

Weekly News Summary for Sunday, September 29, 2024.

Yesterday, search and rescue operations were underway in communities across Western NC and supplies are being brought into the region by air following devastating impacts from Hurricane Helene, according to a media release from the NC Gov's office. More than 200 people have been rescued from flood waters in NC following torrential rains. NC's search and rescue teams are being bolstered by teams from 19 states and three federal teams. Many areas in the mountains received more than 10" and as much as 29" of rain causing catastrophic flooding. High winds gusting up to hurricane strength also brought down trees, power lines and cell towers across the region. More than 700K people remained without power as of Sat morn and utility crews are responding from across the country for immediate restoration and repair efforts. 16 shelters housed approx 1,100 residents Fri night.

A CH Electric Coop crew headed to the western part of the state to Union Power Coop, headquartered in Monroe, to help with restoration efforts after Hurr Helene heavily damaged their system. Heading west are Tyler Scarborough, Robbie Easley, Jonathan Vernesoni, Justin Waterfield and Brayan Garcia. The local coop sent 2 bucket trucks, 4 linemen, a crew supervisor and a pickup truck. Cooperation among cooperatives is a founding cooperative principle.

Cellular phone service remained spotty west of I-77 due to infrastructure damage. Telecommunications partners have activated Disaster Roaming, which allows any phone on any cell network to access any available network to connect to. Telephone service providers are working to restore communications across the area.

Across NC, 29 counties and 52 towns and cities have issued States of Emergency, in addition to the statewide State of Emergency declared by Cooper, and he requested a Major Disaster Declaration fm the fed govt for NC. As of Saturday morn, about 418 state-maintained roads remained closed, mostly due to flooding. Across the area, 11 landslides have been reported. This includes major closures on Interstates 26 and 40 around Asheville, plus dozens of locations along several US and NC highway routes.

State transportation officials continue to urge residents to avoid traveling in western NC, and to consider all roads in that region closed. Go to DriveNC.gov for the latest conditions on roads impacted by Hurr Helene.

And Hatteras Island was affected by Helene. Around 7 Fri morning through Sat morning, Spectrum internet and cable television service was disrupted. Fiber optic cables damaged by flooding in upstate SC from Hurricane Helene was to blame for the lengthy outage for Spectrum internet service customers. A Charter Communications spokesperson said: "Network lines at our regional data center in the Spartanburg, SC-area were damaged as a result of Helene." The network is integral to providing internet services to HattIsl and much of NC. Service to HI was returned after noon on Sat.

The Frisco VFD set up its mobile cell tower for emergency calls, and its Starlink is available for personal calls if needed. The HI Community Response Team set up its Starlink units for anyone without Internet to use. Locations were the Hatt Fire Station (active as of 10 o'clock), the old movie theater (by Ace Hardware) in Avon, and at the Rodanthe-Waves-Salvo Community Bldg in Rodanthe.

The Dare Co Bd of Ed, on a 6-1 vote, decided to recommend the Universal Meals Pgm to Dare's commrs. Meeting on Thurs evening, Sept 26, the school bd first discussed the existing policy and regulation that initially imposed a \$10 cap on charges for breakfast and lunch. School bd member Matt Brauer led the discussion, saying that the policy and regulation need to be eliminated before discussing a new program. The board voted unanimously to eliminate the cap language. After discussion, the school bd passed a motion giving Chairman David Twiddy and the superintendent authority to request from the Bd of Commrs the Universal Meals Plan and provide funding outside the funding formula. The estimated annual cost is up to \$400K. As more students participate in the no-cost breakfast and lunch program, the reimbursement level goes up, reducing the amount that must be paid locally. Cape Hatteras Elementary and Cape Hatteras Secondary students have enjoyed no cost breakfast and lunch since the start of the school year.

Dare Co Commr Steve House, who serves as Chair of the Oregon Inlet Task Force, Dare Co Mgr Bobby Outten, and the Co's consulting engineers met with reps fm the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Wilmington, Wed, Sept 25, to discuss how to ensure that future dredging by the county's contractor is in compliance with dredging permits, according to a media release from Dare Co. The meeting was held in response to concerns raised by the Army Corps about data contained in reports from the Natl Dredging Quality Mgmt Pgm indicating that past work by the Co's contractor was conducted outside the authorized widths and depths of the navigation channels. The Army Corps suspended the Co's dredging permits last week but has assured Co officials that dredging by the contractor can resume in coming days, once the Army Corps updates the permits.

Third Rodanthe house falls to ocean. On Monday, September 23, around 1:00 in the afternoon, a third house on G A Kohler Court fell to the onslaught of northeast winds driving high surf.

As of the latest missive from the Cape Hatteras National Seashore, for public safety, the beach is closed from G A Kohler Court through Sea Haven Drive in Rodanthe, about four-tenths-of-a-mile. This is a change from the initial closure that was south of the KOA Campground.

Most pieces of large debris have been removed from the beach adjacent to Sea Haven Drive and to the south. Small debris, including potentially nail-ridden wooden debris, is still present on the beaches in reduced quantities.

During the cleanup Monday morning, Seashore employees found a urine specimen cup and parts of used feminine hygiene products on the beach in the tri-villages. These items are characteristic of medical waste that was found on beaches in Delaware, Maryland and Virginia over the last month. No other observations of apparent medical waste have been documented along the Seashore. The U.S. Coast Guard's Sector NC has been notified of these observations. Seashore visitors should stay away from apparent medical waste and report observations via email to caha_public_affairs@nps.gov.

