# Governor's Advisory Committee on Western North Carolina Recovery

Monday, November 16, 2026
10:00 am – 12:00 pm

# Today's Agenda

Call to Order, Introductory Remarks | *Sen. Kevin Corbin, Co-Chair*

Welcome / *Nora Coffey, Lake James State Park Superintendent*

Remarks / *Governor Josh Stein*

NC State Parks: Recovery Updates and Remaining Needs | *Brian Strong, Director, and Kathy Capps, Deputy Director, Division of Parks and Recreation, NC Department of Natural and Cultural Resources*

US Forest Service: Good Neighbor Agreements for Recovery Efforts | *James Melonas, Forest Supervisor, National Forests in North Carolina, US Forest Service*

Outdoor Economic Recovery in Western North Carolina | *Amy Allison, Director, NC Outdoor Economy Office, NC Department of Commerce*

Recovery Updates / *Matt Calabria & Emily Gangi, GROWNC*

Wrap Up & Next Steps / *Matt Calabria, GROWNC*

Adjourn

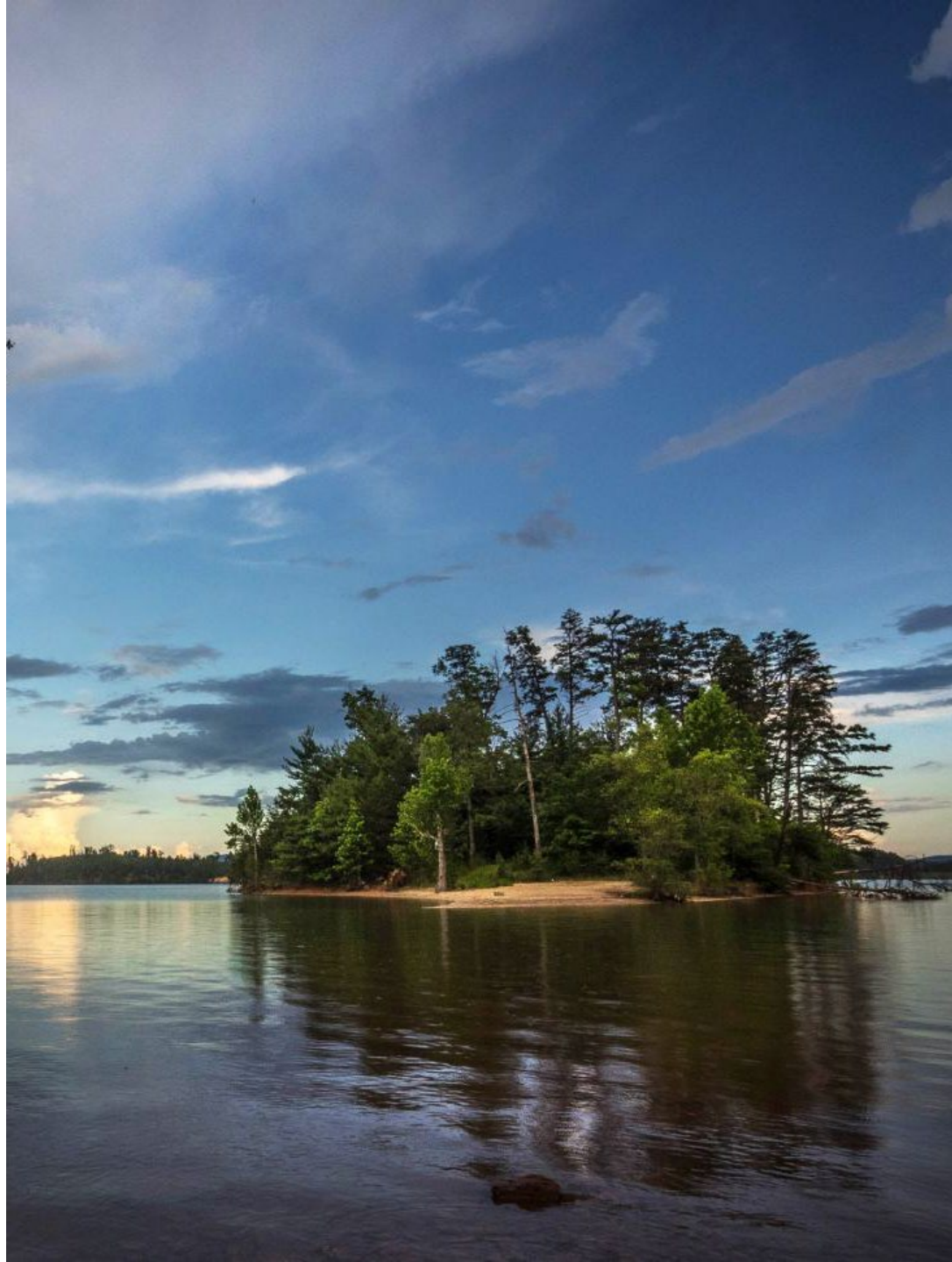


*Photo: Lake James State Park, NC Department of Natural and Cultural Resources*

# Remarks

## Governor Josh Stein





NORTH CAROLINA STATE PARKS

Naturally Wonderful

DNCR

North Carolina Department of Natural & Cultural Resources

# Helene Recovery Update

*Brian Strong, State Parks Director*

Lake James State Park | top left: swim beach, October 2024 | top right: swim beach repairs, June 2025 | center: fishing dock, April 2026 | bottom left: accessible kayak program with Waypoint Adventure, July 2026 | bottom right: Schools in Parks Big Canoes field trip, April 2026

# State Parks Recovery: Overview




Chimney Rock State Park, left to right: December 2024 | Spring 2025 | Summer 2025

