



Governor's Advisory Committee on Western North Carolina Recovery

Mars Hill University

September 25, 2026

10:00 am – 12:00 pm

Today's Agenda

Call to Order, Introductory Remarks | *Mayor Esther Manheimer, Co-Chair*

Welcome / *President Tracy Parkinson, Mars Hill University*

WNC Economic Recovery Plan | *Sharon Decker, Tapestry Collaborative; David Jackson & Dr. Laura Leatherwood, Co-chairs, Long-Term Economic Recovery Subcommittee*

Remarks / *Governor Josh Stein*

Impact of Helene on Small Businesses and Remaining Needs | *Matt Raker, Executive Director, Mountain BizWorks*

2025 Tourism Data & Funds for Tourism Development Authorities / *Wit Tuttell, Executive Director & Marlise Taylor, Director, Tourism Research, Visit NC*

Recovery Updates / *Matt Calabria & Emily Gangi, GROW NC*

Wrap Up & Next Steps / *Matt Calabria, GROW NC*

Adjourn

Photo: Mars Hill University (NC Independent Colleges & Universities)





Welcome

President Tracy Parkinson





Western North Carolina Economic Recovery Plan

From recovery to renewal: how the plan was built, how it works, and where you fit

Sharon Decker

Senior Advisor for Long-Term Recovery

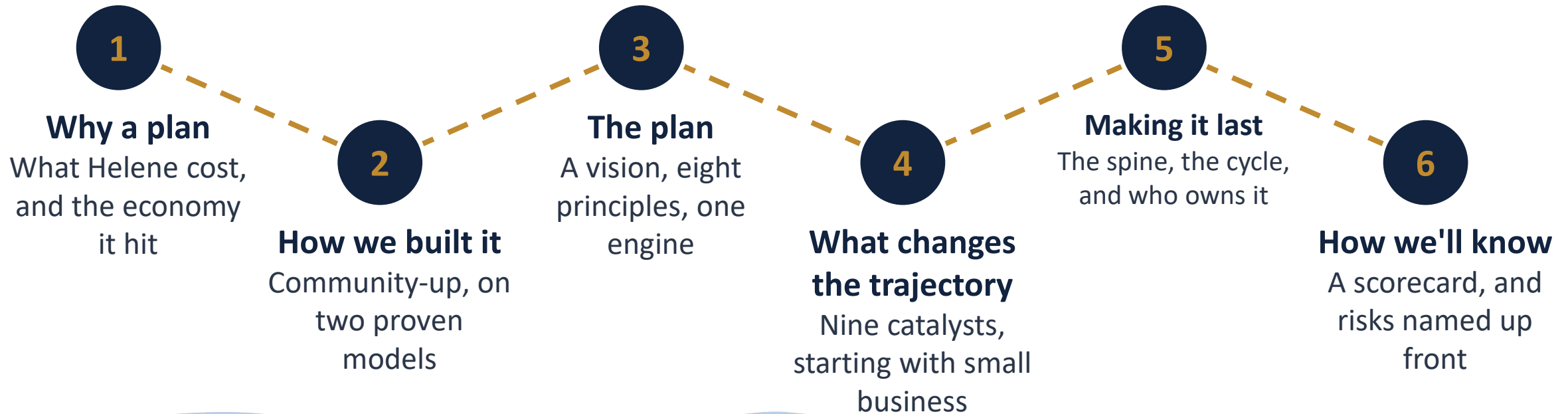
Governor's Recovery Office for Western North Carolina

September 2026



The Road Ahead

Six stops, from what the storm cost to how we will know the plan is working.



Helene Changed Western North Carolina

The plan starts with an honest accounting of the damage and what has been committed so far.

100+

North Carolinians lost their lives

\$59.6B

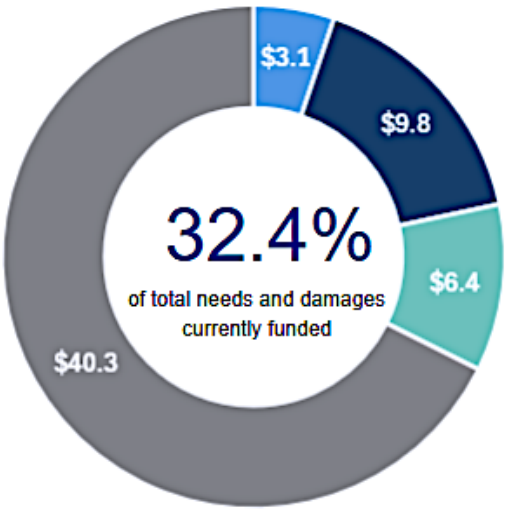
estimated damage and needs (NC OSBM)

73,000+

homes damaged or destroyed

9,000+

sites along roads and bridges damaged



THE GOVERNOR'S QUESTION

“How do we ensure that western North Carolina’s economy not only recovers from these horrific impacts but can be catalyzed to grow again?”

Gov. Josh Stein. This plan is western North Carolina’s chapter of First in Opportunity.

■ State Funding ■ Federal Funding ■ Estimated Insurance & Private Funds ■ Remaining Need

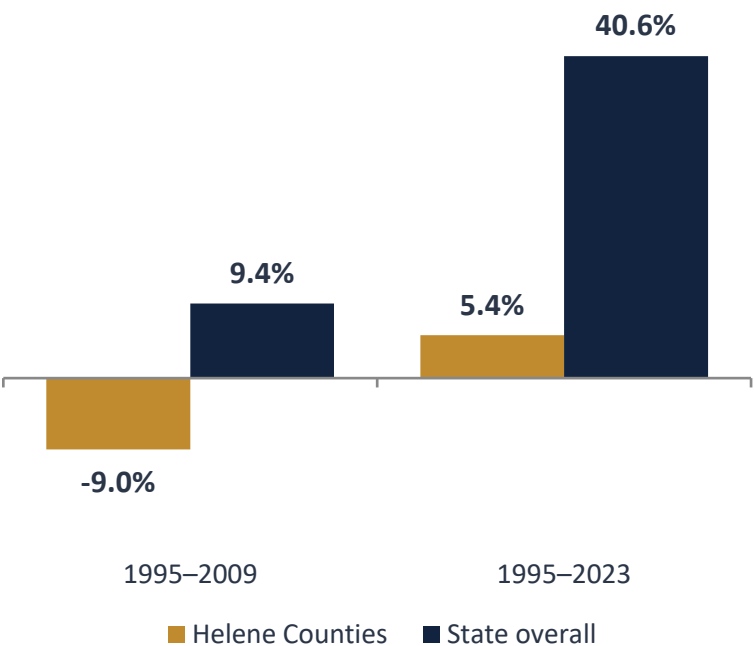
In billions of dollars

Source: [NC OSBM Helene damage & needs](#) · [FEMA DR-4827](#)

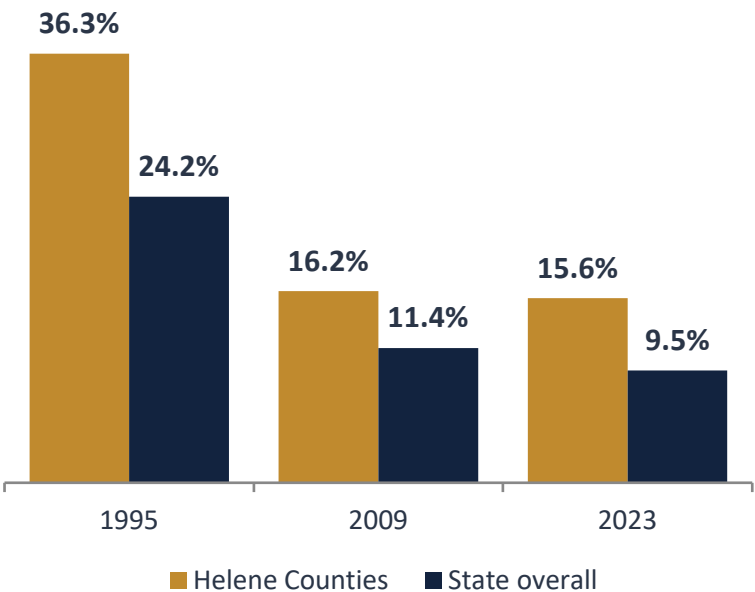
The Storm Hit an Economy Already Under Strain

Helene struck after three decades of slow job growth and manufacturing loss.

Change in total employment



Manufacturing jobs as % of total



15,987

jobs the Helene Counties would have added in 2023–25 had they grown at the state’s rate

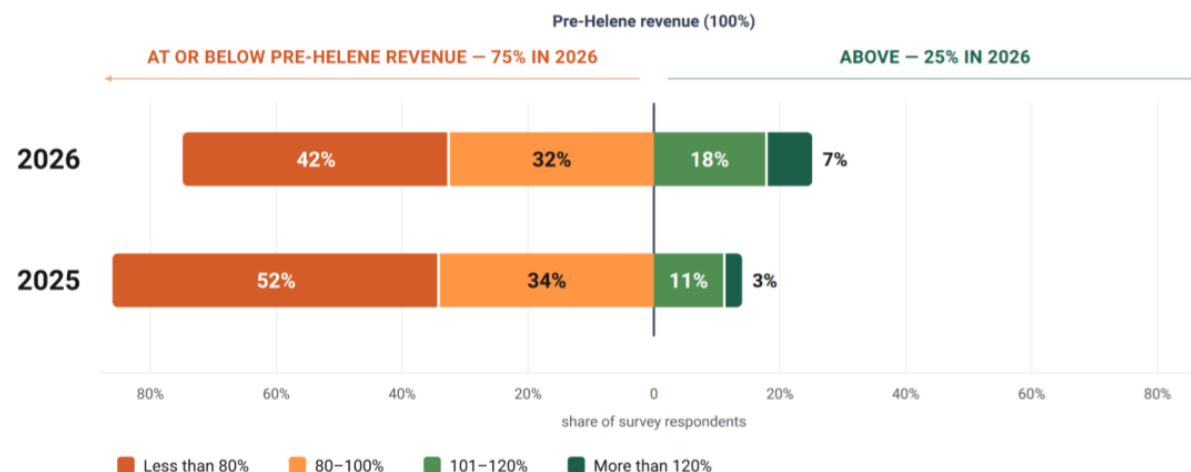
- 130,000 manufacturing jobs lost 1995–2023, about one-third of the state’s total
- Total employment 2023–25: +0.01% vs. +1.79% statewide
- Recent closures: Pactiv Evergreen mill (Haywood), Gerber Foods (Henderson)

Where the Economy Stands Today

Two years out: real progress, but not yet recovery.

3 in 4 Businesses Still at or Below Pre-Helene Levels

The percentage of businesses earning more than before rose from 14% in 2025 to 25% in 2026.



Top barriers named by owners: reduced tourism and customer traffic · working capital · finding and keeping workers · economic pressures beyond the storm.

16,000+

fewer people in the regional labor force, Apr. 2023–Apr. 2026 (–2.2%) while the state grew 0.3%

4 in 10

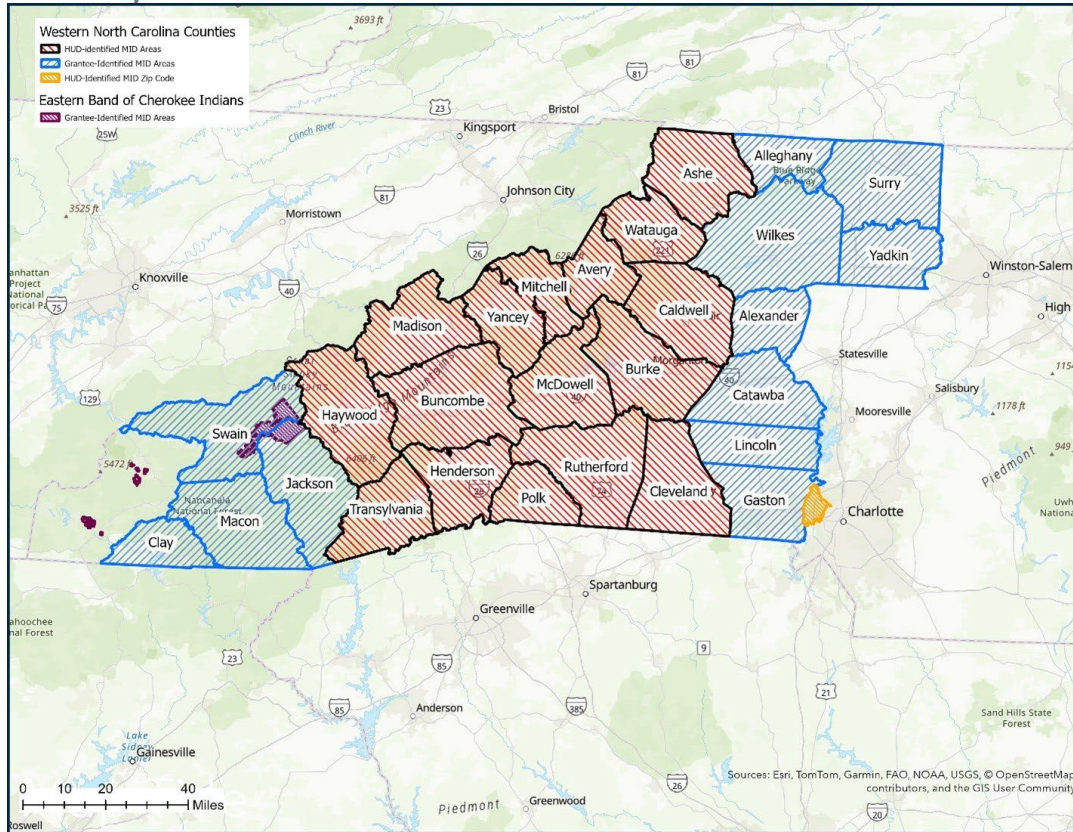
businesses still below 80% of pre-Helene revenue, down from 5 in 10 in 2025

–2.1%

Buncombe visitor spending in 2025; lodging sales 5% below 2024

Built From the Ground Up

Place-based, asset-based, community-based. The plan honors the plans communities already developed.



