

Increased human and bear conflicts could occur in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene

October 5, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Staff report editor@wataugademocrat.com| Section: Local | 487 Words OpenURL Link

Impacts from the hurricane on infrastructure and local government services are leading to increased opportunities for bears to find food due to the availability of trash, unattended donation drop-offs, and the attractiveness of rotting foods, particularly in damaged homes and businesses.

We recognize the immense challenges facing Asheville and surrounding communities trying to recover from this unprecedented event and want to offer resources to help mitigate human – bear conflicts.

Home Entry Advice: Keep windows and doors closed and latched if bears are observed in your area. If you are unable to secure the potential point of entry (e.g., doors or windows) due to damage, consider putting out an unwelcome mat made of plywood and nails.Outdoor Refrigerator/Freezer Advice: If you have an outdoor refrigerator or freezer, consider installing a padlock on the door to keep bears from accessing the food. Some chest freezers come with pre-installed locks.Secure Food, Garbage, and Recycling: Food and food odors attract bears, so don't reward them with easily available food, liquids or garbage.Both Buncombe County and the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission recommend you make every effort to store garbage in a bear-resistant container or inside a secure enclosure, such as a shed, garage, or home until it can be picked up or brought to a collection site.Make every effort not to place your trash or trash bags outside in the open, such as a carport, on your lawn, or in an open garage. Bears will quickly find it and not only scatter garbage but be tempted to return to your home.If possible, please don't leave out unattended food donations. Those food donations are critically needed, but if left outside unattended, will be scavenged by bears and other wildlife.

Make your own trash can bear-resistant:

https://bearwise.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/fwc-trash-retrofit-kit-directions.pdfhttps://trashlockers.com/

Implement these BearWise Basics:

Never Feed or Approach Bears: Intentionally feeding bears or allowing them to find anything that smells or tastes like food teaches bears to approach homes and people looking for more. There is plenty of natural foods (acorns) for bears right now, so please don't feed the bears, they don't need it.Remove Bird Feeders When Bears are Active: Birdseed and grains have lots of calories, so they're very attractive to bears. Removing feeders is the best way to avoid creating conflicts with bears. Please restrain from putting out bird seed or intentionally feeding wildlife. Our bird friends have lots of natural foods available to them.Never Leave Pet Food Outdoors: Feed pets indoors when possible. If you must feed pets outside, feed in single portions and remove food and bowls after feeding. Store pet food where bears can't see or smell it.Keep Dogs Leashed or Leave Them at Home: Letting dogs chase or bark at bears is asking for trouble; don't force a bear to defend itself.

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

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Site may help house storm victims - Former American Hebrew Academy could be used as shelter for Helene victims

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Author: KEVIN GRIFFIN Staff Reporter | Section: A | 558 Words

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The former American Hebrew Academy in Greensboro, planned at one time to house unaccompanied migrant teens, has emerged as an option for sheltering people displaced by Hurricane Helene.

U.S. Rep. Kathy Manning said in a statement Friday that her office "is actively engaging with the Department of Health and Human Services regarding the potential use of the Greensboro Influx Care facility as temporary accommodation for those impacted by the storm."

"My heart aches at the devastation Hurricane Helene has brought to our state," Manning said via the statement, adding: "In this moment of urgent need for our neighbors in western North Carolina, I am committed to ensuring that resources are swiftly mobilized and reach all those affected by this unprecedented storm."

Greensboro Mayor Nancy Vaughan said she reached out to Manning's office and Gov. Roy Cooper's office about the possibility of using the site earlier this week.

"I think that would be a great opportunity to utilize that site for people who really have suffered such an extreme tragedy in Western North Carolina," she said.

Manning said her office "will maintain close contact with HHS as they make critical determinations about the facility's usage."

When asked about the potential use of the site, the department provided a statement saying that Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra "made clear that HHS will do all that we can to help support families impacted by Hurricane Helene."

The statement continued: "We are working closely with state and local health authorities, as well as with our partners across the federal government, to provide public health and medical support. HHS will continue to use every lever we can to help families impacted."

The Health and Human Services Department has a five-year, \$50 million lease on the former American Hebrew Academy property at 4334 Hobbs Road.

The facility was originally set aside as a site for sheltering up to 800 teens who came into the country unaccompanied by parents or legal guardians.

From March to June, the center was technically operational though no teens were actually brought there during that time. Since June, the center has wound down operation and been on standby should the need to house migrant teens increase.

Manning previously attributed the facility's unused status to a decline in unaccompanied minors coming into the United States.

It is not clear at this point if the campus, which is large enough to accommodate at least 1,500 workers in addition to 800 residents, will ultimately be used to assist storm victims.

As of early Friday afternoon, there were around 1,300 people being housed in 22 shelters in and near western North Carolina, according to information published by the state. Two-thirds of the shelters were either housing no one at that time or were below 50% capacity.

Vaughan said she believes Greensboro residents will show their support for those displaced by Helene if the site is ever used as a shelter.

"I think that if this occurs that the city of Greensboro will embrace the refugees from the storm," Vaughan said. "We look forward to welcoming them if that becomes a possibility."

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Thousands still struggle to find water - A week after Helene hit, thousands still without water struggle to find enough

October 5, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC)

Author: MICHAEL PHILLIS, JEFF AMY and BRITTANY PETERSON Associated Press | Section: A | 1100 Words

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ASHEVILLE - Nearly a week after Hurricane Helene brought devastation to western North Carolina, a shiny stainless steel tanker truck in downtown Asheville attracted residents carrying 5-gallon containers, milk jugs and buckets to fill with what has become a desperately scare resource - drinking water.

