

Appalachian Resiliency Network (ARN) Feasibility Study

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	4
Chapter 1 – Introduction	9
Project Background	9
Project Origins	10
Purpose of the Study.....	11
Study Area.....	11
Chapter 2 – How We Gathered Input	13
Study Approach.....	13
Chapter 3 – What We Learned	19
Introduction.....	19
Appalachia Does Not Lack Organizations	19
Capacity Is the Biggest Barrier	20
Coordination Is Needed, But Carefully and With Intention	21
Relationships Are Critical	22
Resilience Is Bigger Than Emergency Management	22
Setting the Stage for Collaboration	23
Chapter 4 – Organizations and Initiatives Already Working in This Space	24
Introduction.....	24
Appalachian Disaster Resiliency Network (ADRN)	24
Appalachian Flood Resilience Coalition (AFRC)	25
Invest Appalachia.....	25
Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster (VOADs)	26
Long-Term Recovery Groups (LTRGs).....	26
State Resilience and Recovery Offices	27
Community Resilience and Adaptation Working Group (CRAWG)	27
MountainTrue	28
East Tennessee River Recovery and Resilience Initiative	28
Areas of Alignment, Overlap, and Opportunity	29
The Opportunity Moving Forward	30
Chapter 5 – Is There a Role for ARN?.....	31

Introduction.....	31
From Potential to Practice.....	36
Chapter 6 – Recommendations and Next Steps.....	37
Introduction.....	37
Near-Term Actions.....	37
Medium-Term Opportunities	39
Long-Term Considerations	40
Long-Term Sustainability	41
Final Reflections	42
Appendices	43
Appendix A - Survey Instrument.....	44
Appendix B - Survey Results Summary.....	54
Appendix C – Conference Summaries... ..	242
Appendix D – Stakeholder List.....	251
Appendix E - East Tennessee River Recovery and Resilience Initiative Overview.....	267

Executive Summary

IN THE MONTHS FOLLOWING HURRICANE HELENE, a simple but important question began to emerge across Appalachia:

How can communities better learn from one another, support one another, and prepare for the next disaster?

That question became the foundation for this feasibility study.

Financially supported by the Volgenau Climate Initiative and developed through a partnership of New River Conservancy, Appalachian Voices, Ohio River Valley Institute, National Parks Conservation Association, and Appalachian Citizens' Law Center, the project was originally conceived as a "ground-truthing" exercise. The partnership sought to evaluate the potential for two related ideas: an Appalachian-focused disaster resilience summit and a more formal regional network dedicated to connecting communities, organizations, and practitioners working in disaster preparedness, response, recovery, mitigation, and long-term resilience. The intent was not to begin with a predetermined solution, but rather to understand what already exists, identify gaps and opportunities, and determine whether additional regional coordination would provide meaningful value.

The study focused primarily on communities across Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky, and West Virginia, with particular attention given to areas impacted by Hurricane Helene and other recent flooding events. Input was gathered through a regional stakeholder survey, engagement at the Appalachian Studies Association Conference, the New River Symposium, and the National Adaptation Forum, as well as reviews of existing resilience initiatives, recovery organizations, watershed partnerships, community development efforts, and relevant literature.

As the work progressed, the central question evolved. The study began by asking whether Appalachia needed a regional resilience network. It concluded by asking a different question tailored by the initial findings of the project, namely:

What functions are currently missing within Appalachia's existing resilience ecosystem, and how can those functions be strengthened without creating unnecessary duplication?

That shift could be the most important finding of the entire effort. One of the clearest conclusions to emerge from stakeholder engagement, conference discussions, and initiative scans is that Appalachia does not lack organizations, expertise, or commitment to resilience work. In fact, the region is home to a growing and increasingly diverse collection of organizations focused on disaster response, long-term recovery, watershed restoration, housing, economic development, conservation, philanthropy, community engagement, and resilience planning.

Organizations such as the Appalachian Disaster Resiliency Network, Appalachian Flood Resilience Coalition, Invest Appalachia, MountainTrue, Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster, Long-Term Recovery Groups, state resilience offices, watershed organizations, and countless local governments and community-based organizations are already contributing important pieces of the resilience puzzle. Additional efforts focused on storytelling, community archives, mutual aid, and recovery documentation have emerged in the wake of recent disasters, adding further depth to the region's resilience landscape.

The challenge, therefore, is not a lack of activity.

The challenge is that much of this work remains difficult to navigate, unevenly connected, and heavily dependent on personal relationships and institutional capacity. Across nearly every engagement setting, stakeholders described a landscape where organizations are often working toward similar goals but lack clear mechanisms for communication, coordination, visibility, and shared learning. Participants repeatedly noted that valuable information frequently remains siloed within sectors, disciplines, states, or individual organizations. They also expressed concern about unintentionally duplicating efforts, particularly in a region where many organizations are already operating with limited staff and resources.

Another theme surfaced with remarkable consistency: capacity. Communities throughout Appalachia are navigating staffing shortages, funding constraints, burnout, administrative burdens, and prolonged recovery efforts while simultaneously attempting to prepare for future disasters. Many stakeholders emphasized that communities generally understand their vulnerabilities and have a strong sense of what needs to be done. The challenge is rarely awareness. More often, the challenge is finding the time, expertise, funding, and organizational bandwidth necessary to move from planning to implementation.

Throughout the study, participants repeatedly described feeling overwhelmed not by a lack of resources, but by the complexity of existing systems. Grant programs, disaster recovery funding, insurance requirements, mitigation programs, permitting processes, housing regulations, and overlapping state and federal programs can be difficult to navigate even for well-resourced organizations. For smaller local governments, volunteer-led organizations, and rural communities, these complexities often become barriers to action.

The study also reinforced that resilience is about far more than emergency management. Stakeholders consistently connected resilience to housing, economic development, outdoor recreation, workforce development, transportation, watershed health, insurance, land use, and community identity. Discussions repeatedly highlighted the importance of viewing resilience through a broader lens that recognizes the interconnected nature of these systems.

Particularly notable was the role of recreation economies and natural assets. Rivers, trails, parks, forests, public lands, and tourism-related businesses were frequently identified not only as economic drivers, but as important components of community well-being, quality of life, and long-term recovery. These findings suggest that resilience planning in Appalachia can't be separated from conversations about outdoor recreation, conservation, and place-based economic development. They also point to an opportunity for the Volgenau Climate Initiative and its partners to help bridge communities and organizations that have not traditionally viewed themselves as part of the resilience ecosystem, broadening both participation and long-term impact.

Not surprisingly, one of the most consistent findings to emerge from this study was the importance of relationships. Across every conference, roundtable discussion, stakeholder conversation, and survey response, participants emphasized that trust, local knowledge, and personal connections often determine how effectively communities prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters. Funding, infrastructure, policies, and technical expertise all remain essential, but they are rarely sufficient on their own. Again and again, participants pointed to relationships as the connective tissue that allows communities to share information, coordinate resources, solve problems, and adapt as conditions change.

Simply put, resilience is a function of connection in addition to infrastructure. They create the trust, communication pathways, and partnerships that make every other investment more effective. Throughout this study, that relationship infrastructure consistently emerged as one of the defining characteristics of resilient communities. This finding was reinforced by discussions at the Appalachian Studies Association, the New River Symposium, and the National Adaptation Forum, all of which highlighted the importance of relationship infrastructure, peer learning, and trusted networks. Participants consistently expressed a desire to connect with others facing similar challenges, learn from communities that have already experienced disasters, and share practical lessons learned. Interestingly, stakeholders demonstrated considerably more enthusiasm for opportunities to connect than for the creation of new organizations.



Image 1



National Adaptation Forum

Many participants expressed interest in convenings, peer exchanges, information sharing, and relationship-building opportunities. By contrast, there was considerably less interest in creating additional layers of governance, membership structures, or bureaucracy. This distinction is important because it suggests that future investments may be most effective when focused on facilitating connection rather than building institutions.

This finding also presents an opportunity for the Volgenau Climate Initiative and its partners. Rather than investing in the creation of a new standalone organization, the Initiative is well positioned to serve as a convener, connector, and early catalyst for regional collaboration. By bringing together existing organizations, supporting relationship building, and helping reduce barriers between sectors and state lines, the Initiative can accelerate progress without duplicating the work already underway across Appalachia.

For that reason, this report does not conclude that Appalachia necessarily needs another large, centralized resilience organization.

Instead, the findings suggest there may be meaningful opportunities to strengthen existing efforts through targeted coordination, improved visibility, enhanced communication, and practical mechanisms for information sharing and peer learning.

Two opportunities that helped inspire the original concept (and that continued to surface throughout the engagement process) were repeatedly identified by stakeholders. The first is the potential value of an Appalachian Disaster Resilience Summit – a recurring, in-person gathering that brings together local elected officials, emergency managers, housing organizations, nonprofit leaders, watershed groups, recovery practitioners, funders, researchers, and community leaders to share experiences, lessons learned, and emerging challenges.

The second is the potential development of a regional network or series of networks that supports ongoing communication, resource sharing, relationship building, and cross-state collaboration between those same stakeholders. Importantly, stakeholders generally favored an approach that builds upon existing organizations and initiatives rather than creating a standalone structure that competes for attention or resources.

Ultimately, the findings suggest that the future of resilience in Appalachia may depend less on building new institutions and more on strengthening the connective tissue

between organizations, communities, and practitioners already doing the work. That connective tissue may take many forms, including intentional partnerships between previously disconnected networks, opportunities for peer learning, improved information sharing, and collaborative efforts that reduce duplication while building upon existing strengths.

The region possesses no shortage of expertise, passion, or commitment. What it may need most is a way to make those efforts more visible, more connected, and more mutually reinforcing.



New River Symposium

Chapter 1 – Introduction

PROJECT BACKGROUND

COMMUNITIES ACROSS APPALACHIA have always faced natural hazards. Flooding, severe storms, landslides, drought, wildfire, and extreme weather are woven into the history of the region. What has changed in recent years is the frequency, scale, and complexity of these events, along with the growing recognition that recovery is becoming more difficult for communities already facing economic, demographic, infrastructure, and capacity challenges.

The devastating flooding in Eastern Kentucky in 2022 and the widespread impacts of Hurricane Helene in 2024 highlighted both the vulnerability and resilience of Appalachian communities. While every disaster is different, many communities experienced similar challenges related to housing recovery, infrastructure damage, staffing shortages, funding navigation, communications, and the long-term economic and emotional impacts that remain long after emergency response efforts have concluded.



Map of the Appalachia region of the United States.

Source: Appalachian Regional Commission.

This study's focus area included West Virginia, SW Virginia, Eastern Kentucky, Eastern Tennessee, and Western North Carolina.

At the same time, these disasters revealed one of Appalachia's greatest strengths: communities consistently showed up for one another. Local governments shared lessons learned. Recovery organizations exchanged resources and expertise. Nonprofits, watershed groups, faith-based organizations, volunteers, and community leaders stepped forward to fill gaps and support recovery efforts. In many cases, the most valuable assistance came not from a formal program, but from someone who had already experienced a similar challenge and was willing to share what they had learned.

Those observations sparked broader conversations about whether there might be value in creating more intentional opportunities for relationship building, peer learning, information sharing, and collaboration across the region.