28 Helene Counties and the Qualla Boundary



Place-based

Focused on the 28 counties HUD and the State designated most impacted, plus the Qualla Boundary.



Asset-based

Start with what the region already has: farms, forests, craft, colleges, health systems, sites.



Community-based

County, chamber, and regional plans are inputs. Nothing is overwritten.

WHO SHAPED IT

- Long-Term Economic Recovery Subcommittee (12 members, 8 core principles)
- five Councils of Government and their CEDS
- Life sciences and Futures Factory coalitions
- Dogwood Health Trust and The Duke Endowment
- NC Commerce First in Opportunity plan
- local and tribal leaders
- Tapestry Collaborative

Two Proven Models, One Discipline

How do you get many independent actors moving toward one goal without a single boss?



Campaign planning

Military doctrine; adopted by FEMA

Ends, ways, means connect a goal to the actions and resources that produce it

Lines of effort are parallel workstreams, each aimed at part of the goal

Decisive points are milestones that unlock outsized progress

Risk is the gap between the means we have and the means we need



The Marshall Plan

Rebuilding Europe, 1948–1951

\$13.3 billion to 16 countries (about \$143 billion today)

Recipients planned together, rather than accepting a top-down allocation

Counterpart capital: public and private money aligned to that shared plan

A defined end to aid, building toward self-sustaining growth

What WNC takes from both: Communities plan together. Federal, state, philanthropic, and private capital align to that plan. The effort has a defined path to self-sustaining resilience.

The Vision and Eight Core Principles

Shaped by the Long-Term Economic Recovery Subcommittee

THE VISION

A healthy, vibrant western North Carolina that fosters an improved quality of life through environmental stewardship, community-driven initiatives, ample educational resources, and a diverse jobs base that builds on the region's traditional leadership.



Infrastructure

Resilient systems that move ideas, goods, and people



Natural resources

Protect scenic beauty and a healthy environment



Jobs & business

Diverse jobs; aerospace, life sciences, adv. manufacturing



Housing

Repair, replace, restore, with creative affordable solutions



Education & workforce

Strong child care, schools, and workforce institutions



Health care

Affordable, quality care throughout the region



Arts & culture

Elevate arts & heritage; grow the creative & tourism sectors

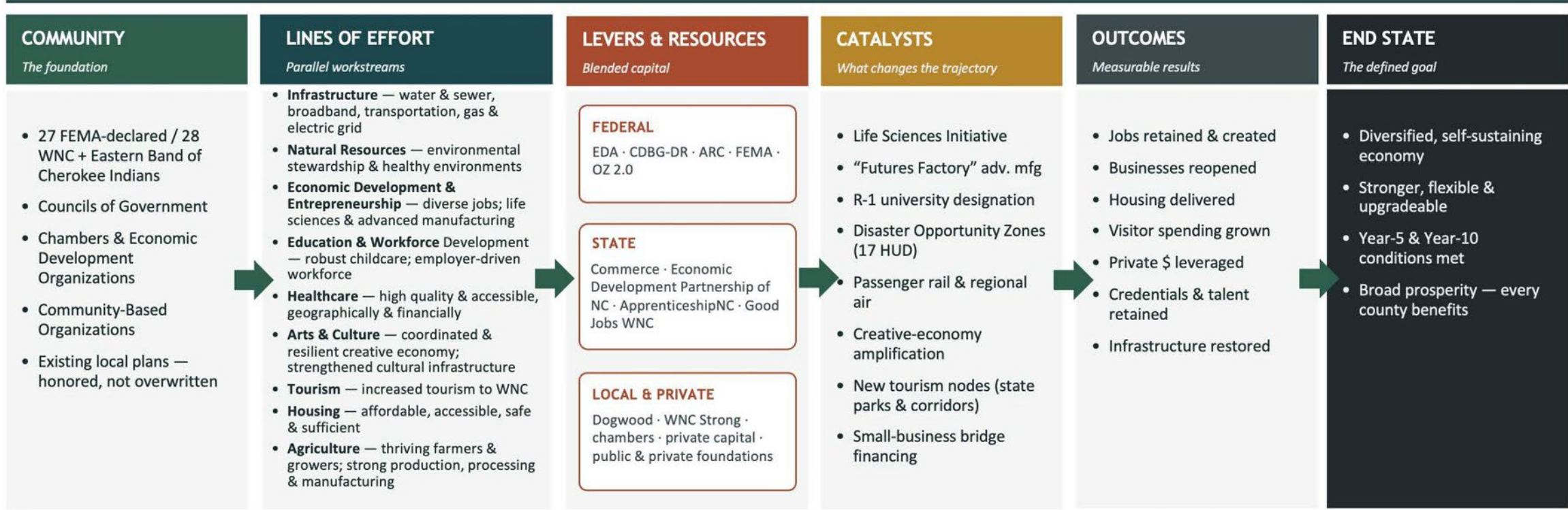


Agriculture

Protect farm livelihoods; expand processing & agritourism

The Engine: How the Plan Works

Read left to right. Community priorities go in, a renewed economy comes out, and the cycle fires again.



← **FEEDBACK LOOP** Outcomes feed the CEDS evaluation framework, which re-informs community priorities — so the plan continuously re-aligns, learns, and upgrades. →

RENEWAL SPINE

LTRGs → COADs. Long-Term Recovery Groups mature into standing Community Organizations Active in Disaster — a permanent readiness capability that re-activates when the next shock strikes.

PHASING — A DEFINED ARC TO SELF-SUSTAINING GROWTH



Apr 2025 CDBG-DR plan · Jun 2025 Chimney Rock reopens · Aug 2026 Corridor K · Jan 2027 OZ 2.0 designations

Nine Lines of Effort, Three Foundations

Parallel workstreams, each led at the community level and aligned across the region.

 Infrastructure Sites, water/sewer, grid, broadband, roads, built to last	 Natural resources Stewardship; productive use of forests & minerals	 Economic development Small business and export industries
 Housing Affordable, accessible, safe housing of all types	 Education & workforce Child care, schools, and employer-led training	 Health care High-quality, affordable, accessible care
 Arts & culture A resilient creative economy	 Tourism New and returning visitors across the region	 Agriculture Production, processing, agritourism

UNDER EVERY LINE

-  **Resilience**
Rebuild so the next disaster does less damage and costs less.
-  **Broadband**
98% of WNC homes and businesses connected by Dec. 2028; 100% by Dec. 2030.
-  **Leveraged capital**
Stack public and private dollars around regional priorities.

Catalysts: What Changes the Trajectory

Each one is real: an active project, a funded award, or an opportunity communities already put forward.

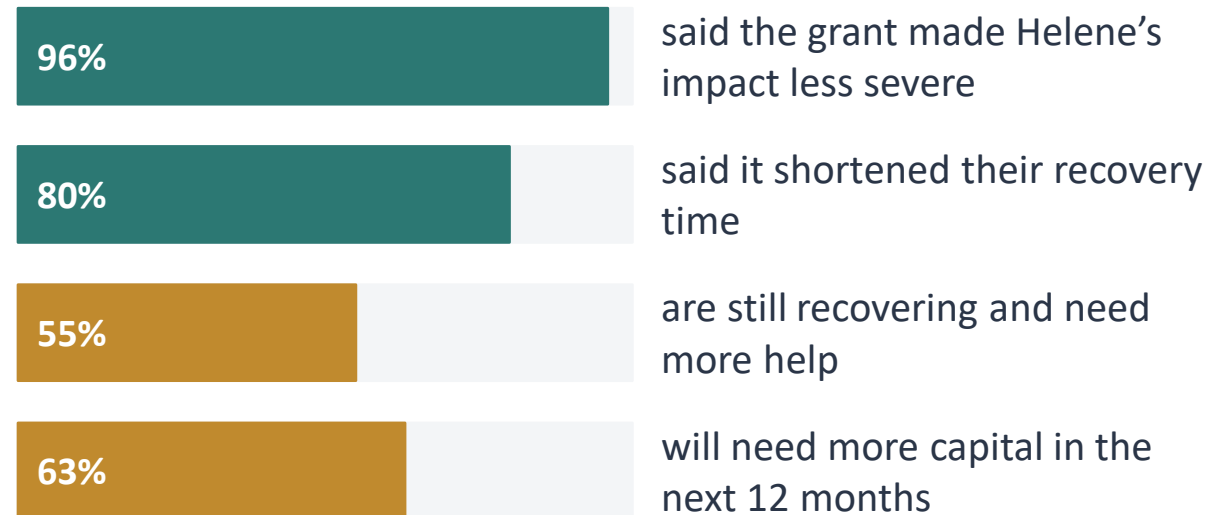
FUTURES FACTORY \$29.2M EDA award (July 2026): 70,000 sq. ft. adv-manufacturing center in Buncombe County	LIFE SCIENCES \$62.5M RTI-led regional proposal to EDA: sites, wet labs, startup support	SMALL BUSINESS \$60M Proposed Commercial Space Fund: \$10M public leveraging up to \$50M private
CONNECTIVITY \$1.8B I-26 Connector (done 2031); Corridor K; Salisbury–Asheville rail by 2035	TOURISM NODES \$17.8B Outdoor recreation economy; state parks as anchors for gateway towns	CREATIVE ECONOMY \$3.05B In 2025 sales and 34,796 jobs; Etsy and Center for Craft investing \$10M
WORKFORCE 1,200 Jobs targeted by Good Jobs WNC across 11 colleges and 23 counties	NATURAL RESOURCES Spruce Pine World’s leading source of ultra-high-purity quartz; next: downstream manufacturing	AGRICULTURE & LEADERSHIP NCAMPI Value-added farm processing; a pipeline of cross-sector regional leaders

Small Business: The Center of Gravity

Access to capital is still the number-one problem. The plan proposes two tools to fill the gap.

\$55M to 2,182 small businesses

WNC Small Business Initiative: \$20M state + \$35M philanthropic.
What 200 recipients told us afterward:



Impact **Future needs** · *Average loss per business: \$322,000, roughly six years of profits*



PROPOSAL 1

Small-business relief grants

- Up to \$50K for businesses with $\leq$ \$2.5M revenue; up to \$25K for $\leq$ \$1M
- Administered by a CDFI such as Mountain BizWorks
- Funded with philanthropy and partners



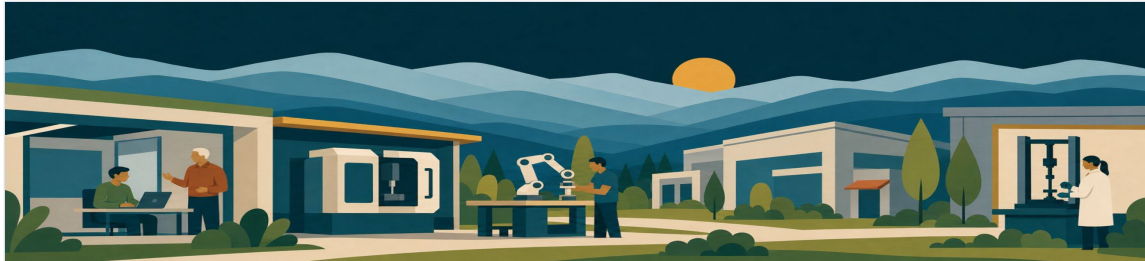
PROPOSAL 2

\$60M Commercial Space Fund

- \$10M public commitment leveraging up to \$50M from banks, philanthropy, and impact investors
- Patient, low-cost capital; owners pass savings to tenants as affordable rent
- Reopens damaged buildings and revives rural Main Streets

What Holds It Together

A standing recovery network, and an alignment tool the region already uses.



THE RESILIENCE SPINE

Recovery groups become a permanent capability

19 LTRGs

serving 20 counties today



COADs

standing, tied to local emergency management

They persist between disasters and reactivate the moment the next one hits. Recovery stops being a one-time event.

THE HOW: CEDS

Align many plans without overwriting any

Foothills Regional Commission

High Country COG

Land of Sky Regional Council

Southwestern Commission

Western Piedmont COG

ARC state strategy



**One common
operating
picture**

A CEDS is the regional strategy EDA requires for most investment, and ARC uses the same structure. GROW NC convenes; each community leads its priorities.

A Cycle, Not a Chart

A defined arc from emergency support to self-sustaining growth, anchored to real decisive points.



Built to learn

Outcomes feed the CEDS evaluation, which informs community priorities. Like the Marshall Plan, aid is designed to wind down as the region sustains itself.



Recovery doesn't pause

Urgent recovery work continues at full speed while long-term growth gets underway. The two run in parallel, not in sequence.

Source: WNC Economic Recovery Plan §3.1, §3.3, §6, §7.3, §10 · [HUD/NC Commerce CDBG-DR Action Plan](#) · [NCDOT I-26 Connector](#) · [NCDOT Corridor K](#) · [NCDOT Rail Division](#)

Making the Engine Last

Three commitments that keep it running after emergency funding ends.



