

**Trail News from the Mountains to the Sea** March 2025

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## Status of the MST Six Months after Hurricane Helene

Over 45% of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail has reopened in the mountains in the six months after Hurricane Helene. This has been a collaboration across agencies and volunteer crews to tackle the unprecedented damage that Hurricane Helene caused.

In the first weeks and months after the storm, a tremendous amount of work was done by National Park Service and US Forest Service staffs. These pros assessed the trail first and found that much of the damage was beyond even their training.



Skilled professional crews and contractors were brought in to detangle the massive tree pile ups and create a narrow corridor of the trail route, oftentimes

needing GPS to find the trail. Once the first pass was cut and certain areas were deemed safe for volunteers, our crews got to work.

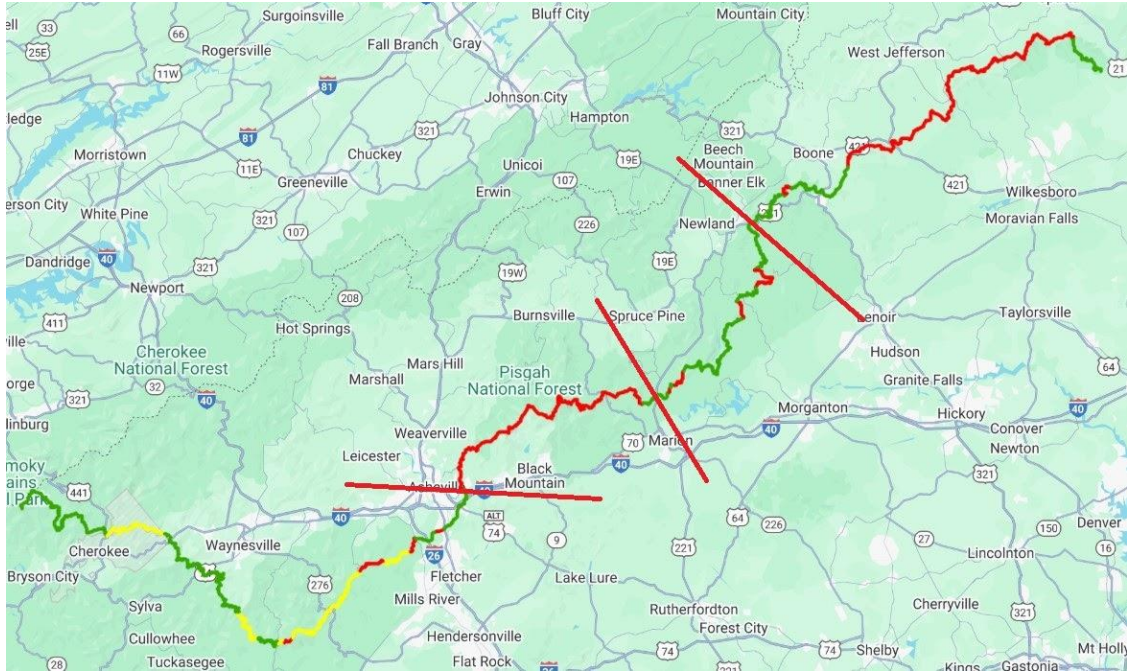


Carolina Mountain Club, in partnership with the National Park Service and Friends of the MST, led a weeklong work blitz through the MST Asheville corridor, with Friends of the MST volunteers coming from as far as Ohio and our Croatan Task Force in Carteret County. CMC provides trail work and advocacy for the MST and other trails throughout the western part of NC and, along with our other task forces, has been instrumental in pushing for trails to reopen.

Friends of the MST's Central Blue Ridge Task Force has been steadily working through the Linville Gorge section, with upwards of 35 volunteers out some weekdays. As a result, 80% of the MST in that area has reopened. Elkin Valley Trails Association has just gotten the trail reopened through Stone Mountain. That is the good news.

Now to the less good news, as we begin to think in terms of work that will take months and years. Friends of the MST has been working with land managers and others to compile an updated map of trail conditions, including what is open, closed and uncertain.

[Click here to access the map.](#) The map below is a screenshot taken March 25, 2025.



Green represents trail that has been opened by the land manager and we have on the ground reports that it is safe for hikers. Yellow is trail through land that has been opened by the land manager but we haven't yet had eyes on the ground reports about the trail conditions. Red is closed by the land manager and off limits. And keep in mind that where the Blue Ridge Parkway is closed it is closed for everything – ALL recreation, hiking, and volunteer trail work.

To help understand the recovery, it's easiest to divide the mountains into four large sections as referenced on the map above. The first section is from the terminus at Kuwohi to Asheville, second is from Asheville to near Marion, third from Marion to Beacon Heights near Grandfather Mountain, and then from Beacon Heights to Stone Mountain State Park.