From September 22 through September 26, Seashore employees removed hand-collected debris in pickup trucks. In total, the Seashore removed more than 60 pickup truck loads of debris from beaches spanning about 20 miles. In addition to hand collecting debris for removal, Seashore employees have used chainsaws to cut large house pilings into manageable pieces for contractor removal.

During the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council meeting being held in Charleston, South Carolina, NOAA Fisheries' Southeast Regional Administrator told South Atlantic Council members the agency is preparing a Secretarial Amendment to end overfishing of red snapper.

A Secretarial Amendment is an amendment to a fishery management plan that is prepared by NOAA Fisheries on behalf of the Secretary of Commerce. This Secretarial Amendment would amend the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper-Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region.

At this time, management alternatives are in development. NOAA Fisheries will soon be requesting input through a public scoping process.

In the past 18 months, NOAA Fisheries was sued three times for failing to end overfishing of South Atlantic red snapper. On Aug. 22, 2024, a Washington D.C. District Court approved a settlement agreement between NOAA Fisheries and plaintiffs for one of these lawsuits. The settlement agreement requires NOAA Fisheries to submit the final rule implementing the Secretarial Amendment to the Federal Register on or before June 6, 2025.

On September 23, the NC Dept of Trans's Ferry Dvn officially christened its 2 newest vessels during a ceremony at the Cherry Branch Ferry Terminal in Havelock. The Motor Vessel Avon and Motor Vessel Salvo are both river-class ferries, larger than the 2 Hatteras-class ferries they're replacing, which are both more than 30 years old. The 2 vessels are currently in service on the Cherry Branch-Minnesott Beach route, although it's possible that they may be used at the Hatteras-Ocracoke route at some point in the future as river-class ferries are moved around as needed when other vessels go into required drydock periods.

Ever heard of dragons at the beach? Seriously! The CH Natl Seashore has reported a Blue Sea Dragon has been spotted washing up on the OBX. This venomous sea slug lives in the open ocean and occasionally gets stranded on dry land following strong winds. They may only grow to about an inch long, but they pack a punch! As they move through ocean currents, they snack on their main meal of choice: the Portuguese man o' war. Because their meals consist of such a venomous creature, they are capable of storing that venom for their own defense. They concentrate that ingested venom and deliver a sting that is even more powerful! If you come across one of these blue beauties, admire it from a safe distance and be cautious of more nearby. Blue Sea Dragons can travel in groups known as "Blue Fleets." If they are discovered, dead or alive, they remain venomous. Don't touch.

October is nationally recognized as Breast Cancer Awareness Month. On HI, a several local restaurants and businesses have joined the HI Cancer Foundation in its annual Drink Pink Campaign, which raises funds through libations. The foundation is an all-volunteer, non-profit organization that provides support for cancer patients and their families who live on Hatteras Island. In an effort to address this continual need for help throughout HI, the "Drink Pink" campaign was first launched in Oct 2014 by Jomi Price at Ketch 55, and has grown every year with more restaurants and businesses getting involved. To date, the campaign has raised nearly \$60,000. This toast-worthy event features ample opportunities to sample pink drinks of all varieties from milkshakes to cocktails--as restaurants offer their own pink concoctions, w/all proceeds going to the HICF.

Congratulations to Island Free Press. At the NC Press Asscn annual convention in Raleigh, the IFP received 7 awards for work published between Mar 1, 2023 and March 31, 2024. The Public Service Award is given to one newspaper in each division – daily newspapers, non-daily newspapers, and online – and "recognizes a distinguished example of meritorious public service of a newspaper to its local community, reflecting exceptional courage or enterprise." Joy Crist of the IFP won the Public Service Award for the state's Online Division for her 2024 coverage of the contamination issues at Buxton Beach.

Don Bowers earned 3 asscn awards, which included a third-place win for Feature Photography for the annual Blessing of the Fleet event in Hatt Vill, a third-place award for General News Photography for his coverage of Buxton Beach deterioration, and a first-place award for Spot Photography for images he captured during a March 2024 storm.

Crist also won a second-place award in the Editorials category, while co-founder and publisher Donna Barnett won third-place awards for magazine or niche publications for her supplemental area guides, as well as in the advertising category.

The NC Press Asscn was established in 1873, and is one of the oldest orgs of its kind in the US. The asscn is a member-owned and operated nonprofit group that helps to maintain high industry standards, represents the interests and rights of established newspapers throughout the state, and promotes literacy and education through the NC Press Foundation. NCPA's annual contest is one of the largest in the country, with over 4,000 entries from over 125 newspapers and news organizations in the 2023-2024 contest.

Major restoration work on 1874 Chicamacomico Life-Saving Station is underway. The contractor is working to finish Phase One of the Restoration by the 150th Anniversary Celebration of the Chicamacomico station. The two-day celebration is set for October 12 and 13. Joy Crist has an in-depth article about the intricacies of the historic restoration. Visit IslandFreePress.org for the article.

A pop up library happens Tues, Oct 1, at the Fessenden Ctr Annex , 47013 Buxton Back Rd. The Hatt Library pop up starts at 10 in the morn and runs for 3 hrs. The Beach Food Pantry will bring fresh produce for pick up.

Please stay safe on Hatteras Island beaches and Remember western NC. This is RH.