Prosperity that reaches every county

- Every county, rural tracts, lower-income households, and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians benefit measurably
- Not just the metro cores around Asheville and Hickory
- Rural Opportunity Zone step-up, regional air, and a craft co-op push activity outward by design



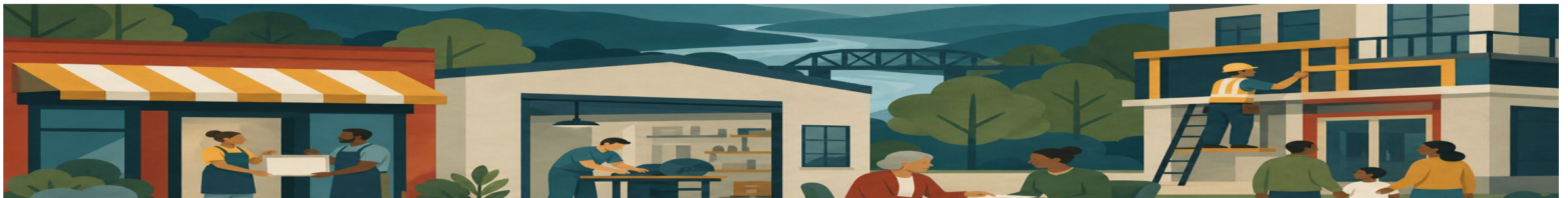
A light steering body

- GROW NC convenes the Advisory Committee, COGs, EBCI, Commerce, EDPNC, philanthropy, and chambers of commerce
- Align the CEDS and maintain the scorecard



Financing tools ready before the money

- New Opportunity Zones take effect Jan. 1, 2027, with a 30% rural step-up
- Pursue Disaster Opportunity Zone status for the 16 HUD most-impacted counties
- A WNC-wide Opportunity Fund and a regional Tax Increment Financing district



Source: WNC Economic Recovery Plan §7 (GROW NC, Sept. 2026) · [Opportunity Zones, IRS](#) · [EDA CEDS content guidelines](#)

Draft plan · September 2026

How We'll Know: The Scorecard

Directional Year 5 and Year 10 targets. A shared definition of progress, not a list of promises.

Line of effort	Baseline (post-Helene)	Year 5	Year 10
Economic development	68% of businesses at or below break-even	Fewer than 20% below break-even; net business creation positive	Increased sector diversity; more EDPNC projects selected
Education & workforce	Labor force decline; child care programs closed	1,200+ credentials via Good Jobs WNC; labor force growing at state rate	Self-sustaining pre-K–university pipeline
Infrastructure	Hundreds of roads damaged; no western passenger rail	Roads and bridges back to pre-Helene levels; rail design funded	Salisbury–Asheville rail operating; regional air
Housing	Thousands of units damaged or destroyed	All damaged units rebuilt to a resilient standard	Net new affordable and workforce housing
Tourism	Tourism jobs and revenues down	Visitor spending and hospitality jobs restored	Visitor demand up and spread across the region
Leveraged capital	Public dollars largely uncombined	≥\$2 private or philanthropic per \$1 public	WNC-wide Opportunity Fund self-sustaining

Each line gets a directly responsible lead. The steering body validates these targets, adds more, and tracks them inside the CEDS evaluation so results flow back to communities.

Source: WNC Economic Recovery Plan §8, Table 1 (excerpt; full scorecard covers all nine lines of effort) · [EDA CEDS evaluation framework](#)

Risks, Named Up Front

Risk is the gap between the means we have and the means we need. Naming it lets us manage it.

1 Workforce and labor shortages Good Jobs WNC, community colleges, UNC System, ApprenticeshipNC	5 Insurance and fiscal strain Resilient standards; parametric insurance; a quick-access cash fund for local governments
2 Permitting and regulatory delay Steering body monitors permitting and escalates blockers	6 Shifting federal priorities Anchor to “economic resilience” in the CEDS, which EDA and ARC both require
3 Construction-cost inflation Pooled public, private, and philanthropic capital; staged sequencing; local materials	7 Another natural disaster Apply lessons learned now to reduce the impact of the next event
4 Match and capacity gaps in smaller communities County technical assistance, a WNC-wide Opportunity Fund, chambers as match conveners	

Source: WNC Economic Recovery Plan §9, Table 2 (GROW NC, Sept. 2026) · [Joint Publication 5-0 \(2020\)](#)

The Plan in 30 Seconds



Western North Carolina's communities already know what they need. This plan lines those priorities up, puts federal, state, private, and philanthropic dollars behind them, and measures whether it's working. So the region doesn't just recover. It grows.

THREE THINGS TO REMEMBER

- 1 It's community-up.** Local plans are the inputs. Nothing is overwritten.
- 2 No one can fund it alone.** The target is \$2 of private or philanthropic funding for every public \$1.
- 3 It's built to learn.** A scorecard, a risk register, and a cycle.

HOW PARTNERS PLUG IN

- Tell us which line of effort your work already sits on
- Bring capital or a federal relationship to a catalyst
- Flag the gaps



Not only recovered. Renewed.

By investing in infrastructure, empowering innovators and local leaders, and making sure opportunity reaches every part of the region.

Questions and discussion · wncrecovery.nc.gov



Remarks

Governor Josh Stein





START. GROW. THRIVE.

mountainbizworks.org

Helene Impacts on Small Business & Remaining Needs

Matt Raker
Executive Director



The Scale of the Damage

\$59.6B

statewide damage &
recovery needs

\$95K

median loss per
business (avg \$322K)

42 days

median period
businesses closed

6-7 years

worth of profits
wiped out





Small Business Support: Loans



Total Provided: \$59.6M

Number of Loans: 852

Total Job Impact: 7,069+

Total Amount Requested: \$90.8M

Small Business Support: Grants



Rural Rebuilding Together
Grant Fund

\$2.3M

Bakersville, Banner Elk,
Beech Mountain, Canton,
Chimney Rock, Hot Springs, Lake Lure,
Lansing, Marshall, Newland, Old Fort,
South Toe, Spruce Pine, Todd, &
West Jefferson



\$1.29M

Chimney Rock, Hot Springs, Marshall,
Spruce Pine, and Swannanoa
Boone Area Chamber of Commerce
Hope for the High Country Program in
Watauga, Ashe, & Avery



\$14M

CDBG-DR Funding

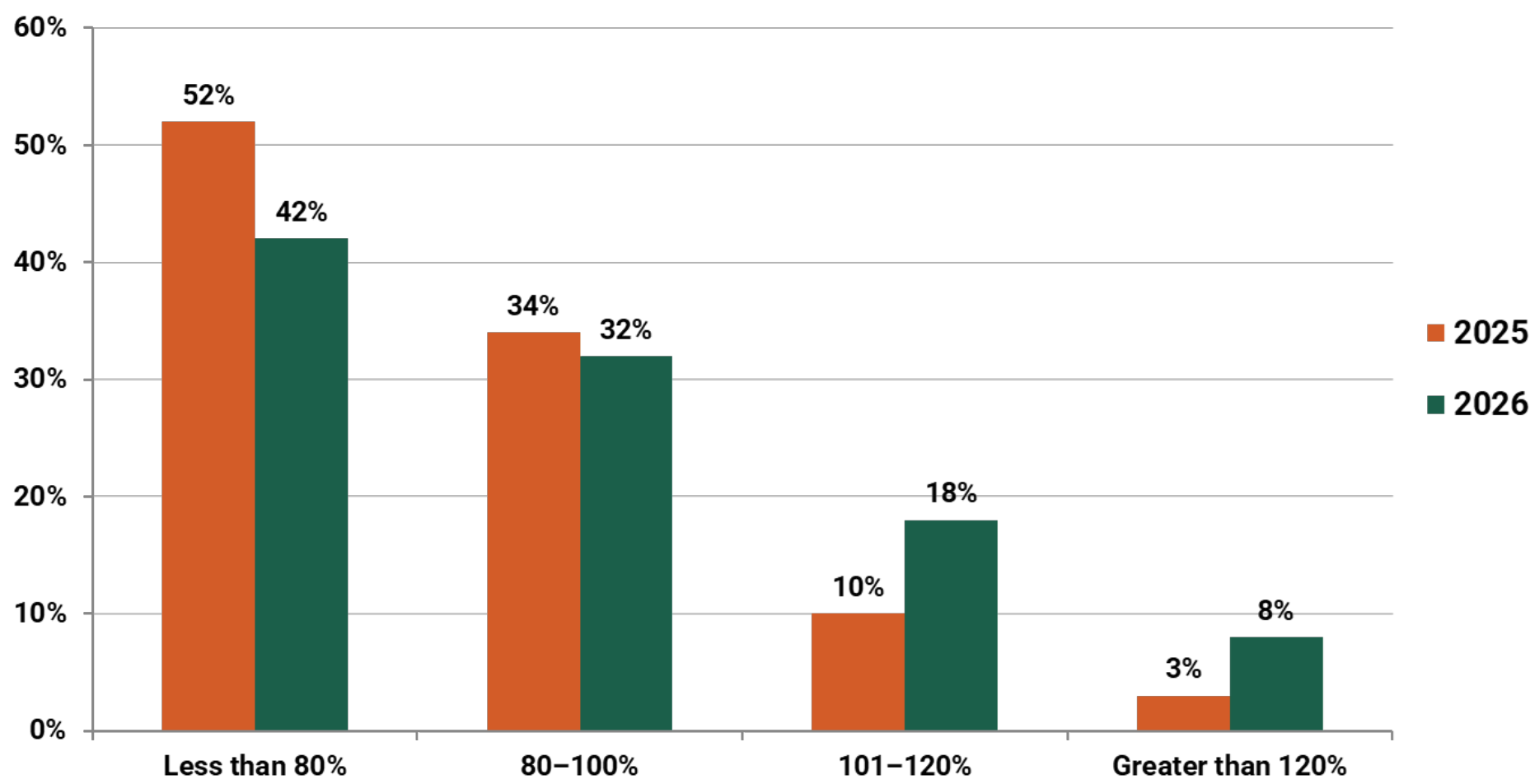
Asheville

2026

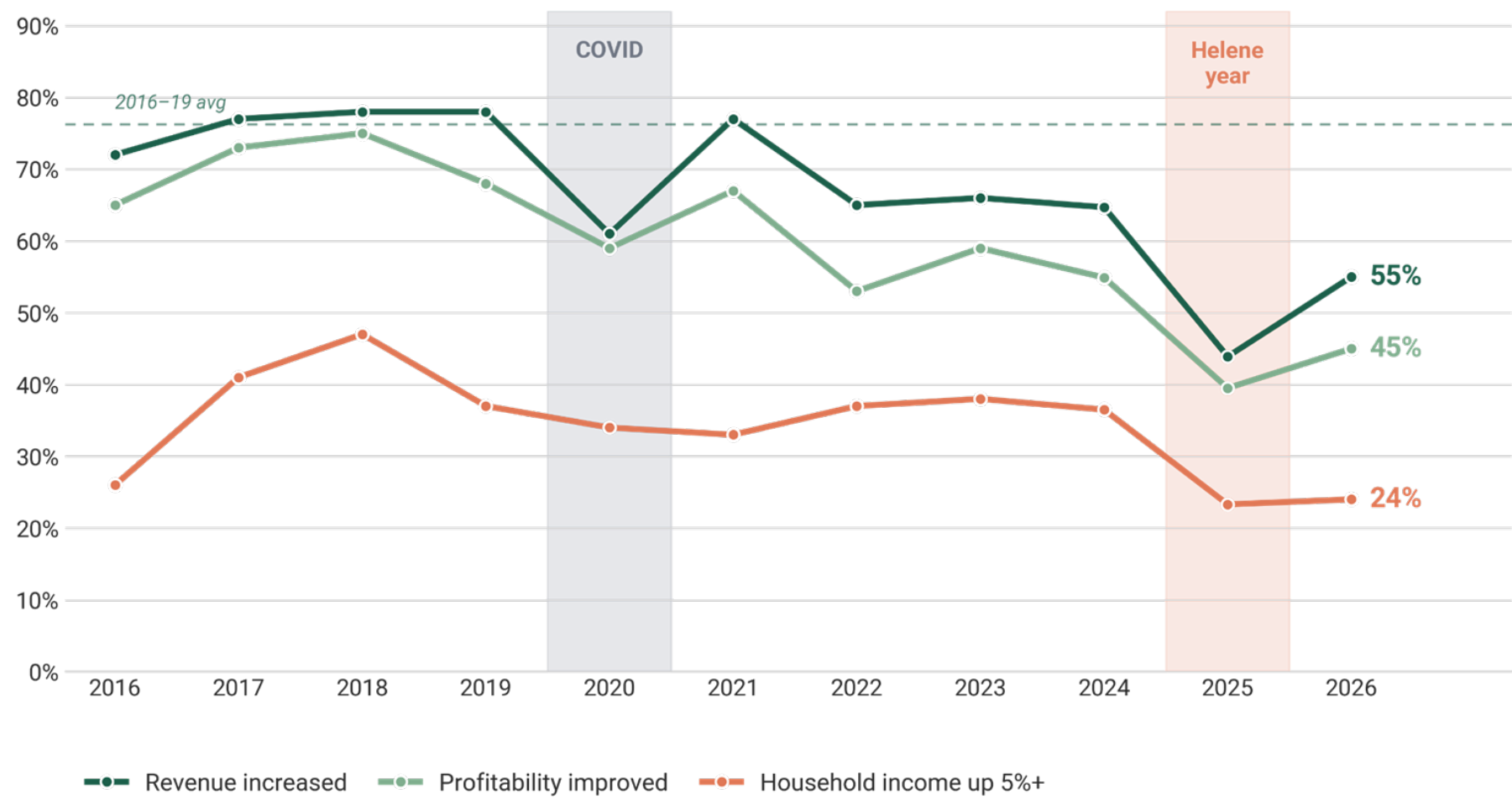
Local Business Impact Survey

*What **700+** WNC entrepreneurs told us about recovery, resilience, and what comes next*

Revenue Still Lags: 75% Below Pre-Helene Levels



One Disaster After Another



WNC Resilience



80%

**of Businesses
are Confident
They Can
Recover**

Meet the Dreamers

Stories of Resilience

Meet the Dreamer

Noah Blakely, Fox and the Fig



Spruce Pine, Mitchell County, NC

Meet the Dreamers

Tara and Eric Bechard, Wilderness Run Adventure Course



Banner Elk, Avery County, NC

The background of the slide is a dark teal color with a subtle, light-colored topographic map pattern consisting of concentric, wavy lines. The text is centered on the left side of the slide.

