC. Why is it so tough to fix?

October 2, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (NC) Author: Ames Alexander and Nora O'Neill, The Charlotte Observer Section: north_carolina | 845 Words OpenURL Link

Time and again over the past several days, Canton mayor Zeb Smathers has heard desperate pleas.

"I've had tears fill my eyes (because) of random people reaching out to me, looking for their loved ones, because they cannot communicate," said Smathers, whose town of 4,400 was among many in western North Carolina ravaged by Tropical Storm Helene.

"I pray that the inability to reach people didn't cost any lives," he said.

In the hours and days after the storm, widespread cellphone and internet blackouts made a devastating situation worse. Thousands of people couldn't contact loved ones in western North Carolina. The blackouts also hurt efforts to help during a historic crisis, Smathers said.

"If I need to say, 'Hey, you come get water at the police department,' and I can't do that... it makes every other problem worse," said Smathers, who spoke with Charlotte Observer reporters by satellite phone because he didn't have a cell signal.

Nearly half of cell sites — locations with antennas and other electronic communications equipment vital to cell phone communication — were still out Tuesday in western North Carolina counties affected by the storm, the Federal Communications Commission says. In Buncombe County, more than 60% of cell sites weren't working. And in Yancey County, more than 90% were out.

Getting things working again is a huge challenge, one slowed by power outages, flooding, blocked roads and downed power lines, according to Verizon, AT&T and Spectrum. And companies have not predicted when the work would be completed.

Swannanoa_key 092922-HURRICANE-HELENE-TEL-07.jpgSwannanoa residents walk on one of the roads taken out by Tropical Storm Helene on Sunday, Sept. 29, 2024. The storm devastated the region - and left many without cellphone coverage for days.

"Access into the region, as well as moving within the area, have been an insurmountable challenge the last few days," Verizon said in a Sept. 29 update about their repair work.

AT&T said Tuesday it restored more than 60 percent of the cell sites in areas impacted by the storm.

Smathers said he knows cellphone companies are working hard to repair the damage. But he wonders whether they did enough before the storm to prevent widespread outages.

"There are going to be a lot of questions," he said.

Storm damaged fiber cables

Officials in Buncombe County say they've received more than 11,000 requests from people trying to reach loved ones. And many people outside the hardest hit areas have turned to social media to express their worry and desperation.

"««Urgent message from a family member re Tropical Storm Helene: Hendersonville NC folks need help with network satellite service," one person said on X Saturday. "This little town is under water from Helene and they have no contact to the outside world."

Many communication blackouts in western North Carolina were caused by power outages and damage to the fiber cables that connect cell sites to other parts of the network, Verizon says. Debris, flooding and high winds damaged the fiber cables, according to the company.

"We're getting reports from AT&T and Verizon," Gov. Roy Cooper said during a press conference on Monday. "Their initial problems were significant in that landslides cut major fiber lines for them."

2024_0930 Hurricane Helene.jpgOn Monday, this truck helped provide emergency satellite communications for first responders and public safety officers in parts of McDowell County, one of the western North Carolina counties hard hit by Tropical Storm Helene.

Repairs — and questions — continue

Verizon and AT&T said their teams are working around the clock to make repairs. At the same time, they've set up equipment to provide alternative connections.

Dozens of Starlink satellite systems have been shipped to North Carolina in recent days to provide high-speed internet access, FEMA said. Starlink, developed by Elon Musk's SpaceX company, uses a network of satellites to provide internet access globally.

Spectrum says it has opened more than 33,800 "access points" in the Carolinas where the public can connect to WiFi. (The locations are detailed in Spectrum's out-of-home WifFi page.)

Verizon and AT&T said they've also brought mobile equipment to western North Carolina to restore cellphone service. Both companies have even launched drones to provide cellphone coverage from the sky.

processed-971E352E-F336-4A58-A866-BCF2949A91F8.jpegAT&T workers in Florida operate a drone that can be used to provide cellphone connections after natural disasters hit. Some of those drones have now been deployed in western North Carolina to help those who lost cellphone service after Tropical Storm Helene.

Before the storm, Verizon says it did take steps to prepare. The company put portable communications equipment — including drones and generator-powered cell sites — in places where it could be deployed rapidly if service was interrupted.

But many still struggle to get a phone signal.

Last weekend, an Ingles supermarket on Asheville's Patton Ave. was closed. But the parking lot was jammed. The reason: It was one of the few sites in that part of town where many could get reliable cellphone service.

And on Tuesday, Mayor Smathers said he saw people in his Haywood County town holding their cellphones in the air as they walked, hoping to find a cell signal.

