

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR**

**ROY COOPER  
GOVERNOR**

September 27, 2024

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, N.W.  
Washington, DC

Through: Mr. Robert D. Samaan, Regional Administrator  
FEMA Region IV  
3003 Chamblee Tucker Road  
Atlanta, Georgia 30341

Dear Mr. President:

Under the provisions of Section 401 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, 42 U.S.C. §§ 5121-5207 (Stafford Act), and implemented by 44 C.F.R. § 206.36, I request that you declare an expedited major disaster for the State of North Carolina due to the impacts of Tropical Storm Helene (Helene). Impacts to the state started on September 26, 2024, and are ongoing. The significant amount of damage and other impacts associated with Helene exceed the local and state capacity to recover.

Given the "unusual severity and magnitude" of the damages caused by Helene, I am requesting the expedited processing of this request pursuant to 44 C.F.R. § 206.36(d). This request is timely under 44 C.F.R. § 206.36(a).

I am requesting that you declare an Expedited Major Disaster Declaration for the following 39 North Carolina counties and one federally recognized tribe for all categories of Public Assistance (PA), including direct Federal Assistance, and Individual Assistance (IA): Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Cabarrus, Caldwell, Catawba, Cherokee, Clay, Cleveland, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, Forsyth, Gaston, Graham, Haywood, Henderson, Iredell, Jackson, Lee, Lincoln, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mecklenburg, Mitchell, Nash, Polk, Rowan, Rutherford, Stanly, Surry, Swain, Transylvania, Union, Yadkin, Yancey, Watauga, and Wilkes, and Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMPG) assistance statewide.

Hurricane Helene entered the Florida panhandle as a Category 4 hurricane and moved northward impacting North Carolina with significant, damaging, and life-threatening flash flooding across the western portions of the North Carolina mountains. Widespread, catastrophic flash flooding is being experienced across the Blue Ridge Escarpment. Rainfall amounts through midday, Friday, September 27, 2024, have reached up to 20 inches in some locations creating power outages, major highway closures, major transportation stoppages, and the need for rescues and evacuations. Numerous landslides, with large damaging debris flows and slope failures, are occurring along the Blue Ridge Escarpment and in western North Carolina. Tornado watches are in effect for Eastern and Central North Carolina. Wind gusts reaching 35 mph are ongoing and isolated tornadoes have been reported throughout the state. Two deaths have been confirmed in North Carolina due to weather-related impacts.

Numerous river gauges have rapidly climbed above flood stage, with seven rivers (French Broad, Swannanoa, Pigeon, Broad, Catawba, South Fork Catawba, and Yadkin) at major flood stage and eighteen at moderate flood stage. Tropical Storm Helene has caused widespread damage including downed trees and flooding that blocked roadways, damaged residential structures and businesses, and caused at least 900,000 power outages and climbing. The investor-owner, municipal, and co-opt utilities have reported significant damage to the electric infrastructure in western and portions of central North Carolina and assessments are ongoing. Communication services have been degraded or are completely unavailable.

### **Actions under State Law and Implementation of the State Operations Plan:**

Based on the National Weather Service Storm Prediction Center and the National Hurricane Center forecast on September 24, 2024, the Division of North Carolina Emergency Management (NCEM) placed the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) on Enhanced Watch. NCEM created an NCSPARTA (WebEOC) event on September 24, 2024. In response to the statewide situation, pursuant to 44 C.F.R. § 206.36, appropriate actions were taken under state law, and I declared a state of emergency for all 100 counties and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians on September 25, 2024, at 8:30 a.m. (See Executive Order No. 315). The incident period for Helene is from the date and time of the state of emergency and is ongoing and continuing. As part of that declaration, I directed the execution of the state emergency operations plan, in accordance with Section 401(a) of the Stafford Act. The requested counties for that declaration request were for all 100 counties and the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians.

The State received an Emergency Declaration under Section 501 of the Stafford Act on September 26, 2024, as FEMA declaration 3617-EM-NC.