PROJECT ORIGINS

THIS FEASIBILITY STUDY was commissioned through a partnership of organizations working at the intersection of conservation, community development, disaster recovery, climate resilience, and community advocacy. Concept partners included New River Conservancy, Appalachian Voices, Ohio River Valley Institute, National Parks Conservation Association, and Appalachian Citizens' Law Center. Funding for the project was provided through the Volgenau Climate Initiative.



Following Hurricane Helene and other recent disasters across the region, project partners began exploring opportunities to strengthen communication and collaboration among communities facing similar challenges. Early discussions led to the development of a concept note¹ that proposed two related ideas: an Appalachian Disaster Resilience Summit and an Appalachian-focused resilience network designed to connect practitioners, organizations, and communities working in preparedness, response, recovery, mitigation, and long-term resilience efforts.

The concept note was intentionally exploratory. Rather than assuming a network or summit was needed, it identified an opportunity to better understand whether communities would benefit from stronger regional connections and what form those connections might take. The partners ultimately agreed that a feasibility study should be conducted before advancing either concept to better understand existing efforts, identify gaps, and assess stakeholder interest. This report represents the first phase of that effort.

¹ Dixon, *Appalachian Disaster Resilience Summit and Network Concept Note*, June 2025.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY was not to create a network or plan a conference. Instead, the purpose was to better understand the existing resilience landscape across Appalachia and determine whether there are meaningful opportunities to strengthen communication, collaboration, and coordination among organizations and communities already engaged in resilience-related work.

More specifically, the study sought to:

- Identify existing organizations, initiatives, and networks operating within the resilience ecosystem.
- Understand the challenges communities continue to face before, during, and after disasters.
- Identify gaps, unmet needs, and opportunities for collaboration, particularly where stronger connections among existing organizations and networks could improve regional efficiency.
- Assess interest in concepts such as a regional summit, resilience network, or other coordination mechanisms.
- Explore opportunities for peer learning, information sharing, and relationship building.
- Evaluate how future efforts could complement rather than duplicate existing work.
- Provide a practical assessment—or "gut check"—of the concepts outlined in the original project framework and concept note.

Importantly, the study was designed as an exploratory process rather than a validation exercise. Stakeholders were encouraged to challenge assumptions, identify concerns, highlight existing efforts, and offer perspectives on what would (and would not) provide value.

STUDY AREA

THE STUDY FOCUSED PRIMARILY on communities within Central and Southern Appalachia, including portions of Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky, and West Virginia.

Particular attention was given to communities impacted by Hurricane Helene and other recent flooding events. However, discussions frequently expanded beyond individual disasters to broader issues related to preparedness, mitigation, recovery, economic resilience, housing, infrastructure, land use, watershed management, and community capacity.

The study also recognized a reality frequently raised by participants throughout the engagement process: disasters do not respect political boundaries. Watersheds cross county and state lines. Infrastructure systems, housing markets, transportation networks, and economic impacts extend beyond local jurisdictions. Yet most preparedness, recovery, and planning efforts remain organized around local or state

governance structures. This tension between regional impacts and localized governance emerged as one of the defining themes of the study and appears throughout the chapters that follow.

GUIDING QUESTIONS: SEVERAL QUESTIONS GUIDED THE STUDY

1. **What is already happening?** Who is currently working on disaster preparedness, response, recovery, mitigation, adaptation, and resilience across Appalachia?
2. **What challenges are communities facing?** What barriers are limiting preparedness, recovery, mitigation, and long-term resilience efforts?
3. **Where are the gaps?** Are there opportunities to improve communication, coordination, information sharing, or collaboration among existing efforts?
4. **Is there a role for greater regional coordination?** Would stakeholders benefit from stronger opportunities for peer learning, relationship building, and cross-state collaboration?
5. **What should happen next?** Based on stakeholder input and existing conditions, what recommendations should be considered moving forward?

A Note on Approach

One lesson became apparent early in this process. The question facing Appalachia is not whether resilience work is occurring. *It is.* The more important question is whether existing efforts are sufficiently connected to one another to maximize their collective impact.

For that reason, this study places significant emphasis on listening, relationship building, ecosystem mapping, and ground-truthing. Rather than beginning with a predetermined solution, the project sought to understand the broader landscape first.

As stakeholders repeatedly noted throughout the process, Appalachia may not lack resilience efforts. What it may lack is the connective tissue that helps communities, organizations, and practitioners learn from one another, coordinate when appropriate, and build upon the work already taking place across the region.

The chapters that follow explore that question in greater detail.

Chapter 2 – How We Gathered Input

STUDY APPROACH

FROM THE OUTSET, this project was designed as a feasibility study rather than a traditional research effort.

The objective was not to test a specific hypothesis or validate a predetermined outcome. Instead, the study sought to better understand the existing resilience landscape across Appalachia, identify opportunities and challenges, and assess whether stakeholders believed additional regional coordination would provide meaningful value.

To accomplish this, the project team employed a multi-faceted engagement approach that combined stakeholder outreach, conference participation, ecosystem mapping, initiative scans, literature review, and practitioner conversations. The goal was to ground findings in the experiences of individuals and organizations actively involved in preparedness, response, recovery, mitigation, adaptation, and long-term resilience efforts throughout the region.

This approach reflected one of the guiding principles established by the concept partners early in the process: before creating something new, it was important to understand what already existed.

Strategic Framework

The study was guided by a series of strategic lenses developed during the project scoping process and refined through early stakeholder conversations.² These lenses were designed to help organize findings, identify recurring themes, and ensure the study considered resilience from multiple perspectives.

The strategic lenses included:

- **Recreation Economies** – Understanding the relationship between resilience, outdoor recreation, tourism, public lands, and place-based economic development.
- **Administrative Barriers** – Identifying regulatory, procedural, staffing, and governance challenges that affect preparedness, recovery, and long-term resilience efforts.
- **Funding Availability and Access** – Exploring challenges associated with grant funding, disaster recovery resources, technical assistance, and implementation capacity.
- **Land Use and Regulatory Systems** – Examining the influence of zoning, floodplain management, development patterns, and planning frameworks on community resilience.
- **Existing Efforts and Potential Duplication** – Documenting organizations, initiatives, and networks already operating within the resilience ecosystem.

² Oxbow Strategies, *Appalachian Resiliency Network Feasibility Study Framework and Scope of Work*, November 2025.

- **Government Appetite for Coordination** – Assessing interest among local governments and public agencies for increased collaboration and regional engagement.

As the project progressed, additional themes emerged around institutional capacity, relationship infrastructure, insurance, implementation support, systems navigation, and cross-sector coordination. These themes are discussed throughout subsequent chapters.

Stakeholder Survey

A regional stakeholder survey was developed to gather perspectives from individuals and organizations involved in resilience-related work across Appalachia.³

The survey was distributed to local government officials, emergency managers, nonprofit organizations, watershed groups, conservation organizations, economic development professionals, recovery practitioners, planners, researchers, and other stakeholders working within the broader resilience ecosystem.

Questions focused on:

- Existing resilience efforts
- Administrative and funding barriers
- Coordination challenges
- Opportunities for collaboration
- Existing networks and partnerships
- Regional priorities
- Perceptions regarding a summit or resilience network

In addition to collecting quantitative information, the survey provided opportunities for participants to share qualitative insights, examples, and recommendations based on their own experiences. Survey findings are summarized throughout this report and presented in greater detail in the appendix.⁴

³ *Appalachian Resiliency Network Feasibility Study Stakeholder Survey Instrument*, Appendix A.

⁴ *Appalachian Resiliency Network Feasibility Study Survey Findings Summary*, Appendix B.

Conference and Symposium Engagement

In addition to the stakeholder survey and literature review, the project team participated in multiple conferences, workshops, and practitioner gatherings throughout the study period. These engagements were not conducted as formal research sessions. Rather, they provided opportunities to test assumptions, identify recurring themes, gather informal feedback, and compare findings across sectors, disciplines, and geographies. Insights gathered through presentations, facilitated discussions, networking conversations, and peer exchanges helped inform the overall synthesis presented throughout this report. Conference summaries are included in the appendix.⁵

Appalachian Studies Association Conference

March 19-21, 2026

The Appalachian Studies Association Conference provided an opportunity to introduce the project framework, gather early feedback, and engage practitioners, researchers, nonprofit leaders, and policy advocates working throughout the region.

Discussions helped validate the project's strategic lenses while surfacing themes related to cross-state coordination, recovery fatigue, communication challenges, housing, and long-term community resilience.

New River Symposium

April 9-10, 2026

The New River Symposium provided an opportunity to explore resilience challenges through the lens of watershed management, recovery, environmental stewardship, and community development. Roundtable discussions focused heavily on implementation challenges, funding complexity, administrative barriers, communication gaps, and the practical realities communities face while balancing recovery and preparedness efforts.

Many of the themes that emerged during the symposium (including coordination fatigue, staffing limitations, and systems complexity) would later reappear in both survey responses and discussions at the National Adaptation Forum.

⁵ Conference Summaries, Appendix D.

National Adaptation Forum

May 12-14, 2026

The National Adaptation Forum provided an opportunity to compare emerging Appalachian findings against broader national conversations around climate adaptation and community resilience. Sessions attended during the forum addressed topics such as rural resilience, economic recovery, governance, adaptation planning, community hubs, cross-sector collaboration, and relationship infrastructure.

While the forum focused on national perspectives, many of the challenges discussed mirrored those identified throughout Appalachia, particularly around capacity constraints, implementation barriers, institutional adaptability, and the importance of trusted networks.



The project team participated in multiple conferences, workshops, and practitioner gatherings throughout the study period.

The chart summarizes the themes that were most prevalent at the conferences:

Theme	Appalachian Studies Association Conference	New River Symposium	National Adaptation Forum
Capacity	✓	✓	✓
Relationships	✓	✓	✓
Watershed resilience	✓	✓	✓
Housing	✓		✓
Nature-based solutions		✓	✓
Cross-state collaboration	✓		✓
Peer learning	✓		✓
Information sharing	✓	✓	✓

Literature Review and Initiative Scan

In addition to direct stakeholder engagement, the project team conducted a review of existing literature, reports, case studies, and resilience initiatives operating throughout Appalachia and beyond.

Particular attention was given to:

- Disaster recovery and resilience networks
- Long-term recovery models
- Watershed-based coordination efforts
- State resilience programs
- Philanthropic and investment initiatives
- Mutual aid and volunteer networks
- Community-based resilience collaboratives
- Climate adaptation and mitigation frameworks

The review included organizations and initiatives such as the Appalachian Disaster Resiliency Network, Appalachian Flood Resilience Coalition, Invest Appalachia, state resilience offices, Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster, and Long-Term Recovery Groups, among several others.

The purpose of this effort was not to evaluate individual organizations, but rather to understand the broader resilience ecosystem and identify opportunities for alignment, collaboration, and shared learning.

Limitations

Like any feasibility study, this effort has limitations. The study reflects the perspectives of those who chose to participate through surveys, conference discussions, meetings, outreach efforts, and other engagement activities. While substantial effort was made

to engage a diverse range of stakeholders, no single study can capture every perspective across a region as large and diverse as Appalachia.

Additionally, the resilience landscape continues to evolve. New initiatives, partnerships, funding opportunities, and recovery efforts continue to emerge as communities respond to changing conditions and ongoing challenges.

Despite these limitations, the consistency of themes across multiple engagement methods, stakeholder groups, conferences, and geographic areas provides confidence in the findings presented throughout this report.

