Helene Recovery Update

Helene Impacts, Public Safety & Recovery on the Pisgah National Forest

May 19, 2026



Buncombe County

Impacts from Helene to National Forests

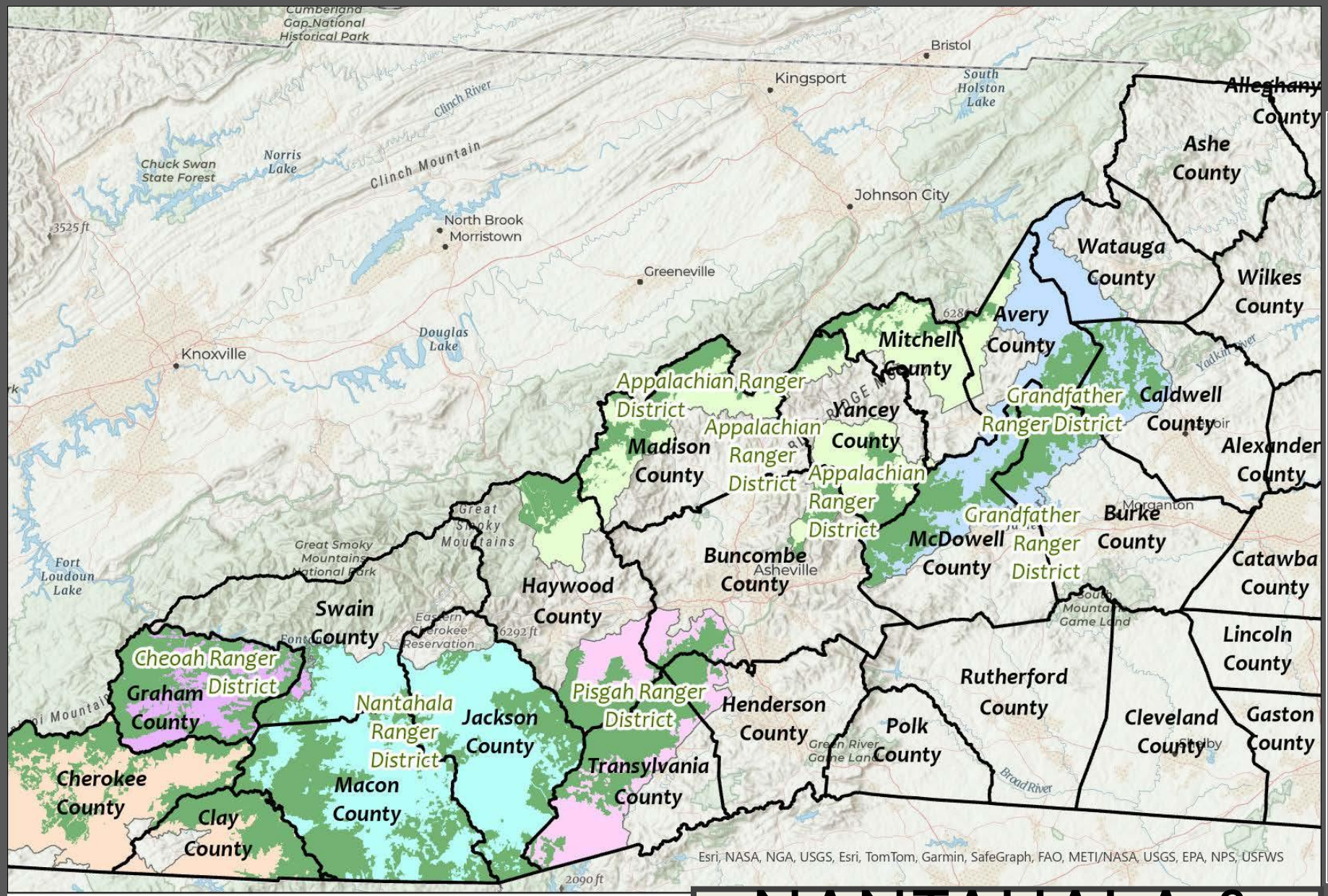




- Tens of thousands of acres of downed trees
- Unprecedented fuel loads
- Extensive impacts to watersheds
- 850 miles of trails damaged
- Nearly all recreation sites damaged, some catastrophically
- 885 miles of road severely impacted, 30% of roads completely destroyed