Pursuant to 44 C.F.R. § 206.36, I have determined that this incident is of such severity and magnitude that effective response is beyond the capabilities of the State and affected local governments and that supplementary Federal assistance is necessary to save lives and to protect property, public health, and safety, or to lessen or avert the threat of a disaster.

I am requesting direct federal assistance for work and services to save lives and protect property such as generators, food, water, shelter supplies, evacuation assistance, non-congregate and congregate shelter assistance, medical assistance, swift water rescue teams, urban search and rescue (USAR) teams, technical assistance, and other response measures.

I am requesting Public Assistance in all categories of work, including direct Federal assistance, for the requested counties.

### **Preliminary Damage Assessment Findings**

Preliminary Damage Assessments are currently not possible due to ongoing conditions. Two deaths have been confirmed. The affected region has experienced landslides, fallen debris, more than 114 road closures, assisted living homes damaged and evacuated, over 900,000 homes and businesses with power outages, school closures, airport and train transportation stoppages, at least 7 major rivers at moderate to major flood risk levels, 25 gauges currently at moderate to major flooding, and hospitals on generator power, along with other damages impacting the health and safety of the public.

### **Nature and amount of State and local resources that have been or will be used to alleviate the conditions of this incident (See Also FEMA Form 010-0-13)**

#### **Public Assistance**

NCEM staff, including the human services branch, area coordinators, emergency services, multi-hazard field planners, and Individual and Public Assistance staff are currently working with the affected areas and local governments and volunteers to assist in coordinating response and recovery efforts. The State has undertaken the following actions to respond to Helene, as of 5:00 p.m. on September 27, 2024.

- The State Emergency Response Team (SERT) was activated at 7:00 a.m. on September 25, 2024.

- On September 25, 2024, I declared a state of emergency at 8:00 a.m. in response to Helene. See Executive Order No. 315 attached.
- I activated the State Emergency Operations Plan on September 25, 2024.
- Local emergency operations centers are activated or partially activated.
- Local states of emergency have been declared for the following counties and their municipalities: Alexander, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Lincoln, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Nash, New Hanover, Polk, Rutherford, Surry, Swain, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes, Wilson, Yadkin, and Yancey.
- Buncombe, McDowell, Mecklenburg, and Transylvania have issued mandatory evacuation orders due to flooding. Alexander, Burke, Haywood, Rutherford, and Wilkes Counties issued have issued voluntary evacuation orders.
- Shelters have been opened in Alexander, Allegheny, Avery, Buncombe, Clay, Haywood, Henderson, Madison, McDowell, Polk, Lincoln, Rutherford, Watauga, and Wilkes Counties.
- Rescues have been performed in Haywood, Henderson, McDowell, and Sampson Counties.
- Swift water rescues have occurred in multiple counties.
- The North Carolina National Guard has activated 175 soldiers/airmen, five (5) armories, maintenance and fuel support teams, cyber security support, and command/control personnel. The NCNG may also activate additional vehicles and one more armory.
- We have activated seventeen (17) swift water rescue teams and are evaluating additional teams with a current EMAC broadcast, as well as federal support.
- Three EOC Overhead Team and staffing for local EOC is deployed.
- We have seven communications specialists deployed and have deployed several communications equipment caches.
- We activated an additional fifteen (15) swift water rescue teams deployed through the Emergency Management Assistance Compact.
- The SERT Emergency Services Functional Branch is implementing a State Medical Support Shelter plan to support local evacuations of medical facilities and special needs populations.
- The SERT Human Services Branch, along with our county partners are actively engaged in deploying mass feeding, congregate sheltering, and staffing and identifying shelter support teams including for special needs sheltering and the general population.
- One feeding site has been opened in Arden, North Carolina in Buncombe County. A State Shelter has been opened in the Western North Carolina Agricultural Center.
- The SERT Infrastructure Branch continues to survey evacuation routes for fuel issues and construction sites that may impede evacuations. They are also providing situational awareness on Duke Energy's, ElectricCities, and Electric Cooperatives plans for responding to power outages. Duke Energy has surged approximately 600 additional personnel to the region to support outage response. We are supporting our critical infrastructure and key resources partners at local water

treatment plants, and sewer treatment plants, and communicating with actions during the incident.