Chapter 3 – What We Learned

INTRODUCTION

WHILE THE ENGAGEMENT METHODS used throughout this study varied, the themes that emerged were consistent. Whether through survey responses, conference discussions, initiative reviews, literature scans, or conversations with practitioners and community leaders, stakeholders repeatedly returned to a common set of observations about resilience in Appalachia.

The findings presented in this chapter do not represent the views of a single organization or stakeholder group. Rather, they reflect recurring themes that surfaced across multiple engagement methods and geographic areas throughout the study process. Unless otherwise noted, the findings presented in this chapter are derived from stakeholder survey responses, conference engagement, initiative scans, literature review, and related project outreach activities.

Taken together, these findings provide insight into the current resilience landscape and help inform subsequent discussions regarding existing initiatives, potential opportunities for collaboration, and the possible role of future regional coordination efforts.

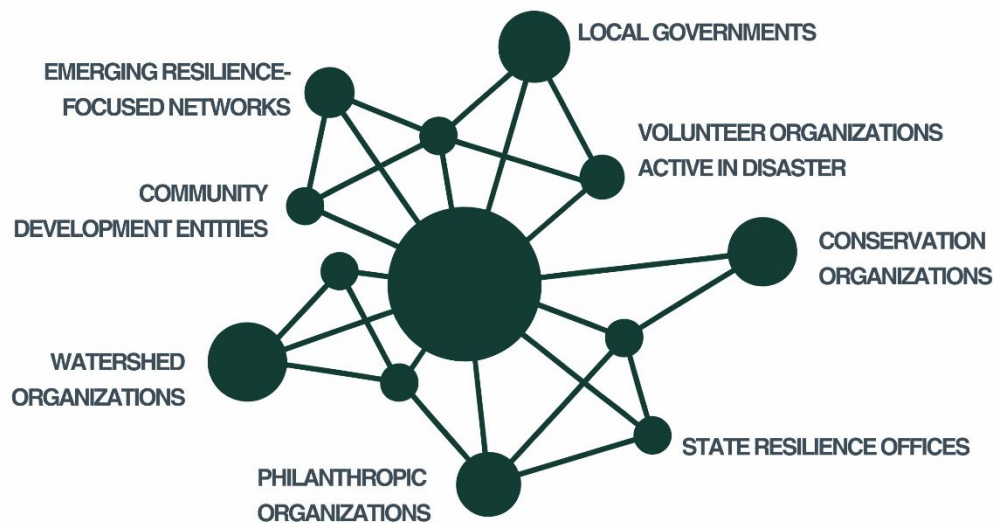
APPALACHIA DOES NOT LACK ORGANIZATIONS

ONE OF THE CLEAREST FINDINGS to emerge from this study is that Appalachia does not lack organizations, initiatives, or individuals committed to resilience-related work. Across the region, communities are supported by a growing ecosystem of organizations focused on disaster response, recovery, housing, conservation, economic development, watershed restoration, public health, community development, and long-term resilience planning.

Stakeholders identified numerous organizations actively engaged in resilience work, including local governments, Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster (VOADs), Long-Term Recovery Groups (LTRGs), watershed organizations, state resilience offices, conservation organizations, community development entities, philanthropic organizations, and emerging resilience-focused networks.

Recent disasters have also spurred the creation of new initiatives focused on recovery, storytelling, mutual aid, investment, flood resilience, and community preparedness.

In many respects, the region possesses a significant amount of expertise, passion, and institutional knowledge.



With all this activity, the challenge is understanding how these efforts relate to one another and where opportunities exist to strengthen communication, coordination, and shared learning. This finding became particularly important as discussions shifted from whether Appalachia needs another organization to whether existing efforts could benefit from stronger connections and greater visibility.

CAPACITY IS THE BIGGEST BARRIER

CAPACITY WAS A THEME THAT SURFACED very consistently. Stakeholders repeatedly emphasized that communities generally understand their vulnerabilities and have a strong sense of what needs to be done. What they often lack is the time, staffing, expertise, funding flexibility, or organizational bandwidth necessary to move from planning to implementation.⁶

Capacity challenges appeared in many forms. Local governments described difficulties pursuing grant opportunities while simultaneously managing day-to-day operations. Nonprofit organizations discussed staffing limitations and burnout. Recovery organizations highlighted the administrative burden associated with disaster assistance programs. Smaller communities often noted that a single individual may be responsible for emergency management, grant administration, planning, community development, and recovery coordination.

Funding was frequently identified as a challenge, but stakeholders often framed the issue less as a lack of available funding and more as a lack of capacity to access, administer, and implement funded projects. Many communities are not struggling

⁶ *Appalachian Resiliency Network Feasibility Study Survey Findings Summary, Appendix B.*

because solutions are unknown, rather they are struggling because implementation requires resources that are often in short supply.

As a result, stakeholders consistently identified technical assistance, peer learning, information sharing, and implementation support as priorities moving forward.



COORDINATION IS NEEDED, BUT CAREFULLY AND WITH INTENTION

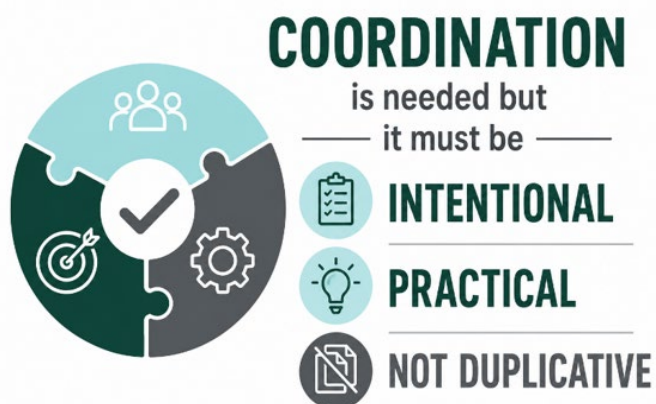
THE STUDY REVEALED BROAD SUPPORT for collaboration and information sharing across Appalachia. At the same time, stakeholders expressed caution about creating new organizations, governance structures, or administrative systems that duplicate work already underway.⁷

Many participants described what could be characterized as coordination fatigue. Communities are already navigating multiple programs, initiatives, coalitions, funding sources, and reporting requirements. While stakeholders generally welcomed opportunities to collaborate, they emphasized that future efforts should provide practical value and avoid creating unnecessary complexity.

This finding was especially important when discussing concepts such as a regional resilience network or recurring summit. Participants consistently expressed interest in learning from peers, sharing experiences, and building relationships across state lines. However, support was strongest when these concepts were framed as mechanisms for connection rather than as new institutions.

Stakeholders generally favored approaches that build upon existing efforts, strengthen communication pathways, and create opportunities for collaboration without competing with organizations already operating in the space.

The message was clear: coordination is needed but it must be intentional, practical, and not duplicative.



⁷ *Appalachian Resiliency Network Feasibility Study Survey Findings Summary, Appendix B.*

RELATIONSHIPS ARE CRITICAL

ACROSS EVERY ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITY, one theme emerged repeatedly: relationships are critical. Participants frequently described trust, local knowledge, and personal connections as foundational components of resilience.⁸ Communities recover more effectively when relationships exist before disasters occur. Information travels more quickly through trusted networks. Organizations collaborate more effectively when people know one another and understand each other's roles.



While resilience discussions often focus on infrastructure, funding, and planning, stakeholders consistently pointed to relationships as one of the most important assets available to communities. This theme was reinforced throughout conference discussions and survey responses, where participants repeatedly expressed interest in opportunities to connect with peers, learn from communities that have experienced similar challenges, and share practical lessons learned.

In many respects, relationship infrastructure emerged as a form of resilience infrastructure.

This finding helps explain why stakeholders showed greater enthusiasm for convenings, peer exchanges, and information sharing opportunities than for the creation of formal organizational structures. People were often less interested in building something new than they were in connecting with one another.

RESILIENCE IS BIGGER THAN EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

THE FINAL MAJOR FINDING TO EMERGE from this study was the recognition that resilience extends far beyond traditional emergency management functions. Stakeholders consistently connected resilience to housing, economic development, transportation, watershed management, conservation, workforce development, insurance, land use, recreation, public health, and community identity.

Discussions about resilience frequently expanded beyond disaster response and recovery to include broader questions about how communities adapt, grow, and sustain themselves over time. Particularly notable was the recurring connection between resilience and quality of life. Stakeholders frequently discussed parks, trails, rivers, public lands, and outdoor recreation assets as important contributors to community well-being, economic vitality, and long-term recovery. Housing affordability, insurance accessibility, workforce capacity, and land-use decisions were similarly viewed as resilience issues because they influence a community's ability to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disruption.

⁸ *Appalachian Resiliency Network Feasibility Study Survey Findings Summary, Appendix B.*

Participants also frequently cited funding navigation, disaster recovery programs, insurance challenges, and administrative complexity as barriers to implementation and long-term resilience.⁹ This broader perspective reflects an important shift in how resilience is being understood throughout Appalachia. Rather than viewing resilience solely through the lens of emergency response, stakeholders increasingly see it as a community-wide responsibility that touches nearly every aspect of civic life.

SETTING THE STAGE FOR COLLABORATION

COLLECTIVELY, THESE FINDINGS SUGGEST that Appalachia’s resilience challenges are not rooted in a lack of commitment, expertise, or activity. Instead, they stem largely from questions of capacity, connectivity, communication, and implementation.

The region possesses a growing network of organizations and leaders dedicated to resilience-related work.



The opportunity moving forward may lie less in creating new institutions and more in helping existing efforts become more visible, more connected, and more mutually reinforcing.

The next chapter examines the organizations, initiatives, and partnerships already working within this space and explores where opportunities for alignment and collaboration may exist.

⁹ ReImagine Appalachia, *Tracking Changes to FEMA and Their Impact in the Appalachian Region*, <https://reimagineappalachia.org/new-report-tracking-the-changes-to-fema-and-its-impact-in-the-appalachian-region/>, 2026.

Chapter 4 – Organizations and Initiatives Already Working in This Space

INTRODUCTION

THIS STUDY HAS MADE CLEAR that Appalachia does not lack organizations working on resilience-related issues.

Throughout stakeholder engagement, conference discussions, survey responses, and initiative reviews, participants consistently pointed to a growing ecosystem of organizations engaged in disaster preparedness, emergency response, long-term recovery, housing, economic development, watershed restoration, conservation, climate adaptation, and community resilience.

While these organizations differ in mission, geography, and focus area, they collectively represent significant expertise and capacity throughout the region.

The purpose of this chapter is not to evaluate individual organizations. Rather, it is to better understand the existing landscape, identify areas of alignment and overlap, and explore opportunities for collaboration and shared learning.

APPALACHIAN DISASTER RESILIENCY NETWORK (ADRN)

THE APPALACHIAN DISASTER RESILIENCY NETWORK brings together academic institutions, nonprofit organizations, and community partners to advance conversations around disaster resilience across Appalachia. The network emphasizes research, community engagement, storytelling, and knowledge sharing as tools for better understanding the region's resilience challenges and opportunities.¹⁰

One of ADRN's distinguishing strengths is its ability to connect research with lived experience. By documenting community perspectives and elevating local voices, the network contributes to a broader understanding of how disasters affect Appalachian communities and how resilience can be strengthened over time.