NANTAHALA & PISGAH NFs

Three Ranger Districts encompass the Pisgah NF

- **Pisgah RD**
  - Ranger Station is in Brevard, NC
    - Bent Creek
- Grandfather RD
  - Ranger Station is in Nebo, NC
- **Appalachian RD**
  - Ranger Station is in Mars Hill, NC
    - Big Ivy, Shope Creek, Ox Creek

Helene Recovery Priorities



Fuel and Debris Removal



Emergency Responder Access



Reopening Trails, Roads, and Rec Sites





Shope Creek Recent Progress

- **Fuel reduction**
  - ~50% of fuels reduced
  - Improved emergency access for SAR and fire response
  - Road and crossing improvements
  - Site preparation for revegetation
- **Reforestation planting occurred in spring 2026)**
- **Partial Reopening –** Parking Lot & Roads Only
  - Remainder of the Area is Closed
- **Non-native invasive species treatments**
- **Preliminary trail system planning**
  - Cooperator & partner collaboration
- **Multiple community meetings & trail listening sessions**

Shope Creek Fuel Reduction

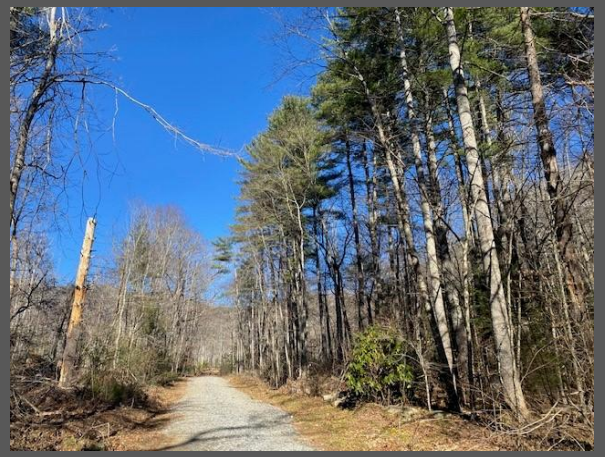
Best Management Practices (BMPs) & Leave Trees













Shope Creek Trail Planning Overview

- Provide an area that fills the same needs and matches current character with improved management and planning.
- Multi-use trail system (hike & bike, multiple levels of challenge) paying careful attention to user conflict mitigation.
- Community engagement and input – targeted meetings to engage specific groups.
- Layout to combine existing trails and new trails for the best possible user experience with responsible land and ecosystem management.
- Planned with safety in mind and in coordination with local EMS needs.
- Long-term maintenance plan, strong partnerships.
- Continuation of forest management (NNIS treatment, oak regen work) .