What Now?

The Next Phase of Recovery

Capital Landscape: A Recap



Capital Landscape: Ongoing Needs



What Could Additional Grant Funding Do?

- Maintain vital businesses with limited revenue due to infrastructure challenges
- Alleviate debt burden
- Reduce the gap between urban and rural businesses
- Infuse resources to support expanded hours and additional staff

Capital Landscape: Ongoing Needs



What Could Additional Loan Capital Do?

- Renovate, reopen, and develop commercial real estate
- Redevelop vacant or underutilized Main Street properties
- Restructure owner-occupied mortgages
- Address shortage of smaller and mid-sized manufacturing production spaces

Thank You for Your Support in Helping WNC Recover Forward.





2025 Tourism Data & Funds for Tourism Development Authorities Wit Tuttell & Marlise Taylor, Visit NC



2025 STATEWIDE VISITOR SPENDING

- **\$37.2 Billion** in Visitor Spending
(+1.3%)
- **Nearly 231,000 Jobs** (+0.3%)
- **\$1.4 Billion** in State Tax Revenues
(+2.0%)
- **\$1.3 Billion** in Local Tax Revenues
(+2.6%)



COUNTY LEVEL VISITOR SPENDING — 2025 A PLATEAU YEAR

\$37.2B

Visitor spending

+1.3% vs 2024

230,997

Tourism jobs

+0.3% vs 2024

59 of 100

Counties with higher spending

Growth was far from universal

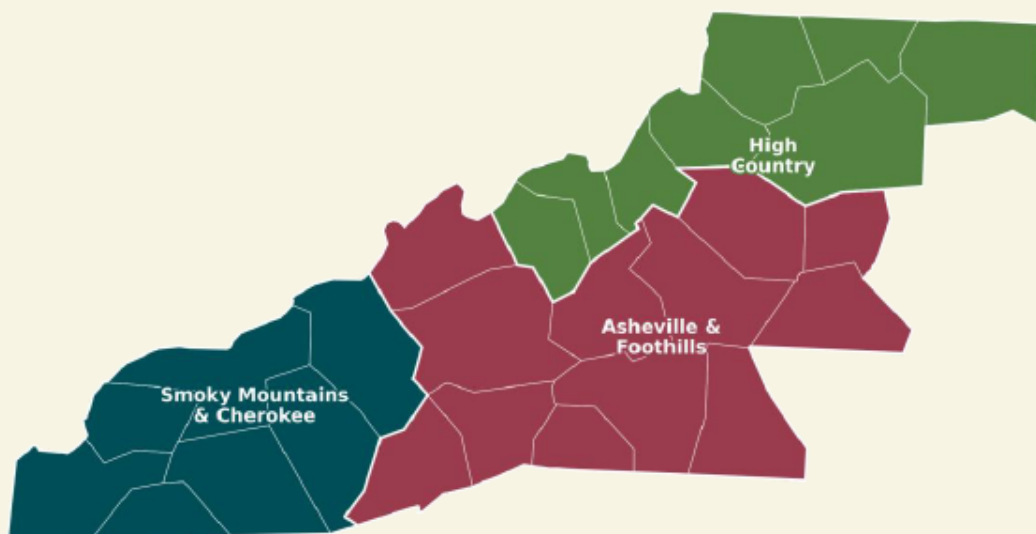
The takeaway: statewide growth was modest. The real story is the wide dispersion beneath the average, across both counties and regions.

Dispersion defined 2025.

59% of the 100 counties saw spending increase and 14% held essentially flat, but growth ranged from +14% to -8%. Ten of eleven regions gained; only Asheville & Foothills declined.

ONE STORM, THREE OUTCOMES

Together the western marketing regions drew \$7.7B — about a fifth of NC's visitor economy — yet Helene left each on a different path.



+4.3%

Smoky Mountains & Cherokee

Strongest region in the state — largely spared, and thriving.

+2.5%

High Country

A solid rebound in spending, though jobs barely moved.

−0.7%

Asheville & Foothills

The center of impact — the only NC region still in decline.

\$7.7B visitor spending (≈21% of NC)

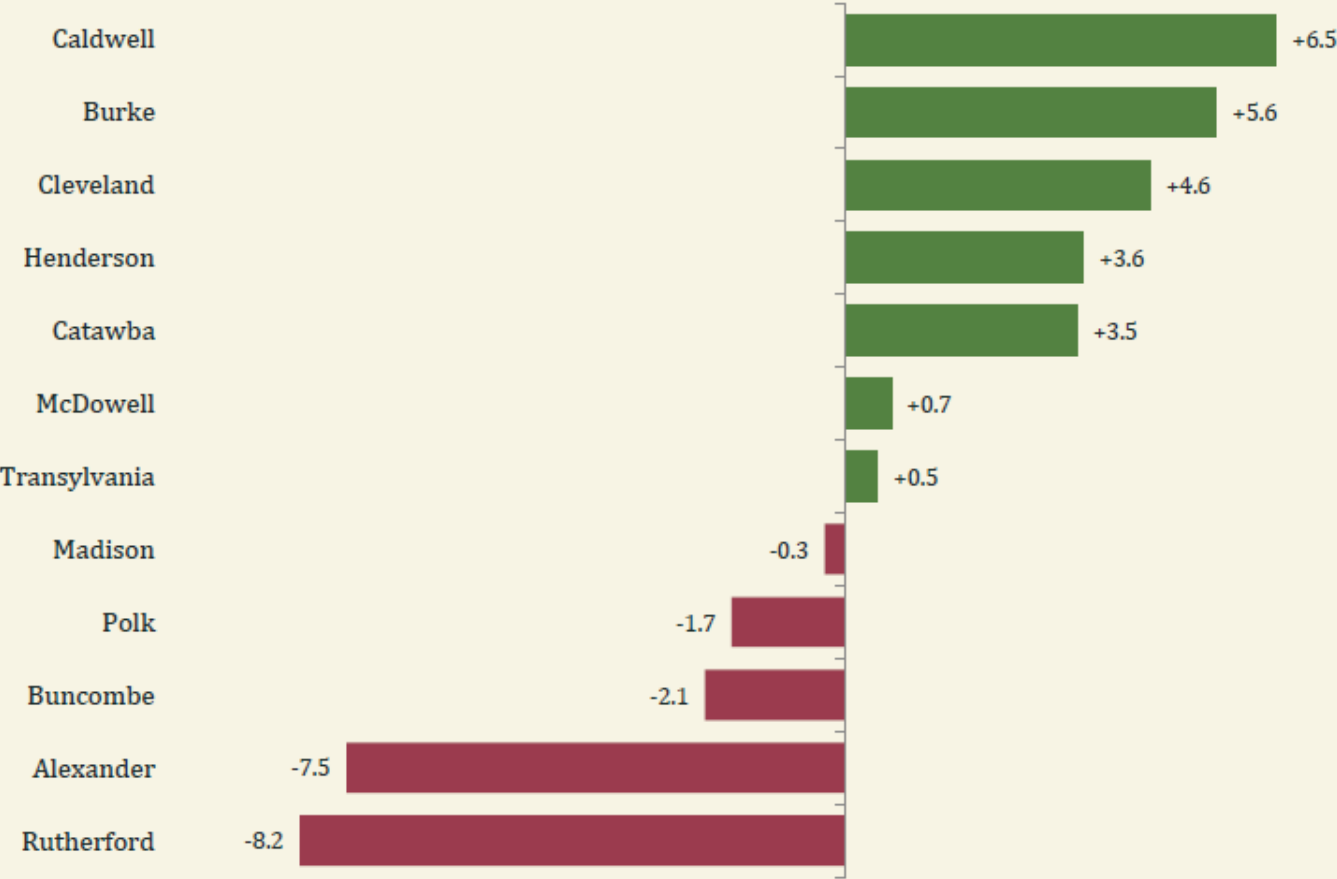
46,544 tourism jobs

\$585M state & local taxes

27 counties · 3 regions

THE CENTER OF IMPACT

A hard-hit core and growing foothills pulling in opposite directions — the core wins.



Still shrinking

Buncombe -2.1% atop -10.8% in 2024 — now ~13% below 2023. It is over half the region and lost 6.3% of its tourism jobs.
Rutherford -8.2% as recreation fell 18% with Chimney Rock's attraction base removed from service.

Already climbing

Caldwell +6.5%, Burke +5.6%, Cleveland +4.6%, Henderson +3.6% and Catawba +3.5% grew — but several were already rising before the storm, and their gains could not offset a shrinking Buncombe.



THE STRONGEST REGION

Largely spared the storm's physical damage, the far-southwest counties led North Carolina in spending growth.

+13.9%
Cherokee

Recreation and lodging both up ~10%

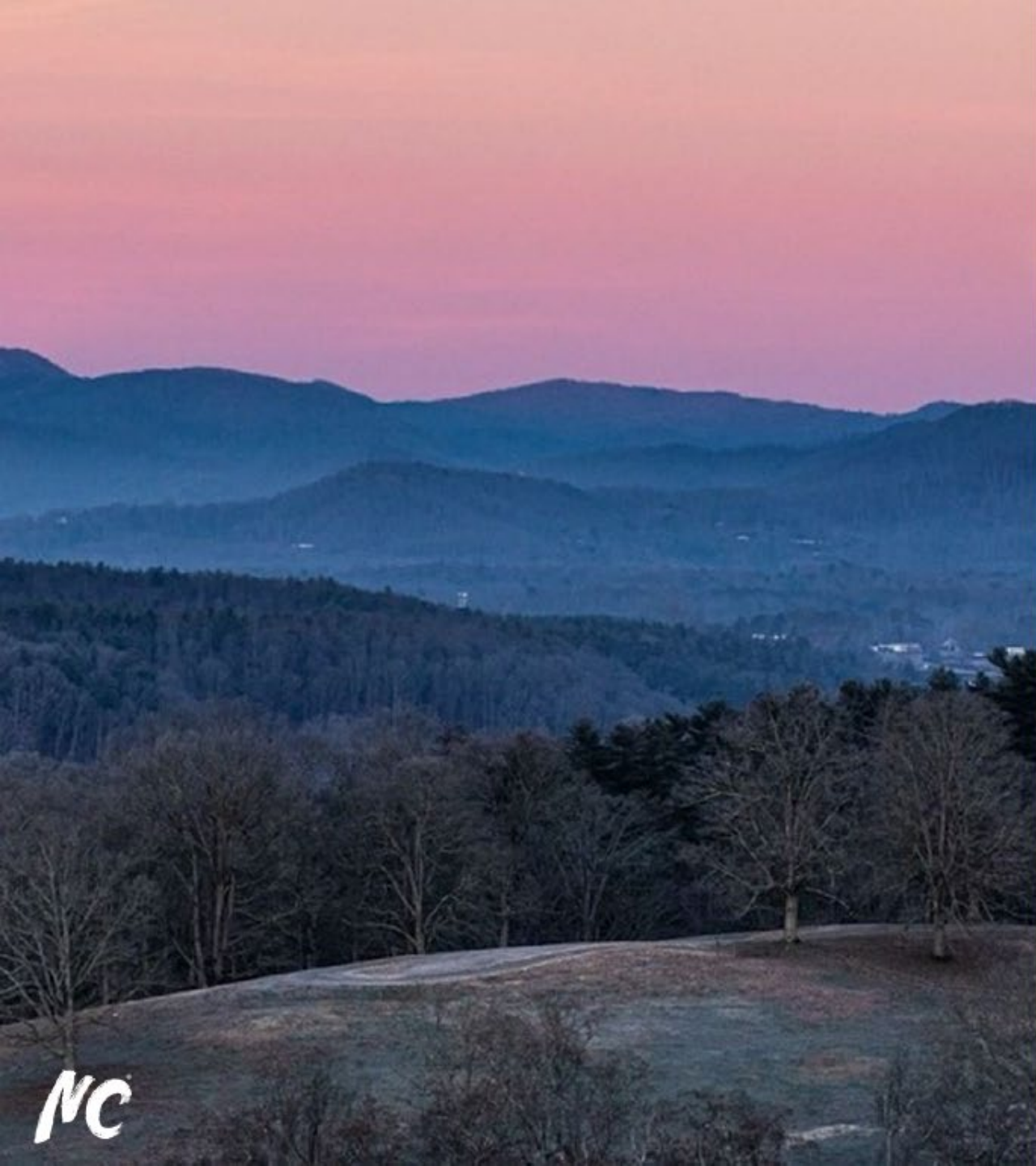
+11.1%
Macon

The same broad, balanced growth

Why it matters: recreation spending rose alongside lodging in both counties — the signature of a healthy, broad-based recovery, not just rooms filling up.

Jackson +5.1% and Graham +1.9% added to the gains; only Clay and Swain edged lower.





HIGH COUNTRY · +2.5%

A REBOUND, WITH A LAG

Spending bounced back across the northwest mountains, but the jobs and the attractions have further to travel.

