



North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

N.C. Forest Service



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Helene Disaster Mitigation Program: Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is the Disaster Mitigation Program (DMP)?

A: The DMP is a N.C. Forest Service (NCFS) initiative funded under a USDA Forest Service National Fire Plan grant. Funding will be used to reduce hazardous fuels in areas impacted by Hurricane Helene, reopen existing fuel breaks, conduct limited home ignition zone (HIZ) treatments and increase wildfire resiliency in storm-damaged communities. Eligible projects must be entirely or partially within the FEMA Disaster Declaration DR-4827 areas, declared as of Dec. 18, 2024.

Q: How is the DMP funded?

A: In 2025, the NCFS was awarded a State Fire Capacity/Wildfire Hazard Mitigation grant to support the recovery of forests and communities impacted by Hurricane Helene in 2024. The grant provided around \$18 million in funding to purchase equipment, hire contractors and develop programs to implement wildfire mitigation projects in Western North Carolina, over a five-year period. The DMP was allocated \$5.15 million to meet the intent of the grant.

Approved Practices

Q: Which practices are eligible under the DMP?

A: - Prescribed burning (understory hazard reduction only)
- Home ignition zone (HIZ) treatments
- Fuel break/road restoration: Restore previously existing forest/farm roads or fuel breaks to function as continuous control lines

Q: Can other state agencies participate?

A: Yes, with prior approval.

Q: Where can DMP projects take place?

A: Projects must be entirely or partially within the Helene disaster declaration area (DR-4827) and should be near homes/infrastructure to mitigate wildfire threats. Federal ownership is not eligible. Private ownership, i.e., individuals, land trusts, partnerships, corporate holdings, and public lands, i.e., local and state, are eligible.

Q: What is an Area of Concern (AOC), and how does it affect priorities?

A: AOCs include areas verified with wildfire risk in SouthWRAP, areas identified in an NCFS-approved mitigation plan, or areas with limited access, difficult terrain (greater than 40% slopes), high fuel buildup (greater than six tons per acre), or inadequate defensible space per Firewise principles. A project's proximity to an AOC is part of prioritization.

Q: Are there restrictions with other grant/cost-share programs?

A: The DMP is not a cost-share program. There is no cost to qualified landowners. Interactions with Farm Bill programs, i.e., EQIP, WHIP, CSP, CRP, must be checked. Double dipping is not permitted, e.g., if an active EQIP contract pays for prescribed burning on the same tract, DMP burning cannot be performed without canceling the cost share.

Q: Can more than one mitigation action be taken on the same acre?

A: Only one mitigation action is allowed per acre unless approved in writing by regional or state mitigation personnel, e.g., using a newly opened shaded fuel break as a fire line for a subsequent prescribed burn.

Q: How does the DMP prioritize work?

A: Priority is based on proximity of homes and/or infrastructure to Helene damage, categorized as moderate (20-50%), severe (51-75%) and catastrophic (greater than 75%) stand damage. The highest priority goes to homes and/or infrastructure within a half mile of catastrophic damage; second priority within a half mile of severe damage; and, next priority within 1 mile of moderate damage. Prescribed burns do not have to be treated strictly in priority order due to weather dependencies. HIZ and fuel break restoration should follow priority order as practical.

Q: How are DMP projects initiated and approved?

A: County staff submit a DMP project form, a no-cost forestation or prescribed burn contract, any HIZ scope of work (if applicable), and a map with aerial imagery showing the project area. A district Helene mitigation specialist visits the tract/residence to ensure criteria and priority are met, then forwards to the regional Helene mitigation coordinator for approval based on funding and prioritization.

Q: Is there any cost to landowners?

A: No. The DMP is not a cost-share program. Qualified projects are performed at no cost to the landowner.

Q: What is the total program budget, and how is it allocated?

A: The DMP has an overall budget of \$5.15 million allocated across three practice categories.

Q: What safety constraints apply to HIZ and mechanical work?

A: Personnel will not work on rooftops, ladders or elevated surfaces greater than 4 feet high. Marking property lines is the owner's responsibility. NCFS personnel must ensure boundaries are clearly identified. Pre/post-photo documentation from the same geotagged camera point is required.

Q: What guidance is used to determine HIZ treatment distances?

A: NFPA Firewise USA® principles and checklists guide treatment distances. Deviations require written justification in the project documentation.

Q: Who should landowners contact if they have questions or to start the process?

A: Your local NCFS county ranger's office can help initiate assessments for HIZ and fuel break restoration. Staff in that office can evaluate prescribed burning opportunities. The NCFS will guide documentation and approvals. The NCFS maintains a directory of county offices and will highlight program information via the NCFS website: www.ncforestservice.gov.

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DMP points of contact:

Regional Helene Mitigation Coordinator: Jason O'Neal, jason.l.oneal@ncagr.gov, 984-365-5557

District Helene Mitigation Specialists:

D1: Coleman Enloe, coleman.enloe@ncagr.gov, 828-553-7580

D2: (South) Rusty Dellinger, rusty.dellinger@ncagr.gov, 828-292-2358

(North) Tater Maines, tater.maines@ncagr.gov, 828-964-5577

D9: Jamie Logan, jamie.logan@ncagr.gov, 828-586-4007

D12: Craig Huffstetler, craig.huffstetler@ncagr.gov, 980-522-1525

Western Mitigation Specialist: Jason Noble, jason.noble@ncagr.gov, 828-475-2814