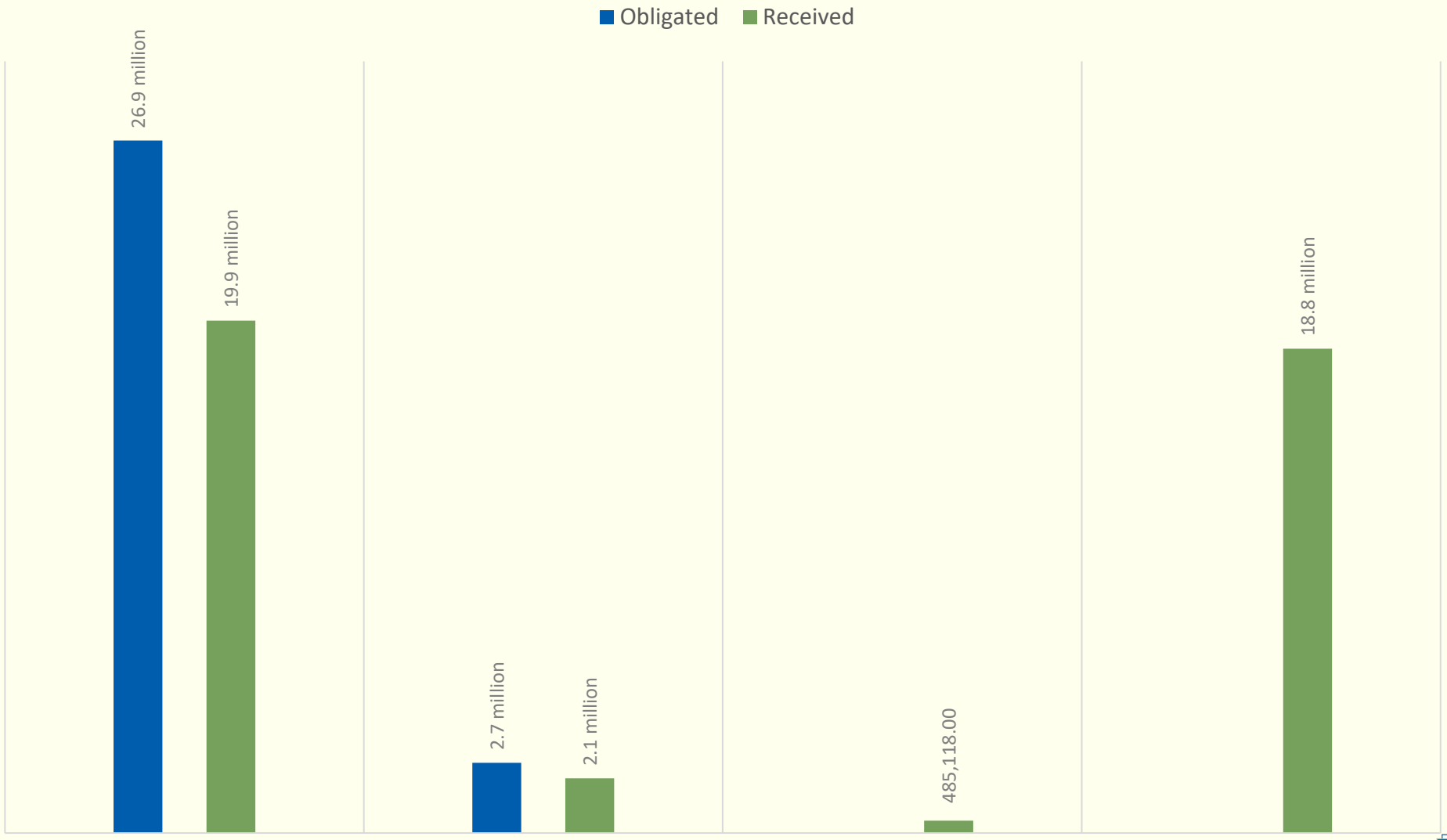
**16 of 16**
impacted state parks at least partially reopened

**301 of 315**
miles of trails cleared and reopened

**0 of 11**
impacted bridges repaired*

** Temporary bridge at Chimney Rock completed*

## RECOVERY FUNDING BY SOURCE




**$41.3 million received of $111.9 million projected cost**

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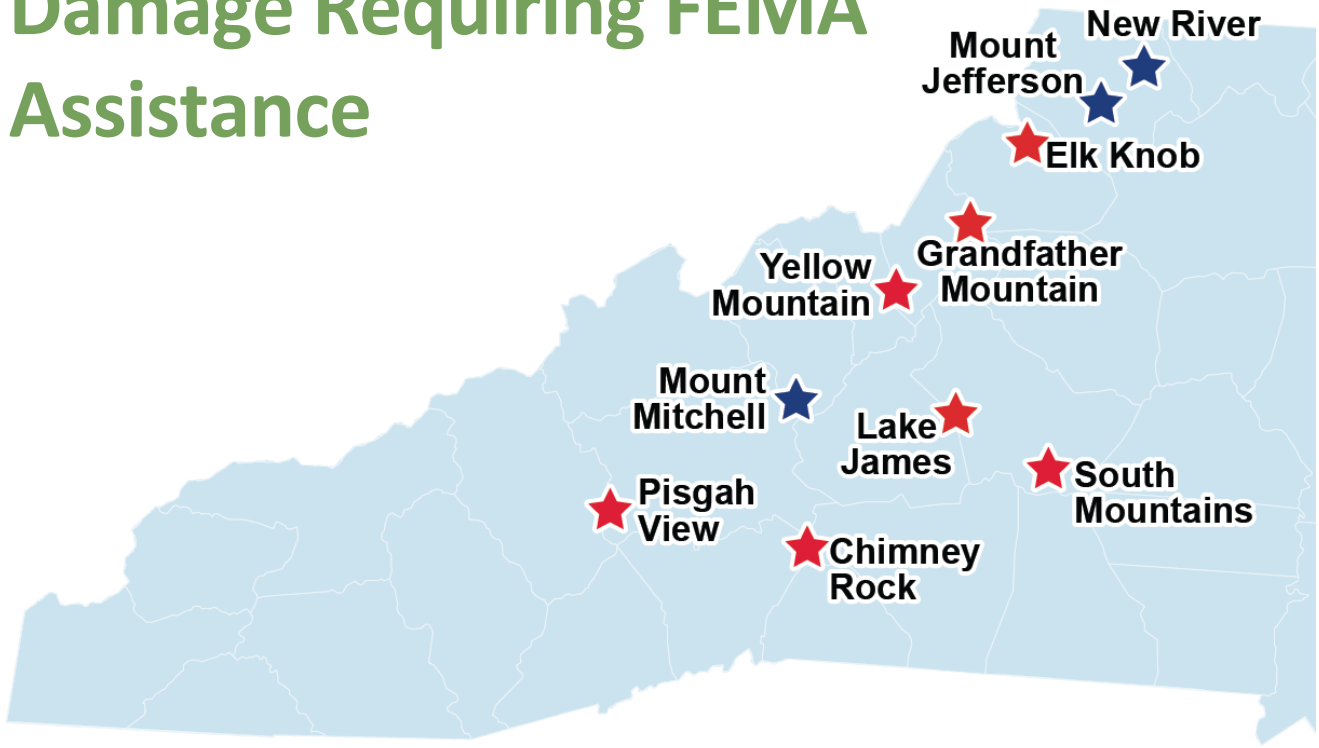
# Parks with Significant Damage Requiring FEMA Assistance




★ State parks with FEMA projects

★ State parks with FEMA projects totalling over $1 million in projected cost

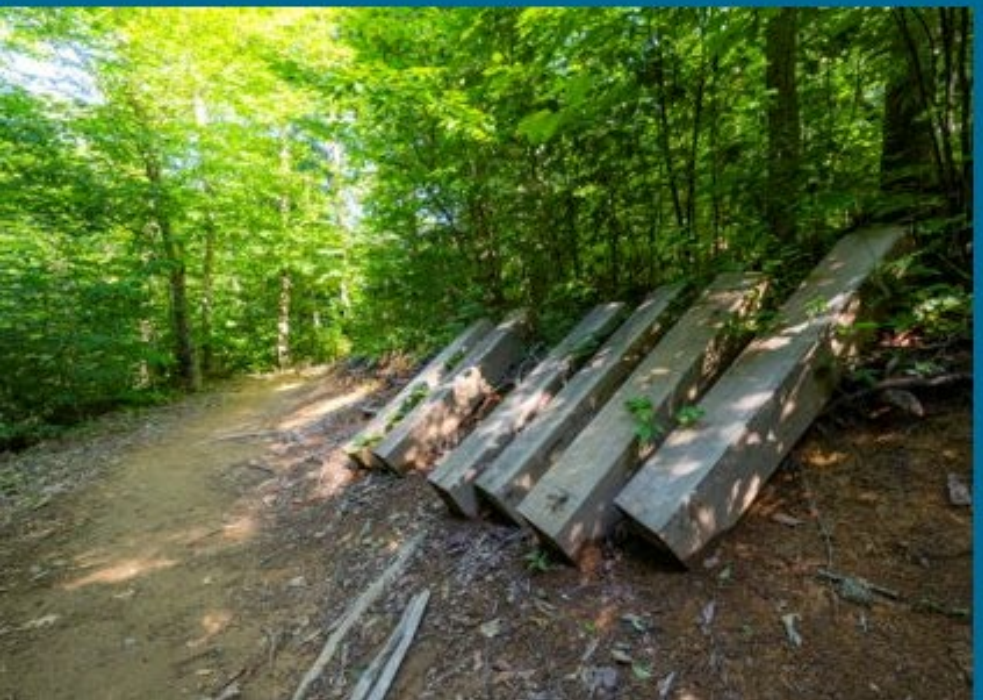


Clockwise from top left: Grandfather Mtn, Mt Mitchell, Crowders Mtn, Mt Jefferson, Rendezvous Mtn

# Grandfather Mountain State Park Profile
# Trail Reopening

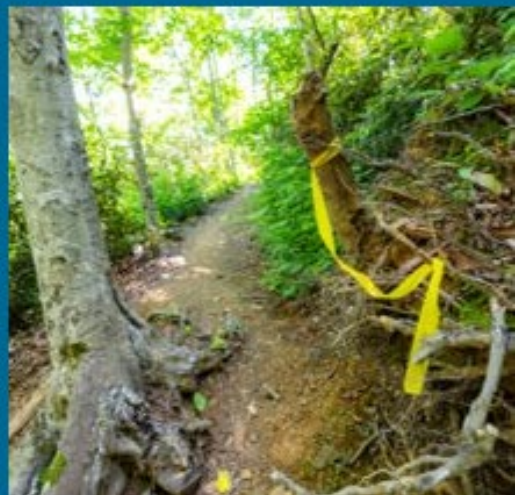










# 2026 Progress

Well house at New River State Park repaired

All roads within Mount Mitchell State Park repaired

Debris removal complete except on the New River

Advanced planning completed and underway for several larger projects

Most FEMA projects either obligated or closed out, except for 3 in final stages of formulation

# Challenges

Visitation to Chimney Rock remains low

Continued closure of Parkway impacting visitation to Mount Mitchell

Project negotiations pushing back start dates

Public frustration with lack of visible progress

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Natural & Cultural Resources

NORTH CAROLINA
STATE PARKS

Naturally Wonderful



# US Forest Service Good Neighbor Agreements in WNC

James Melonas, US Forest Service



USDA Forest Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

# STRENGTH THROUGH PARTNERSHIP:

Supporting Hurricane Helene Recovery on WNC's National Forests



# What is the Good Neighbor Authority?

- First authorized in the 2014 Farm Bill
- Allows the Forest Service to enter into cooperative management agreements with state, county and tribal governments
- Provides federal funding to address issues such as watershed management, invasive species mitigation and fuel reduction.



# Our GNA Partners

NORTH CAROLINA
Natural Heritage Program
SCIENCE GUIDING CONSERVATION

NORTH CAROLINA
Wildlife
RESOURCES COMMISSION

NORTH CAROLINA
FOREST SERVICE
NC

DNCR North Carolina Department of Natural & Cultural Resources

SEAL OF THE EASTERN BAND OF CHEROKEE INDIANS
MARCH 11, 1889

THE GREAT SEAL OF THE STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
MAY 20. 1775
APRIL 12. 1776
ESSE QUAM VIDERI

NORTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT of COMMERCE

# North Carolina Natural Heritage Program

## $10.19 million through June 2035

- Develop action plans for habitat and species restoration
- Conduct area and species surveys across impacted ecosystems
- Assess ecological damage and species population impacts
- Map species and monitor biological conditions



# NC Wildlife Resources Commission

## $290.3 million through September 2035



- Largest GNA in Forest Service history
- Repair hurricane-damaged roads, bridges, trails, and recreation sites
- Restore aquatic and terrestrial habitats, including streambanks and trout stocking

# NC Outdoor Economy Office

## $7.7 million through September 2036

- Restore trail and recreation infrastructure
- Develop statewide recreation hub website and signage
- Expand youth corps, skills training, and certification programs



# Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians

## $1.19 million through October 2035




- Hurricane Tribal Project Coordinator
- Coordinate multi-government and tribal engagement
- Identify, plan, and monitor recovery projects
- Support emergency response and compliance oversight
- Provide cultural and technical guidance for restoration

# Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians

## $3.9 million through September 2030

- EBCI Fire Module
- Hire and train tribal wildland fire personnel
- Conduct hazardous-fuels mitigation and thinning
- Perform prescribed fire operations
- Ensure equipment and safety compliance
- Manage logistics for fire-adapted forest restoration



# North Carolina Forest Service

## $64.4 million through September 2036



- Provide training for cooperators and rural fire departments
- Implement hazardous-fuel reduction across forest
- Build fuel breaks and conduct prescribed fire operations

# NC Dept. of Natural & Cultural Resources

## $3.1 million through July 2031

- Strengthen stewardship of cultural and watershed resources
- Assess damage to historic structures and archaeological sites