Shope Creek

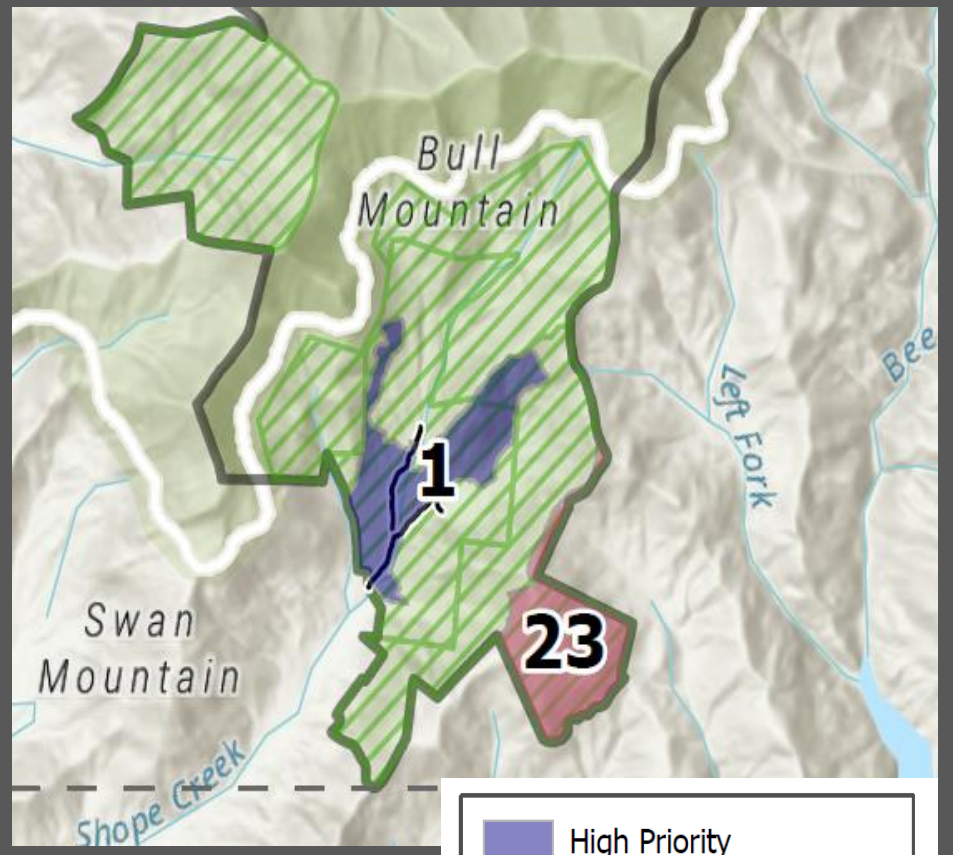
Oak & Pine Plantings







Non-Native Invasive Species Treatments



Number	Name
1	Shope Creek - North
23	Shope Creek - BT



Big Ivy Recent Progress

- All Big Ivy Trails reopened in October 2025
  - 2,000+ hours of sawyer work to clear trails.
- Roads:
  - Ranger Road extension opened, and the portion of Ranger Road/Lower Staire (FSR 231) to the parking lot was re-opened Oct. 31, 2025, to all authorized uses.
    - Special use permit issued for a private bridge for private landowner access.
  - Ogle Meadows Road (FSR 5554) received emergency repairs.
  - FSR 63A off Stoney Fork Road – Bridge debris removal & restoration completed.
- Watershed assessments completed.
  - Collected Baseline Impacts/Changes From Helene.
- Debris Removal completed to decrease flooding risk.

Big Ivy - Coleman Boundary (FSR 74) – Post Helene

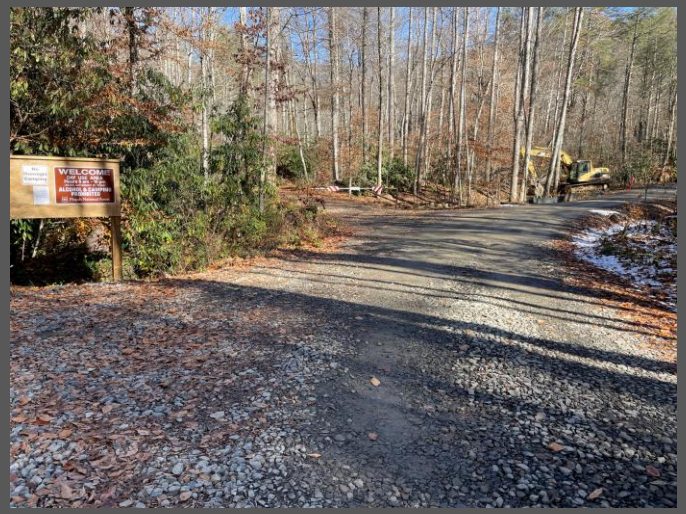








Emergency & Public Access Restored



Restoring Search and Rescue Access, Private Landowner Access and Public Access with Ranger Road/Lower Staire and Ranger Rd Ext.









Big Ivy – Upcoming Recovery Focus

- Re-establish motorized access to Douglas Falls.
  - **Currently vehicles can only drive to the intersection of Ranger Rd & Coleman Boundary Rd.**
  - **Award a contract in FY26.**
  - **Reopen in Summer FY27 for high clearance vehicles.**
- Trail assessments and trail work.
- FY27 - Federal Highways Administration will be working on Long-term Resiliency & Road Realignment for Coleman Boundary Road.
  - **Will include resource review with public input.**





Learn More About Helene Recovery

Check Out Our Website & Facebook Page for More Information on Closures, Alerts, Public Meetings, and More!

NFsNC Webpage

NFsNC Facebook Page: