

Grandfather Mountain - Disaster Relief Response and Economic Impacts From Helene

Who We Are

Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, was formed in 2009 to operate one-third of the Grandfather Mountain property that includes the Mile High Swinging Bridge, Wilson Center for Nature Discovery, hiking trails, wildlife habitats and much more. The other two-thirds of the Grandfather Mountain property is owned by the state of North Carolina, comprising Grandfather Mountain State Park.

Our mountain is an amazing classroom. Through education programs, annual events, research and behind-the-scenes experiences, we provide learning opportunities in nature for all ages. Our mission is to inspire conservation of the natural world through education, exploration and example.

Hurricane Helene

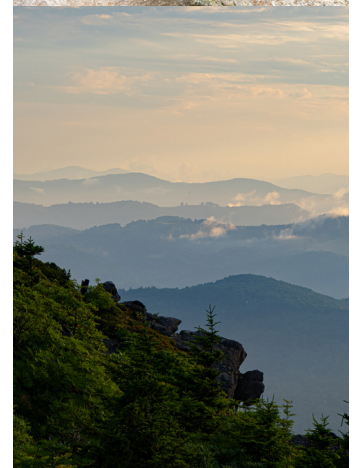
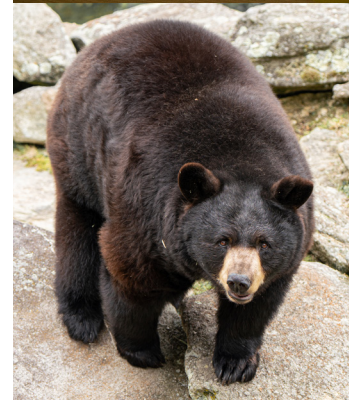
The Grandfather Mountain nature park was extremely fortunate to receive only minor damage from Hurricane Helene. A small number of trees fell during the storm, and only a few washouts or small landslides have been discovered. The mountain was impacted by the electricity, internet and cell signal outages that were widespread across the region in the weeks following the storm. A few days after Helene, the park was able to confirm that all staff and the mountain's resident habitat animals were safe.

Economic Impact

- Grandfather Mountain closed to the public on Sept. 26, the day before Hurricane Helene tore through the southeastern part of the country, leaving behind unimaginable effects on the communities surrounding the park. The mountain was closed to guests for 27 days.
- The Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation estimates \$1.5 million in lost attendance revenue while the park was closed. This stat does not include revenue lost from the mountain's in-park retail centers, restaurant or special events.
- Annually, the month of October is when Grandfather Mountain welcomes its largest number of visitors.
- During October 2023, Grandfather Mountain welcomed 60,000 visitors over the course of the month, 20% of the park's annual attendance of 300,000 visitors.

Disaster Relief

With the mountain suffering minor damage, the nonprofit Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation was able to turn its focus outward from park operations to humanitarian efforts in Avery County, reflecting the



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group's core value of community. In fact, many staff members immediately began showing up at the mountain to assist the community following the hurricane, even before cell signal communication was restored to the area. Since the storm hit, the organization has worked with dozens of nonprofits (local to international), regional businesses, tourism colleagues, good Samaritans and many others in an effort to bring relief to the mountain's surrounding communities.

A few examples of this work include purchasing generators and gas grills for community members in need, installing culverts and building bridges, feeding local rescue crews, helping with grading repairs so flood-damaged businesses could get closer to reopening, assisting in flood cleanup at a local affordable housing complex, volunteering in donation distribution centers and coordinating the installation of Starlink kits where needed.

Reopening

Grandfather Mountain reopened to the public on Oct. 23. In the weeks leading up to this decision, the mountain's leadership team kept in close regular contact with county administrators, North Carolina Department of Transportation representatives, Blue Ridge Parkway officials, Grandfather Mountain State Park rangers, local community leaders and regional and state tourism representatives concerning a thoughtful reopening plan for the park. With a goal of encouraging mindful tourism in the High Country, Grandfather Mountain's staff created a list of travel tips for guests visiting the area, which can be accessed at www.grandfather.com/thoughtful-travel.

Please note that Grandfather Mountain State Park is a separate entity and has its own set of announcements and updates.

Continued Relief Efforts

Although Grandfather Mountain has reopened, our surrounding communities have not been so fortunate. Towns were flooded; roads and bridges washed away; landslides have forever changed the landscape of the region; many people have lost their homes and livelihoods; and, tragically, people are still missing and lives were lost. Knowing that the hurricane's impacts will be long-lasting, Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation aims to continue its financial contributions to individual families in need. The organization plans to provide monetary assistance after disaster relief organizations, such as FEMA, have helped — essentially filling in any gaps if additional support is needed beyond the provided financial assistance.

Contact media@grandfather.com for additional information or photo/video needs.

📷 Front: Leslie Restivo
📷 Back: GMSF