# Additional Agreements Supporting Helene Recovery

**$34,502,826**
**Awarded - Active**
**Until 06/15/2030**

**$83,711,026**
**Awarded - Active**
**Until 09/25/2036**

**$60,000,000**
**Awarded - Active**
**Until 09/17/2035**

**$58,233,706**
**Awarded - Active**
**Until 09/21/2031**






# Any Questions?





# Outdoor Economic Recovery in WNC

Amy Allison, NC Department of Commerce



# North Carolina Outdoor Economy Office: Recovery Update

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COMMERCE



# Outdoor Economy Office: Areas of Focus

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE TRAINING

CONSERVATION AND STEWARDSHIP

PUBLIC HEALTH AND WELLNESS

OPPORTUNITY AND EXPERIENCE



# Economic Impact of Outdoor Recreation in North Carolina

NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT of COMMERCE

IN 2024, OUTDOOR RECREATION GENERATED

**$17.8 BILLION**

IN ECONOMIC IMPACT FOR **NORTH CAROLINA**

2.1% OF GDP

**155,462 JOBS**



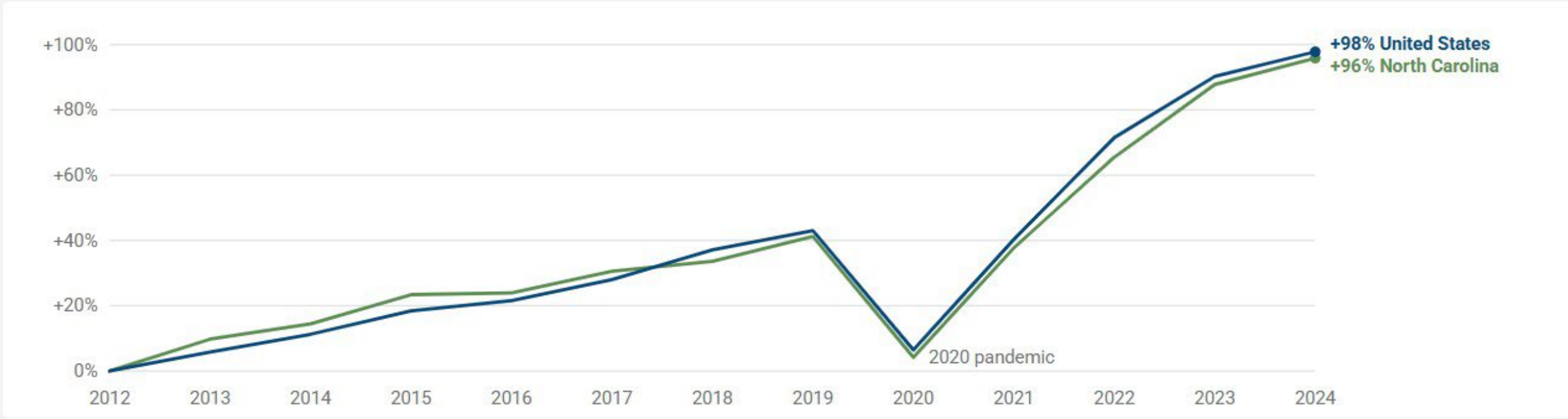
TOP ACTIVITIES IN THE STATE BY **ECONOMIC IMPACT**

- Boating/Fishing
- RVing
- Hunting/Shooting/Trapping
- Climbing/Hiking/Tent camping
- Motorcycling/ATVing

**DATA: OUTDOOR RECREATION ECONOMIC STATISTICS**
U.S. BUREAU OF ECONOMIC ANALYSIS, 2024

# Growth Since 2012: North Carolina and the U.S.

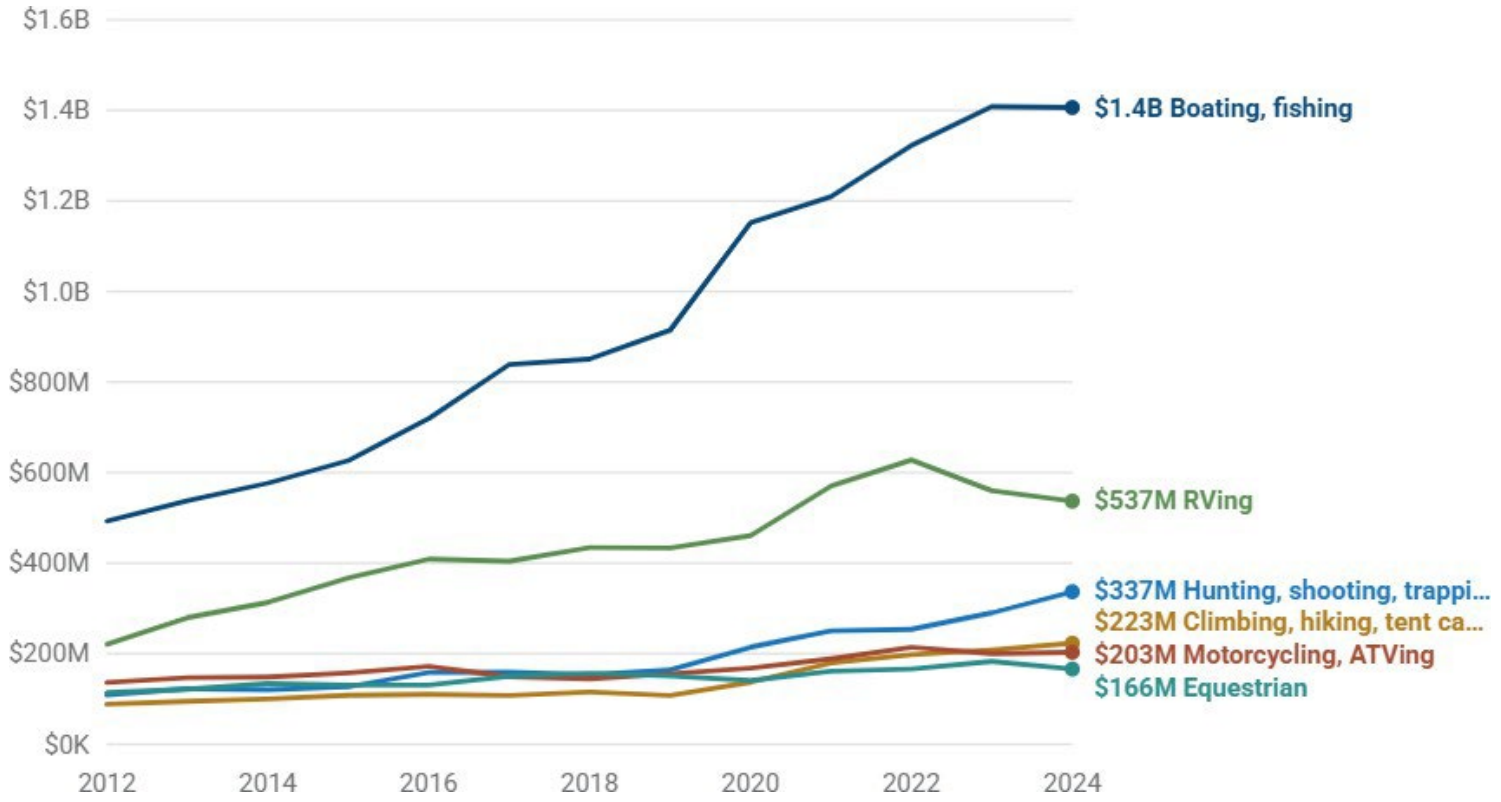
Outdoor recreation value added, percent change from 2012, in current dollars (not adjusted for inflation). By 2024, North Carolina had grown 96% and the U.S. had grown 98%.