"It is unacceptable and disgusting that in our time of need, cellular service for the entire region is blocked out," he said.

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Pilots get needed supplies to battered Western NC and beyond, one delivery at a time

October 2, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (NC) Author: Rebecca Noel, The Charlotte Observer | Section: north_carolina | 1225 Words OpenURL Link

From above, Gatlinburg, Tennessee, looks almost serene — the hills' jagged edges in fog, creeks and rivers twisting through the green like capillaries. From there, you wouldn't know Gatlinburg's babies don't have formula.

But there's been no running water in the area since remnants of Hurricane Helene tore through the mountain community on Thursday. Many residents still don't have power.

Gatlinburg's airport reopened Tuesday for the first time since Helene struck, and Jillian Gorrell was there to greet the seventh plane to touch down there that morning – a small CJ2+ from Concord, North Carolina. It was carrying over 1,000 pounds of diapers, baby formula, clothes and first aid supplies with eight more planes expected to follow.

"We desperately need medical supplies, baby supplies, cleaning supplies, trash bags," said Gorrell, a resident of the area and lecturer in the school of natural resources at the University of Tennessee in nearby Knoxville.

With roads and bridges in the area devoured and mangled in Helene's wake, it was the first assistance many in the area were able to get, she said.

"Roads are gone, landmarks are gone...," Gorrell said, teary-eyed, with her voice beginning to break. "Our area is hurting, but we're pulling together, and we really appreciate everything people are doing for us."

CLT_OpAirDrop_5.JPGDavid Asman helps load several hundred pounds of supplies into a piper lance airplane that he will fly into Ashe County, which sustained catastrophic flooding over the weekend, in Concord, NC on Monday, September 30, 2024.

The pilots making the delivery were volunteers with Operation Airdrop, a disaster relief nonprofit, that has mobilized to deliver thousands of pounds of donated goods to western North Carolina, southern Appalachia, and other hard hit areas. Some, including Byron MacRae and Owen Williams, take off from Concord-Padgett Regional Airport, just northeast of Charlotte.

"We got to Asheville about 2:45 p.m. on Sunday, and they had just gotten power back about 10 minutes before we were landing," Williams said of the first trip he took after the storm, delivering 1,500 pounds of goods to the hard-hit Buncombe County city. "The mission has evolved with every trip we take as we learn more about what people need, what areas need us the most and how to spread the word to people that can help."

'Look for the helpers'

Operation Airdrop pilots have carried canned food, utensils, cleaning supplies, diapers, bottled water, feminine hygiene products, first aid supplies and more to small airfields in the North Carolina mountains, including Ashe County, Wilkes County and Banner Elk, in addition to parts of Tennessee and South Carolina.

With help from the Experimental Aircraft Association and the Carolina Aviators Network, Operation Airdrop and affiliated volunteers delivered eight tons of supplies from Concord, Statesville and Hickory to western North Carolina on Sunday alone. On Monday, 50,000 pounds of supplies left Concord aboard 75 flights.

Operation Airdrop in ConcordVolunteer pilots with the Operation Airdrop deliver life-saving supplies - including food, water, medical necessities, and personal hygiene items - to Hurricane Helene residents in Western N.C.

Getting crucial supplies to those in storm-battered Western North Carolina remains one of the top Helene-recovery priorities. It's a massive effort involving federal, state and local governments, along with volunteers with groups like Operation Airdrop.

The organization started in 2017 after Hurricane Harvey dumped over 27 trillion gallons of rain in southeast Texas. Its founders, Doug Jackson and Robert Johnson from Dallas, flew supplies to the greater Houston area.

After Harvey, they launched Operation Airdrop, with the mission of delivering supplies in times of disaster to small communities cut off by storm damage that the Federal Emergency Management Agency couldn't immediately reach.

"We keep an eye on the weather as soon as hurricane season starts, and when we saw this one coming, we immediately reached out to pilots to see if they could get ready to help," said Shaun Carroll, a Durham resident who's been volunteering with Operation Airdrop since 2018.

Carroll weaved through rows of supplies in an airplane hangar in Concord Monday, as around 100 volunteers sorted donations into neat stacks to be weighed and loaded onto waiting planes.

CLT_OpAirDrop_7.JPGVolunteers help Operation Air Drop as they organize supplies to be flown into western North Carolina, which sustained catastrophic flooding over the weekend, in Concord, NC on Monday, September 30, 2024.

The whole place was humming with purpose. Volunteers loaded supplies onto pallets donated from a Walmart down the street. Pilots from around the country filtered in and announced they had a few hours to spare, as Operation Airdrop organizers huddled around a table in the back of the room, monitoring weather conditions and dispatching pilots to areas they knew they could reach.

"That's the beautiful thing about Airdrop," Carroll said. "It's kind of like what Mr. Rogers used to say: 'Look for the helpers.' You'll find them everywhere."

On Tuesday, the Concord-Padgett Airport operation had reached its capacity for volunteers by 10 a.m. even as people continued to come in to offer help.

Challenges to the mission

Ben Spells is a local organizer for another airlift effort in Statesville, which a group of local individuals put together in collaboration with Operation Airdrop. Water remains one of the most high-need items in communities impacted by Helene, he said.

"We've heard from several people that there's either no water or there's a boil advisory or water treatment plants are just completely destroyed," he said.

However, water can require larger planes to transport it, since it tends to be heavy and planes have a limit on the weight they can move at a time.

CLT_OpAirDrop_2.JPGVolunteers help Operation Air Drop receive supplies in the parking lot of Wal-Mart on Thunder Road in Concord, NC on Monday, September 30, 2024. The supplies are being taken to flown into western NC through Operation Air Dop at Concord Regional Airport.

"While water is really heavy, we're trying to make sure we can get water to as many people as possible," Carroll said. "Water purification is a really big thing we're trying to get out there: LifeStraws, tablets, filters, that kind of thing, just because there's a big water issue right now."

Collecting donations is the easy part, Spells said. They get them from local individuals as well as corporations.

To distribute them, they reach out to organizations in hard-hit areas that can help, and, with communication severely limited in the region, it's no simple task.

"We try to connect with verified people out there, like churches, nonprofits, food banks, fire departments, just folks that can meet the planes when they get there and tell them where to go. It depends on the location," Spells said.

"We've honestly had a hard time finding people with a lot of people lacking electricity and cell service, but it's getting easier as more people come back online," he added.

In Gatlinburg, MacRae and Williams unloaded supplies from the CJ2+ into waiting pickup trucks ready to head to two local churches for distribution. Then, they fueled up, strapped back in and watched the green beneath them turn to white as they rose above clouds.

Time for another delivery.

Operation Airdrop will continue collecting donations of household necessities throughout the week, as long as roads in and out of western North Carolina remain blocked. Supplies can be delivered to the drop-off center in the parking lot of Walmart at 5825 Thunder Road NW in Concord.

Operation Airdrop in ConcordVolunteer pilots with the Operation Airdrop deliver life-saving supplies - including food, water, medical necessities, and personal hygiene items - to Hurricane Helene residents in Western N.C.

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At Kounter, restaurant operations have come to a halt. Now, it's feeding NC storm workers.

October 2, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (NC) Author: Mari Pressley, The Charlotte Observer | Section: c5_food_drink | 528 Words OpenURL Link

A Rock Hill restaurant steps up to support linemen, providing thousands of meals to those restoring power in NC.

In the wake of Hurricane Helene's devastation across the Southeast, outages have left more than a million in the Carolinas without power. Amidst the chaos, a Rock Hill restaurant known for its significant site in civil rights history has become an advocate. Kounter has temporarily closed its doors to regular customers – to support lineman at Duke Energy as they tend to relief efforts.

Kounter's team, led by Chef Rob Masone, is currently serving between 600 and 800 meals daily at Duke Energy's training facility in Kings Mountain.

"We got a phone call and prayed about it, and it just felt like we needed to put our talents to use," Masone told CharlotteFive. "We're going to go do some of the things that we do well for some of the folks that are dealing with a lot of things that none of us want to imagine dealing with on a daily basis right now, but I couldn't do this without my entire team. This is a lot. It's a big ask."

US Foods covers some costs in Helene relief effort

With support from US Foods, which is covering refrigeration costs and helping with the logistics of food supply, the partnership between Kounter and Duke Energy has become an essential part of the disaster relief efforts. Masone expressed his appreciation for US foods' role, noting, "We have a good relationship with US Foods here in Rock Hill US Foods reached out and said, 'How can we help out? How can we get involved?'"

The meals being prepared include pork, chicken and beef dishes. Each morning, the linemen receive hot breakfasts and cold lunches packed for them to take with them into the field. And after a long day's work, they are served dinner before heading to their hotels or cots.

Kounter is trying to 'create a little sense of normalcy'

"We're trying to create a little sense of normalcy for them when they get back up. You know, I can't speak for all the great things and the hard things that they're doing out there, But I mean, it's got to be, it's not just physically taxing for them. I mean, they're just working hard. They're finding a lot of things out there that none of us want to think about," Masone said.

