

NC Economy Watch

September 2025

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Hurricane Helene: (almost) one year later

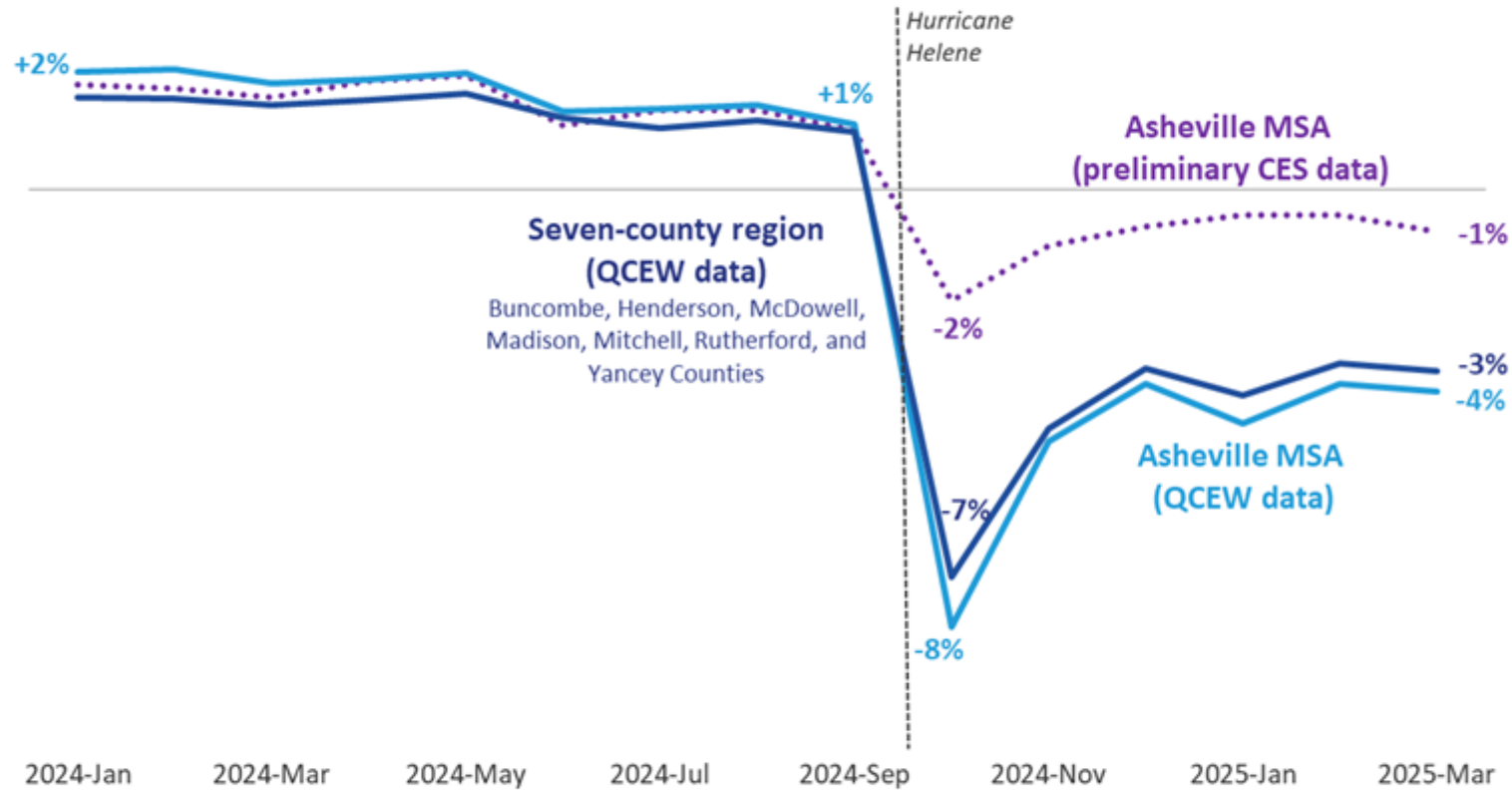
Hurricane Helene was arguably the **worst disaster in North Carolina history**.

Western North Carolina's post-Helene **economic recovery** began in earnest in November 2024 and has shown signs of progress with each passing month.

However, as more data come in, we are learning that the **economic impact** of Helene was **larger than initially estimated**, and so far, by several measures, counties affected by the storm have experienced an **incomplete economic recovery**.