- The SERT Logistics Section has brought in additional purchasing agents to review our contracts for buses to support evacuations and shelters. The section is also fulfilling commodities requests for meals ready to eat and water.
- The SERT Hazard Mitigation Branch is conducting modeling based on MEOWS and monitoring the riverine flood gages to assist with evacuation decisions and timing thereof.
- We will support the deployment of CAMETS (Companion Animal Mobile Equipment Trailers) to host shelter operations and Mass Care Support Trailers to assist with sheltering operations.

## **Individual Assistance**

## **COUNTY DEMOGRAPHICS**

The State of North Carolina utilizes ARGIS tools to track demographic information. This data is an average of the previous two years of data and was last evaluated in May 2022. In September 2023, the North Carolina Budget and Tax Center reported that 12.8% of North Carolinians were in poverty. The table below shows the demographics of the counties affected by this Disaster thus far. Nearly three-fourths of the counties in the affected area fall below the state poverty level (24 out of 38). An additional four counties affected are within one (1) point of the federal poverty guidelines. Twenty-eight (28) out of thirty-eight (38) counties affected are within one percentage point or below the poverty percentage for the state. This will make it difficult or impossible for families affected by this storm to recover without Federal assistance.

Additionally, reports of homes that have been severely damaged as a result of Helene will drive the State's request for all forms of Individual Assistance including temporary housing.

Below are the indicators affecting resilience for the affected Counties:

County	% pop. for whom poverty status is determined	% pop. already receiving governmental assistance	Pre-disaster unemployment rate	% pop. 65 years and older	% pop. 18 years and younger	% pop. With a disability	% pop. who speak a language other than English
Alexander	12.2%	9.1%	3.2%	20.4%	19.7%	17.1%	5.9%
Alleghany	19.5%	11.6%	4.5%	28.0%	16.3%	17.4%	7.4%
Ashe	14.1%	12.4%	3.0%	26.6%	16.9%	17.9%	5.0%
Avery	11.2%	9.7%	3.0%	22.7%	13.9%	19.0%	5.1%
Buncombe	11.2%	9.2%	2.7%	20.6%	18.0%	13.6%	8.4%
Burke	17.0%	14.9%	3.3%	21.0%	18.2%	20.4%	9.6%
Cabarrus	8.4%	10.0%	3.2%	13.3%	25.2%	10.7%	13.8%
Caldwell	13.3%	12.4%	3.4%	20.7%	19.9%	18.8%	5.7%
Catawba	13.0%	13.1%	3.3%	18.3%	21.8%	14.0%	13.3%
Cherokee	16.7%	10.5%	3.9%	30.7%	16.1%	18.1%	2.9%
Clay	13.5%	11.4%	3.7%	31.9%	16.5%	16.3%	4.3%
Cleveland	18.4%	19.8%	3.5%	18.7%	22.1%	16.2%	4.5%
Forsyth	15.2%	13.5%	3.5%	16.4%	22.7%	12.3%	15.0%
Gaston	12.4%	15.7%	3.4%	16.4%	22.3%	14.7%	8.5%
Graham	11.3%	13.0%	4.4%	23.6%	20.3%	19.6%	5.7%
Haywood	12.1%	11.8%	3.0%	25.1%	17.9%	17.2%	3.7%
Henderson	11.4%	8.8%	2.9%	26.1%	18.6%	14.8%	10.3%
Iredell	9.4%	8.0%	3.2%	16.3%	22.5%	11.8%	10.1%
Jackson	19.3%	10.6%	3.6%	20.4%	16.6%	13.2%	8.1%
Lee	16.0%	16.2%	4.0%	16.8%	23.8%	17.4%	18.6%
Lincoln	9.3%	11.1%	3.0%	18.6%	20.8%	15.2%	7.8%
Macon	15.4%	10.4%	3.2%	28.8%	17.8%	16.9%	7.1%
Madison	12.5%	12.6%	3.2%	22.9%	17.6%	18.5%	1.3%
McDowell	14.9%	17.6%	3.2%	20.6%	19.6%	19.1%	7.8%
Mecklenburg	10.5%	9.0%	3.4%	11.6%	23.0%	8.1%	20.5%
Mitchell	13.4%	14.8%	3.6%	25.1%	18.2%	18.6%	5.2%
Nash	14.5%	17.4%	4.6%	18.8%	21.9%	15.1%	7.5%
Polk	11.0%	9.1%	3.3%	31.7%	15.7%	18.1%	7.0%
Rowan	16.4%	16.2%	3.4%	17.7%	22.0%	15.5%	9.7%
Rutherford	18.4%	19.5%	4.6%	21.7%	20.2%	21.2%	5.1%
Stanly	13.8%	13.9%	3.0%	18.9%	21.5%	17.1%	6.5%
Surry	17.9%	18.1%	3.2%	20.6%	21.0%	19.0%	10.5%
Swain	19.8%	14.8%	2.9%	19.2%	22.6%	17.9%	7.4%
Transylvania	13.4%	11.0%	3.2%	31.0%	15.5%	14.9%	2.6%
Union	6.8%	7.9%	3.0%	13.1%	26.0%	9.2%	15.6%
Watauga	24.9%	7.1%	3.0%	16.2%	12.1%	11.1%	5.1%
Wilkes	17.1%	15.9%	3.7%	22.3%	20.0%	19.0%	6.8%
Yadkin	13.8%	12.8%	3.1%	20.6%	20.6%	15.6%	9.8%
Yancey	15.3%	12.6%	3.1%	26.2%	18.5%	18.4%	4.9%