This effort required all hands on deck from the Kounter staff for the 24-hour operation. "We're producing all day, all night. We're shipping, moving things back and forth from Rock Hill, South Carolina, to Kings Mountain every few hours," Masone said. "My team has showed up, and we're working on very little sleep. We got a lot less sleep in our future, and we're rocking and rolling."

Masone remains focused on one primary goal: "My job is to make sure these guys get fed, and they have a good meal."

For the time being, Kounter's doors will remain closed to regular diners, but the restaurant's heart is firmly rooted in serving the community.

If you're interested in volunteering with Kounter, email hello@kre8events.com for more information.

Kounter

Location: 135 E Main Street, Suite 101, Rock Hill, SC 29730

Menu

Cuisine: American

Instagram: @kounterdining
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Mari Pressley, The Charlotte Observer, 'At Kounter, restaurant operations have come to a halt. Now, it's feeding NC storm workers.', *Charlotte Observer, The: Web Edition Articles* (online), 2 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BF453B70BBA5A0



Storm spares county from worst - HURRICANE HELENE HORRORS \cdot Western North Carolina communities hit hard, page 9A

October 2, 2024 | Cherokee Scout (NC)

Author: RANDY FOSTER editor@cherokeescout.com | Section: News | 1736 Words

Page: 1A OpenURL Link

Oktoberfest in Andrews was canceled. School was canceled for several days. Some trees fell, including one that blocked Blairsville Highway. Cell phone service and local 911 were knocked out. Businesses unable to process credit and debit cards went cash only. Some parts of Cherokee County saw 8 inches of rain over five days, while others saw wind gusts of 26 mph. The impacts of Hurricane Helene on Cherokee County were noteworthy, but there was a universal sigh of relief because it could have been far worse. As Hurricane Helene moved north Thursday and early Friday, blasting Florida and Georgia with ferocious winds and record-setting rainfall, county residents braced for the worst. But the storm drifted east during the night, passing through South Carolina. Traveling north by northwest, its eye skirted just east of Hayesville and just

west of Andrews on Friday before it crossed into Graham County. The eye wasn't the problem. It was everything north and east of the eye that was most dangerous. right side saw terrible destruction -Ashe, Avery, Watauga, Mitchell, Yancey, Madison, Haywood, Swain, Jackson, Macon, Transylvania, Henderson, Rutherford, Buncombe, McDowell, Burke and Caldwell -but in Cherokee, it was a mere inconvenience. "This world, overall, is fast paced, and offers instant gratification," the Andrews Chamber of Commerce posted Sunday on Facebook. "But, folks we've just missed. We've just missed being in the situation that many other folks in the Southeast find themselves in. Desperately scared. Without power, without food or water, without a way to go anywhere. Let's remember that as we go through the coming weeks, and give grace. Give grace to the places that can only take cash. Give grace to the parents children, friends who haven't heard from someone they care about, and might seem 'short' or 'distracted.' Give grace to businesses that may not have a normal way to communicate, but have to find a way to get supplies and keep going. "Life will get back to normal, much quicker for us, than for so many others. Let's take a deep breath, and give grace." Set

ting the stage Cherokee County, which had been in the midst of a drought, was soaked by rain from a cold front starting Sept. 24 up until the arrival of Hurricane Helene, which made landfall on Florida's Gulf Coast on Sept. 26. The ground was soaked -a recipe for disaster with the approaching remnants of a Category 4 hurricane. Leading up to the storm, Cherokee County Schools canceled school and after school activities for Sept. 26-27. Court dates for Sept. 26-27 at the Cherokee County Courthouse were postponed. Those with court dates were advised to call back on Monday for a new court date. Andrews canceled Oktoberfest, one of its biggest events of the year, which had been scheduled for Saturday. Chamber officials decided it would forego the rain date because it conflicted with other scheduled events. Murphy Mayor Tim Radford kept county residents informed using his Facebook page. In a statement posted Sept. 25, he said he was in briefings with local and statewide groups in order to prepare for the storm. "We are all united in one clear message: please take Hurricane Helene seriously and stay informed about any watches or warnings issued for our area." He went on to mention to possible severity of the storm, as well as that emergency services response times may be longer than usual and that U.S. Forest Service will be closing recreation areas. "Please stay vigilant, follow updates from official sources, and ensure that you and your loved ones are prepared for whatever may come. We are all working together to keep our community safe, and your preparedness is key," he posted. The Cherokee County Board of Commissioners declared a state of emergency for Cherokee County, soon followed by Murphy and Andrews. On the evening of Sept. 25, Cherokee County was under a tropical storm warning of peak winds of 15-25 mphwith gusts up to 45 mph. It said there could be potential damage to porches, awnings, carports, sheds and unanchored mobile homes. It also mentioned the possibility of flooding in the area. Luckily, it also said the risk for tornados was unfavorable in Cherokee County. Multiple Florida and Georgia counties were under tornado warnings on Sept. 25. In preparation, Cherokee County Emergency Services set up an operations center at the Murphy Fire Department. It missed Early Friday morning, Helene moved farther east than expected, crossing over South Carolina and barreling into North Carolina. The eye passed west of

Andrews in Cherokee County, but the right side -with powerful bands of rain and wind -swept through Buncombe and surrounding counties. Cherokee County had 4-8 inches of rain with gusts of around 25 mph, according to National Weather Service meteorologist Jim Doyle. Compare that to up the 30 inches recorded in Yancey County and wind gusts of more than 70 mph as far east as Charlotte. Cherokee County Emergency Services closed its Emergency Operations Center on Friday. First responders breathed a collective sigh of relief. There were widespread cell phone and landline outages across the region starting Friday, with some outages continuing. This included 911 calls -which were routed to Bladen County for Cherokee County and Johnston County for Clay County.

greements with eastern counties were arranged in advance in case they were impacted by hurricanes, not the western counties. Local 911 calls were routed to the eastern counties and relayed back to local counties' respective emergency services. Cherokee County Emergency Services advised residents to call 911 via wifi calling or, absent that, go to the nearest fire station. that, go to the nearest fire station. Friday was a day of rain and some wind gusts. That's it. Just that. But through the haze of cell phone outages, reports started showing up in social media of major flooding just to the east. Cherokee County residents who still had cable TV or wifi watched as dreadful news, photos and videos started coming in. Radford announced that the State of Emergency for the Town of Murphy was lifted at 7 a.m. Saturday. He said in a statement on Facebook that conditions were sufficiently improved, which allowed for public facilities and normal activities to resume. On Friday, Radford posted a message of appreciation to community heroes in Murphy on Facebook. "In times of emergency, it's easy to feel overwhelmed, but it's also in these moments that we witness incredible dedication from the people who work tirelessly to keep us safe," Radford wrote. "Often, we take for granted the services provided by local governments, sometimes frustrated by taxes or politics, but during tough times like these it's important to pause and recognize the invaluable work being done behind the scenes." Radford went on to mention the water main breaks in both Murphy and Andrews last week. He thanked the Public Works crews that got those fixed quickly. He also thanked the people behind the scenes. Radford also thanked the town managers and sanitation crews, as well as multiple groups that worked together during this time. He concluded his message by encouraging people to show appreciation for the unsung heroes during this time. "They are the backbone of our community, ensuring that even in the most difficult times, we remain strong, safe, and supported," Radford writes. "Thank you to everyone who has gone above and beyond for us." The aftermath From Friday through the weekend and early this week, Cherokee County was reacting to Hurricane Helene's im

pacts nearby. Cherokee County Emergency Services sent its swift water rescue team to flooded areas in Haywood County. Peachtree Fire & Rescue sent a water tanker to Buncombe County to help with widespread water outages. Henderson County requested help from Murphy Fire & Rescue's chainsaw and utility task vehicle team. Cherokee County Emergency Services Director Robin Caldwell was to Avery County to relieve her counterpart there. Cherokee County Sheriff Dustin Smith answered a call for help and traveled to Black Mountain, where he met up with other Cherokee County sheriff's deputies who responded over the weekend. Before he left, he and the Murphy Fire Department arranged a donation drop-off. He took the donated goods with him as he joined his deputies in Black Mountain. Elsewhere, other local agencies and nongovernment organizations were busy organizing donation drives to bring food, water and other necessities to affected counties. Caldwell advised that if you plan to volunteer or donate, make sure it was requested and that they know it's coming. Spontaneous volunteers can be a problem in the flood-stricken counties, she said. Libraries in Andrews and Murphy maintained normal working hours and offered free public wifi. N.C. Emergency Management installed a portable cell phone towers with free public wifi. Cherokee County Emergency Management is maintaining a list of resources on its Facebook page, including free wifi locations. John C. Campbell Folk School announced that this weekend's 48th annual Fall Festival will go on, with the school donating 10% of its proceeds to organizations serving those in the region affected by Hurricane Helene. The Cherokee Clay Food Alliance will be on hand to collect donations for immediate food and water needs, as well as the Craft Emergency Relief Fund, which provides financial support to artists in emergencies. Aside from widespread cell phone outages, perhaps the biggest local impact from this regional catastrophe is Ingles, which operates around 200 supermarkets in the Appalachian region, including stores in Andrews and Murphy. Ingles is based in Black Mountain, which was clobbered by Helene. The company's vast distribution plant is

next to the Swannanoa River, and video posted on social media on Monday morning shows it surrounded on three sides by standing water. The company posted this Sunday: "Ingles distribution center in Swannanoa NC and store

operations in many areas have been greatly affected by Hurricane Helene. We will keep our communities informed regarding important store information to the best of our ability. "Stores that are able to open are doing so with our Ingles associates facing the same challenges, grief and destruction you are. "We are your neighbors." For more on ways to help, read the free story on cherokeescout.cofn. Sports Editor Cannon Crotnpton contributed to this report.

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Flooding, road closings[^] power outages across WNC

October 2, 2024 | Cherokee Scout (NC) Author: CANNON CROMPTON sports@cherokeescout.com| Section: News | 1153 Words Page: 9A OpenURL Link

Western North Carolina suffered flooding, road closures and widespread power outages as a result of Hurricane Helene. Helene, the third deadliest Hurricane in the last 50 years in the United States, surpassing Hurricanes Sandy and Harvey with a death toll of 47 in North Carolina and a total of more than 133, according to CNN. North Carolina has the highest death toll from Helene. As of Monday, the death toll in Buncombe County is 35 and could "go much higher," Weaverville Mayor Patrick Fitzsimmons told CNN. Buncombe County Sheriff Quentin Miller said Monday morning, "Today, we can confirm 35 losses of life in Buncombe County. Devastation does not even begin to describe how we feel." In

a press conference Monday, President Joe Biden said Helene is "a historymaking storm," adding, "My first responsibility is to get all the help needed to those impacted area." Biden said the federal government will assist those in need, but might need additional help from Congress. He decided against visiting affected areas today or Thursday, as those areas can't handle the logistics involved with a presidential visit. As of Monday, 455, 056 customers were still without power in Georgia, North Carolina and South Carolina. States of emergency The storm, which The Weather Channel called "super-sized," made landfall at 11:10 p.m. as a category 4 Hurricane with 140 mph winds, National Weather Service Director Ken Graham said Friday. Helene remained a hurricane for six hours after landfall. Graham said the forecast was accurate and only about 40 miles off of their original prediction on Sept. 23. He added that this is the fourth landfall this year. On Sept. 25, Gov. Roy Cooper issued a state of emergency for North Carolina in preparation for Helene's impact. Two tornados did touch down that day in western North Carolina, the National Weather Service confirms. One was in Rutherford County at 8:07 p.m., while the other was in Watauga County at 10:

35 p.m. Around noon Sept. 26, the U.S. Forest Service announced the entirety of the Blue Ridge Parkway would be closed until the storm passes. The Federal Emergency Management Agency released a statement Thursday, prior to the hurricane making landfall, saying FEMA was prepared for the multi-state impacts of Helene, with the Biden-Harris Administration approving pre-landfall emergency declarations for Florida, Georgia and North Carolina. The declarations allow FEMA to provide federal resources to protective measures, like reimbursement for evacuations and sheltering, and to aid initial response and recovery efforts. FEMA urged people in the path of the hurricane they say is "massive" and "dangerous" to take immediate action to stay safe as the storm approached, including evacuation. For local resources such as evacuation, shelter and important storm updates, visit FEMA.gov. Cooper released a statement Sept. 26 saying state leaders were urging residents to prepare for "life-threatening flooding as well as high winds, tornadoes and heavy rain." The heaviest rainfall was expected in the mountains and foothills, with amounts of 9-20 inches. Using all resources Multiple state groups were deployed, including the State Emergency Response Team, N.C. Swift Water Rescue Teams and Urban Search & Rescue Teams, as well as more than 200 N.C. National Guardsmen. Cooper's statement shared state resources, including ReadyNC.gov, where you can go to get information on how to build an emergency kit; as well as DriveNC.gov, where you can get information on road conditions and closings. Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Macon and Swain counties, as well as the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, are some of those listed as receiving federal funding to state, tribal and eligible local governments and certain private nonprofit organizations on a cost-sharing basis for emergency protective measures, including direct federal assistance, according to a FEMA release. State Rep. Karl Gillespie (R-Franklin) released a statement Monday. "'Our office is actively utilizing all available resources to provide assistance to our region. We are coordinating closely with local, state and federal officials, as well as the private sector, to ensure a swift and effective response given the challenging road conditions," he said. "Other areas in far-western North Carolina have experienced significantly more damage than the 120th House District. We will do all we can to assist our fellow citizens in the aftermath of this unprecedented event." Gillespie represents the 120th District, which includes Cherokee, Clay, Gra

ham, Jackson, Macon and Swain counties. FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell is in the state and will remain there until the situation has stabilized, as directed by Biden, a FEMA statement said. Criswell was also in Florida and Georgia. More than 3, 500 personnel from across the federal workforce have been deployed in response efforts in impact areas. More than 1, 000 are from FEMA. In the impacted states, FEMA has shipped 1.9 million Meals Ready to Eat, more than 1 million liters of water, 30 generators and more than 95, 000 tarps. Former President Donald Trump spoke Monday in Valdosta, Ga. He said he brought "truckloads" of supplies for south Georgia residents affected by Helene. Flooding Excessive rain threatened Lake Lure Dam, which prompted mandatory evacuation around 11 a.m. Residents were asked to evacuate to Rutherfordton Presbyterian Church. A flash flood warning was issued in Jackson and Macon counties after the French Broad and Swannanoa rivers reached dangerous levels Friday. There was significant flooding in and around Buncombe and Haywood counties. Flooding of the French Broad led to advisories in Buncombe, Henderson, Madison and Transylvania counties. As rain continued, these rivers overflowed. Many areas in western North Carolina have been dealing with severe flooding -including Bryson City, which is only one hour from Cherokee County. The Ingles distribution center in Black Mountain has been directly affected by the hurricane and its aftermath, which includes severe flooding in the area. The distribution center is used for roughly all 200 locations. As

a result, Ingles customers could only pay with cash as of Monday. Water is also being airlifted in due to numerous road closures. The National Guard is working with local officials to get necessities to those affected by the storm and its aftermath. "People are desperate for help -and we are pushing to get it to them. Please know that we are sending resources, and coordinating closely with local governments, first responders, state and federal partners, and volunteer organizations to help those impacted by this tragic storm," Cooper said. "This is an unprecedented tragedy that requires an unprecedented response." N.C. Attorney General Josh Stein announced Sunday that the N.C. Department of Justice's Consumer Protection Division phone line is open for people to report price gouging or other Helene-related concerns. To report price gouging, visit ncdoj.gov/pricegouging or call 1-877-5-NO-SCAM. Cooper is encouraging donations to help those in need in the western part of the state. To donate, visit nc.gov/donate.

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Soccer plays games be fore storm arrives - Murphy, Tri-County were in action just days before Hurricane Helene

October 2, 2024 | Cherokee Scout (NC)

Author: CANNON CROMPTON sports@cherokeescout.com | Section: News | 279 Words

Page: 1B OpenURL Link

Prior to almost a week of canceled games due to Hurricane Helene, boys soccer played on Sept. 23. Both the Murphy and Tri-County Early College soccer teams were in action on the road. The Bulldogs hit the road and headed to Clay County to take on Hayesville. The Yellow Jackets got the win 2-1. Tri-County was also on the road when they headed to Highlands. Hie Jaguars lost to the Highlanders 2-0. Both teams were scheduled to play on Sept. 25, but the games were canceled due to severe weather brought on by Hurricane Helene. Andrews was also scheduled to be in action last week, but their game was canceled. This week in boys soccer will see in-county rivalries and big Smoky Mountain Conference games. Today, Murphy will take on Andrews at David Gentry Field. Kickoff is scheduled for 6 p.m. as both teams look to improve their record in the final month of the regular season. Also today, Tri-County will head to take on Swain County at 6 p.m. On Monday, all three Cherokee County teams will be in action. Andrews will host Highlands at 6 p.m.,Tri-County will host Cherokee at 6 p.m. and Murphy will head to Swain County at 6 p.m. Highlands sits atop the conference with a 5-5 overall record, 5-0 in the conference. Murphy is in fifth at 3-8, 2-3; Andrews is in sixth at 1-2-1; and Tri-County is in seventh at 1-6-1, 1-3-1. Boys soccer teams are in their final month of the regular season with just three weeks to go before the playoffs begin.

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Lady Bulldogs all to Hayesville - Dogs n action pre-Helene

October 2, 2024 | Cherokee Scout (NC)

Author: J.R. CARROLL; Staff Correspondent | Section: News | 545 Words

Page: 1B OpenURL Link

MURPHY -The Lady Bulldogs played host to the Hayesville Yellow Jackets, falling in three straight sets on Sept. 23. The Lady Bulldogs (7-7) scored the first point in the first set when Julia Dockery got the first kill, but Hayesville (10-4) answered quickly and, after trading scores, jumped out to a 6-3 lead. Hayesville went onto extend their lead to 15-5 lead and never trailed again in the set. Murphy tried to mount a comeback but could get no closer than 10 points, as a stingy Hayesville defense held the Lady Dogs to only 12 points in the first set. They went on to win the first set 25-12. Murphy jumped out to a 3-0 lead in the second set and would hold a lead of 7-6, but that's when the Lady Jackets went on a run, building

an 11-8 lead. The Lady Dogs battled back to tie the score at 11 via some great saves by Carsyn Lovingood and front-line play by Cayla Geer and Dockery. The lead then exchanged hands several times, Dockery keeping the Lady Dogs in the game with several kills, as the Lady Dogs built a 16-14 lead. The lead would not hold, as the Lady Jackets stormed back and took an 18-17 lead, only to see Murphy tie it back up at 18, before Hayesville won the second set 25-19. Hayesville erased a 2-0 Murphy lead at the start of the third set to take a 7-2 lead. The Lady Dogs battled back to within one point, when Anna Brinke made a great save and Dockery followed up with another kill, to cut the Hayesville lead to 10-9. The Lady Dogs took the lead at 12-11, but Hayesville instantly tied the score back up. The lead would change hands several more times, with Murphy gaining a lead only to see Hayesville come back to tie the score. Murphy would lead 15-13, then Hayesville tied the score at 15 all. Murphy again took the lead

at 16-15. The lead continued to rock back and forth until the score was tied at 19. That's when Hayesville's front line took over as they outscored the Lady Dogs 6-0 to take the set 25-19 and claim the match 3-0. Dockery led the Murphy with 10 kills;, she also had two solo blocks, one assist and nine digs. Reagan Curtis had six kills, followed by Lovingood with five. Brinke had eight digs for the Lady Dogs. Murphy had a game scheduled with the Lady Black Knights on Thursday, but the match was postponed due to the hurricane. As a result, the Lady Dogs will have three matches this week. They will play the game with Robbinsville before hosting Swain at home and then traveling to Andrews. Those games will be paramount in determining the seeding in the Smoky Mountain Conference race. Swain and Robbinsville both come into this week with 2-3 records. If Murphy can win both of those matches and defeat Andrews in the third one, the Lady Dogs could drastically improve their fifth-place standing in the Smoky Mountain Conference.

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J.R. CARROLL, Staff Correspondent, 'Lady Bulldogs all to Hayesville - Dogs n action pre-Helene', *Cherokee Scout* (online), 2 Oct 2024 1B https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19BF47595770F618>



ootball conference games kicking o this week - Smoky Mountain Conference picks, week 7; last week 0-1, season 16-7 That's the Way I^See It

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Western North Carolina was devastated by Hurricane Helene, which caused most of the region's games to be postponed or even canceled. For our neighbors closer to Asheville, it's not clear of how those teams will proceed with the rest of their games. However, that's probably the least of their worries. Robbinsville will play Cherokee on Friday night, which was originally scheduled for last week. It will be Robbinsville's homecoming game. Andrews' game with Southside Christian was cancelled, while Swain County's game with Madison County was also canceled, as Madison was hit hard by Helene. With that all being said, let's look at this week's games as everybody's conference schedule gets underway Cherokee at Robbinsville This game was rescheduled from last week, and my thoughts haven't changed. Robbinsville only has one win this season, but they have played a tougher schedule than they will face the rest of the year. Cherokee is 3-2, with only one win coming against a team with a winning record. The Knights will win this one going away. Robbinsville by 21. Swain County at Andrew

s Swain County has yet to find its offense. Andrews has three wins against less-thanstellar competition, but did play Mitchell very close in their lone loss. This one is hard to predict, but Andrews may have too much speed for the Maroon Devils -if they can get out of the backfield. Swain still has a decent line, but there are rumors of internal problems that may play to the Wildcats' advantage. Andrews by 1. Murphy at Hayesville Hayesville has had offensive woes of their own this year, with way too many turnovers. They did get on the winning track against Concord Christian last week, but Murphy is a completely different animal. The Bulldogs are riding high on a fourgame winning streak after a week one loss to Franklin. They have had to replace a couple of players in the lineup due to injuries, but they seem to be doing well with the replacements. This will be the first of a two-game road trip for the Dogs, as they travel to Robbinsville next week. They will prove to be just too much for Yellow Jackets this week. Murphy by 14. J.R. Carroll is a staff correspondent for the Cherokee Scout and a longt'mie follower of Smoky Mountain Conference football. His picks column will run weekly during the high school football season. Email him at jcarroll8760@qTnail.cotn.

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