COUNTY LEADERS

Yancey	+5.5%
Ashe	+4.0%
Surry	+3.2%
Watauga	+3.1%
Avery	+3.0%

+4.1%

retail spending — a sign of real leisure visitation returning to the region.

+0.4%

tourism employment — spending is back well ahead of the jobs it usually supports.

Where lodging outpaced recreation, the upside is still to come in 2026 as damaged attractions reopen.

READING A RECOVERY YEAR

Helene struck at peak fall 2024, so 2025's numbers are measured against a disrupted base. Here is how to read them.

01

A peak-season hit

Because Helene made landfall during the mountains' high-revenue weeks, it depressed the 2024 base in the hardest-hit counties.

02

A muddied base

Through 2024 and early 2025, lodging booked by recovery and relief crews was hard to separate from visitor lodging, inflating that base where damage was worst.

03

A truer read

By peak season 2025, those crews had largely gone — so most of this year's sector spending reflects real leisure demand once again.

The real tell is to compare lodging with recreation. Rising together signals a broad recovery; lodging running ahead means visitors returned before the attractions could reopen.

DID VISITORS OUTRUN THE ATTRACTIONS?

Where lodging outran recreation, rooms filled before damaged parks, trails and sites could reopen.



Balanced recovery

Cherokee & Macon — recreation up ~10% right alongside lodging. The healthiest pattern in the west.

Rooms ahead of attractions

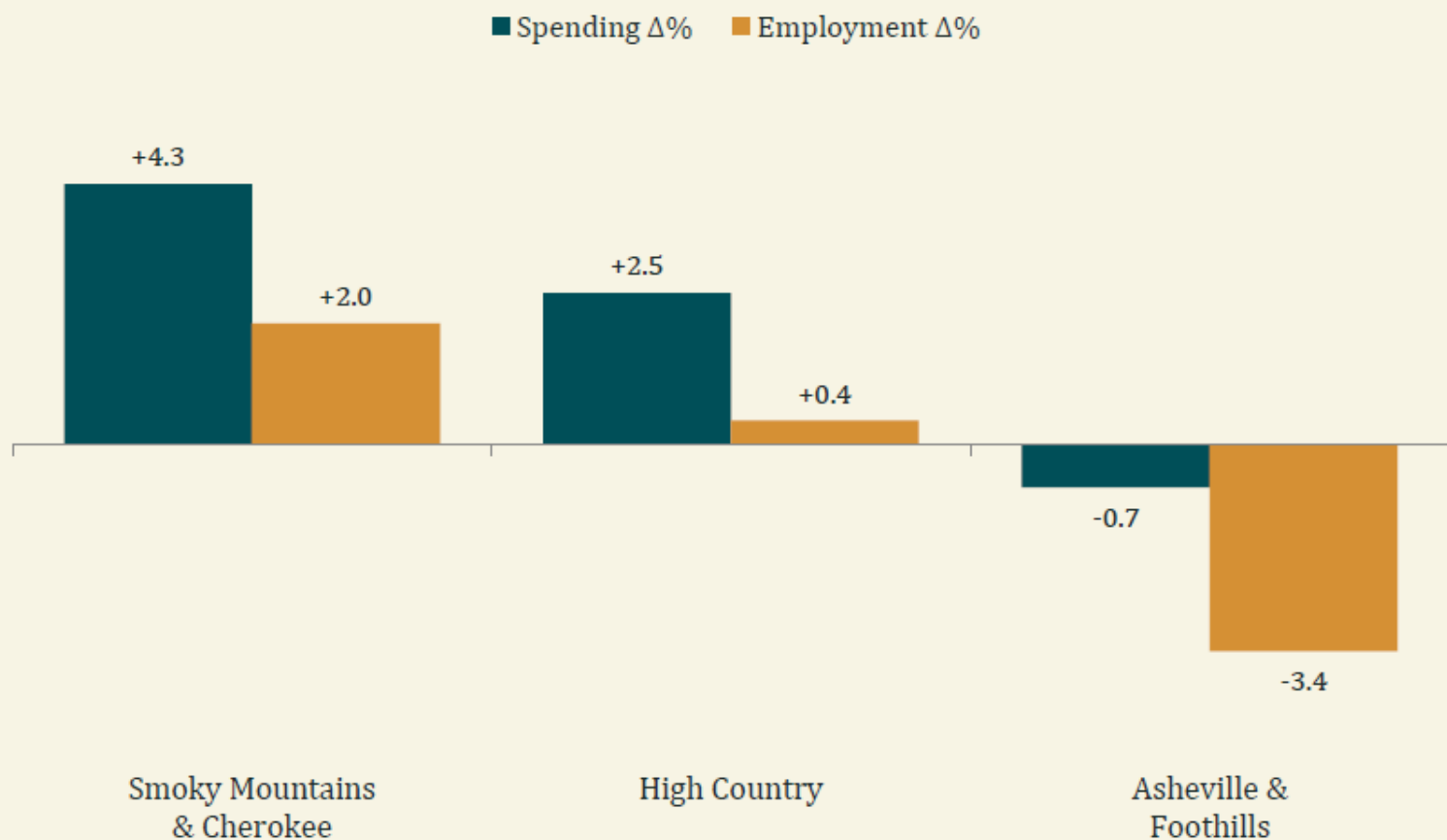
Watauga & Surry — lodging climbed while recreation stayed flat. A likely upside for 2026 as sites reopen.

Still rebuilding

Rutherford — recreation fell 18% with Chimney Rock's attraction base destroyed.

THE JOBS HAVEN'T FULLY FOLLOWED

Across all three regions, tourism employment trailed spending.



—6.3%

Buncombe's tourism jobs

The worst job loss in the state can be a signal of permanent closures and a displaced hospitality workforce, not just softer demand.

What it means

Even the Smokies and High Country added jobs more slowly than they added spending. Rebuilding the workforce and not just the visitor count will be important this year and next.



RECENT BRAND & PERCEPTION RESEARCH

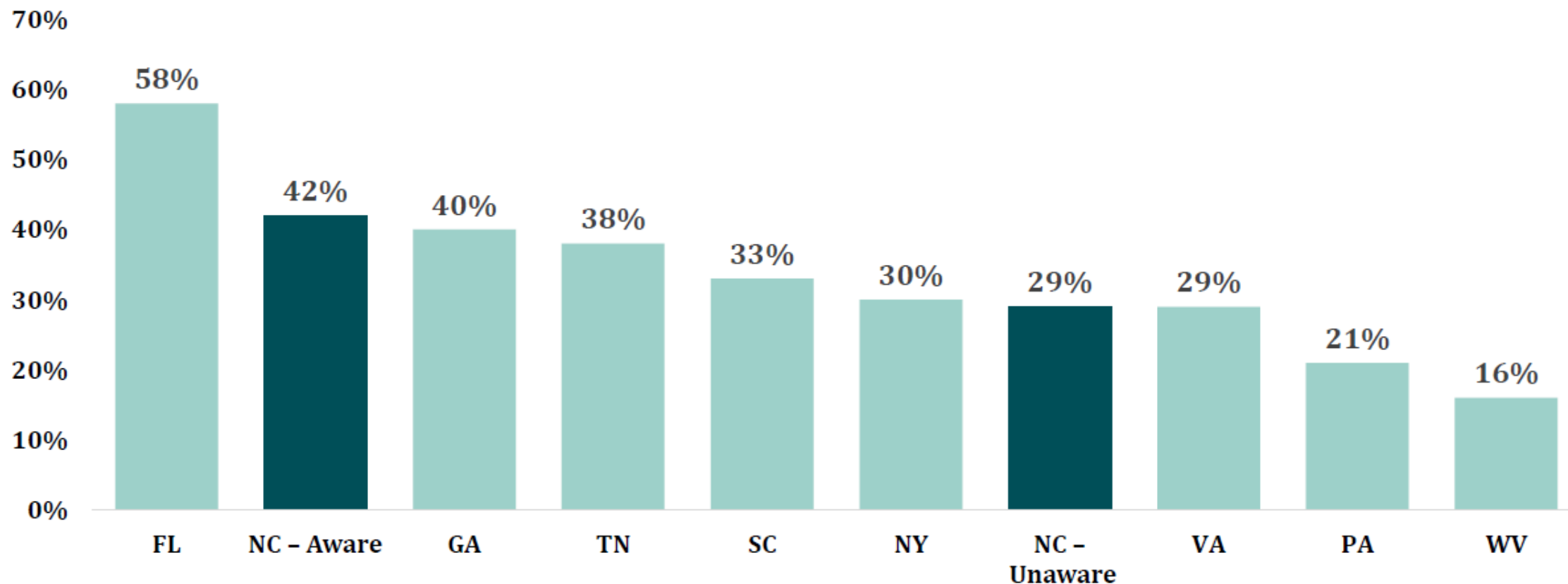
CAMPAIGN RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Advertising Impacts	2025
Ad Awareness	53%*
Ad-Influenced Trips	885,337
Ad-Influenced Visitor Spending (total)	\$1.67 billion
ROI (Visitor Spend Per Dollar of Investment)	\$133
State and Local Taxes Generated	\$147.5 million
Tax ROI (State and Local Taxes Generated Per Dollar of Investment)	\$12

** Consumers that were aware of at least one campaign (brand or recovery)*

ADVERTISING INVESTMENT LIFTS INTEREST AND VISITATION

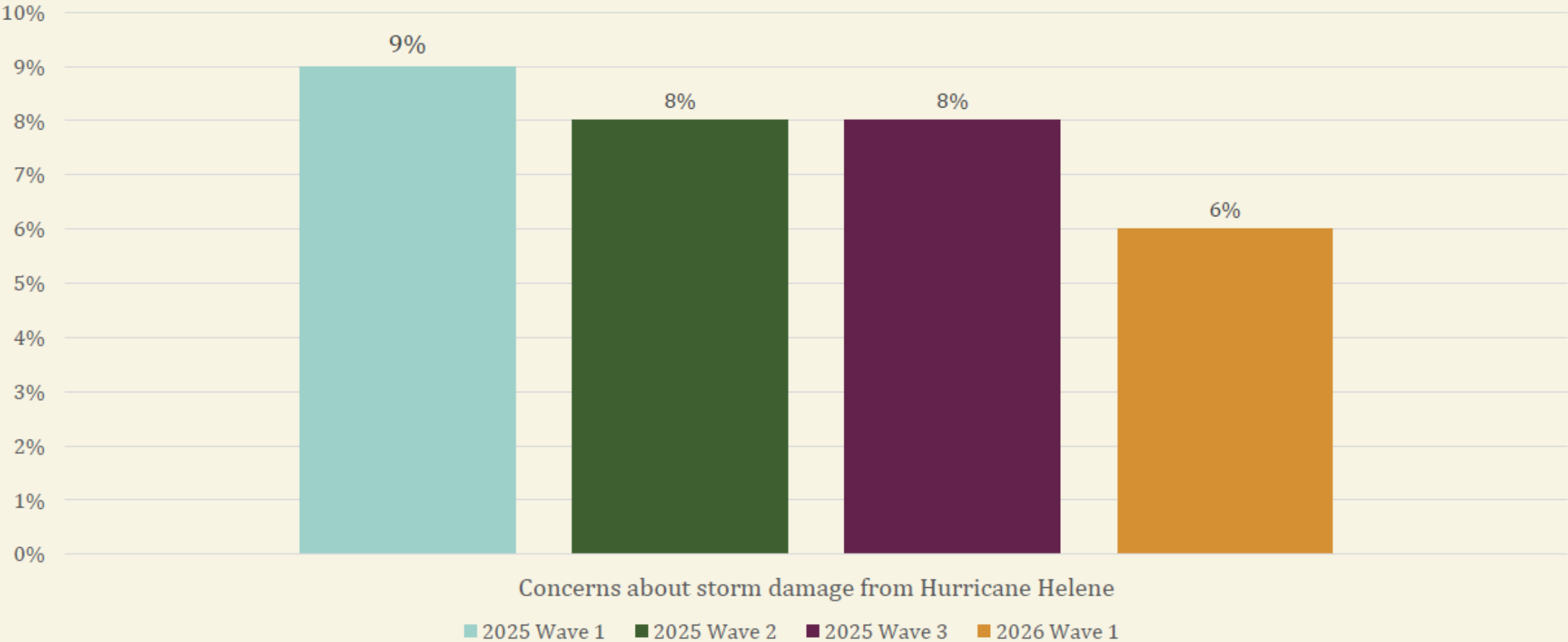
Likelihood to Visit Comp Set – Aware vs. Unaware of NC



Source: SMARInsights, 2026

If Visit NC can reach visitors with our messaging, we pass Georgia, Tennessee, South Carolina and New York in likelihood to visit. Potential visitors aware of our marketing are 13 percentage points more likely to visit than those that have not seen our marketing efforts.