# Economic Impact of Outdoor Recreation in North Carolina

NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT of COMMERCE

## Category Growth from 2012 to 2024



# Economic Impact of Outdoor Recreation in North Carolina

NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT of COMMERCE

## How States Compare
## Outdoor recreation value added, 2024

| | State | 2024 |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | California | $87.9B |
| 2 | Florida | $65.3B |
| 3 | Texas | $59.4B |
| 4 | New York | $37.3B |
| 5 | Illinois | $26.4B |
| 6 | Washington | $23.5B |
| 7 | Georgia | $20.7B |
| 8 | Pennsylvania | $20.4B |
| 9 | Ohio | $20.1B |
| 10 | Colorado | $18.1B |
| 11 | North Carolina | $17.8B |

# What is the Outdoor Economy?

The Outdoor Economy is a diverse and interconnected economic sector that includes the businesses, industries, workforce, infrastructure, and natural resources that support and enable outdoor recreation.





# What is the Outdoor Economy?

The Outdoor Economy spans everything from outdoor product manufacturing, retail, and tourism to trail development, conservation, land management, recreation infrastructure, workforce development, and entrepreneurship.

# What is the Outdoor Economy?

The Outdoor Economy generates jobs, attracts investment, supports small businesses, strengthens rural and urban communities, and contributes to quality of life across all of North Carolina.



# Outdoor recreation contributes to economic success in many ways.




**TOURISM**
Visitors who come to enjoy the outdoors spend money on lodging, restaurants, and other services, creating jobs and putting money into the community.

**ENTREPRENEURS + TALENT**
Access to the outdoors and a high quality of life attracts and retains new businesses and skilled workers.

**RETIREMENT + INVESTMENT INCOME**
Wealth from retirees and investors—who are drawn to live near outdoor access—helps boost the local economy.

**TAX REVENUE**
Spending at local businesses and increased property tax revenue contribute to the tax base.

**HEALTHIER RESIDENTS**
Access to the outdoors improves public health and reduces costs of chronic conditions, especially for impoverished and under-resourced neighborhoods.

**NEW RESIDENTS**
Places with recreation amenities on federal public lands have higher rates of in-migration, helping fuel jobs for teachers, doctors, construction workers, and more.

**MAIN STREET BUSINESSES**
Restaurants, grocery stores, gear stores, and other local retailers benefit from visitors and new residents.

**GEAR MANUFACTURING**
Companies that make outdoor equipment tend to locate in places with outdoor amenities, providing jobs and investment in the community.

# Good Neighbor Agreement: NC Department of Commerce and the USDA Forest Service, National Service In North Carolina

This $7.7M agreement is focused on helping Western North Carolina recover from Hurricane Helene by restoring safe, reliable access to the Pisgah and Nantahala National Forests while strengthening the connection between public lands and the gateway communities that depend on them.



# Develop, design, and install 100 interpretive signs and supporting informational materials

- Install 100 interpretive signs at strategic trailheads and recreation sites.
- Create consistent wayfinding and educational messaging across land management jurisdictions.
- Highlight local natural, cultural, and recreational assets.






# Develop and launch a regional outdoor recreation and community hub website

- Connect visitors to regional trails, recreation destinations, and experiences.
- Link recreation sites to nearby gateway communities, businesses, lodging, dining, and services.
- Promote alternative destinations when popular sites are closed for repairs.
- Provide regularly updated recreation information and business connections.

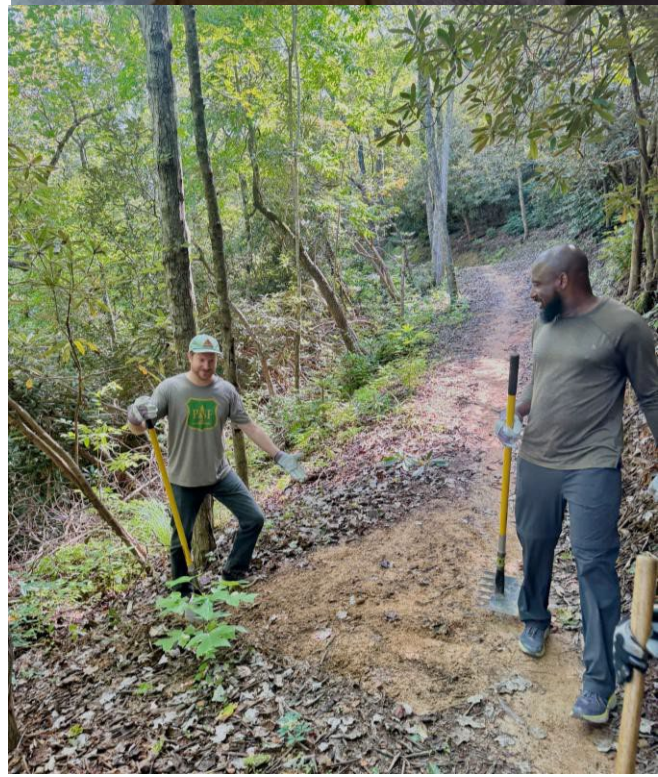





# Develop a long-term inventory of trail recovery projects, partners, and volunteer opportunities, hosted on the recreation and community hub website

- Inventory trail restoration projects, partner organizations, and ongoing recovery needs.
- Promote volunteer workdays, voluntourism experiences, and other safe public participation opportunities.
- Connect interested volunteers with project leads and provide updated information on project status and participation requirements.

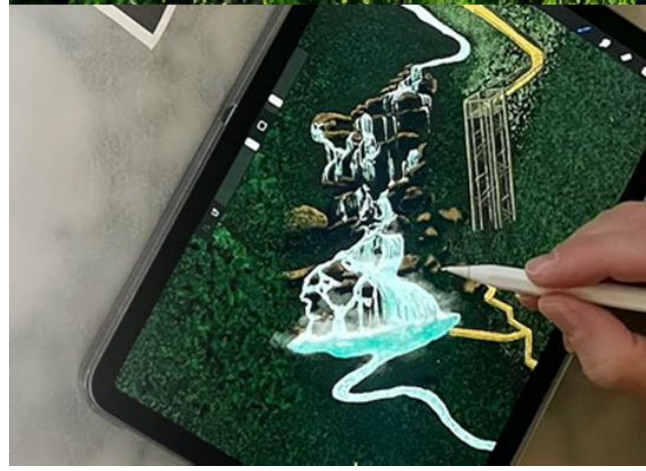




# Develop coordinated outreach materials and digital communication assets to support consistent regional recreation

- Develop shared messaging, outreach materials, signage, and digital content for regional partners.
- Equip communities and recreation partners with consistent, easy-to-share information.
- Promote responsible recreation and sustainable visitation.






