



## Two Years Since Hurricane Helene: Rebuilding for the Long Haul

Two years since Hurricane Helene struck western North Carolina, the headlines have faded, but the work remains. The people of western North Carolina have not let up on rebuilding after Hurricane Helene, and Governor Stein and his team have not let up in their commitment to strengthen infrastructure, restore housing, and support small businesses. To rebuild western North Carolina for the long haul, Governor Stein is calling on the federal government to reinvigorate its commitment to the region and support the next phase of recovery.

**Supporting Long-Term Recovery:** Governor Stein is committed to addressing not only people's immediate needs but also the region's long-term ability to thrive.

- **Funding recovery efforts out west:** In July, Governor Stein signed Senate Bill 257 into law, enacting North Carolina's first full state budget in more than two years. The budget appropriates more than \$700 million to support Hurricane Helene recovery – the third and largest Hurricane Helene Recovery package since Governor Stein took office in January 2025 – to rebuild housing, protect against future disasters, strengthen the economy, and support local governments. The state has appropriated more than \$3 billion in recovery funding.
- **Building a long-term economic plan:** This week, the Governor's Recovery Office for Western North Carolina (GROW NC) launched its long-term Western North Carolina Economic Recovery Plan. This plan identifies the catalysts for a long-term, diversified economic recovery, including strengthening the workforce; expanding connectivity via rail, air, and highway; promoting tourism and the region's craft economy and outdoor recreation opportunities; growing local agriculture and food processing; and supporting local leadership.
- **Supporting jobs:** A reliable job with a steady income is foundational to remaining in a community. After the storm, the Western NC Small Business Grant Initiative and the Helene Small Business Recovery Fund awarded \$105 million in grants and loans to nearly 3,000 small businesses to retain nearly 15,000 jobs. Now, Governor Stein is committed to expanding economic opportunity through apprenticeship programs in western North Carolina. In July, Governor Stein and Secretary Sangvai launched a new state health care apprenticeship program that is creating new pathways into the health care workforce for residents of Burke County and the surrounding area in the program's first cohort. Governor Stein also celebrated \$34.2 million in grants from the US Economic Development Administration to expand economic opportunity, including the construction of the Futures Factory, a new 70,000-square-foot advanced manufacturing workforce and innovation hub in Buncombe County. Governor Stein has also supported 11 community colleges' participation in the Good Jobs WNC program, which aim to connect 1,200 people to good jobs with good wages that can support a family.



- **Fixing downtowns:** Western North Carolina's economy is dependent on its vibrant downtowns and their small businesses, so strengthening downtown infrastructure means giving small businesses a chance to thrive. Since 2025, the North Carolina Department of Commerce has awarded 42 projects more than \$30 million in grants through the Small Business Infrastructure Grant Program (SmBIZ). These repairs include downtown streetscape repairs, water and sewer lines, stormwater controls, and utility relocation.

**Strengthening Infrastructure:** Western North Carolina must be rebuilt stronger than it was before. Governor Stein and his team are focused on resiliency so that the region can be prepared for the next storm.

- **Awarding \$1 billion to strengthen water infrastructure:** People need clean, safe, reliable water. As of July, the Department of Environmental Quality has awarded more than \$1 billion to strengthen water infrastructure and resilience in western North Carolina. Since Hurricane Helene struck, 99% of all drinking water systems damaged by the storm have been fully restored, but more than \$758 million in unmet federal needs remain to fully repair systems and make them more resilient to future storms.
- **Repairing roads and bridges:** NCDOT has now reopened more than 99% of roads closed or impacted by Hurricane Helene. Maintenance and construction crews and contract partners have reduced the number of state-maintained roads completely closed by Helene to three. To ensure people can access their property, North Carolina has served 2,000 households through its private roads and bridges programs. As of August 2026, 140 sites have been completed, and 140 more are in progress.
- **Rebuilding broadband:** People need reliable high-speed internet to find resources, apply for jobs, run businesses, and educate their kids. Helene knocked thousands of homes, businesses, and community institutions offline, some for weeks. Through the Broadband Recovery Program, established by Governor Stein and the General Assembly with American Rescue Plan Act funds, NCDIT is funding nearly \$63 million in internet service providers' projects in the 39 disaster-designated counties, including the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, prioritizing the restoration of high-speed internet service to the communities that lost it.

**Bringing People Home:** Getting families back into safe housing that they can afford is critical to the region's recovery. Governor Stein has worked with state agencies and volunteer partners to enable more than 1,250 North Carolinians get back home.

- **Building safe, affordable housing:** Renew NC has ramped up its Single-Family Housing Program. Construction has been completed on more than 150 homes, with another 158 in the construction phase and more than 618 in pre-construction as of September 21. Renew NC has launched a number of other rebuilding programs, including the Multi-Family Construction and Repair Program, which is constructing and rehabilitating rental housing for families, and the Workforce Housing for Ownership



Program, which is expanding homeownership opportunities for people in western North Carolina with low to moderate incomes. In August, Governor Stein announced a new initiative creating 828 new affordable rental units across 10 western North Carolina counties.

- **Partnering with volunteer organizations:** It takes partnership not only among all levels of government but also with private and nonprofit groups to support recovery and prepare for the next natural disaster. Thus far, state-funded nonprofit partnerships have completed the repair and rehabilitation of more than 1,100 homes. Governor Stein recently signed a budget that includes \$35 million in additional funding for these volunteer organizations to continue repairing and rebuilding homes.

**Bringing People Back:** Western North Carolina has so much to offer from breathtaking views to a world-renowned craft industry. Governor Stein continues to tell western North Carolina's story and encourage people from near and far to remember all that the region has to offer.

- **Bringing people back to the mountains:** Much of western North Carolina's economy depends on tourism. Last year, Governor Stein launched the state's new tourism campaign: "Western North Carolina: Rediscover the Unforgettable." This year, Governor Stein has promoted the region to ski tourists by highlighting the state as the Winter Capital of the South. He also joined Etsy in launching the Craft Catalyst Initiative, awarding \$2 million to uplift the Asheville region's status as a craft destination and encourage visitors to explore western North Carolina's unique craft history and culture. The Governor and First Lady regularly return to western North Carolina to promote all it has to offer.
- **Celebrating western North Carolina:** The Stein administration continues to recruit for opportunities to share western North Carolina's story on the national stage. The North Carolina Department of Commerce awarded a film grant for "Top Chef" to film in the Carolinas, including an episode dedicated to western North Carolina's food scene, and awarded a Major Events, Games and Attractions grant to the PGA Tour to support the new Biltmore Championship golf tournament. Governor Stein and the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources dedicated the 2025 North Carolina Awards to recognizing some of the North Carolinians whose resilience, service, and creativity have moved the region forward. The awards ceremony raised more than \$200,000 to support Hurricane Helene recovery efforts through the North Carolina Community Foundation.
- **Rebuilding outdoor recreation:** DNCR has reopened all of its 18 sites impacted by Helene. Work continues to finish debris removal and repairs on trails. Of 315 miles of storm damaged trails, 301 miles have been cleared and reopened, including a portion of Profile Trail at Grandfather Mountain State Park. In September 2026, Governor Stein celebrated the reopening of the Blue Ridge Parkway between Blowing Rock and Grandfather Mountain, just ahead of leaf season in western North Carolina. More than \$4 million in grants to fund 11 local parks and recreation projects in western North



Carolina were awarded in 2026 through the Helene Recovery Fund for the N.C. Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF).

- **Supporting the arts and creative economy:** The North Carolina Arts Council, working with national funders and partner organizations in western North Carolina, have helped to raise more than \$6 million to support artists and arts organizations in the region affected by Hurricane Helene. This summer, Governor Josh Stein joined the Center for Craft and e-commerce platform Etsy to celebrate the launch of the Craft Catalyst Initiative, a new partnership that over the next three years will invest \$2 million into greater Asheville's creative economy.

**Working with the Federal Government:** Recovery is a marathon, not a sprint. Governor Stein will be with the people of western North Carolina every step of the way. While he is grateful for every federal dollar the state has received, he recognizes that the federal government must contribute substantially more resources to the recovery effort than it has to date.

- **Calling on Congress to appropriate new funding:** Congress has not appropriated new funding to support recovery efforts since December 2024, with federal funding comprising 16% of the total damages from Helene as of July 2026. Governor Stein is calling for a \$10 billion appropriation from Congress to repair and rebuild damaged homes, support small businesses and local governments, restore dams and streambanks, rebuild private roads and bridges, and repair federal highways. Governor Stein will continue working with the North Carolina congressional delegation to ensure western North Carolina has what it needs to recover as quickly as possible. The time is now to pass another bill and get more funds to western North Carolina. [Click here to read more about Governor Stein's federal request.](#)
- **Working with FEMA to unlock funding:** Governor Stein has maintained an active relationship with FEMA, providing recommendations to the FEMA Review Council on how future FEMA reforms can help states receive fast, flexible funding. He continues to work with FEMA to speed up its review of outstanding Public Assistance (PA) and Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) applications to unlock reimbursements for local governments and homeowners.

## RESOURCES:

- [GROW NC dashboard](#)
- [DCR Dashboard](#)
- [Resource page on GROW NC website](#)