HURRICANE RELATED TRAVEL BARRIERS CONTINUE TO DECREASE

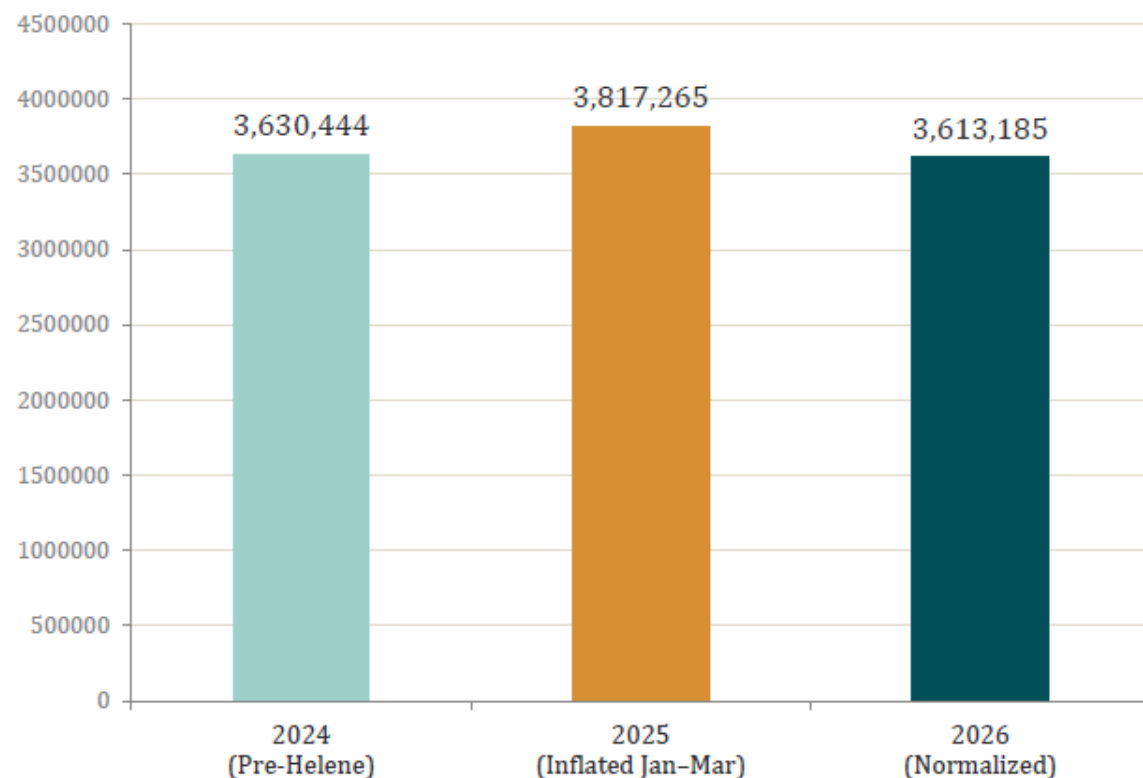


WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA LODGING DEMAND RECOVERY

Hotels vs. Vacation Rentals: January 2024 — August 2026

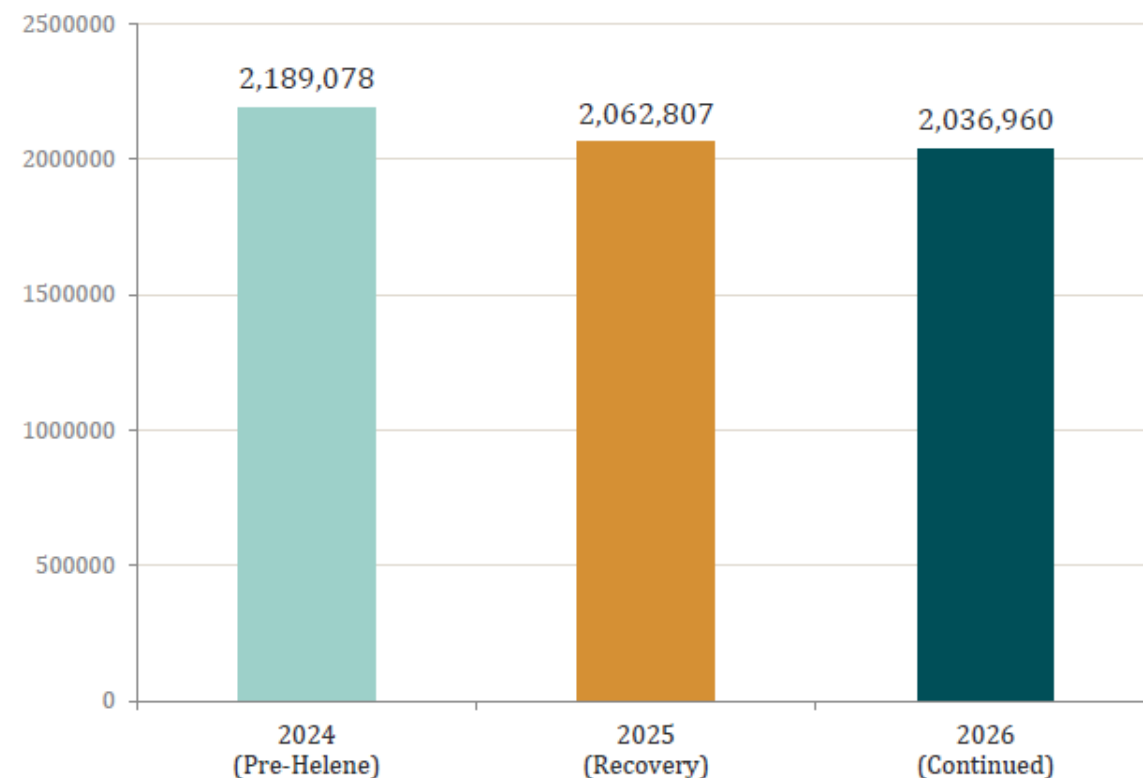
YEAR-TO-DATE WESTERN NC DEMAND | JANUARY THROUGH AUGUST — APPLES TO APPLES

Hotel Demand (YTD Jan–August)



Hotel YTD 2026 vs 2024: -0.5% | vs 2025 (inflated): -5.3%
2025 inflated by recovery. 2026 is the first true normalized comparison to 2024.

Vacation Rental Demand (YTD Jan–August)



Rental YTD 2026 vs 2024: -6.9% | vs 2025: -1.3%
Rentals gradually improving year-over-year, but still below pre-Helene 2024 baseline.

VACATION RENTAL PACING: FALL/WINTER 2026 - BOOKINGS AS OF SEPTEMBER vs. SAME POINT IN 2025



METHODOLOGY: Both years reflect only **bookings made as of mid-September** — a true apples-to-apples pacing comparison. Winter months naturally show fewer total bookings than fall months at this point in the calendar, but 2026 is running ahead of 2025 in every month. The strong Sep–Nov leads suggest growing traveler confidence in the region's recovery.

ADDITIONAL FUNDING

FY26-27 BUDGET PLANNING PROCESS (WITH \$13M INCREMENTAL)



For our brand campaign, this incremental budget allows us to:

Fall 2026

- Increase weight and frequencies of existing plan

Winter 2026 / Spring 2027 / Summer 2027

- Add in new markets and explore audience opportunities
- Increase weight and frequencies of existing plan
- Layer in new, complementary tactics across the full-funnel

PLANNING FOR ADDITIONAL MARKETS

Markets for the media plan will be considered according to a variety of factors and categorized for how spend is allocated.

High volume origin markets, efficient origin markets and opportunity markets will each be weighted differently in terms of how spend is allocated.

Fund heavily

40% of new budget

Fund

45% of new budget

Test Into

15% of new budget

OTHER AREAS OF FOCUS

The incremental budget also allows us to more robustly support other areas of our marketing plans.

- **Partner Program:** increase program inventory, explore efficiencies for ease of partner access to managing their programs
- **Non-brand campaign paid media partnerships**, such as Travel South domestic, NC Ski, NC Broadcasters Association, etc., and emerging media opportunities
- **Creative asset production**, affecting campaign development for 'For Real,' and photo/video library
- **Volume of content** produced internally and externally for Website, Email and Social channels
- Additional support for **personalization efforts** across Web and Email.
- **Creator partnerships** at an increased volume
- **Sponsored Content** back in brand paid media plan

\$2 MILLION GRANT PROGRAM

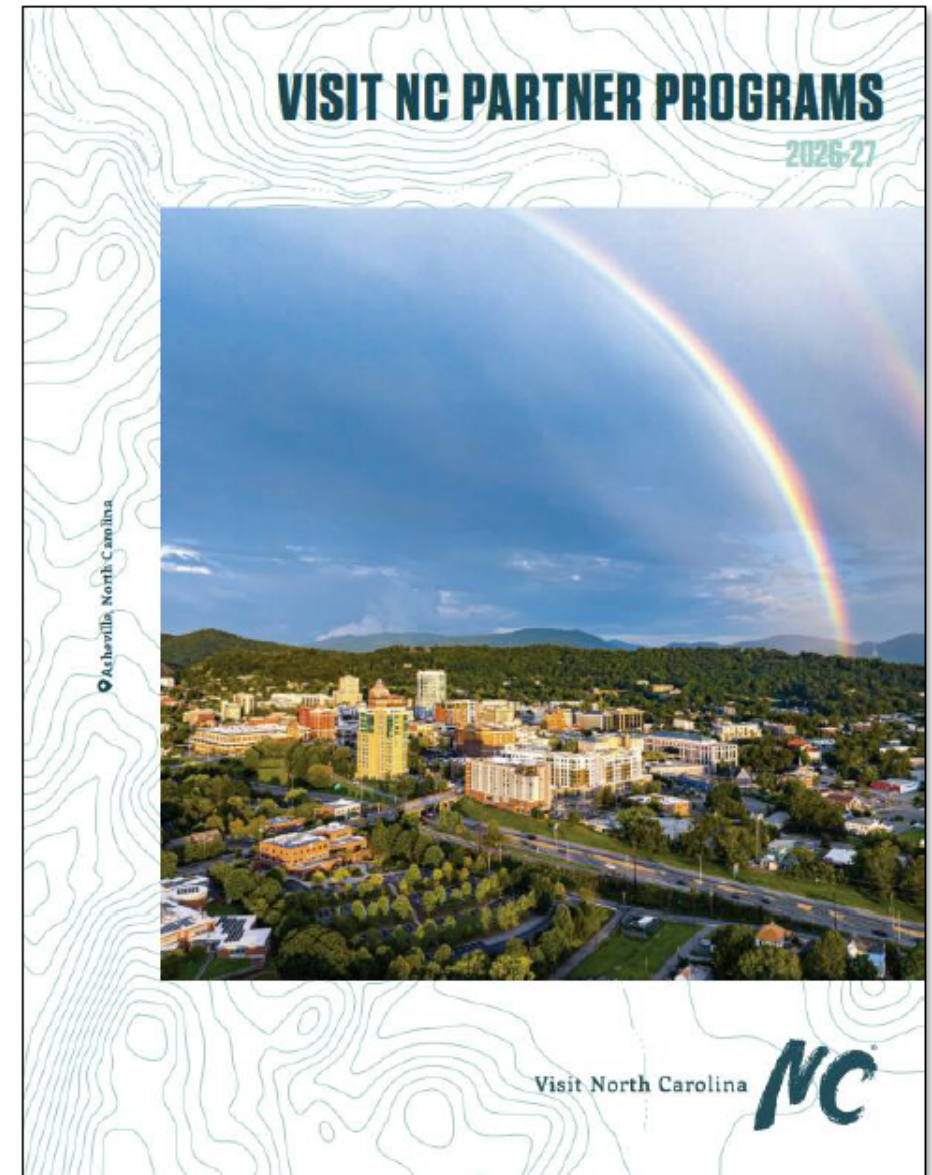
Funds to Promote Western North Carolina

Program Guidelines

- Credit for local tourism offices
- Advertising, research, PR, social media, video and photography
- Expanded Co-op offerings

Ashe, Avery, Burke, Haywood, Henderson, McDowell, Mitchell, Rutherford, Transylvania, Watauga, Yancey, Caldwell, Cleveland, Madison and Polk counties.

- Funds shall be encumbered by June 30, 2028



A person wearing a hat, sunglasses, and a fishing vest is standing in a shallow river, casting a fly fishing line. The river is surrounded by dense green trees and foliage, with sunlight filtering through the leaves. The water is calm, reflecting the surrounding greenery.

THANK YOU

Visit North Carolina

NC



Recovery Updates

Matt Calabria & Emily Gangi, GROW NC



SmBIZ Fourth-Round Grant Awards Announced Sept. 24

Town of Bryson City – \$965,968 to restore public water system and improve public safety and continuity of operations south of the Tuckasegee River.

Buncombe County – \$786,291 to repair, improve, and extend sidewalks on Railroad, South, and Alexander streets in Beacon Village.

Town of Elk Park – \$100,000 to replace a failing culvert on Main Street to protect adjacent infrastructure and reduce flood risks for nearby businesses.

Town of Hayesville –

- \$1,000,000 to build a retaining wall and replace and improve sidewalk infrastructure to restore pedestrian access and protect the downtown from future storm-related impacts.
- \$1,000,000 to repair and improve the downtown stormwater system and sidewalk infrastructure for increased public safety and long-term resilience.
- \$1,000,000 to repair the stormwater system and infrastructure for the Mill Street corridor.

Town of West Jefferson – \$233,191 to support and rehabilitate existing infrastructure serving the downtown commercial area.

Applications Remain Open: Small Business Infrastructure Grants

More than \$19M remains of the \$55M appropriation from the NC General Assembly to assist small businesses by expediting infrastructure repairs impacting the operation and patronage of small businesses in the affected area. There is a max award per project of \$1M.

Eligibility: Local governments impacted by Hurricane Helene and designated under a major disaster declaration from Helene. Special consideration given to local governments in Tier 1 and Tier 2 Counties.

Timeline: Applications accepted on a rolling basis; awards announced:

- June 30, 2025 – *\$7.3m announced*
- November 12, 2025 – *\$13.8m announced*
- March 20, 2026 – *\$8.5m announced*
- *September 24, 2026 – \$5m announced*



For more information: commerce.nc.gov/SmBIZ

\$69 Million Awarded to Support Affordable Rental Housing in WNC

On August 25, Governor Stein, the NC Department of Commerce Division of Community Revitalization, and the NC Housing Finance Agency announced 10 projects to develop 828 new affordable rental units will receive awards totaling more than \$69 million in Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) funds.