# Expand trail maintenance programs to employ local youth in trail recovery and infrastructure repair across the National Forest in WNC.

- Expand conservation corps crews focused on trail maintenance, repair, and restoration.
- Employ local youth in hands-on recovery projects across the National Forests in WNC.
- Provide work-based learning, technical training, and exposure to outdoor recreation careers.
- Build practical skills in trail construction, maintenance, conservation, and land management.



# Develop youth outdoor career skills programs that engage students in trail recovery and restoration following Hurricane Helene.

- Develop and staff youth outdoor career skills programs that combine classroom education with hands-on experience.
- Engage students in supervised trail recovery and restoration projects across the region.
- Provide exposure to trail construction, maintenance, conservation, and outdoor career pathways.





# Develop hands-on training and certification to build a skilled outdoor recreation workforce.

- Partner with community colleges to deliver hands-on training and certification programs.
- Provide technical instruction in trail construction, maintenance, safety, emergency response, and outdoor skills.
- Equip workers with practical skills to support trail restoration and long-term recreation infrastructure needs.
- Build pathways into employment with trail contractors, land management agencies, outdoor businesses, and conservation organizations.

# Expand organizational capacity within the NC Outdoor Economy Office to coordinate, manage, and implement regional initiatives

- Accelerate project delivery: Ensure recovery initiatives are coordinated and implemented efficiently.
- Strengthen partnerships: Connect government, communities, nonprofits, and outdoor businesses around shared priorities.
- Leverage resources: Coordination of grants, funding opportunities, and regional investments.
- Support long-term growth: Build the organizational capacity needed to sustain and grow Western North Carolina's outdoor recreation economy.








# Implement recreation monitoring to evaluate recovery progress and measure the economic contributions of public lands in North Carolina.

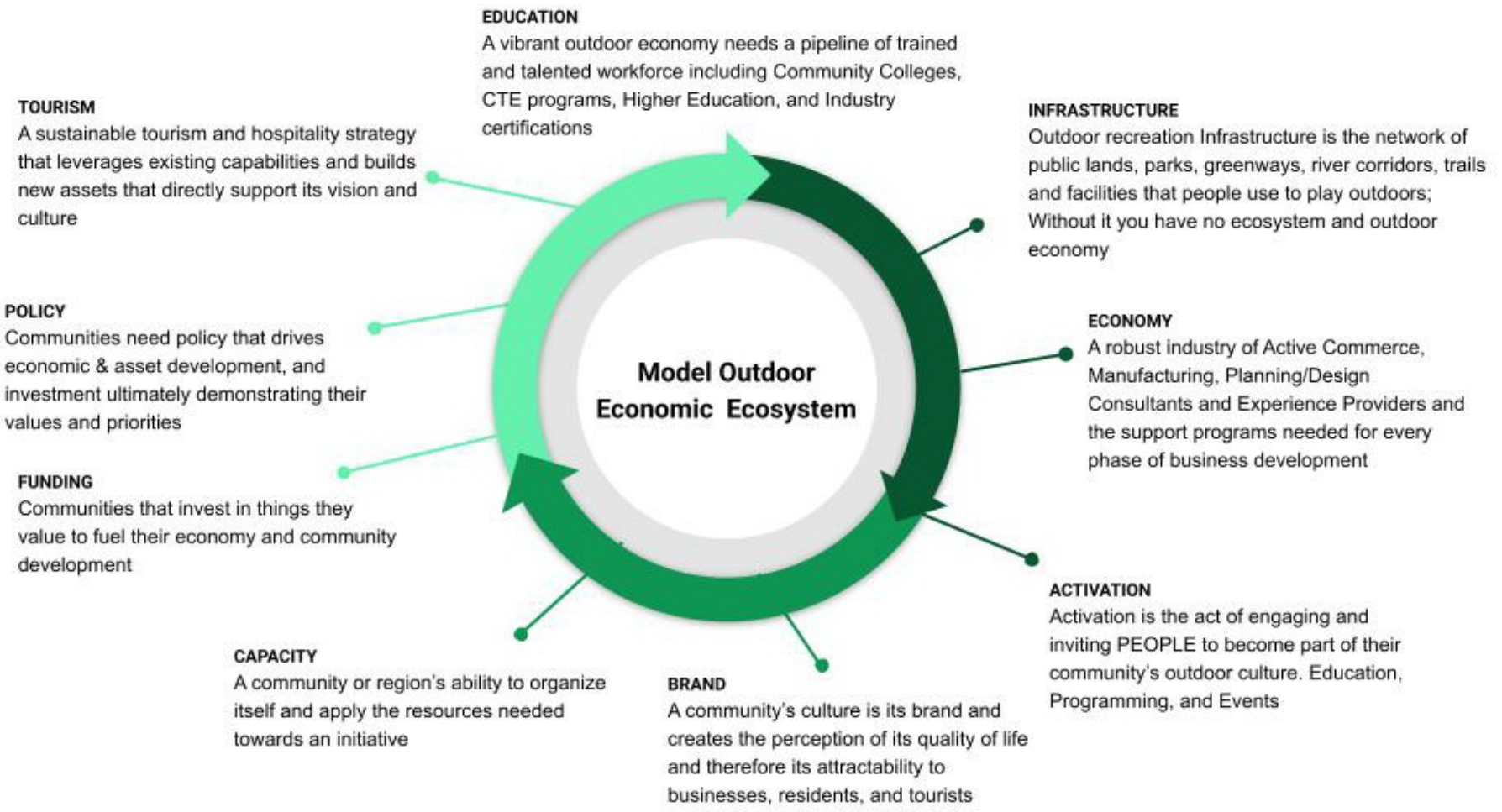
- Monitor trail use, visitation, and recreation activity throughout the recovery process.
- Evaluate project progress and identify changing visitor needs and recreation trends.
- Measure the economic contributions of National Forest recreation to surrounding communities and businesses.
- Develop data and reporting tools to communicate recovery progress and outcomes.





# Building a Model Outdoor Economic Ecosystem for WNC







# North Carolina's Outdoor Assets are Economic Development Assets

OUTDOOR ECONOMY IN NC IS A $17.8 BILLION INDUSTRY

OUTDOOR ECONOMY PROVIDES OVER 155,000 JOBS IN NC

DRIVES PROSPERITY IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

OUTDOOR ECONOMY IS SO MUCH MORE THAN TOURISM

STRENGTHENS WORKFORCE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

OUTDOOR ECONOMY DELIVERS CROSS-SECTOR BENEFITS

# THANK YOU!

Contact Information:

Amy Allison
amy.allison@commerce.nc.gov

NORTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT of COMMERCE



# Recovery Updates

Matt Calabria & Emily Gangi, GROW NC



# FHWA Announced $873 Million for Helene Road Repairs

This additional funding will support reconstruction of eight major transportation corridors damaged by Helene, including Interstate 40 through the Pigeon River Gorge.