While ADRN's work is still evolving, it represents an important addition to the region's resilience ecosystem by helping generate knowledge, foster dialogue, and encourage collaboration among organizations working toward similar goals.

The resilience landscape across Central Appalachia continues to evolve. During the course of this feasibility study, a new multi-state partnership was awarded a 2026 Trust in Practice Award, bringing \$1 million to support community-led flood resilience efforts in 18 rural communities across West Virginia, eastern Kentucky, southwest Virginia, and

¹⁰ Appalachian Disaster Resiliency Network (Resilience After Helene), <https://resilienceafterhelene.org/>, 2026.

western North Carolina. Led by the West Virginia Community Development Hub in partnership with Mountain Association, Appalachian Voices, and RelImagine Appalachia, the initiative will provide technical assistance, community coaching, and storytelling to help local leaders strengthen partnerships, advance long-term recovery, and build more resilient communities. While still in its early stages, this effort reflects the growing emphasis on regional collaboration and capacity building that emerged throughout this study.¹¹

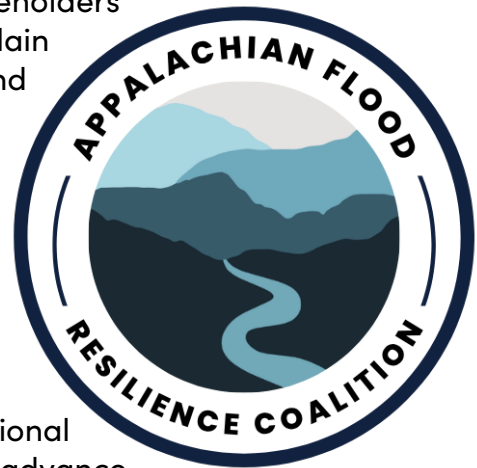
APPALACHIAN FLOOD RESILIENCE COALITION (AFRC)

THE APPALACHIAN FLOOD RESILIENCE COALITION focuses on flood-related challenges throughout Appalachia, including policy advocacy, research, and education.

The coalition brings together organizations and stakeholders interested in reducing flood risk, improving floodplain management, supporting mitigation efforts, and strengthening long-term community resilience through federal policy advocacy.

Because flooding remains one of the most significant hazards affecting Appalachian communities, stakeholders frequently identified AFRC as an important component of the broader resilience ecosystem.

The coalition's work complements many local and regional initiatives by helping elevate policy discussions and advance solutions that extend beyond individual communities.¹²



INVEST APPALACHIA

INVEST APPALACHIA operates at the intersection of economic development, community investment, and regional resilience.

The organization works to increase access to capital and investment opportunities in historically underserved Appalachian communities. Its efforts include supporting community development projects, fostering regional partnerships, and helping align investment strategies with long-term community needs.

¹¹ West Virginia Community Development Hub, "WV Community Development Hub Wins Trust in Practice Award, Bringing \$1 Million for Flood Recovery and Community Resilience," WTOV9, <https://wtov9.com/news/local/wva-community-development-hub-wins-award-brings-1m-for-flood-recovery-west-virginia-flood-recovery-community-resilience-trust-in-practice-award-community-development-economic-development-technical-assistance-central-appalachia>, July 2026

¹² Appalachian Flood Resilience Coalition, <https://www.appalachianfloodresilience.org/>, 2026.

Several stakeholders identified access to capital as a critical component of resilience. In this context, Invest Appalachia emphasizes that resilience is not solely about disaster response or recovery, it is also about economic opportunity, community wealth-building, and long-term sustainability.¹³



VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATIONS ACTIVE IN DISASTER (VOADS)

VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATIONS ACTIVE IN DISASTER (VOADS) play a critical role in disaster response and recovery efforts throughout Appalachia.

VOADs serve as coordinating bodies for nonprofit, faith-based, and volunteer organizations involved in disaster response. Their work helps reduce duplication, improve communication, and facilitate collaboration among organizations providing assistance during and after disasters.

Stakeholders frequently highlighted the importance of VOADs because they provide a proven model for coordination while allowing participating organizations to maintain their individual missions and identities. This model may offer useful lessons for future resilience collaboration efforts.

LONG-TERM RECOVERY GROUPS (LTRGS)

LONG-TERM RECOVERY GROUPS are often formed following disasters to coordinate rebuilding and recovery efforts within affected communities.

These groups typically bring together local governments, nonprofits, faith-based organizations, businesses, volunteers, and residents to address unmet recovery needs.

Stakeholders consistently described Long-Term Recovery Groups as valuable because they are grounded in local knowledge and focused on practical implementation.

However, many participants also noted that Long-Term Recovery Groups frequently face challenges associated with staffing, funding, and long-term sustainability once immediate recovery efforts begin to subside.

These observations highlight both the strengths and limitations of recovery-focused coordination structures.

¹³ Invest Appalachia, <https://investappalachia.org/>, 2026.

STATE RESILIENCE AND RECOVERY OFFICES

SEVERAL STATES WITHIN THE STUDY AREA have established offices, programs, or initiatives dedicated to disaster recovery, hazard mitigation, resilience planning, and long-term adaptation.

Examples include:

- North Carolina Office of Recovery and Resiliency (NCORR)¹⁴
- Growing Rural Opportunities in Western North Carolina (GROW NC)¹⁵
- State hazard mitigation and resilience programs
- Recovery and rebuilding initiatives associated with recent disasters

These offices often serve as important links between federal resources and local implementation efforts.

Stakeholders generally viewed state resilience offices as critical partners but also noted that structures, responsibilities, and resources vary considerably from state to state. These differences can create challenges for regional coordination while also creating opportunities for cross-state learning and information sharing.

COMMUNITY RESILIENCE AND ADAPTATION WORKING GROUP (CRAWG)

THE COMMUNITY RESILIENCE AND ADAPTATION WORKING GROUP (CRAWG) is an initiative of the Central Appalachian Network focused on strengthening community resilience and adaptation across the region. Its placement within the Central Appalachian Network is important because it connects resilience work to a broader ecosystem of organizations already focused on community development, economic transition, local capacity, and regional collaboration.¹⁶

CRAWG appears to occupy a complementary space within the resilience ecosystem. Rather than functioning primarily as an emergency response or recovery organization, it provides a forum for learning, coordination, and shared strategy among organizations working on long-term adaptation and community resilience.

For this study, CRAWG is important because it reinforces one of the central findings: Appalachia already has multiple organizations and networks working in adjacent spaces. The opportunity may be less about creating a new standalone structure and more about clarifying roles, improving visibility, and connecting efforts that are already underway.

¹⁴ North Carolina Office of Recovery and Resiliency (NCORR), <https://www.rebuild.nc.gov/>, 2026.

¹⁵ Growing Rural Opportunities (GROW NC), <https://grow-nc.org/>, 2026.

¹⁶ Central Appalachian Network, Community Resilience and Adaptation Working Group (CRAWG), <https://www.cannetwork.org/community-resilience-and-adaptation-working-group/>, 2026.

MOUNTAINTRUE

MOUNTAINTRUE IS A REGIONAL nonprofit organization focused on conservation, watershed protection, public engagement, and community resilience throughout Southern Appalachia.



Its work includes river restoration, water quality protection, trail stewardship, community engagement, advocacy, and recovery-related initiatives. MountainTrue was frequently identified during initiative scans and stakeholder discussions because of its ability to connect environmental stewardship with community resilience outcomes.

The organization's work demonstrates how conservation and resilience objectives can reinforce one another while supporting broader community goals.¹⁷

EAST TENNESSEE RIVER RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE INITIATIVE

THE EAST TENNESSEE RIVER RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE INITIATIVE is a collaborative effort led by the Nolichucky Outdoor Recreation Association (NORA) to address the long-term environmental, economic, and community impacts of Hurricane Helene across Northeast Tennessee. Working alongside a diverse coalition of partners, the initiative focuses on restoring rivers, streams, floodplains, and riparian corridors while supporting local communities through recovery, workforce development, and resilience-building efforts.¹⁸

Rather than creating new programs or seeking new legislation, the initiative is designed to leverage existing Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation funding mechanisms to accelerate recovery and restoration efforts. Proposed activities include completion-phase debris removal, streambank stabilization, riparian restoration, assistance for landowners and agricultural producers, science-based restoration practices, and the development of a dedicated local restoration workforce.

What distinguishes this initiative is its emphasis on implementation. The effort builds upon work already undertaken by local governments, nonprofit organizations, volunteers, and community partners, recognizing that significant recovery needs remain long after initial emergency response and federally funded cleanup efforts have concluded. By combining environmental restoration with workforce

¹⁷ MountainTrue, <https://mountaintrue.org/>, 2026.

¹⁸ *East Tennessee River Recovery and Resilience Initiative Overview*, Appendix E.

development, economic recovery, and community resilience, the initiative demonstrates how disaster recovery can serve as a catalyst for long-term investment in both natural resources and local communities.

The initiative also reinforces one of the central findings of this study: effective resilience efforts often require collaboration among organizations with complementary expertise. Led by NORA and supported by several partners representing conservation, government, higher education, watershed restoration, agriculture, and local communities, the initiative illustrates how regional partnerships can advance practical, on-the-ground recovery while strengthening long-term resilience.

Shared Priorities

Many organizations are working toward similar goals, including:

- Community resilience
- Disaster preparedness
- Recovery support
- Capacity building
- Economic stability
- Watershed health
- Community engagement

Opportunities for Greater Coordination

Despite strong alignment, stakeholders repeatedly identified opportunities to improve:

- Cross-state communication
- Information sharing
- Visibility of existing resources
- Peer learning opportunities
- Implementation support
- Relationship building

AREAS OF ALIGNMENT, OVERLAP, AND OPPORTUNITY

A REVIEW OF THE RESILIENCE LANDSCAPE suggests that Appalachia possesses a diverse and increasingly interconnected ecosystem of organizations and initiatives. Several areas of alignment emerged consistently throughout the review:

Complementary Strengths

Organizations often bring different strengths to the resilience ecosystem. Some focus on policy and advocacy, while others focus on recovery and implementation. Still others contribute technical expertise, community organizing, conservation, investment capital, research, or education. This diversity creates opportunities for collaboration while reducing the need for any single organization to fulfill every function.

Importantly, most stakeholders did not identify significant duplication of effort. Instead, they described a landscape where organizations are often unaware of one another's work or lack mechanisms to communicate regularly. This distinction suggests that the region's greatest opportunity may be strengthening the connections between organizations that already exist rather than creating new ones.

THE OPPORTUNITY MOVING FORWARD

THE ORGANIZATIONS HIGHLIGHTED in this chapter represent only a portion of the broader resilience ecosystem operating throughout Appalachia. Collectively, however, they demonstrate that the region already possesses significant expertise, leadership, and commitment to resilience-related work.

The question moving forward then is not whether organizations exist, it's whether there are opportunities to help those organizations communicate more effectively, learn from one another, and collaborate in ways that strengthen the region's collective resilience.

The following chapter explores that question by examining potential gaps, unmet needs, and the possible role of future coordination efforts.

Chapter 5 – Is There a Role for ARN?

INTRODUCTION

THE PREVIOUS CHAPTERS ESTABLISHED two important realities. First, Appalachia is home to an increasingly diverse network of organizations working across disaster preparedness, response, recovery, conservation, economic development, housing, watershed restoration, and long-term resilience. Second, stakeholders consistently identified opportunities to improve communication, strengthen relationships, and increase coordination among those efforts.