## Disaster History

The State of North Carolina has a strong Emergency Management Division with both an Individual and Public Assistance recovery program. However, in the last two months, the state and local emergency management teams have had to respond to and continue to address impacts from a federally declared emergency event from Tropical Storm Debby, and last week's significant rainfall from Potential Tropical Cyclone Eight. Furthermore, in the last 60 months, state and local emergency management agencies have responded to the unprecedented COVID-19 global pandemic, with nine federally declared major disaster declarations to wit: Tropical Storm Fred in August 2021, Tropical Storm Eta in November 2020, Hurricane Isaias in July 2020-August 2020, the COVID-19

pandemic in March 2020; severe storms, tornadoes and flooding in February 2020; and Hurricane Dorian in September 2019. I have declared eleven state disaster declarations in the last two years, the most recent in July 2024. The damages for those events are far in the millions, if not billions of dollars of direct state appropriations or cost share for the federally declared events.

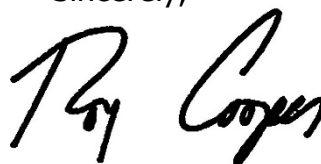
I have determined that this incident is of such unusual severity and magnitude that effective recovery is beyond the capabilities of the state and affected local governments and that supplementary Federal assistance is necessary. The state has expended an extraordinary amount of money on Stafford Act and non-Stafford Act disasters in the previous five years, as well as the current fiscal year. With the recent impacts of Tropical Storm Debby, Potential Tropical Cyclone Eight, and now Helene, there are many impacts that will need to be addressed. Therefore, I am respectfully requesting you issue a Major Disaster Declaration for Individual Assistance, including the Individual and Households Program (IHP), the Small Business Administration's Disaster Assistance Loans, Crisis Counseling, Disaster Legal Services, Disaster Unemployment Assistance, Serious Needs Assistance, Displacement Assistance, Transitional Sheltering Assistance, Other Needs Assistance, Disaster Case Management, the Disaster Supplement Nutritional Assistance Program for the requested counties. I am requesting Public Assistance category A (debris removal), category B (emergency protective measures), and C-G (Permanent Work) for the requested counties and HMPG assistance statewide.

I certify that for this major disaster, the state and local governments will assume all non-Federal shares of costs required by the Stafford Act.

I have designated William C. Ray as the State Coordinating Officer for this request. He will work with the Federal Emergency Management Agency and may provide further information or justification on my behalf.

I appreciate your support and recognition of the State's need for Federal support in its response to this Disaster.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Roy Cooper". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Roy Cooper

RAC/wmp/swh

Enclosures

Executive Order No. 315

FEMA Form 010-0-13