Post-Hurricane Job Losses in Western NC Were Much Larger Than Initially Estimated

Over-the-year growth in total employment (Jan 2024 - Mar 2025)



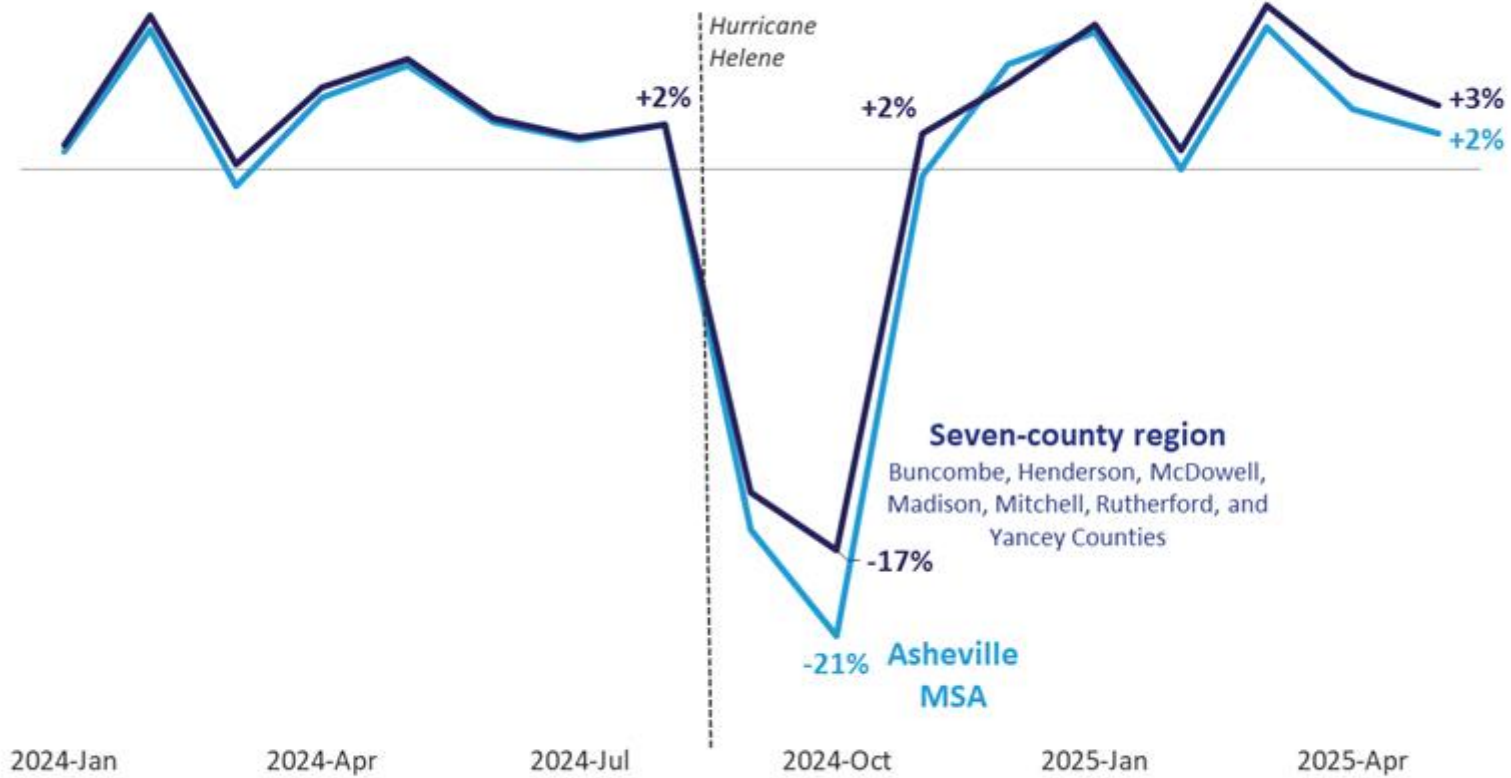
NC Department of Commerce, Labor & Economic Analysis Division (LEAD)

Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics (Current Employment Statistics); LEAD (Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages)

Note: these data are not seasonally adjusted

Consumer Spending in Western NC Quickly Recovered To Pre-Hurricane Levels

Over-the-year growth in taxable sales and purchases (Jan 2024 - May 2025)



NC Department of Commerce, Labor & Economic Analysis Division (LEAD)

Source: NC Department of Revenue

Note: these data are not seasonally adjusted

Hurricane Helene: (almost) one year later

Where are we now?

Despite a partial rebound, the **WNC labor market** continues to suffer

- Job losses were larger than we initially thought. Unemployment rates remain elevated.
- Some jobseekers may need help addressing barriers to re-employment.
- Did the region lose population? (TBD)

Some sectors are growing, but others (like **tourism**) are taking longer to recover

- Retail sales and electricity demand recovered to pre-hurricane levels by Jan 2025.
- However, airport traffic is down 6% over-the-year, while Buncombe County lodging revenue is down 21% over-the-year as of Jun 2025.

Resources of interest

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Western North Carolina Faces an Incomplete Recovery After Hurricane Helene

<https://www.commerce.nc.gov/news/the-lead-feed/sept-2025-nc-economy-watch>

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“Thank you!”

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