These findings naturally lead to an important question:

If the region already has a growing resilience ecosystem, is there still a meaningful role for an Appalachian Resiliency Network (ARN)?

Based on the findings of this feasibility study, the answer appears to be yes, provided that ARN is designed to complement existing efforts rather than compete with them. Stakeholders expressed caution about creating another organization responsible for delivering services already provided elsewhere. At the same time, they demonstrated considerable interest in functions that improve communication, strengthen relationships, connect organizations, and help communities navigate an increasingly complex resilience landscape.¹⁹

The following sections explore several areas where ARN could provide meaningful value while building upon the work already underway throughout Appalachia.

¹⁹ *Appalachian Resiliency Network Feasibility Study Survey Findings Summary*, Appendix B.

Potential Role 1: Improving Cross-State Coordination

Disasters rarely stop at political boundaries. Floodwaters move through entire watersheds, supply chains extend across multiple states, and communities often face similar recovery challenges regardless of where state lines are drawn.

Despite these shared experiences, resilience efforts remain largely organized at the local or state level. Stakeholders repeatedly described situations where neighboring communities were solving similar problems independently, often without knowing that another community had already developed a successful approach.



ARN could help bridge these geographic boundaries by creating opportunities for communities, organizations, and agencies to share experiences across the broader Appalachian region. The Network could also help existing multi-state initiatives lean-into a resilience focused conversation. Such coordination would not replace state-level programs or local leadership. Rather, it would strengthen communication between jurisdictions facing common challenges and encourage the exchange of practical lessons learned.

Several existing organizations already facilitate coordination within their respective areas of focus. ARN could complement these efforts by providing a broader regional perspective that encourages collaboration across disciplines, sectors, and state boundaries.

Potential Role 2: Strengthening Information Sharing

Throughout the engagement process, participants described information as abundant but often difficult to locate. Funding opportunities, successful case studies, technical guidance, research findings, and organizational resources already exist. The challenge is knowing where to find them and determining which resources are most relevant to a particular community or project.



Stakeholders expressed interest in a trusted source that could curate rather than create information. Potential functions could include:

- Highlighting successful recovery and resilience projects.
- Sharing funding opportunities from federal, state, philanthropic, and nonprofit sources.
- Promoting innovative tools and best practices.
- Showcasing lessons learned following recent disasters.

- Maintaining a directory of resilience-related organizations and technical resources.

By focusing on information sharing rather than information ownership, ARN could increase the visibility of existing work while reducing duplication of effort.

Potential Role 3: Supporting Local Implementation



One of the strongest findings to emerge from this study was that communities generally understand their needs. The greater challenge is implementation. Communities described limited staff capacity, increasing administrative complexity, and difficulty navigating funding requirements. Smaller jurisdictions, in particular, often rely on a handful of employees responsible for emergency management, planning, grant administration, infrastructure, and economic development simultaneously.²⁰

ARN is not positioned to become an implementation agency, nor should it attempt to duplicate the work of organizations already providing technical assistance. Instead, it could serve as a catalyst by helping communities identify existing implementation resources, connect with organizations possessing specialized expertise, and learn from peers who have successfully completed similar projects.

This approach recognizes that resilience is often strengthened by making existing resources easier to access rather than creating entirely new programs.

Potential Role 4: Helping Communities Navigate Complex Systems

Resilience increasingly requires communities to navigate a complex network of funding programs, regulatory requirements, technical assistance providers, insurance considerations, and governmental agencies.

Survey respondents and conference participants frequently described this complexity as a barrier to progress. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) grant programs, Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery funding, state recovery initiatives, insurance requirements, permitting processes, and nonprofit assistance programs each play important roles in resilience. Understanding how these systems



²⁰ *Appalachian Resiliency Network Feasibility Study Survey Findings Summary*, Appendix B.

interact can be challenging, particularly for smaller communities with limited staff capacity.²¹

Rather than serving as an expert in every program, ARN could function as a guide, helping communities understand where to begin, identifying organizations that specialize in particular issues, and connecting local leaders with existing expertise. Helping communities navigate current systems is as valuable as developing new resources, if not more than. Emerging initiatives, such as the Trust in Practice collaboration supporting community coaching across Central Appalachia, could also provide an opportunity to pilot and refine these navigation tools while receiving feedback from the communities using them.

Organizing the ARN partnership network as a connected web instead of a centralized hub would allow ideas to flow organically among members, create space for connection to emerge naturally, and remove a traditional, transactional approach to coming together. Instead, a collaborative network mindset could develop that could ensure adaptability and longer-term alignment among partners, ensuring that the work of ARN was relevant to the needs of communities in real time.

Potential Role 5: Increasing Visibility and Connectivity



Perhaps the most surprising finding from this study was that many stakeholders were unfamiliar with organizations already working within the resilience ecosystem. Several participants identified organizations, funding opportunities, or initiatives that others had never encountered, despite operating within the same geographic region.

However, this lack of visibility represents an opportunity. ARN could help improve awareness by maintaining an inventory of resilience organizations, facilitating introductions among practitioners, and highlighting successful partnerships occurring throughout Appalachia.

Increasing visibility benefits both established organizations and local communities by making it easier to identify partners, avoid duplication, and leverage existing expertise.

In many respects, resilience depends as much on knowing who to call as it does on knowing what to do.

²¹ ReImagine Appalachia, *Tracking Changes to FEMA and Their Impact in the Appalachian Region*, <https://reimagineappalachia.org/new-report-tracking-the-changes-to-fema-and-its-impact-in-the-appalachian-region/>, 2026.

Potential Organizational Roles

The opportunities described above suggest several potential roles that an Appalachian Resiliency Network could fulfill. Importantly, these roles are not mutually exclusive, nor do they require ARN to become a large operational organization. Instead, they reflect functions that stakeholders consistently identified as valuable and that complement organizations already working throughout the region. The chart below demonstrates this point.

Potential Organizational Roles		
Potential Role	What This Role Would Do	Relationship to Existing Organizations
Convener	Bring organizations together through conferences, workshops, roundtables, and facilitated discussions focused on shared resilience challenges.	Builds upon existing conferences and organizational meetings by creating additional opportunities for cross-sector collaboration.
Connector	Introduce organizations, communities, practitioners, and agencies with complementary expertise or shared interests.	Strengthens relationships among existing organizations without changing their missions or responsibilities.
Translator	Interpret research, policy changes, funding opportunities, and technical guidance into practical information that local communities can apply.	Bridges the gap between researchers, government agencies, nonprofits, and practitioners.
Information Hub	Curate existing resources, funding opportunities, organizational contacts, and successful project examples in a single, accessible location.	Improves visibility of work already underway while avoiding duplication of existing resources.
Peer Learning Network	Facilitate opportunities for communities to learn directly from one another through case studies, exchanges, presentations, and networking.	Responds directly to stakeholder interest in relationship building and practical knowledge sharing.

No single role emerged as sufficient on its own. Instead, stakeholders consistently described value in an organization that helps connect people, ideas, and resources while respecting the expertise and missions of organizations already active in the resilience landscape.

Collectively, these roles emphasize collaboration over administration, communication over bureaucracy, and practical support over direct service delivery.

FROM POTENTIAL TO PRACTICE

THIS FEASIBILITY STUDY DOES NOT SUGGEST that Appalachia needs another organization responsible for emergency response, disaster recovery, conservation, economic development, or technical assistance. Instead, the findings suggest there is an opportunity for an organization that helps strengthen the resilience ecosystem already in place.

By improving cross-state coordination, sharing information, supporting implementation, helping communities navigate complex systems, and increasing connectivity among existing organizations, ARN could provide meaningful value without duplicating work already being performed by others.

Ultimately, the success of any future ARN effort will depend less on the services it delivers and more on its ability to strengthen relationships, build trust, and create lasting connections among the many organizations and communities already committed to building a more resilient Appalachia. Those relationships also provide the flexibility to adapt as regional needs evolve, whether responding to future disasters, shifts in funding, or changes in political and administrative priorities.

Chapter 6 – Recommendations and Next Steps

INTRODUCTION

THIS FEASIBILITY STUDY BEGAN with two closely related ideas: the feasibility of creating an Appalachian Disaster Resilience Summit and the establishment of an Appalachian Resiliency Network (ARN). Throughout the course of the study, those ideas were tested through stakeholder surveys, conference participation, literature review, initiative scans, and conversations with practitioners, nonprofit organizations, local governments, researchers, and community leaders.

The findings affirm that the original concepts remain both relevant and achievable. They also suggest that the greatest opportunity lies in strengthening and connecting the resilience ecosystem that already exists rather than building new institutions alongside it.

The recommendations presented in this chapter reflect that evolution. They are intended to provide a practical roadmap for continuing the work while respecting the organizations, partnerships, and relationships already serving Appalachia.

NEAR-TERM ACTIONS

THE NEXT 12 TO 18 MONTHS present an opportunity to build upon the momentum generated through this feasibility study without requiring significant organizational infrastructure or financial investment.



Convene Rather Than Create

The Volgenau Climate Initiative and its partners are well-positioned to help convene existing organizations, facilitate introductions across sectors, and support collaborative projects that strengthen the existing resilience ecosystem. Early investments in relationship building and information sharing may produce greater long-term value than investments in new organizational structures.

Advance Outdoor Recreation as Part of Community Recovery

One of the more consistent themes emerging from conference discussions was the role of outdoor recreation in helping communities recover from disasters. Participants described parks, rivers, trails, and public lands not only as economic assets, but as places that restore normalcy, support local businesses, improve quality of life, and reinforce community identity during recovery.

Future resilience efforts should intentionally recognize recreation economies as contributors to long-term recovery and community resilience, particularly in rural communities where outdoor assets often represent significant economic and cultural resources.

Continue Building Relationships

Perhaps the most valuable outcome of this project has been the relationships established throughout the engagement process.

The conversations that occurred through the stakeholder survey, the Appalachian Studies Association Conference, the New River Symposium, the National Adaptation Forum, and numerous one-on-one discussions created a foundation that should continue to grow. Maintaining these relationships through regular communication and participation in existing regional initiatives will help sustain the momentum created during this study.

Share the Findings

This report should serve as the beginning of a broader regional conversation. Sharing the findings with local governments, nonprofit organizations, watershed groups, universities, philanthropic organizations, state agencies, and existing resilience initiatives will help validate the conclusions presented here while identifying additional partners interested in future collaboration.

Continue Expanding the Resilience Inventory

The organizational inventory developed through this project provides an important starting point, but it should remain a living document. As new initiatives emerge and existing organizations evolve, maintaining an updated inventory will improve visibility throughout the region and make it easier for communities to identify partners with specific expertise.

MEDIUM-TERM OPPORTUNITIES

AS RELATIONSHIPS CONTINUE TO MATURE, the focus should shift toward creating opportunities for collaboration while building upon existing infrastructure.



Build an Appalachian Resilience Presence Within Existing Conferences

One of the more unexpected findings to emerge from this study was the number of conferences, workshops, and regional gatherings already serving Appalachia.

Rather than establishing another standalone conference, stakeholders may be better served by partnering with existing events to create an Appalachian resilience track, facilitated workshop, networking event, or summit experience.

A spring gathering, such as the ones referenced in this study, provides an opportunity to engage researchers, nonprofit organizations, community leaders, and policy practitioners around emerging resilience issues and long-term community adaptation.