*Phas1 1 paving underway along US 74A/NC 9 in Henderson County (From: Wright Brothers Construction Company Inc.)*



*Construction crews work to reconstruct Interstate 40 in the Pigeon River Gorge in Haywood County, N.C. (From: NCDOT)*

# Blue Ridge Parkway Repairs Nearing Completion

- The National Park Service recently celebrated completion of scheduled maintenance projects funded through the Great American Outdoors Act as well as additional Helene-related repairs.
- Helene related repairs on the final 11 miles from milepost 344 to 355 are underway and are anticipated for completion and reopening by the end of 2026.
- Blue Ridge Parkway reopenings are critical for the region during peak tourism season.



# Renew NC Single-Family Housing Dashboard

11/15/2026 7:27:20 PM
Latest Data Refresh

| Applications in Progress But Not Submitted | Total Applications Submitted | Total Active Applications | Inactive or Ineligible Applications |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2,189 | 7,924 | 2,181 | 5,742 |

## Application Submission Deadline

January 31, 2026

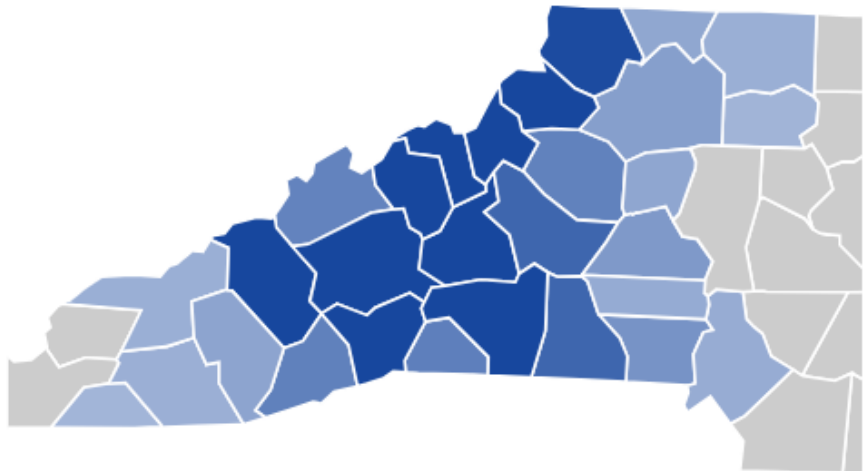
## Verified Eligible Phase and Priority

| Phase | Priority 1 | Priority 2 | Priority 3 | Priority 4 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Phase 1 | 1,049 | 167 | 88 | 14 | 1,318 |
| Phase 2 | 159 | 51 | 11 | 4 | 225 |
| Phase 3 | 160 | 7 | N/A | N/A | 167 |
| Phase 4 | 353 | 12 | N/A | N/A | 365 |

*Hover over the information bubble for Phase and Priority definitions.*

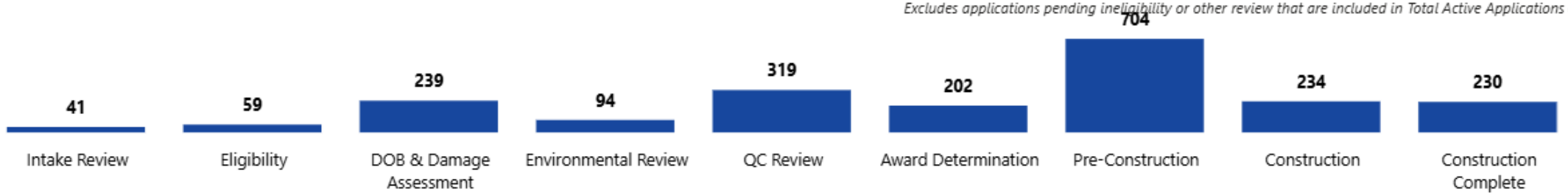
*Applications will be processed beginning with Phase 1, followed by Phase 2, etc.*

## Applications by County



## Active Applications by Workflow Status

*Excludes applications pending ineligibility or other review that are included in Total Active Applications count..*



# Applications Open: Workforce Housing for Ownership

- Who the Program Serves: The program will fund the development of affordable workforce housing units to provide homeownership opportunities to LMI households at or below 80% AMI in the HUD-MID areas.
- Funding Available: $53,380,000 in CDBG-DR funding
- Eligible Applicants: Local governments, public, private, or non-profit organizations, and Community Development Housing Organizations (CHDOs)/ Community Based Development Organizations (CBDOs). Must be located in HUD-MID areas.
- Eligible Uses of Funds: New construction of units for purchase by LMI households. Approach may include repurposing of existing buildings.
- Award range: $2 million - $5 million



Application deadline: December 14, 2026

For more info: bit.ly/RenewNC-Workforce-Housing

# FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant Program

Local governments and NCEM began processing and submitting HMGP applications within months after Helene, with the first voluntary property acquisition application submitted to FEMA in February 2025. FEMA approved the first voluntary acquisition in January 2026.

After FEMA approves an HMGP application, state officials must procure vendors to perform the work. Once vendors are procured for voluntary home acquisitions, NCEM will contact homeowners to schedule a kickoff meeting, where the future management of the project will be outlined and timelines for work will be shared.

**As of October 2026, status of applications submitted by NCEM:**

- 892 properties for voluntary acquisition, with nearly 600 approved by FEMA
- 466 properties for voluntary elevation, with zero properties approved by FEMA
- 98 infrastructure applications, with zero projects approved by FEMA

**Acquisitions have been approved by FEMA so far in** Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Catawba, Cleveland, Haywood, Henderson, Madison, McDowell, Mecklenburg, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Transylvania, Watauga, and Yancey counties.

For updates on the status of applications submitted to FEMA: bit.ly/HMGP-updates

# Expansion of Child Care WAGE$ Program in Helene-impacted Counties

Governor Stein announced an $11.3M expansion of the Child Care WAGE$ salary supplement program over three years to support the early education workforce in Helene-impacted counties.

Funding Source: American Relief Act Disaster Supplemental Funds for Child Care.

Purpose: Provide education-based, biannual salary supplements to low-paid child care providers, early childhood teachers, directors, and other staff.

Timeframe: In the three expansion counties (Ashe, Madison, and Watauga), the opportunity to apply for salary supplements will open in November 2026, and supplement checks will be available by spring 2027. Annual incentives for individuals in the 36 other Helene-affected counties are expected to begin in January 2027.