Flooding tore through the city's water system, destroying so much infrastructure that officials said repairs could take weeks. To make do, Anna Ramsey arrived Wednesday with her two children, who each left carrying plastic bags filled with 2 gallons of water.

"We have no water. We have no power. But I think it's also been humbling," Ramsey said.

Helene's path through the Southeast left a trail of power outages so large the darkness was visible from space. Tens of trillions of gallons of rain fell and more than 200 people were killed, making Helene the deadliest hurricane to hit the mainland U.S. since Katrina in 2005. Hundreds of people are still unaccounted for, and search crews must trudge through knee-deep debris to learn whether residents are safe.

It also damaged water utilities so severely and over such a wide inland area that one federal official said the toll "could be considered unprecedented." As of Thursday, about 136,000 people in the Southeast were served by a nonoperational water provider and more than 1.8 million were living under a boil water advisory, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

Western North Carolina was especially hard hit. Officials are facing a difficult rebuilding task made harder by the steep, narrow valleys of the Blue Ridge Mountains that during a more typical October would attract throngs of fall tourists.

"The challenges of the geography are just fewer roads, fewer access points, fewer areas of flat ground to stage resources" said Brian Smith, acting deputy division director for the EPA's water division in the Southeast.

After days without water, people long for more than just a sponge bath.

"I would love a shower," said Sue Riles in Asheville. "Running water would be incredible."

The raging floodwaters of Helene destroyed crucial parts of Asheville's water system, scouring out the pipes that convey water from a reservoir in the mountains above town that is the largest of three water supplies for the system. To reach a second reservoir that was knocked offline, a road had to be rebuilt.

Boosted output from the third source restored water flow in some southern Asheville neighborhoods Friday, but without full repairs schools may not be able to resume in-person classes, hospitals may not restore normal operations, and the city's hotels and restaurants may not fully reopen.

Even water that's unfit to drink is scarce. Drew Reisinger, the elected Buncombe County register of deeds, worries about people in apartments who can't easily haul a bucket of water from a creek to flush their toilet. Officials are advising people to collect nondrinkable water for household needs from a local swimming pool.

"One thing no one is talking about is the amount of poop that exists in every toilet in Asheville," he said. "We're

dealing with a public health emergency."

It's a situation that becomes more dangerous the longer it lasts. Even in communities fortunate enough to have running water, hundreds of providers have issued boil water notices indicating the water could be contaminated. But boiling water for cooking and drinking is time consuming and small mistakes can cause stomach illness, according to Natalie Exum, an assistant professor at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

"Every day that goes by, you could be exposed to a pathogen," Exum said. "These basic services that we take for granted in our everyday lives actually do do a lot to prevent illness."

Travis Edwards' faucet worked immediately after the storm. He filled as many containers as he could for himself and his child, but it didn't take long for the flow to weaken, then stop. They rationed water, switching to hand sanitizer and barely putting any on toothbrushes.

"(We) didn't realize how dehydrated we were getting," he said.

Federal officials have shipped millions of gallons of water to areas where people also might not be able to make phone calls or switch on the lights.

Power has been restored to about 62% of homes and businesses and 8,000 crews are out working to restore power in the hardest hit parts of North Carolina, federal officials said Thursday. In 10 counties, about half of the cell sites are still down.

The first step for some utilities is simply figuring out how bad the damage is, a job that might require EPA expertise in extreme cases. Ruptured water pipes are a huge problem. They often run beneath roads, many of which were crumpled and twisted by floodwaters.

"Pretty much anytime you see a major road damaged, there's a very good chance that there's a pipe in there that's also gotten damaged," said Mark White, drinking water global practice leader at the engineering firm CDM Smith.

Generally, repairs start at the treatment plant and move outward, with fixes in nearby big pipes done first, according to the EPA.

"Over time, you'll gradually get water to more and more people," White said.

Many people are still missing people, and water repair employees don't typically work around search and rescue operations. It takes a toll, according to Kevin Morley, manager of federal relations with the American Water Works Association.

"There's emotional support that is really important for all the people involved. You're seeing people's lives just wiped out," he said.

Even private well owners aren't immune. Pumps on private wells may have lost power and overtopping floodwaters can contaminate them.

There's often a "blind faith" assumption that drinking water won't fail. In this case, the technology was insufficient, according to Craig Colten. Before retiring to Asheville, he was a professor in Louisiana focused on resilience to extreme weather. He hopes Helene will prompt politicians to spend more to ensure infrastructure withstands destructive storms.

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Helene puts climate change at campaign forefront - Hurricane Helene brings climate change to forefront of the presidential campaign

October 5, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC) Author: MATTHEW DALY Associated Press | Section: B | 940 Words Page: 6 OpenURL Link

WASHINGTON - The devastation wrought by Hurricane Helene has brought climate change to the forefront of the presidential campaign after the issue lingered on the margins for months.

Vice President Kamala Harris traveled to Georgia on Wednesday to see hard-hit areas, two days after her Republican opponent, former President Donald Trump, was in the state and criticized the federal response to the storm, which has killed at least 215 people. Thousands of people in the Carolinas still lack running water, cellphone service and electricity.

President Joe Biden toured some of the hardest-hit areas by helicopter Wednesday. Biden traveled to the Carolinas to get a closer look at the hurricane devastation. He is expected to visit Georgia and Florida later this week.

"Storms are getting stronger and stronger," Biden said after surveying damage near Asheville, North Carolina. At least 70 people died in the state.

"Nobody can deny the impact of the climate crisis anymore," Biden said at a briefing in Raleigh, the state capital.

"They must be brain dead if they do."

Harris, meanwhile, hugged and huddled with a family in hurricane-ravaged Augusta, Georgia.

"There is real pain and trauma that resulted because of this hurricane" and its aftermath, Harris said outside a storm-damaged house with downed trees in the yard.

"We are here for the long haul," she said.

The focus on the storm - and its link to climate change - was notable after climate change was only lightly mentioned in two presidential debates this year.

The hurricane featured prominently in Tuesday's vice presidential debate as Republican JD Vance and Democrat Tim Walz were asked about the storm and the larger issue of climate change.

Both men called the hurricane a tragedy and agreed on the need for a strong federal response. But it was Walz, the governor of Minnesota, who put the storm in the context of a warming climate.

"There's no doubt this thing roared onto the scene faster and stronger than anything we've seen," he said.

Bob Henson, a meteorologist and writer with Yale Climate Connections, said it was no surprise that Helene is pushing both the federal disaster response and human-caused climate change into the campaign conversation.

"Weather disasters are often overlooked as a factor in big elections," he said.

During Tuesday's debate, Walz noted that Trump has called climate change "a hoax" and joked that rising seas "would make more beachfront property to be able to invest in."

Trump said in a speech Tuesday "the planet has actually gotten little bit cooler recently."

In fact, summer 2024 sweltered to Earth's hottest on record, making it likely this year will end up as the warmest humanity has measured, according to the European climate service Copernicus.

Vance, an Ohio senator, said he and Trump support clean air, clean water and "want the environment to be cleaner and safer." However, during Trump's four years in office, he took a series of actions to roll back more than 100 environmental regulations.

Vance sidestepped a question about whether he agrees with Trump's statement that climate change is a hoax. "What the president has said is that if the Democrats - in particular Kamala Harris and her leadership - really believe that climate change is serious, what they would be doing is more manufacturing and more energy production in the United States of America. And that's not what they're doing," he said.

"This idea that carbon (dioxide) emissions drives all of the climate change. Well, let's just say that's true just for the sake of argument. So we're not arguing about weird science. If you believe that, what would you want to do?" Vance said.

The answer, he said, is to "produce as much energy as possible in the United States of America, because we're the cleanest economy in the entire world."

Vance claimed that policies by Biden and Harris actually help China, because many solar panels, lithium-ion batteries and other materials used in renewable energy and electric vehicles are made in China and imported to the United States.

Walz rebutted that claim, noting that the Inflation Reduction Act, the Democrats' signature climate law approved in 2022, includes the largest-ever investment in domestic clean energy production. The law, for which Harris cast the deciding vote, has created 200,000 jobs across the country.

"We are producing more natural gas and more oil (in the United States) than we ever have," Walz said. "We're also producing more clean energy."

While Biden rarely mentions it, domestic fossil fuel production under his administration is at an all-time high. Crude oil production averaged 12.9 million barrels a day last year, eclipsing a previous record set in 2019 under Trump, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

Democrats want to continue investments in renewable energy such as wind and solar power - and not just because supporters of the Green New Deal want that, Walz said.

"The solution for us is to continue to move forward, (accept) that climate change is real" and reduce reliance on fossil fuels, Walz said, adding that the administration is doing exactly that.

"We are seeing us becoming an energy superpower for the future, not just the current" time, he said.

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Many didn't heed urgent warnings over Helene - Soul-searching and regret over unheeded warnings follow Helene's destruction

October 5, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC) Author: JIM MUSTIAN, BERNARD CONDON and ERIK VERDUZCO Associated Press| Section: A | 816 Words Page: 3 OpenURL Link

ASHEVILLE - Before Hurricane Helene's landfall last week, the National Weather Service began an all-out blitz to alert emergency planners, first responders and residents across the Southeast that the storm's heavy rains and high winds could bring disaster hundreds of miles from the coast.

Warnings blared phrases such as "URGENT," "life threatening" and "catastrophic" describing the impending perils as far inland as the mountains of North Carolina and Tennessee. Smartphones buzzed with repeated push alerts of flash floods and dangerous winds. States of emergency were declared from Florida to Virginia.

The weather service reached back to 1916 for a precedent, correctly predicting Helene would rank among the "most significant weather events" the Asheville area had ever seen.

But the red flags and cataclysmic forecasts weren't enough to prevent the still-rising death toll. The number soared to at least 215 across six states. At least 72 of those were in hard-hit Asheville and surrounding Buncombe County from flash floods, mudslides, falling trees, crumbled roads and other calamities.

"Despite the dire, dire predictions, the impacts were probably even worse than we expected," said Steve Wilkinson, the meteorologist in charge of the National Weather Service's regional office in Greenville-Spartanburg, South Carolina.

"We reserve this strong language for only the worst situations," he said. "But it's hard to go out and tell people this is going to totally change the landscape of western North Carolina."

As the region begins its long road to recovery, a task complicated by cut-off communities, a lack of running water and still-spotty cellphone service, the growing number of casualties has prompted soul-searching among devastated homeowners and officials alike.

They wonder whether more could have been done to sound the alarms and respond in a mountainous region that's not often in the path of hurricanes.

"It sounds stupid to say this, but I didn't realize it would be like bombs going off," Brenton Murrell said after surveying his Asheville neighborhood strewn with mud and debris, military Osprey aircraft whirring overhead. "It's like a war zone."

Like many residents interviewed by The Associated Press, Murrell had never experienced the effects of a hurricane and felt detached from the danger despite receiving numerous warnings of "extreme risk of loss of life and property."

Murrell said those words never really scared him, in part because his neighbors had been talking for days about the last big flood two decades ago and offered mostly reassuring words that "if you're not in a low-lying area, you'll be fine."

"There was some sort of disconnect," said Murrell, who now regrets riding out the storm at home with his wife, two children and dog, even though they are all safe. "It's human nature to not truly comprehend something until you've felt it yourself."

Many residents said they didn't grasp the magnitude of the storm until it was too late. For some, evacuating became impossible as fallen trees and surging floodwaters made roads and bridges impassable. The cascade of emergencies caught seemingly everyone off guard.

Sara Lavery, of Canton, said she received multiple alerts last Thursday before the worst of the storm hit and was alarmed at how quickly "flood watches" on her phone progressed to "flood warnings."

Then she looked out at the Pigeon River near her home and got really scared.

"We saw a tree the size of telephone pole, a kitchen sink, a bedroom dresser," she said. "It was terrifying."

Still, she and her fiance decided to stay, partly because their home was on high ground, partly to leave the roads empty for others and help out endangered residents in lower areas.

"Some people don't have a place to go, some don't have a four-wheel vehicle to get out," Lavery said. "People always say, 'Why didn't you evacuate?' Not everyone can.

"We never thought this would happen," she said. "Western North Carolina is the mountains."

As the storm swept through, Mia Taylor, of nearby Hendersonville, said she received alerts on her phone about the threat of floods "but some of us were kind of just like, 'Oh, it's not that serious.'"

She tried to drive to a nearby town to shelter with her children but found "every which way was blocked off." She ended up turning around only for her car to shut off in the storm.

"You didn't think that it was going to be this bad," she said.

Lillian Govus, a Buncombe County spokesperson, said that has been a familiar refrain since the storm because no one alive in the area had seen anything approaching Helene's destruction.

She described the storm's pre-dawn arrival last Friday as "insidious," noting some residents were in bed and may not have heard the emergency alerts.

"Folks were trying to evacuate, but there was nowhere to go," she said. "If there's a landslide, it doesn't matter how high you go."

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4 Northwest NC residents among dead from storm - Watauga woman killed when her house slides down an embankment

October 5, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC)

Author: RICHARD CRAVER Staff Reporter | Section: A | 397 Words

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A 36-year-old Watauga County woman died when her house slide down an embankment during Hurricane Helene, one of four confirmed storm-related deaths in Northwest North Carolina, the N.C. Division of Public Health said Friday.

Watauga had two storm-related deaths, while there was one each in Ashe and Yadkin counties. The division did not provide the identities of the victims, citing privacy policies.

So far, 63 Helene-reported deaths have been confirmed by the state, though there have been unconfirmed reports of at least 100.

"We are aware there are additional reports of decedents, and our team is working to verify that these are storm related deaths," the division said in a statement. "Life-saving activities will always take priority, and we will continue to work to update this information as appropriately as possible."

The storm has killed 215 overall, mostly in the Southeast.

The other Watauga fatality involved a 65-year-old Watauga woman who drowned. Her body was found Sept. 30.

The Ashe fatality was reported as a 72-year-old woman who drowning in the floodwaters after escaping her vehicle, which also was swept away in floodwaters. Her body was found on Sept. 27.

The Yadkin fatality was a 57-year-old man who died from injuries suffered when tree fell on the vehicle he was driving. His body was recovered on Sept. 27.

Buncombe County has had the most confirmed deaths at 26, followed by nine in Yancey, six in Henderson, four in Madison, three in Avery, two each in Catawba, Cleveland and Rutherford, and one each in Burke, Catawba, Gaston, Macon, McDowell, Mecklenburg and Polk.

The division provided the types of deaths: unknown circumstances at 17; drowning, 16; landslide, 10; blunt force injuries, 6, wind or tree trauma, 5; drowning while trapped in motor vehicle, 4; motor vehicle accidents, including hydroplaning, 3; other, 2.

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Wednesday vote planned on Helene relief funding - GOP legislative leaders plan Wednesday vote on Helene relief funding

October 5, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC)

Author: RICHARD CRAVER Staff Reporter | Section: A | 1121 Words

Page: 1 OpenURL Link

Republican legislative leaders said Friday that next week's scheduled one-day session will include a vote on an initial disaster relief package to launch the state's funding response to Hurricane Helene.

When the regular part of the 2024 session was adjourned, the legislature established specific dates to return to address certain pending legislation and to hold potential veto override votes.

The next date is Wednesday, which was expected to involve veto override votes of House Bill 10, which features Republican priorities of \$460 million in K-12 Opportunity Scholarship funding for the 2024-25 school year, and would require all sheriffs to cooperate with federal ICE officials.

A joint statement from Senate leader Phil Berger, R-Rockingham, and House speaker Tim Moore, R-Cleveland, said "we are still working to determine what needs to be included in that legislation."

There is about \$5 billion in the state's so-called "rainy day fund" that has been a set aside funding priority of Republican legislators toward natural disaster relief efforts.

"Over the past week, we've heard directly from residents in Western North Carolina and have seen the devastation firsthand," the legislative leaders said.

"Our hearts are broken for the communities that have been ravaged by Hurricane Helene. Despite the destruction, it has been incredible to see how North Carolinians have stepped up to help. We cannot let up on those efforts or forget about the small communities that have been effectively closed off because of this storm."

Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper and state and federal officials also are awaiting initial damage assessment in order to request Federal Emergency Management Administration assistance.

President Joe Biden has approved a federal emergency declaration for North Carolina, which provides federal financial reimbursement for response actions by government entities and some non-profits. Biden visited this week parts of western N.C. with Cooper and state and federal relief officials.

House Minority leader Rep. Robert Rieves, D-Chatham, said "House Democrats are thinking of and praying for the residents affected by Hurricane Helene, especially in Western North Carolina, but also in Eastern North Carolina where a tornado tore through Rocky Mount."

"We are committed to doing whatever it takes to help rebuild the region over the long term. We have to begin planning for the long-term recovery, which will take time. House Democrats have begun working on a package of relief measures and look forward to working with our Republican colleagues and the governor's team to help get it done.

"We stand ready to do this work in one of our regularly scheduled sessions or during a special session - whatever is necessary."

Mitch Kokai, senior policy analyst with conservative think tank John Locke Foundation, said "it's important to note that the statement referenced an initial disaster relief package."

"No one knows at this point how state government ultimately will need to respond to the storm's damage. We might not have those answers before a new General Assembly convenes in 2025."

Kokai said lawmakers "can take steps now to free up money for items that can be addressed in the coming weeks."

"Since lawmakers are already scheduled to return to Raleigh again in November and December, it's likely that more hurricane-related legislation could be considered at those sessions as well."

Neither Berger nor Moore's office could be immediately reached for comment on whether veto override votes still were planned. Neither chamber have posted their planned agendas for Wednesday.

The Republican supermajority passed HB10 on Sept. 12. The Opportunity Scholarship language in HB10 allows North Carolina parents - no matter how much they make - to get vouchers to help cover tuition for K-12 private or religious schools for their children.

It's likely both chambers will override the veto, as they have seven of Cooper's eight vetoes this session.

It's not clear whether the legislature will look to divert the Opportunity Scholarship funding for 2024-25 school year to disaster relief efforts, or just draw from the rainy day fund.

Cooper has declared a state public education emergency in response to the proposed Opportunity Scholarship expansion, saying "we need to put a moratorium on destructive private-school vouchers until North Carolina's public schools are fully funded."

More than relief?

Berger and Moore did not indicate in their joint statement whether they intended to address any other pending legislation or call for a special session to do so.

In December 2016, the Republican super-majority held its third special session to pass a bill to provide \$200.9 million in disaster relief to 49 eastern counties affected by Hurricane Matthew and two tropical storms, as well as five western counties affected by wildfires.

However, rather than end that session and go home outside of scheduled joint oversight meetings, the General Assembly was called into a fourth special session protested by House Democrats.

Two bills were passed during that fourth session and quickly signed into law by Republican Gov. Pat McCrory. The bills surrendered gubernatorial appointee authority - held for decades - that Republican legislative leaders claimed allowed them to not have to go to court to enforce their reclaiming of authority.

For critics, McCrory's signing of the two bills demonstrated another example of a lack of political will and unwillingness to butt heads with strong Republican legislative leadership over potentially unconstitutional legislation.

The decision by McCrory not to hold a press conference or bill signing ceremony encapsulated his reputation as a go-along-to-get-along executive more in tune with being mayor of North Carolina than its governor.

Hot food exceptions

People and families in North Carolina who are enrolled in the Food and Nutrition Services program can now use their EBT benefits card to temporarily purchase hot food.

This temporary flexibility applies to all 100 counties in North Carolina and the nearly 700,000 households enrolled in

the FNS program. It includes food prepared for immediate consumption,

"For people and families in North Carolina whose lives have been turned upside down by Hurricane Helene, a hot meal can provide a small comfort and sense of normalcy to their day," Cooper said.

"This flexibility helps us make sure everyone has access to basic necessities while we continue to work to restore services to impacted communities."

All authorized EBT vendors have been notified about this change, which will remain in effect until Nov. 3.

Customers do not have to apply for this benefit, but should inquire first with the store to see if they can process hot food purchases with their FNS benefits.

It is important to note this is for authorized retailers, such as gas stations or deli departments, and not restaurants or other non-EBT authorized retailers.

DHHS has applied for a waiver to automatically replace a portion of FNS benefits for individuals and families in the western North Carolina who have lost food purchased with their September FNS benefits. Once DHHS receives approval, the department will send out a notification with more details.

Additionally, DHHS is actively working with USDA to receive federal authority to operate a Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

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RICHARD CRAVER; Staff Reporter, 'Wednesday vote planned on Helene relief funding GOP legislative leaders plan Wednesday vote on Helene relief funding', *Winston-Salem Journal* (online), 5 Oct 2024 1 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C04353E8565AE0



CLOSED INDEFINITELY - Blue Ridge Parkway closed indefinitely; Families along the parkway scramble to communicate

October 5, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC)

Author: CONNOR MCNEELY Staff writer | Section: A | 961 Words

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In the wake of the devastation of Hurricane Helene, only a handful of families could still reach the observation decks of the Blue Ridge Parkway and witness a brilliant mountain sunset.

Officials with the National Park Service (NPS) announced Wednesday that the parkway will remain closed through the entire state of North Carolina indefinitely as crews continue to conduct their initial assessment of the damage from the hurricane.

Those who lived far up into the mountains, past closed roadways and dangerous washouts, walked to the observation deck at Gillespie Gap Wednesday evening across from the Skyline Village Inn, about 100 feet from an access point to the parkway. It was virtually the only way for the families, who had come to the McDowell-Mitchell county line for better cell signal to call their loved ones.

Ernan and Marcia Santos, longtime Spruce Pine residents who spent many days following the storm attempting to leave the mountains, sat on a bench and gazed over at a view they had seen hundreds of times in their lives. Earlier the couple had called their daughter, who had just finished law school at Duke University.

"Even now, it's pretty," Ernan Santos said, looking out at the sunset. "It's so peaceful here."

According to the National Park Service announcement, NPS assessment teams have seen significant, and in some cases, catastrophic damage along the parkway, particularly from milepost 280 to milepost 469.

As of Thursday afternoon, 250 NPS employees from 32 states are working with the Blue Ridge Parkway staff in the recovery efforts, the news release said.

In the coming weeks, the assessment teams from the NPS will use data from their inspections to determine the timeline and cost estimates for repairs.

A projected reopening of any section of the Blue Ridge Parkway hasn't yet been established, the NPS announcement said.

The conversations of other families mainly centered on the status of the roads on the way up the mountains. Washouts had closed many of the possible exits for them and their family.

On one of the tables on the observation deck, the Skyline Inn had set down a log that mountain residents filled with more than two dozen names of those who were safe.

Bubba Presnell stood with his wife, Tamara, a principal in the Yancey County School system, and their daughters Hannah and Sarah. They had weathered the storm together and were able to reach nearby Irwin, Tennessee, a couple of days ago to retrieve a portable DVD player that charged in their car.

Usually, they would charge it during the day and watch one movie in the evening. At the observation deck, Sarah and Bubba would call loved ones and ask about a shared fantasy football league, and for recaps of two Monday Night Football games.

It was terrible for Bubba Presnell to think about what would happen next for their undefeated local high school football team, the Mountain Heritage Cougars.

"I'm heartbroken for our guys, because I don't know what's going to happen or if they're even going to get to finish playing," Presnell said. "I hate that for them."

Tamara Presnell said she made her way to her school, Newland Elementary to make contact with different families and to check on the water damage.

"We had several families that have lost their homes, but we were able to lay eyes on all our kids, and talk to all of our kids," Presnell said.

Up at the Skyline Village Inn, now closed, co-owner Tamara Seid-Graham recounted enduring the storm with different guest couples who became a tight-knit group during the experience.

As the roads closed, there was no way out for several days. The group bonded as the first floor of the inn flooded and they ran around the building to get flashlights.

"One of the guests was like, 'Can we extend our stay?' And I was like, 'What are you talking about? There's nowhere to go. You're good.'" Seid-Graham said.

Her phone was now flooded with over 600 missed emails, Seid-Graham said. But everything, including peak business season for most of the businesses near the Blue Ridge Parkway, had to be pushed aside to deal with the aftermath of the hurricane.

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CONNOR MCNEELY; Staff writer, 'CLOSED INDEFINITELY Blue Ridge Parkway closed indefinitely; Families along the parkway scramble to communicate', *Winston-Salem Journal* (online), 5 Oct 2024 1 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C04353DE648098



Helene latest disruption for young athletes - Helene the latest disruption for young athletes

October 5, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC) Author: JOHN RABY Associated Press | Section: B | 997 Words Page: 2 OpenURL Link

Pisgah High School in western North Carolina reopened its football stadium last year after Tropical Storm Fred tore through in 2021.

Now it has to be rebuilt again after being demolished by Hurricane Helene.

Amid the lives lost and the catastrophic damage, high schools in dozens of communities in southern Appalachia are shut down and with that the prep sports that binds so many towns together. It's the latest disruption for young athletes who've already endured a pandemic.

The Pigeon River rose to record levels after Helene plowed through, taking out parts of Interstate 40 along with bridges, homes and other infrastructure in the region. In Canton, North Carolina, the high school's football, baseball and softball fields, covered in several feet of water, were "a total loss," Pisgah athletic director Heidi Morgan said.

In an adjacent county, six dozen people have died. Morgan is keeping that in perspective as she ponders the monumental task ahead at her school.

"You cannot replace a life," she said. "Material things, you can replace."

First COVID, now this

The loss of Pisgah's athletic facilities is personal for Morgan. She played softball there in high school and became its athletic director in 2019. She's also the current softball coach.

"I'm sad for our kids. They've just been through so much," Morgan said. "In high school, you have to have a sense of normalcy. Our seniors, they've played at Pisgah Memorial Stadium eight times in four years due to COVID and then the flood in '21. It's just heartbreaking."

It's also summoned a resiliency that Morgan processed during the first stadium overhaul that she hopes will help get her school through even tougher times.

"We'll get our hands dirty again and we'll rebuild and be back stronger than ever," Morgan said. "We will come back."

About a half hour to the east, the Swannanoa River swallowed up the outdoor athletic fields at Asheville Christian Academy. In Hampton, Tennessee, Hampton High School's football stadium was destroyed by flooding from the Doe River.

Schools remain closed in many states as work continues on roads and other infrastructure. Some schools have become temporary Red Cross shelters. Others are accommodating utility crews. High school games have been called off for a second straight week, with many having no idea if or when practices or games might resume. Local police officers used for game security have other, more important things to do.

'Push through it'

South Carolina was hit the hardest by power outages from the hurricane, posing one of the many challenges for

young athletes.

"It does take a little bit of focus off the game and season because you have to worry about a lot of stuff that's going on at home," said Abraham Hoffman, a running back and wide receiver at American Leadership Academy, a charter school in Lexington, South Carolina. "It definitely causes a distraction."

The school lost power for five days and the football team only recently returned to practice with its game postponed this week. But there isn't time for self pity, considering what's going on in every direction.

"We kind of just have to push through it," Hoffman said. "You can't sit back and let it affect you. Even though we went through it, it was tough, the hurricane and stuff, There are places that had it worse."

American Leadership coach Robin Bacon spoke with two head coaches from other areas who said "'this looks like an atomic bomb hit in some of these areas.' It's just so bad.

"We take for granted having a hot meal," he said. "We take for granted having electricity. We take for granted that we can take a shower. And I'm talking to some of my football players and they're like, 'coach, we don't have air conditioning."

Seeking a pause

The South Carolina Athletic Coaches Association is seeking a two-week postponement in football games on behalf of schools in the hard-hit western part of the state, where students "face extreme challenges that go beyond athletics," association executive director Scott Earley wrote.

In the letter to the South Carolina High School League, the state's governing body for high school sports that is scheduled to meet next week, Earley said many athletes "are unable to attend practice due to lack of transportation, closed schools and impassible roads. Others are prioritizing family responsibilities as they cope with significant losses."

In Georgia, a group overseeing high school athletics announced this week it would extend the football regular season by one week.

Gen Z giving back

In Boone, North Carolina, some of Brian Newmark's cross country teammates at Watauga High School have damage to their homes or downed trees or destroyed bridges blocking roads. The team was still trying to figure out whether it can compete in a meet on Saturday in Charlotte, 100 miles away.

Until then, they're prioritizing helping others. Newmark, a sophomore, handed out bottled water to needy residents for four hours at the school Thursday. The day before, the team cleared tree limbs, mud and other debris along a popular walking trail.

That sense of giving back makes Newmark proud about his generation, often seen as being too attached to electronics. Newmark said there is some truth to those complaints, but he and his classmates are doing their part to turn that reputation on its side.

"We're working together to help each other," Newmark said.

AP Sports Writers Teresa M. Walker, Aaron Beard and Pete Iacobelli and Associated Press writer Kimberlee Kruesi contributed.

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JOHN RABY; Associated Press, 'Helene latest disruption for young athletes Helene the latest disruption for young athletes', Winston-Salem Journal (online), 5 Oct 2024 2 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C04353F1B714D0>



NC distributes Benadryl and EpiPens as yellow jackets swarm from flooding - North Carolina is distributing Benadryl and EpiPens as yellow jackets swarm from Helene flooding

October 5, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC) Author: DEVI SHASTRI ASSOCIATED PRESS | Section: A | 305 Words Page: 4 OpenURL Link

Deadly flooding from Hurricane Helene in western North Carolina has also disrupted the underground nests of yellow jackets, bees and other insects, causing them to swarm and sting people struggling to recover from the storm.

It's caused such a surge in requests for medication to protect people allergic to stings that the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services is buying Benadryl and epinephrine injections to help fill requests through hospitals, emergency medical personnel and doctors.

Pharmacists in the state can also provide emergency refills for people who are already prescribed allergy medications, according to a state health department spokesperson. The state is planning to allow people to buy epinephrine injections such as EpiPens without a prescription, and it is working to collect and distribute donations of medicines.

While most people are not allergic to stings from bees and other insects, irritation and pain can be intense and stings can swell and remain painful for days, according to the Mayo Clinic. And some people can have a severe allergic reaction that can lead to anaphylaxis that can cause difficulty breathing, swelling of the tongue and throat, weak pulse and loss of consciousness. In these situations, it's critical to administer epinephrine immediately.

Being stung more than a dozen times can also cause a buildup of venom in the body that can cause serious sickness that can include dizziness, fever, convulsions or vomiting.

To reduce the risk of getting stung, experts recommend wearing long and light-colored clothing that has a smooth finish, avoiding perfumes and smelly soaps and deodorants. If there's only one stinging insect around, they recommend staying calm and still, and to avoid swatting at it. But if several are stinging, they say it's better to try to quickly get indoors or into a shaded area. Bees release a chemical when they sting that attracts other bees.

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DEVI SHASTRI; ASSOCIATED PRESS, 'NC distributes Benadryl and EpiPens as yellow jackets swarm from flooding North Carolina is distributing Benadryl and EpiPens as yellow jackets swarm from Helene flooding', *Winston-Salem Journal* (online), 5 Oct 2024 4 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C043540903E838



Sheriff: Rescuers 'will not rest' - Sheriff: Rescuers 'will not rest'

October 5, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC) Author: JEFF AMY Associated Press| Section: A | 355 Words Page: 6 OpenURL Link

SEVERE WEATHER

PENSACOLA, N.C. - The search for victims of Hurricane Helene dragged into its second week Friday, as exhausted rescue crews and volunteers continued to work long days - navigating past washed out roads, downed power lines and mudslides - to reach the isolated and the missing.

"We know these are hard times, but please know we're coming," Sheriff Quentin Miller of Buncombe County, North Carolina, said at a Thursday evening briefing. "We're coming to get you. We're coming to pick up our people."

With at least 215 killed, Helene is already the deadliest hurricane to hit the mainland U.S. since Katrina in 2005, and dozens - possibly hundreds - of people are still unaccounted for.

About half the victims were in North Carolina, while dozens more were killed in South Carolina and Georgia.

In Buncombe County alone, 72 people were confirmed dead as of Thursday evening, Miller said. Buncombe includes the tourist hub of Asheville, the region's most populous city. Still, the sheriff holds out hope that many of the missing are alive.

"Your safety and well-being are our highest priority. And we will not rest until you are secure and that you are being cared for," he said.

It has been more than a week since the storm came ashore on Florida's Gulf Coast, but phone service and electricity outages continue to hinder efforts to contact the missing. That means search crews must trudge through the mountains to learn whether residents are safe.

In Florida, a dozen people died in the Tampa Bay area, with the worst damage on the narrow, 20-mile string of barrier islands that stretch from St. Petersburg to Clearwater.

"The water, it just came so fast," said Dave Behringer, who rode out the storm in his home after telling his wife to flee. "Even if you wanted to leave, there was no getting out."

Electricity is being slowly restored, and the number of homes and businesses without power dipped below 1 million on Thursday for the first time since last weekend, poweroutage.us showed.

Most of the outages are in the Carolinas and Georgia, where Helene struck after coming into Florida on Sept. 26 as a Category 4 hurricane.

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JEFF AMY; Associated Press, 'Sheriff: Rescuers 'will not rest' Sheriff: Rescuers 'will not rest", *Winston-Salem Journal* (online), 5 Oct 2024 6 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C0435461988660



Man died from hit-and-run injuries in Boone - A man died Sept. 28 in Boone after he was injured in a hit-and-run crash in Boone

October 5, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC) Author: JOHN HINTON Staff Reporter | Section: A | 117 Words Page: 3 OpenURL Link

A man died last Saturday after he was seriously injured in a hit-and-run traffic crash in Boone, authorities said.

Boone police and firefighters responded at 7:23 p.m. Sept. 28 to Deerfield Road at its intersection with Blairmont Drive on a reported hit-and-run crash involving a pedestrian, police said.

When officers arrived, they found Terry Turbyfill, 48, with life-threatening injuries at the scene, police said.

Turbyfill was taken to Watauga Medical Center, where he was pronounced dead, police said.

Tropical Storm Helene had caused flooding and other damage in Boone around the time of the crash, police Sgt. Dennis O'Neal said Friday.

"But I cannot confirm it was storm-related," O'Neal said.

Anyone with information regarding this incident can call Boone police at 828-268-6925.

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Volume 128, Issue 186

WEATHER

WSJ weather and index - WSJ weather and index

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Helene the latest disruption for high school athletes in western North Carolina. Sports, B2 © Copyright 2024, Winston-Salem Journal, Winston-Salem, NC					

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IRS provides relief for Helene victims in the Carolinas

October 5, 2024 | Yadkin Ripple, The (Yadkinville, NC) Author: Staff Report | Section: Elkin | 416 Words OpenURL Link

WASHINGTON — The Internal Revenue Service this week announced disaster tax relief for all individuals and businesses affected by Hurricane Helene, including the entire states of Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina and South Carolina and parts of Florida, Tennessee and Virginia.

Taxpayers in these areas now have until May 1, 2025, to file various federal individual and business tax returns and make tax payments. Among other things, this includes 2024 individual and business returns normally due during March and April 2025, 2023 individual and corporate returns with valid extensions and quarterly estimated tax payments.

The IRS is offering relief to any area designated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Besides all of Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina and South Carolina, this currently includes 41 counties in Florida, eight counties in Tennessee and six counties and one city in Virginia.

Individuals and households that reside or have a business in any one of these localities qualify for tax relief. The same relief will be available to other states and localities that receive FEMA disaster declarations related to Hurricane Helene. The current list of eligible localities is always available on the Tax relief in disaster situations page on IRS.gov.

The tax relief postpones various tax filing and payment deadlines that occurred beginning on Sept. 22, 2024, in Alabama; Sept. 23 in Florida; Sept. 24 in Georgia; Sept. 25 in North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia; and Sept. 26 in Tennessee. In all of these states, the relief period ends on May 1, 2025 (postponement period). As a result, affected individuals and businesses will have until May 1, 2025, to file returns and pay any taxes that were originally due during this period.

This means, for example, that the May 1, 2025, deadline will now apply to:

Any individual or business that has a 2024 return normally due during March or April 2025.

Any individual, business or tax-exempt organization that has a valid extension to file their 2023 federal return. The IRS noted, however, that payments on these returns are not eligible for the extra time because they were due last spring before the hurricane occurred.

2024 quarterly estimated income tax payments normally due on Jan. 15, 2025, and 2025 estimated tax payments normally due on April 15, 2025.

Quarterly payroll and excise tax returns normally due on Oct. 31, 2024, and Jan. 31 and April 30, 2025.

In addition, the IRS is also providing penalty relief to businesses that make payroll and excise tax deposits. Relief periods vary by state.

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Staff Report, 'IRS provides relief for Helene victims in the Carolinas', *Yadkin Ripple, The* (online), 5 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C1B5BD0D14E850



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