A second annual gathering during the fall could focus more heavily on implementation by partnering with an existing conference serving emergency managers, local governments, watershed organizations, planners, conservationists, and other community development professionals and practitioners.

This approach builds upon existing audiences, reduces administrative burden, minimizes duplication, and reinforces one of the central findings of this study: collaboration is often strongest when it grows from relationships and institutions that already exist.

Pilot ARN Functions Before Building ARN

The feasibility study consistently identified interest in several practical functions, including information sharing, peer learning, systems navigation, relationship building, and cross-state collaboration.

Rather than creating a formal organization immediately, these functions should be tested through pilot projects.

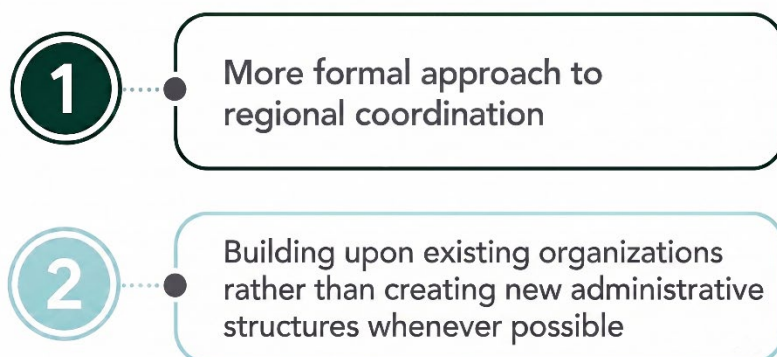
Examples could include:

- Quarterly virtual roundtables.
- Topic-specific webinars.
- Community-to-community peer exchanges.
- Shared resource directories.
- Regional newsletters highlighting successful projects and funding opportunities.

Piloting these activities allows value to be demonstrated before additional organizational structure is created.

LONG-TERM CONSIDERATIONS

IF INTEREST CONTINUES TO GROW and early collaborative efforts prove successful, the region may wish to consider a more formal approach to regional coordination. Any future effort should remain flexible enough to evolve alongside the changing needs of Appalachian communities.



Success should be measured by the strength of relationships created, the usefulness of information shared, and the practical value delivered to communities rather than by the size or complexity of the organization itself.

One of the strongest lessons from this feasibility study is that meaningful collaboration often develops incrementally. Building trust, demonstrating value, and allowing partnerships to mature naturally may ultimately produce a more durable and sustainable network than attempting to establish a comprehensive organization from the outset.

Governance Options

The stakeholder engagement process consistently reinforced the importance of building upon existing organizations rather than creating new administrative structures whenever possible.

Several governance models could support future collaboration, ranging from an informal coalition of participating organizations to a hosted initiative operating within an existing nonprofit.

Among the organizations reviewed during this study, the Appalachian Disaster Resiliency Network (ADRN) appears to represent the strongest opportunity for future collaboration. Although ADRN continues to evolve, many of the functions envisioned in the original ARN concept closely align with ADRN's existing direction and strengths. The organization has already established relationships across the region, demonstrated a commitment to convening conversations around resilience, invested in documenting community experiences, and created space for knowledge sharing and regional dialogue. What is more, the organization has academic representation and, therefore, access to additional funding opportunities that academia afford.

Rather than developing a parallel organization with many of the same aspirations, stakeholders may wish to explore how the broader ARN vision could evolve in partnership with ADRN. Such an approach would allow future investments to strengthen existing capacity, reduce organizational duplication, and build upon relationships that have already been established.

This recommendation should not be interpreted as suggesting that ADRN assume sole responsibility for the future of regional resilience collaboration. Instead, it recognizes ADRN as the most logical starting point for continued discussion because its existing mission and trajectory align closely with many of the themes identified throughout this study.

LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY

LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY will likely depend upon diversified funding sources, shared leadership, and a governance model that remains intentionally collaborative. Potential funding opportunities may include philanthropic investment, federal and state grants, conference partnerships, sponsorships, university collaborations, and contributions from participating organizations.

As such, sustainability should be measured by the value delivered to communities. If collaboration becomes easier, information becomes more accessible, relationships become stronger, and communities become better equipped to prepare for and recover from future disasters, the effort will have achieved its purpose.

FINAL REFLECTIONS

THIS STUDY BEGAN WITH A QUESTION about whether Appalachia should create a regional resilience network. It concludes with a different question.

How can Appalachia strengthen the remarkable network of organizations, partnerships, and people who are already committed to this work?

Throughout this process, stakeholders consistently demonstrated a willingness to collaborate. They are already gathering. They are already sharing ideas. They are already solving difficult problems within their own communities and organizations.

The opportunity moving forward is to make those conversations more connected, more intentional, and more accessible across the region. The same philosophy applies to future convenings. Rather than creating another annual conference, the region has an opportunity to strengthen conferences that already exist by creating dedicated resilience programming and intentionally bringing together voices that might not otherwise have the opportunity to learn from one another.

Likewise, the future of ARN may be found not in building another organization from the ground up, but in strengthening and expanding the partnerships that already exist, particularly through continued collaboration with ADRN and the many organizations working alongside it.

Appalachia has never lacked resilience. Its opportunity lies in making that resilience easier to share.

Appendices

Appendix A – Survey Instrument

Appendix B – Survey Results Summary

Appendix C – Stakeholder List

Appendix D – Conference Summaries

Appendix E – East Tennessee River Recovery and Resilience Initiative Overview

Appendix A

Appalachian Resiliency Network – Response and Recovery Survey

Appalachian Disaster Resilience Survey

For organizations involved in disaster response, recovery, and preparedness (Local Government, EM, Fire/Rescue, EMS, Swiftwater Teams, Hospitals, and Others)

The Appalachian Resiliency Network (ARN) is a new regional network that seeks to improve disaster preparedness, response, and recovery by building relationships to share best practices across communities and organizations, identify common challenges and solutions, and support one another during the next disaster.

Your organization's experience is essential. This short survey will help us understand:

- real-world barriers to effective disaster response and recovery
- appetite for participating in a multi-state resiliency network

Your responses will directly inform the 2026 Action Plan and shape future coordination across Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia.

The ARN is currently being spearheaded by a number of organizations including Appalachian Citizens' Law Center, Appalachian Voices, National Parks Conservation Association, New River Conservancy, Ohio River Valley Institute, and Volgenau Climate Initiative.

* Indicates required question

1. Your Information - Name, Title, Organization, Location *

2. Has your community been impacted by and/or involved with Hurricane Helene or another extreme weather event in the past 5 years?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes - significant impact
- ☐ Yes - moderate impact
- ☐ Yes - minor impact
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

3. Which functional areas were most stressed during recent disasters? (Select all that apply) *

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Emergency operations coordination
- ☐ Evacuation/swiftwater response
- ☐ Communication with state agencies
- ☐ Sheltering
- ☐ Damage assessment
- ☐ Volunteer management
- ☐ Supply/resource logistics
- ☐ Recovery planning
- ☐ Hazard mitigation planning
- ☐ Other: _____

4. Which administrative or regulatory challenges most affect your ability to respond or recover effectively?

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Permitting delays
- ☐ Land-use or zoning limitations
- ☐ Cross-county or cross-state coordination barriers
- ☐ Confusion about funding eligibility
- ☐ Slow decision-making from higher-level agencies
- ☐ Lack of access to shared data systems
- ☐ Other: _____

5. Please provide an example of a coordination or permitting barrier you've encountered.

6. How familiar are you with state and federal disaster funding programs (FEMA, BRIC, HMGP, CDBG-DR, ARC, USDA, etc.)?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Very familiar
- ☐ Somewhat familiar
- ☐ Not very familiar
- ☐ Not at all familiar

7. Which of the following funding challenges does your community experience most often? (Select all that apply)

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Too much administrative burden
- ☐ Not enough staff capacity to apply
- ☐ Hard to track funding opportunities
- ☐ Hard to meet match requirements
- ☐ Awareness of programs is low
- ☐ Awards take too long
- ☐ Reporting requirements too difficult
- ☐ Other: _____

8. What resources or support would most help your agency access recovery or mitigation funding?

9. Does your locality have land-use or zoning rules (such as floodplain development, slope stability, access roads)?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

10. If yes, what barriers or constraints do these rules create during disaster recovery or mitigation

11. Are there areas in your jurisdiction where land-use decisions have exacerbated all hazards risk or slowed recovery?

12. Are you aware of other regional or statewide resilience initiatives (e.g., flood resilience programs, disaster recovery networks, resilience hubs, or state-led preparedness initiatives)?

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Unsure

13. If yes, please list any initiatives, agencies, or organizations currently doing related work.

14. Do you feel that resilience and recovery work in your area is currently duplicated, under-coordinated, or fragmented?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes - major duplication
- ☐ Yes - some duplication
- ☐ No duplication, but not coordinated
- ☐ Well-coordinated
- ☐ Unsure

15. What coordination gaps do you see across county or state lines? *

16. How significant is outdoor recreation (trails, rivers, parks, tourism-related businesses) to your community's economy and identity?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Very significant
- ☐ Moderately significant
- ☐ Somewhat significant
- ☐ Not significant
- ☐ Unsure

17. Were any recreation-related assets in your jurisdiction impacted by Hurricane Helene or other recent disasters (e.g., trail closures, damaged river access, park infrastructure, tourism disruptions)?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

18. If yes, please briefly describe the impacts:

19. What barriers most affect your ability to repair, reopen, or restore recreation assets after disasters?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Permitting or land-use regulations
- ☐ Funding limitations
- ☐ FEMA eligibility or complexity
- ☐ Staffing or contractor capacity constraints
- ☐ Coordination challenges across agencies or jurisdictions
- ☐ Other:

20. In your view, what types of support or resources would most improve your community's resilience and recovery related to outdoor recreation and tourism?

21. How interested would your organization be in participating in a multi-state Appalachian Resiliency Network (a coalition of public, private, and non-profit organizations across the region)?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Very interested
- ☐ Somewhat interested
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Not very interested
- ☐ Not interested

22. What concerns or barriers would limit your participation? *

23. Would you or someone from your organization be willing to participate in a short virtual interview to share deeper insights?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No

24. Would you be interested in the creation of a contact directory of people in the region with experience with disaster response, recovery, and preparedness, to connect communities who experience future disasters with people in the region who have relevant experience or expertise?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No

25. Would you consider attending one of the following conferences to discuss this topic further? *Appalachian Carbon Forum, March 3-4, 2026, Morgantown, WV; Appalachian Studies Conference, March 19-21, 2026, Huntington, WV; New River Symposium, April 9-11, 2026, Boone, NC; and the National Adaptation Forum, May 12-14, 2026, Pittsburgh, PA.*

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No

26. Is there anything else we should know about your local challenges, recovery experience, or coordination needs?

Appendix B

Appalachian Resiliency Network – Response and Recovery Survey

Appalachian Disaster Resilience Survey

For organizations involved in disaster response, recovery, and preparedness (Local Government, EM, Fire/Rescue, EMS, Swiftwater Teams, Hospitals, and Others)

The Appalachian Resiliency Network (ARN) is a new regional network that seeks to improve disaster preparedness, response, and recovery by building relationships to share best practices across communities and organizations, identify common challenges and solutions, and support one another during the next disaster.

Your organization's experience is essential. This short survey will help us understand:

- real-world barriers to effective disaster response and recovery
- appetite for participating in a multi-state resiliency network

Your responses will directly inform the 2026 Action Plan and shape future coordination across Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia.

The ARN is currently being spearheaded by a number of organizations including Appalachian Citizens' Law Center, Appalachian Voices, National Parks Conservation Association, New River Conservancy, Ohio River Valley Institute, and Volgenau Climate Initiative.

Your Information - Name, Title, Organization, Location *

Loyd Lowry, Director Summers County Office of Emergency Management and E911 Hinton West Virginia

Has your community been impacted by and/or involved with Hurricane Helene or another extreme weather event in the past 5 years? *

- ☐ Yes - significant impact
- ☒ Yes - moderate impact
- ☐ Yes - minor impact
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

Which functional areas were most stressed during recent disasters? (Select all that apply) *

- ☒ Emergency operations coordination
- ☒ Evacuation/swiftwater response
- ☒ Communication with state agencies
- ☒ Sheltering
- ☒ Damage assessment
- ☐ Volunteer management
- ☐ Supply/resource logistics
- ☐ Recovery planning
- ☐ Hazard mitigation planning
- ☐ Other:

Which administrative or regulatory challenges most affect your ability to respond or recover effectively? *

- ☐ Permitting delays
- ☐ Land-use or zoning limitations
- ☐ Cross-county or cross-state coordination barriers
- ☐ Confusion about funding eligibility
- ☐ Slow decision-making from higher-level agencies
- ☐ Lack of access to shared data systems

☒ Other: None

Please provide an example of a coordination or permitting barrier you've encountered.

none

How familiar are you with state and federal disaster funding programs (FEMA, BRIC, HMGP, CDBG-DR, ARC, USDA, etc.)? *

- ☒ Very familiar
- ☐ Somewhat familiar
- ☐ Not very familiar
- ☐ Not at all familiar

Which of the following funding challenges does your community experience most often?
(Select all that apply) *

- ☐ Too much administrative burden
- ☒ Not enough staff capacity to apply
- ☐ Hard to track funding opportunities
- ☒ Hard to meet match requirements
- ☐ Awareness of programs is low
- ☒ Awards take too long
- ☒ Reporting requirements too difficult
- ☐ Other:

What resources or support would most help your agency access recovery or mitigation funding? *

easier requirements for funding / grants - less paperwork

Does your locality have land-use or zoning rules (such as floodplain development, slope stability, access roads)? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

If yes, what barriers or constraints do these rules create during disaster recovery or mitigation?

none

Are there areas in your jurisdiction where land-use decisions have exacerbated all hazards risk or slowed recovery? *

no

Are you aware of other regional or statewide resilience initiatives (e.g., flood resilience programs, disaster recovery networks, resilience hubs, or state-led preparedness initiatives)? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

If yes, please list any initiatives, agencies, or organizations currently doing related work.

WV EMD, VOAD, IFLOWS

Do you feel that resilience and recovery work in your area is currently duplicated, under-coordinated, or fragmented? *

- ☐ Yes - major duplication
- ☐ Yes - some duplication
- ☐ No duplication, but not coordinated
- ☒ Well-coordinated
- ☐ Unsure

What coordination gaps do you see across county or state lines? *

none

How significant is outdoor recreation (trails, rivers, parks, tourism-related businesses) to your community's economy and identity? *

- ☒ Very significant
- ☐ Moderately significant
- ☐ Somewhat significant
- ☐ Not significant
- ☐ Unsure

Were any recreation-related assets in your jurisdiction impacted by Hurricane Helene or other recent disasters (e.g., trail closures, damaged river access, park infrastructure, tourism disruptions)? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

If yes, please briefly describe the impacts:

trails washed out high water closing Bluestone Lake multiple times, Bluestone state park flooded

What barriers most affect your ability to repair, reopen, or restore recreation assets after disasters? *

- ☐ Permitting or land-use regulations
- ☒ Funding limitations
- ☐ FEMA eligibility or complexity
- ☐ Staffing or contractor capacity constraints
- ☐ Coordination challenges across agencies or jurisdictions
- ☐ Other:

In your view, what types of support or resources would most improve your community's resilience and recovery related to outdoor recreation and tourism? *

funding

How interested would your organization be in participating in a multi-state Appalachian Resiliency Network (a coalition of public, private, and non-profit organizations across the region)? *

- ☒ Very interested
- ☐ Somewhat interested
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Not very interested
- ☐ Not interested

What concerns or barriers would limit your participation? *

none

Would you or someone from your organization be willing to participate in a short virtual interview to share deeper insights? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No

Would you be interested in the creation of a contact directory of people in the region with experience with disaster response, recovery, and preparedness, to connect communities who experience future disasters with people in the region who have relevant experience or expertise? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No

Would you consider attending one of the following conferences to discuss this topic further? *

Appalachian Carbon Forum, March 3-4, 2026, Morgantown, WV; Appalachian Studies Conference, March 19-21, 2026, Huntington, WV; New River Symposium, April 9-11, 2026, Boone, NC; and the National Adaptation Forum, May 12-14, 2026, Pittsburgh, PA.

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No

Is there anything else we should know about your local challenges, recovery experience, or coordination needs? *

none

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Appalachian Resiliency Network – Response and Recovery Survey

Appalachian Disaster Resilience Survey

For organizations involved in disaster response, recovery, and preparedness (Local Government, EM, Fire/Rescue, EMS, Swiftwater Teams, Hospitals, and Others)

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Your organization's experience is essential. This short survey will help us understand:

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Your Information - Name, Title, Organization, Location *

Jon Butler, Giles County Emergency Manager

Has your community been impacted by and/or involved with Hurricane Helene or another extreme weather event in the past 5 years? *

- ☒ Yes - significant impact
- ☐ Yes - moderate impact
- ☐ Yes - minor impact
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

Which functional areas were most stressed during recent disasters? (Select all that apply) *

- ☒ Emergency operations coordination
- ☒ Evacuation/swiftwater response
- ☒ Communication with state agencies
- ☒ Sheltering
- ☒ Damage assessment
- ☒ Volunteer management
- ☒ Supply/resource logistics
- ☒ Recovery planning
- ☒ Hazard mitigation planning
- ☒ Other: Debris Management

Which administrative or regulatory challenges most affect your ability to respond or recover effectively? *

- ☐ Permitting delays
- ☐ Land-use or zoning limitations
- ☐ Cross-county or cross-state coordination barriers
- ☒ Confusion about funding eligibility
- ☒ Slow decision-making from higher-level agencies
- ☐ Lack of access to shared data systems
- ☐ Other:

Please provide an example of a coordination or permitting barrier you've encountered.

.....

How familiar are you with state and federal disaster funding programs (FEMA, BRIC, HMGP, CDBG-DR, ARC, USDA, etc.)? *

- ☐ Very familiar
- ☒ Somewhat familiar
- ☐ Not very familiar
- ☐ Not at all familiar

Which of the following funding challenges does your community experience most often?
(Select all that apply) *

- ☐ Too much administrative burden
- ☒ Not enough staff capacity to apply
- ☒ Hard to track funding opportunities
- ☐ Hard to meet match requirements
- ☐ Awareness of programs is low
- ☒ Awards take too long
- ☐ Reporting requirements too difficult
- ☐ Other:

What resources or support would most help your agency access recovery or mitigation funding? *

Staff that specialize in that area

Does your locality have land-use or zoning rules (such as floodplain development, slope stability, access roads)? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

If yes, what barriers or constraints do these rules create during disaster recovery or mitigation?

In most cases rebuilding can not be completed as was pre disaster due to these rules.

Are there areas in your jurisdiction where land-use decisions have exacerbated all hazards risk or slowed recovery? *

Yes most areas within the flood plain

Are you aware of other regional or statewide resilience initiatives (e.g., flood resilience programs, disaster recovery networks, resilience hubs, or state-led preparedness initiatives)? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

If yes, please list any initiatives, agencies, or organizations currently doing related work.

Working with DCR funding to develop a Giles County Flood Resilience Plan

Do you feel that resilience and recovery work in your area is currently duplicated, under-coordinated, or fragmented? *

- ☐ Yes - major duplication
- ☒ Yes - some duplication
- ☐ No duplication, but not coordinated
- ☐ Well-coordinated
- ☐ Unsure

What coordination gaps do you see across county or state lines? *

Continue to push for regionalization.

How significant is outdoor recreation (trails, rivers, parks, tourism-related businesses) to your community's economy and identity? *

- ☒ Very significant
- ☐ Moderately significant
- ☐ Somewhat significant
- ☐ Not significant
- ☐ Unsure

Were any recreation-related assets in your jurisdiction impacted by Hurricane Helene or other recent disasters (e.g., trail closures, damaged river access, park infrastructure, tourism disruptions)? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

If yes, please briefly describe the impacts:

Numerous Boat Landings/River Access points.

What barriers most affect your ability to repair, reopen, or restore recreation assets after disasters? *

- ☐ Permitting or land-use regulations
- ☐ Funding limitations
- ☒ FEMA eligibility or complexity
- ☐ Staffing or contractor capacity constraints
- ☐ Coordination challenges across agencies or jurisdictions
- ☐ Other:

In your view, what types of support or resources would most improve your community's resilience and recovery related to outdoor recreation and tourism? *

Resilience and Recovery pre planning with less dependency on FEMA funding sources.
.....

How interested would your organization be in participating in a multi-state Appalachian Resiliency Network (a coalition of public, private, and non-profit organizations across the region)? *

- ☐ Very interested
- ☒ Somewhat interested
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Not very interested
- ☐ Not interested

What concerns or barriers would limit your participation? *

Scheduling capacity

Would you or someone from your organization be willing to participate in a short virtual interview to share deeper insights? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No

Would you be interested in the creation of a contact directory of people in the region with experience with disaster response, recovery, and preparedness, to connect communities who experience future disasters with people in the region who have relevant experience or expertise? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No

Would you consider attending one of the following conferences to discuss this topic further? *

Appalachian Carbon Forum, March 3-4, 2026, Morgantown, WV; Appalachian Studies Conference, March 19-21, 2026, Huntington, WV; New River Symposium, April 9-11, 2026, Boone, NC; and the National Adaptation Forum, May 12-14, 2026, Pittsburgh, PA.

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No

Is there anything else we should know about your local challenges, recovery experience, or coordination needs? *

Not at this time

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Appalachian Resiliency Network – Response and Recovery Survey

Appalachian Disaster Resilience Survey

For organizations involved in disaster response, recovery, and preparedness (Local Government, EM, Fire/Rescue, EMS, Swiftwater Teams, Hospitals, and Others)

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- appetite for participating in a multi-state resiliency network

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Your Information - Name, Title, Organization, Location *

Vic Misenheimer, EM Coordinator, Caldwell County Emergency Services, Lenoir, NC

Has your community been impacted by and/or involved with Hurricane Helene or another extreme weather event in the past 5 years? *

- ☒ Yes - significant impact
- ☐ Yes - moderate impact
- ☐ Yes - minor impact
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

Which functional areas were most stressed during recent disasters? (Select all that apply) *

- ☒ Emergency operations coordination
- ☐ Evacuation/swiftwater response
- ☐ Communication with state agencies
- ☐ Sheltering
- ☐ Damage assessment
- ☒ Volunteer management
- ☒ Supply/resource logistics
- ☐ Recovery planning
- ☒ Hazard mitigation planning
- ☐ Other:

Which administrative or regulatory challenges most affect your ability to respond or recover effectively? *

- ☐ Permitting delays
- ☐ Land-use or zoning limitations
- ☐ Cross-county or cross-state coordination barriers
- ☐ Confusion about funding eligibility
- ☒ Slow decision-making from higher-level agencies
- ☐ Lack of access to shared data systems
- ☒ Other: FEMA changing rules regularly not following their own regulations

Please provide an example of a coordination or permitting barrier you've encountered.