For more information: WAGE$ Expansion

# North Carolina Awarded More Than $216 Million in Rural Health Transformation Program Funding

(Brings total amount U.S. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services awarded North Carolina to more than $429 million since April 2026.

The Rural Health Transformation Program aims to improve health in rural communities and ensure high-quality care is available for years to come.

NC Department of Health and Human Services will host a public webinar on Dec. 10 to discuss progress, priorities, and what's ahead. Registration is required.

They also recently launched a new dashboard with information about projects awarded grants from this funding.



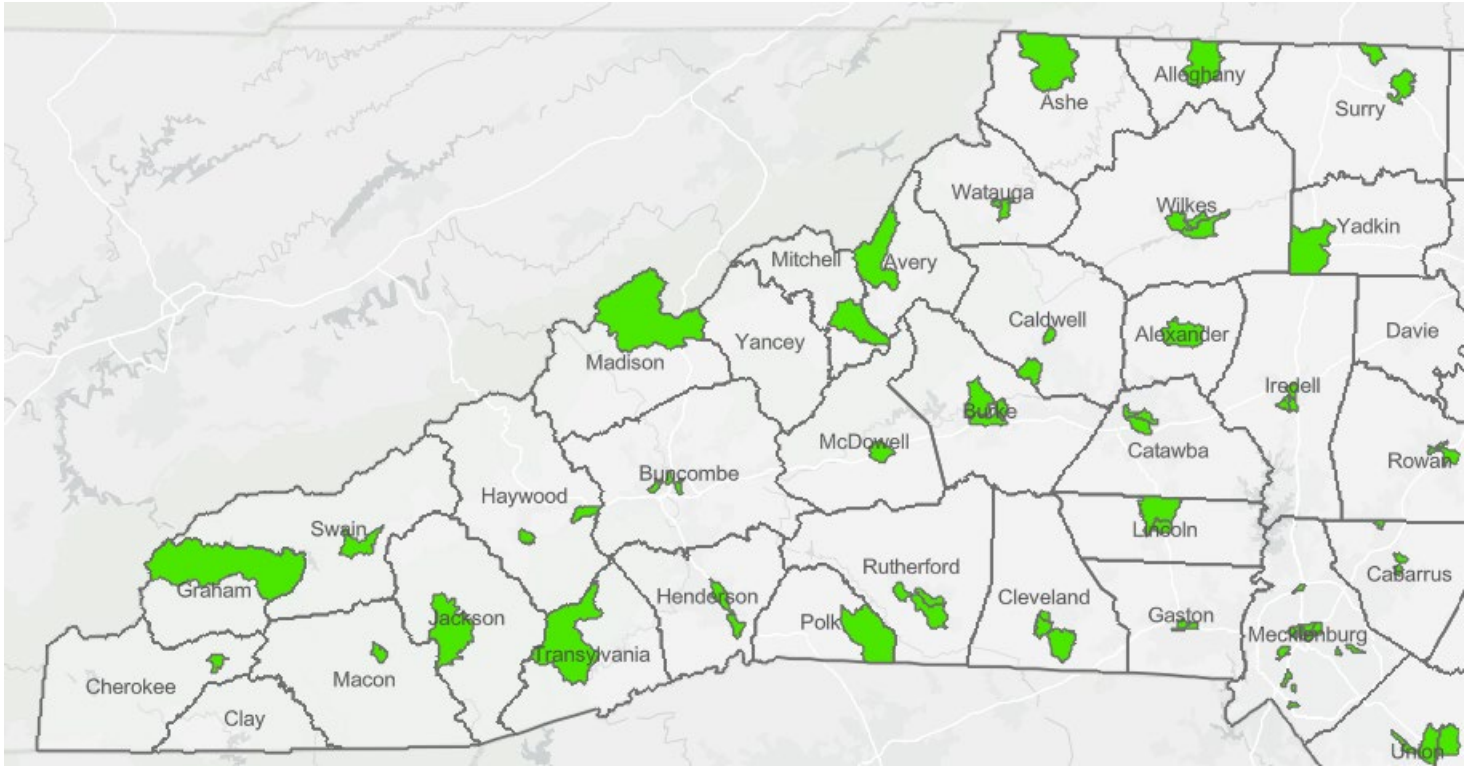

Register: https://us06web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_Ad6LYVdLS66fNVAHLaKLhg#/registration

# New Opportunity Zones Approved by US Department of Treasury

Governor Stein announced that North Carolina received certification for 204 census tracts as Opportunity Zones by the U.S. Department of the Treasury. This announcement reflects months of engagement with local leaders and communities across the state.

These eligible low-income census tracts will benefit from enhanced federal tax treatment to attract private investment, create jobs, support business growth, revitalize communities, and expand housing opportunities.

These Opportunity Zones become effective January 1, 2027.




More info: https://opportunityzonesmap.com/states/north-carolina

WNC Recovery
POWERED BY GROWNC

# Applications Open: Helene Local Government Capital Grant Program Round II

Governor Stein recently announced $65 million to support local governments and volunteer fire departments in their recovery efforts from Hurricane Helene. The Office of State Budget & Management will administer the Helene Local Government Capital Grant Program to repair, renovate, or replace infrastructure damaged by the hurricane.

Eligibility: Units of local government, federally recognized tribes, and volunteer fire departments with infrastructure needs created by Hurricane Helene. Projects must be in FEMA-designated areas and be ineligible for FEMA Public Assistance. Grant award amounts will be based on statutory caps per recipient and county.

Deadline: November 23, 2026




More info: osbm.nc.gov/grants/helene-local-government-capital-grant-program

WNC Recovery
POWERED BY GROWNC

# Grant Funding for Well and Septic Systems

The Water Well Trust provides grants and low-interest loans up to $15,000 to households with no additional costs or application fees.

Requirements:

- Mortgage or Deed must be in applicant's name
- Existing homes only – must not be new construction
- Home must be applicant's primary residence
- Must have no option to connect to a public system
- Address must be deemed rural by USDA
- Maximum household income limits apply
- Must reside in a permanent structure and have existing plumbing




More info: Water Well Trust

# Managing Disaster Recovery Projects

Part 1 Webinar: Understanding the Rules

Planning or managing a recovery construction project?
Join the UNC School of Government's Environmental Finance Center for a free,
four-hour Zoom session on the procurement and contracting rules that shape these projects.

December 11 from 12:00-4:00 p.m.

Attendees will learn about North Carolina procurement basics,
the roles of local governments and project partners,
architect and engineer selection,
alternative construction delivery methods,
and additional requirements that come with federal funding.




More info: Register to Attend

# Wrap Up and Next Steps

Matt Calabria, GROW NC

Next meeting: **Monday, December 14**, 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. (Virtual)



# Stay Connected

GROW NC is sharing recovery news, resources, progress metrics, and more.