- Arendell Trace (Ashe)
- Crescent Place Apartments (Buncombe)
- Leonhardt Landing (Burke)
- Abbingdon Overlook (Caldwell)
- The Lofts at Shelby (Cleveland)
- Saxony Hall Manor (Haywood)
- Meadowcrest (Henderson)
- Sweetwater Place Apartments (Rutherford)
- Cascade Ridge (Transylvania)
- Hemlock Ridge Trace (Watauga)



For more info: bit.ly/4h9dh7e

Applications Open: Multi-Family Construction and Repair Program

- Who the Program Serves: Multi-family rental properties with five or more units
- Eligible Applicants: For-profit, non-profit developers, public housing authorities, local governments, and joint ventures between these entities. Must be located in HUD- or State-MID areas.
- Eligible Uses of Funds: New construction and substantial rehab of multi-family units.
- Award range: \$500,000 to \$15M per project.
Approximately \$70M available.

Prescreening is still available and strongly encouraged for interested applicants.

Deadline: November 2, 2026

For more info: bit.ly/RenewNC-Multi-Family-Housing



Nearly \$23 Million in Cashflow Loans Distributed in Western N.C.

2026 Round announced Sept. 24

Local governments applied for more than \$100 million in loans from the Treasurer's office for specific projects and needs.

The Cashflow loan program started in 2025 to help bridge the gap for communities awaiting federal funding to help with rebuilding and cleanup efforts.

Local governments receiving funds in this round will pay back Cashflow loans with no interest no later than June 30, 2030.

Town of Clyde: \$1,000,000

County of Rutherford: \$ 2,767,787.63

Town of Beech Mountain: \$3,000,000

County of Madison: \$3,600,000

Town of Canton: \$2,809,630.60

Village of Chimney Rock: \$4,000,000

Town of Lake Lure: \$5,000,000

County of Polk: \$593,670

N.C. Forest Service Receives Nearly \$65 Million to Help Restore National Forests

The U.S. Forest Service and the North Carolina Forest Service (NCFS) announced a nearly \$65 million, 10-year Good Neighbor Agreement to support Hurricane Helene recovery efforts in WNC.

Under the agreement, the NCFS will reduce hazardous fuels across areas of wildland-urban interface impacted by the storm, as well as develop strategies to address non-native and invasive species that can potentially thrive in the aftermath of a landscape-scale disturbance. The agreement will also increase the pace of forest restoration while bringing new job opportunities to the impacted area.



Governor Announces Nearly \$10 Million in Parks and Recreation Grant Awards

Governor Stein recently announced more than \$9.8 million in grants to fund 25 local parks and recreation projects across the state through the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF) administered by North Carolina State Parks, a division of the N.C. Department of Natural and Cultural Resources. Awards in WNC include:

- Town of Jefferson (Ashe County): \$235,175 – Foster-Tyson Park / Northern Peaks State Trailhead Upgrade
- Town of Granite Falls (Caldwell County): \$371,950 – Shuford Recreation Expansion
- Town of Brookford (Catawba County): \$193,031 – Brookford Community Park
- Town of Long View (Catawba County): \$187,425 – Long View Recreation Center
- Macon County: \$500,000 – Veterans Memorial Park
- Town of Mars Hill (Madison County): \$500,000 – Bone Camp Creek on Bailey Mountain
- Yadkin County: \$500,000 – Yadkin Memorial Park



NC DEQ Awards Grants to Repair High-Hazard Dams Damaged by Helene

The NC Department of Environmental Quality (NC DEQ) recently announced grants totaling \$3.4M to address at-risk dams that were damaged by Hurricane Helene.

- Turner Shoals Dam (Polk County) - \$1.3M
- Beech Lake Dam (Henderson County) - \$1.2M
- Ashe Lake Dam (Ashe County) - \$840,000

NC DEQ awarded \$6.6M earlier this year to address six high-hazard dams that were also damaged during Hurricane Helene.



Application Open: \$35M in Grants for Nonprofit Organizations Repairing & Rebuilding Homes

Nonprofit organizations actively involved in ongoing housing repair and reconstruction projects from Hurricane Helene can now apply for grant funding through the Volunteer Organization Recovery Fund Grant Round 3 (VORG-3).

An initial \$35 million is available, appropriated by the General Assembly and administered by the NC Division of Emergency Management. Projects can be 100% funded with no local cost share and paid on a reimbursement basis.

Applications are due by 5 p.m. October 16, 2026.



For more info: www.ncdps.gov/VORGrantRound3



Renew NC Single-Family Housing Dashboard

9/24/2026 5:23:23 PM

Latest Data Refresh

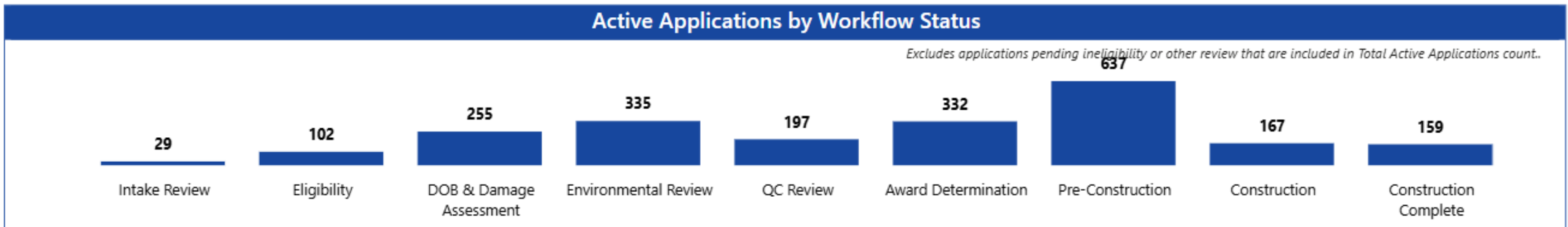
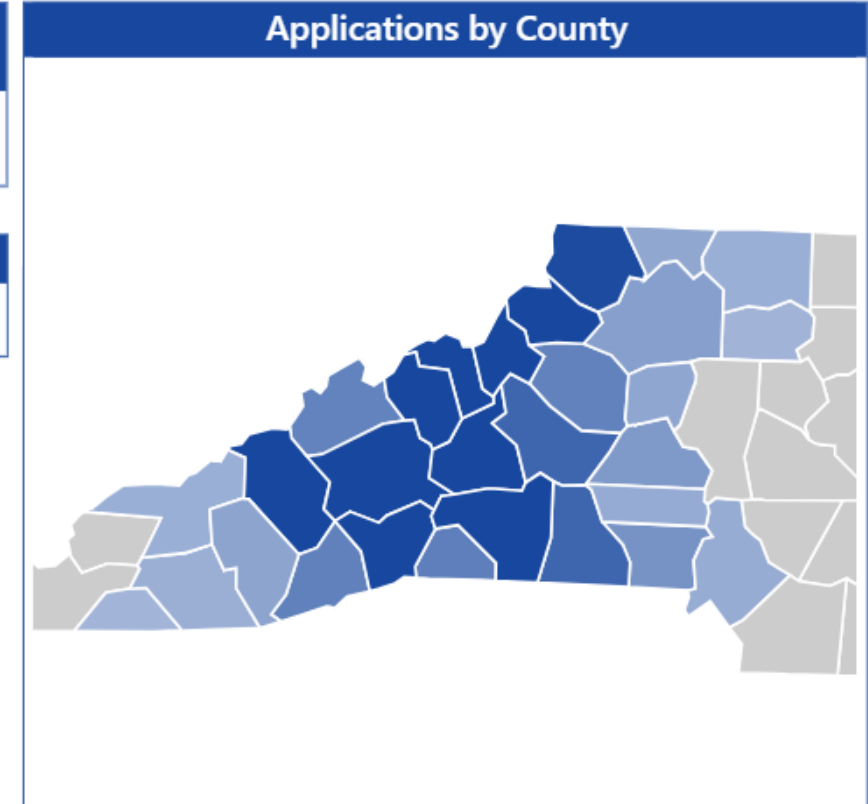
Applications in Progress But Not Submitted	Total Applications Submitted	Total Active Applications	Inactive or Ineligible Applications
2,189	7,924	2,216 i	5,708 i

Application Submission Deadline
January 31, 2026

Verified Eligible Phase and Priority i					
Phase	Priority 1	Priority 2	Priority 3	Priority 4	Total
Phase 1	1,118	177	91	15	1,401
Phase 2	162	57	10	6	235
Phase 3	158	6	N/A	N/A	164
Phase 4	370	12	N/A	N/A	382

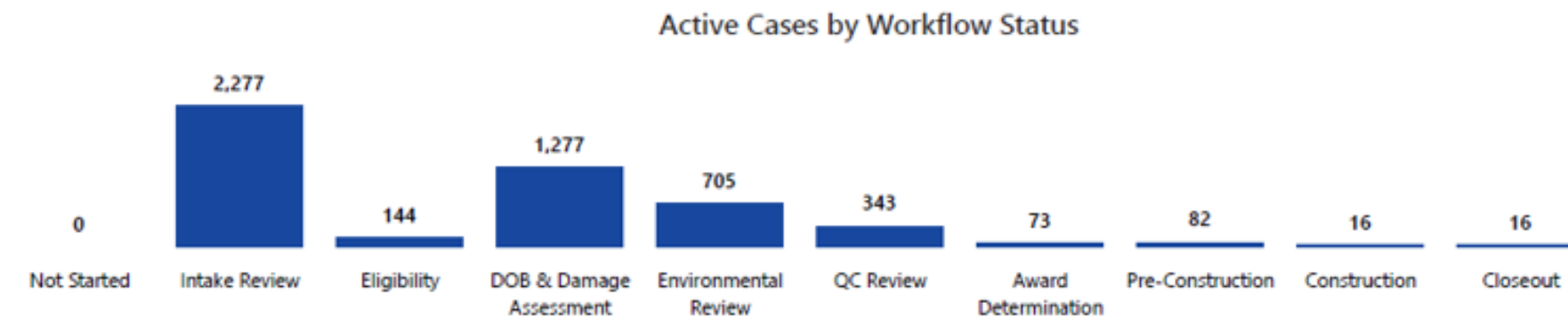
Hover over the information bubble for Phase and Priority definitions.

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

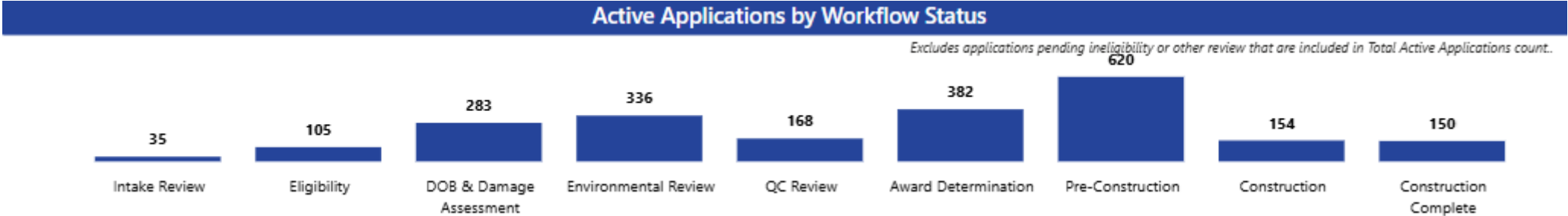


Workflow Status Progression for Single-Family Housing

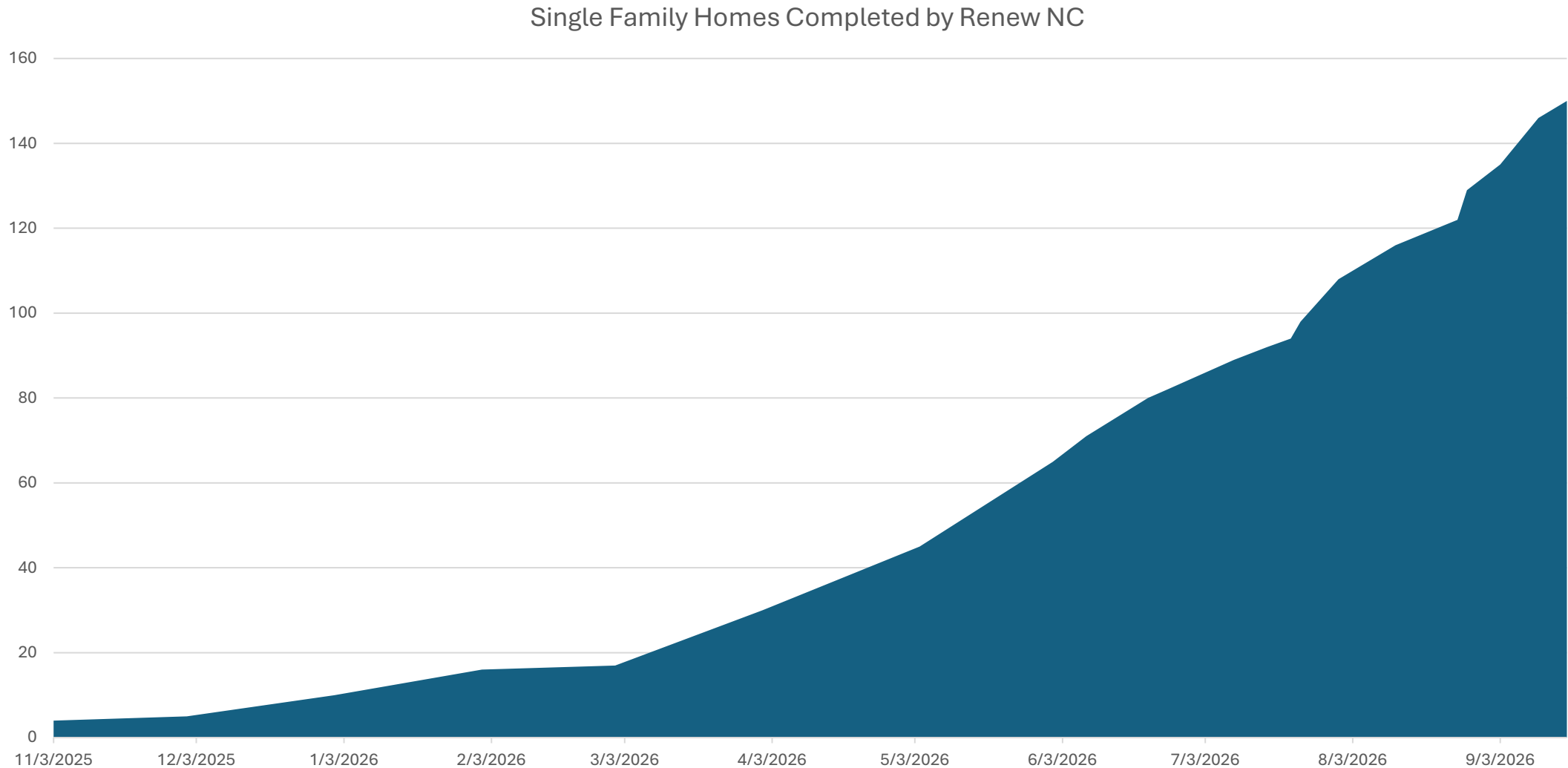
As of
February 1,
2026



As of
September
17, 2026

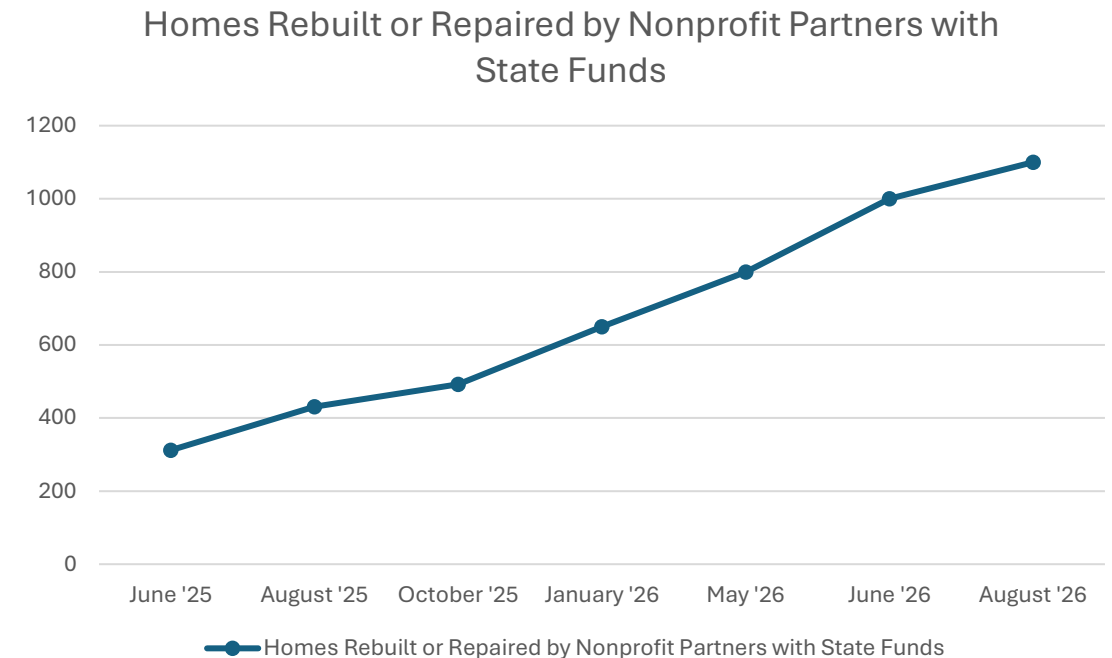


Rate of Single-Family Home Completions is Accelerating



Over 1,100 Homes Rebuilt or Repaired by Volunteer Organizations using State Funds

- Over 1,100 homes have been repaired, rebuilt, or weatherized by volunteer organizations with support from state funds.
- Examples of these organizations include, but are not limited to, Baptists on Mission, Habitat for Humanity, All Hands & Hearts, Housing Assistance Corporation, Long-Term Recovery Groups (LTRGs), and many other community-based partners.
- The progress made by these partnerships demonstrates the critical role that nonprofit, volunteer, and faith-based organizations play in supporting recovery efforts and housing resilience across the region.



Oversubscribed Helene Recovery Programs (*abridged*)



Program	Description	Total Funding	Demand	Locations
Community Infrastructure	Competitive grant funding for infrastructure projects. Helps impacted areas become more resilient to natural hazards	\$194 Million	\$397M+ requested to date ▪ 113 pre-screens ▪ 53 applications completed ▪ \$50 million to award in Round 1	
Large Non-LIHTC Housing Projects (5-50 units)	Competitive grant or loan funding to support reconstruction, rehabilitation or construction of affordable rental housing; DCR-administered	\$70 Million	\$283M+ requested to date ▪ 56 pre-screens underway ▪ 21 applications underway ▪ 0 submitted	
Large LIHTC Housing Projects (50+ units)	Competitive grant or loan funding supports reconstruction, rehabilitation or construction of affordable rental housing; HFA-administered	\$69.1 Million	\$294M+ requested to date ▪ 10 projects awarded, funding 828 new affordable units	
EPA SRF	Federal supplemental State Revolving Fund (SRF) appropriations for water and wastewater recovery	\$645 Million	\$1B+ remaining unmet needs ▪ 127 water and sewer projects completed	Unfunded SRF Helene Applications for Water, Wastewater and Septic System Projects - April 2026

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 September 1, 2026, NCEM submitted the following to FEMA:

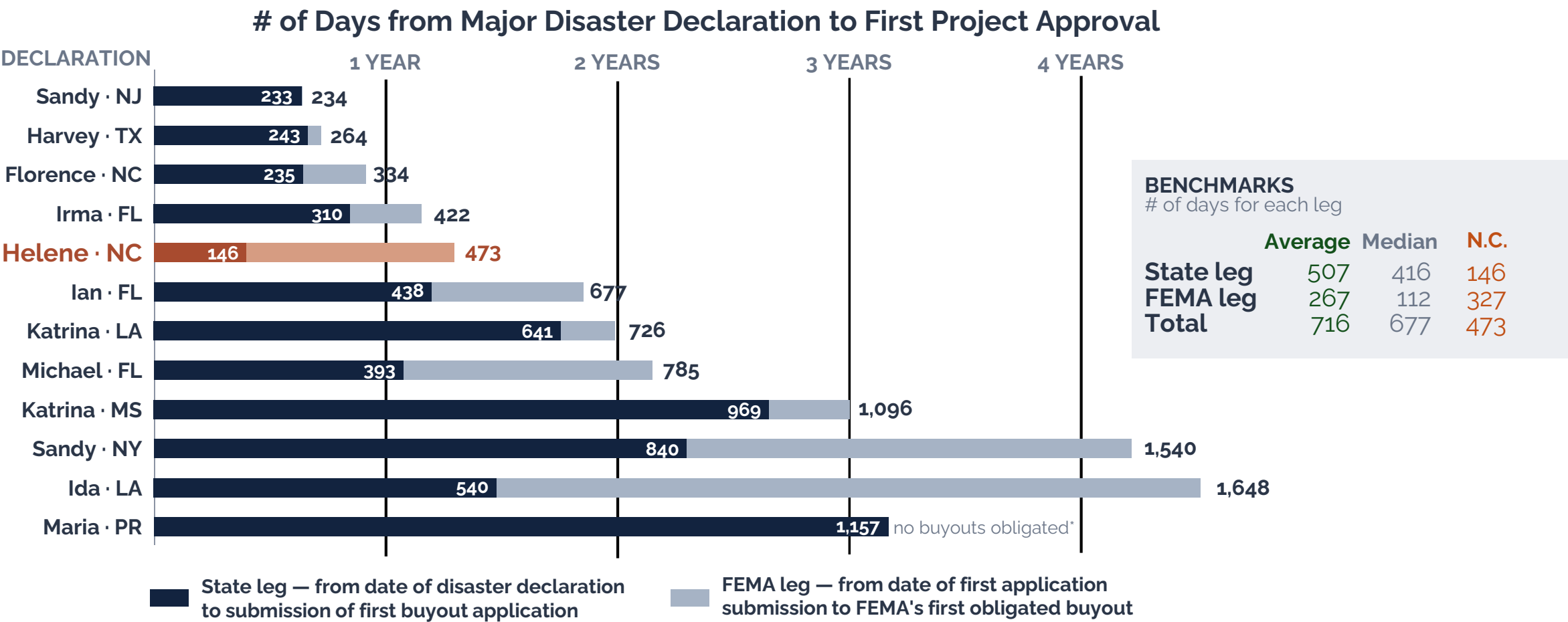
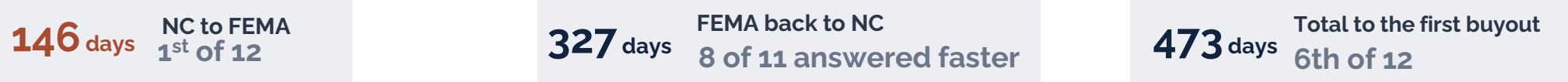
- 892 properties for voluntary acquisition, with 535 approved by FEMA
- 466 properties for voluntary elevation, with zero properties approved by FEMA
- 86 infrastructure applications, with zero projects approved by FEMA

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

NC filed its first buyout application in 146 days, faster than any state after a major hurricane in more than two decades

Days counted from major disaster declaration to FEMA's first obligated home buyout — Ten U.S. hurricanes, twelve state declarations, 2005–2024



More than \$1B of Private Investment and 342 Rural New Jobs

NC's Rural Infrastructure Authority has approved 11 grant requests for local governments totaling \$4,933,520. The grants include commitments to create 673 jobs. The additional private investment in these projects is expected to reach more than \$1 billion. Three awards are in WNC:

- Buncombe County: \$480,000 to support the reuse of an 8,740-square-foot building in Black Mountain for an integrated health care facility operated by Appalachian Mountain Health. Expected to create 48 jobs, with an investment of \$14,591,626.
- City of Lenoir (Caldwell County): \$186,000 to renovate a 103,102-square-foot building in Lenoir to be occupied by Chase Corporation, which manufactures protective materials for a variety of industries. Expected to create 37 jobs, with an investment of \$233,274.
- City of Claremont (Catawba County): \$500,000 for renovations of a facility where Prysmian Cables and Systems USA is expanding. The overall project is expected to create 385 jobs; 110 jobs and an investment of \$2,041,072 are tied to this grant.



NEW JOBS for NC 

11 GRANTS TO RURAL COMMUNITIES

ATTRACT 342 NEW JOBS

OVER \$4.9 MILLION
IN TOTAL GRANT MONEY

\$1.25 Million Announced to Expand School-Based Health Centers

Earlier this month, Governor Stein and the NC Department of Health and Human Services announced \$1.25 million in federal funding through the [North Carolina Rural Health Transformation Program](#) to expand preventive and acute health care, provide nutrition support, and address behavioral health needs.

Five organizations will receive funding: Appalachian District Health Department, Blue Ridge Community Health Services, First Health of the Carolinas, Mountain Community Health Partnership, and Wilson County Health Department.



NORTH CAROLINA
RURAL HEALTH TRANSFORMATION

Submit a Project Idea: WNC Regional Communications Resiliency Project

After Hurricane Helene, Land of Sky Regional Council and Information Technology Disaster Resource Center worked with local governments, emergency managers, public safety and industry partners, nonprofits, and community anchor institutions to document where communications failed across WNC and what it would take to keep communities connected through the next disruption. That work became the WNC Regional Communications Resiliency Plan.

The organizations are now collecting project ideas tied to the plan's goals to determine where to invest next.

Tell them about work your organization is already doing, something you've been wanting to start, or a need for which you don't yet have a solution.

Completing the form does not guarantee funding or project selection.



Submit a project idea: bit.ly/3TlzoQg

Blue Ridge Parkway Seeks Public Input on Linville Falls Recovery Plan

On September 1, the Blue Ridge Parkway opened a 30-day public comment period for a site management plan to restore visitor access, rebuild storm-damaged facilities, and ensure a more resilient future for the Linville Falls area.

The Blue Ridge Parkway plans to begin design and construction in 2027.

The comment period runs through September 30.



For more info & to submit comments: <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/> (select "Linville Falls Site Plan")

Timber Loss Relief Program Application Closes Oct. 12

The N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services was awarded a USDA block grant to support Helene recovery. The N.C. Forest Service is using part of these funds to administer a Timber Loss Relief Program, which will partially compensate eligible woodland owners for the value of timber loss as a result of Helene.

Deadline: Monday, Oct. 12, 2026 at 5 p.m.

To begin the application process, landowners should contact their local N.C. Forest Service county ranger's office (contacts at the link below).



Landowners who applied during the initial application period DO NOT need to reapply. Previously submitted applications will continue through the program's application review and damage assessment process.

For more info: www.ncagr.gov/divisions/nc-forest-service/managing-your-forest/tlrp



Wrap Up and Next Steps

Matt Calabria, GROW NC

Next meeting: **Monday, October 19**, 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.
(Virtual)



Stay Connected

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



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wncrecovery.nc.gov



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