## Kuwohi to Asheville

From the western terminus to approximately milepost 44 on the Blue Ridge Parkway in segment 2, the trail looks good as the storm wasn't as impactful

further west. Once in the Devil's Courthouse area near milepost 44, there begin to be closures on the parkway. A couple of these have somewhat easy short-term reroutes, that we are working to get approval for, and in other locations, the parkway has prioritized road reconstruction. [Check out the Blue Ridge Parkway's website for updates on recovery work.](#) Several of these projects are already underway around Asheville and just north of the Folk Art Center. Superintendent Tracy Swartout, Trail Coordinator Neal Wilcox, Landscape Architect Jeff Curtis and Volunteer Coordinator Jonathan Bennett among others have been tenacious in their support for the MST's recovery.

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## Asheville to Near Marion

Further north, between Craven Gap and Mount Mitchell, there is a long stretch of closed trail. There are two landslides on either side of Mount Mitchell that will require significant infrastructure to rebuild the roadbed. State Parks is working with the National Park Service on a time frame to restore access to Mount Mitchell State Park, but it will be lengthy. In this long stretch, the footpath is buried under huge hardwood tree pile ups in areas where it is routed high on the ridges. In other spots, the tree cover is mostly smaller trees like birch and beech and didn't suffer the catastrophic and widespread type of damage, so the trail appears to be in better condition, but it is not accessible because of the landslides that keep the road closed.

Based on what we know from the land managers, it appears likely that the MST could remain closed here from approximately I-40 to either NC 80 or US 221 for multiple years. Our goal is to create convenient access points for thru hikers to shuttle around, and we are finalizing that guidance soon.

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## Marion to Beacon Heights

The section through Linville Gorge from approximately US 221 to Beacon Heights near Linn Cove Viaduct and Grandfather Mountain has been incredibly resilient. More than 80% of the MST has reopened due to the strong working partnership with the US Forest Service under the leadership of Lisa Jennings, the nonprofit contractor Wild South and Friends of the MST's Central Blue Ridge Task Force.

The nearly 200-foot bridge over the North Fork of the Catawba River was lost, and the US Forest Service is exploring options to replace that. One half of the steel bridge traveled a short distance before lodging itself on the riverbed and the other went much farther downriver, scooting under a railroad bridge without damaging it.

There are plans to clear the remaining closed areas or route the MST on nearby trails to create a through route as soon as possible.

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## Beacon Heights to Stone Mountain State Park

In the most northern mountain section, the MST comes out of Linville Gorge and again follows the Blue Ridge Parkway from Beacon Heights to where the trail drops off the parkway into Stone Mountain State Park.

Task forces in the Grandfather Mountain and the Tanawha Trail area, and a short portion of the trail in Watauga County around the Boone area, have cleared much of the trail and it is passable. Julian Price Park is still closed, which includes the MST on the Boone Fork Trail.

There is a very long closed stretch coming up from the Boone area all the way to Devil's Garden Overlook where the trail then joins into Stone Mountain State Park. This stretch is closed because of on-going roadbed reconstruction and paving. In the past, volunteers in Ashe and Alleghany counties could access the trail from side roads or walk in. This wasn't ideal, especially for sawyers carrying heavy gear, but in most cases it was feasible. And hikers were allowed to walk the trail.

Now, with the 100% closure on the parkway, Friends of the MST volunteers have not been allowed on the trail since the hurricane. In early February, we began negotiations to allow our trail volunteers in to work on this part of the trail. Our crews have been admirably patient but are frustrated because they take much personal pride in keeping the trails safe and beautiful for all to use. It's been a long time off the trail, and the trail needs their attention. We can safely assume that the trail is degrading through this area and will need much work to return it to good shape.

Finishing up the mountain section, the MST has been fully cleared and reopened through Stone Mountain State Park.

## What's Next?

The National Park Service and US Forest Service have had significant challenges, including reductions in staff, which has the potential to hamper and delay trail recovery efforts in these areas. We will continue to support our agency partners as they move forward and our organization, from staff to volunteers, stands ready to pitch in where we can to ensure the path to recovery for the MST, and other trails and facilities across the mountains, remains a priority.

We remain optimistic and cannot stress enough the work we've put into the relationships with these hardworking champions of the trail and the work that they have put in on our behalf.

Our staff is in constant communication with our mountain partners, task force leaders and other nonprofit and trail groups. While it may seem like a slow process, the amount of work, planning and energy going on is thoughtful and complex. In time, the MST will reopen. Until then, we invite you to explore the trail in open mountain areas and support those communities as they get back to business. We're also working on guidance for those who wish to complete the entire MST, and should have that ready in the next few weeks.

We wish we could give you a timeline, next steps and a reopen date. Some of the MST may be closed for a few years, some may reopen sooner. In the meantime, [check the map for the most updated trail information](#), reach out if you have specific questions and we'll do what we can to get the answers. And remember, there are many miles of MST to explore in the Piedmont and the Coastal Plain.

And when we are allowed back on the trail, whether it's next month or next year, we'll need the MST Community to show up, as we know you will.

Thanks for your support,

Betsy Brown, Associate Director & Brent Laurenz, Executive Director  
and the team at Friends of the MST