Constant changes from FEMA regarding debris removal

How familiar are you with state and federal disaster funding programs (FEMA, BRIC, HMGP, CDBG-DR, ARC, USDA, etc.)? *

- ☒ Very familiar
- ☐ Somewhat familiar
- ☐ Not very familiar
- ☐ Not at all familiar

Which of the following funding challenges does your community experience most often?
(Select all that apply) *

- ☐ Too much administrative burden
- ☒ Not enough staff capacity to apply
- ☐ Hard to track funding opportunities
- ☐ Hard to meet match requirements
- ☒ Awareness of programs is low
- ☐ Awards take too long
- ☐ Reporting requirements too difficult
- ☒ Other: Currently unknown future with EMPG and HSGP grants

What resources or support would most help your agency access recovery or mitigation funding? *

Staffing

Does your locality have land-use or zoning rules (such as floodplain development, slope stability, access roads)? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

If yes, what barriers or constraints do these rules create during disaster recovery or mitigation?

None

Are there areas in your jurisdiction where land-use decisions have exacerbated all hazards risk or slowed recovery? *

No

Are you aware of other regional or statewide resilience initiatives (e.g., flood resilience programs, disaster recovery networks, resilience hubs, or state-led preparedness initiatives)? *

☒ Yes

☐ No

☐ Unsure

If yes, please list any initiatives, agencies, or organizations currently doing related work.

NCEM

Do you feel that resilience and recovery work in your area is currently duplicated, under-coordinated, or fragmented? *

- ☐ Yes - major duplication
- ☒ Yes - some duplication
- ☐ No duplication, but not coordinated
- ☐ Well-coordinated
- ☐ Unsure

What coordination gaps do you see across county or state lines? *

Unknown

How significant is outdoor recreation (trails, rivers, parks, tourism-related businesses) to your community's economy and identity? *

- ☐ Very significant
- ☒ Moderately significant
- ☐ Somewhat significant
- ☐ Not significant
- ☐ Unsure

Were any recreation-related assets in your jurisdiction impacted by Hurricane Helene or other recent disasters (e.g., trail closures, damaged river access, park infrastructure, tourism disruptions)? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

If yes, please briefly describe the impacts:

Closure of Wilson Creek Day Use area and some trails

What barriers most affect your ability to repair, reopen, or restore recreation assets after disasters? *

- ☐ Permitting or land-use regulations
- ☐ Funding limitations
- ☐ FEMA eligibility or complexity
- ☐ Staffing or contractor capacity constraints
- ☐ Coordination challenges across agencies or jurisdictions
- ☒ Other: Federal land

In your view, what types of support or resources would most improve your community's resilience and recovery related to outdoor recreation and tourism? *

Funding for USFS

How interested would your organization be in participating in a multi-state Appalachian Resiliency Network (a coalition of public, private, and non-profit organizations across the region)? *

- ☐ Very interested
- ☐ Somewhat interested
- ☒ Neutral
- ☐ Not very interested
- ☐ Not interested

What concerns or barriers would limit your participation? *

Time

Would you or someone from your organization be willing to participate in a short virtual interview to share deeper insights? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☒ Maybe
- ☐ No

Would you be interested in the creation of a contact directory of people in the region with experience with disaster response, recovery, and preparedness, to connect communities who experience future disasters with people in the region who have relevant experience or expertise? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☒ Maybe
- ☐ No

Would you consider attending one of the following conferences to discuss this topic further? *

Appalachian Carbon Forum, March 3-4, 2026, Morgantown, WV; Appalachian Studies Conference, March 19-21, 2026, Huntington, WV; New River Symposium, April 9-11, 2026, Boone, NC; and the National Adaptation Forum, May 12-14, 2026, Pittsburgh, PA.

☐ Yes

☒ Maybe

☐ No

Is there anything else we should know about your local challenges, recovery experience, or coordination needs? *

No

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Appalachian Resiliency Network – Response and Recovery Survey

Appalachian Disaster Resilience Survey

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Your Information - Name, Title, Organization, Location *

David Eaton Russell County Board of Supervisor Chairman

Has your community been impacted by and/or involved with Hurricane Helene or another extreme weather event in the past 5 years? *

- ☒ Yes - significant impact
- ☐ Yes - moderate impact
- ☐ Yes - minor impact
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

Which functional areas were most stressed during recent disasters? (Select all that apply) *

- ☐ Emergency operations coordination
- ☐ Evacuation/swiftwater response
- ☐ Communication with state agencies
- ☐ Sheltering
- ☐ Damage assessment
- ☐ Volunteer management
- ☒ Supply/resource logistics
- ☐ Recovery planning
- ☐ Hazard mitigation planning

☒ Other: We are in need of storage building for our emergency equipment

Which administrative or regulatory challenges most affect your ability to respond or recover effectively? *

- ☒ Permitting delays
- ☐ Land-use or zoning limitations
- ☐ Cross-county or cross-state coordination barriers
- ☐ Confusion about funding eligibility
- ☒ Slow decision-making from higher-level agencies
- ☐ Lack of access to shared data systems
- ☐ Other:

Please provide an example of a coordination or permitting barrier you've encountered.

Fema was hard to deal with rural County's have a hard time meeting the threshold of funding

How familiar are you with state and federal disaster funding programs (FEMA, BRIC, HMGP, CDBG-DR, ARC, USDA, etc.)? *

- ☒ Very familiar
- ☐ Somewhat familiar
- ☐ Not very familiar
- ☐ Not at all familiar

Which of the following funding challenges does your community experience most often?
(Select all that apply) *

- ☐ Too much administrative burden
- ☐ Not enough staff capacity to apply
- ☐ Hard to track funding opportunities
- ☒ Hard to meet match requirements
- ☐ Awareness of programs is low
- ☒ Awards take too long
- ☒ Reporting requirements too difficult
- ☐ Other:

What resources or support would most help your agency access recovery or mitigation funding? *

THE PROCESS TAKES FOREVER AND THE CITIZENS SUFFER
.....

Does your locality have land-use or zoning rules (such as floodplain development, slope stability, access roads)? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

If yes, what barriers or constraints do these rules create during disaster recovery or mitigation?

Working with DEQ and the State or Vdot better coronation

Are there areas in your jurisdiction where land-use decisions have exacerbated all hazards risk or slowed recovery? *

Allot of Trees that feel if our emergency management team and sheriff's office had not responded vdot would have had a hard time. They need more workers in the field.

Are you aware of other regional or statewide resilience initiatives (e.g., flood resilience programs, disaster recovery networks, resilience hubs, or state-led preparedness initiatives)? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

If yes, please list any initiatives, agencies, or organizations currently doing related work.

Russell county has been proactive not reactive since Helena, we put backup generators in all fire departments and community centers for shelters. Expended training for swift water rescue and purchased 2 emergency management trucks.

Do you feel that resilience and recovery work in your area is currently duplicated, under-coordinated, or fragmented? *

- ☐ Yes - major duplication
- ☐ Yes - some duplication
- ☐ No duplication, but not coordinated
- ☒ Well-coordinated
- ☐ Unsure

What coordination gaps do you see across county or state lines? *

We started a regional emergency management response team

How significant is outdoor recreation (trails, rivers, parks, tourism-related businesses) to your community's economy and identity? *

- ☒ Very significant
- ☐ Moderately significant
- ☐ Somewhat significant
- ☐ Not significant
- ☐ Unsure

Were any recreation-related assets in your jurisdiction impacted by Hurricane Helene or other recent disasters (e.g., trail closures, damaged river access, park infrastructure, tourism disruptions)? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

If yes, please briefly describe the impacts:

Local parks and the Clinch river and streams caused major damage

What barriers most affect your ability to repair, reopen, or restore recreation assets after disasters? *

- ☐ Permitting or land-use regulations
- ☐ Funding limitations
- ☒ FEMA eligibility or complexity
- ☐ Staffing or contractor capacity constraints
- ☐ Coordination challenges across agencies or jurisdictions
- ☐ Other:

In your view, what types of support or resources would most improve your community's resilience and recovery related to outdoor recreation and tourism? *

I believe money needs to be set aside for storms so a portion can help the citizens until more money could be available

How interested would your organization be in participating in a multi-state Appalachian Resiliency Network (a coalition of public, private, and non-profit organizations across the region)? *

- ☒ Very interested
- ☐ Somewhat interested
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Not very interested
- ☐ Not interested

What concerns or barriers would limit your participation? *

None I am the emergency director in Russell County Virginia

Would you or someone from your organization be willing to participate in a short virtual interview to share deeper insights? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No

Would you be interested in the creation of a contact directory of people in the region with experience with disaster response, recovery, and preparedness, to connect communities who experience future disasters with people in the region who have relevant experience or expertise? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No

Would you consider attending one of the following conferences to discuss this topic further? *

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- ☐ Yes
- ☒ Maybe
- ☐ No

Is there anything else we should know about your local challenges, recovery experience, or coordination needs? *

Its not all bad sometimes an effect of something this devastating brings more attention to the needs we don't currently have.. I have also purchased starlink mobile units for our first responders and sheriff's officers to help navigate when the power goes out ..It has helped feel the gaps where coverage is limited..Thanks David Eaton Chairman Russell County Board of Supervisors 276-701-7604

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Your organization's experience is essential. This short survey will help us understand:

- real-world barriers to effective disaster response and recovery
- appetite for participating in a multi-state resiliency network

Your responses will directly inform the 2026 Action Plan and shape future coordination across Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia.

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Your Information - Name, Title, Organization, Location *

Brad Wright, Emergency Management Coordinator, Pulaski County, VA

Has your community been impacted by and/or involved with Hurricane Helene or another extreme weather event in the past 5 years? *

- ☐ Yes - significant impact
- ☒ Yes - moderate impact
- ☐ Yes - minor impact
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

Which functional areas were most stressed during recent disasters? (Select all that apply) *

- ☐ Emergency operations coordination
- ☐ Evacuation/swiftwater response
- ☐ Communication with state agencies
- ☐ Sheltering
- ☐ Damage assessment
- ☐ Volunteer management
- ☐ Supply/resource logistics
- ☒ Recovery planning
- ☒ Hazard mitigation planning
- ☐ Other:

Which administrative or regulatory challenges most affect your ability to respond or recover effectively? *

- ☐ Permitting delays
- ☐ Land-use or zoning limitations
- ☐ Cross-county or cross-state coordination barriers
- ☒ Confusion about funding eligibility
- ☒ Slow decision-making from higher-level agencies
- ☐ Lack of access to shared data systems
- ☐ Other:

Please provide an example of a coordination or permitting barrier you've encountered.

.....

How familiar are you with state and federal disaster funding programs (FEMA, BRIC, HMGP, CDBG-DR, ARC, USDA, etc.)? *

- ☐ Very familiar
- ☒ Somewhat familiar
- ☐ Not very familiar
- ☐ Not at all familiar

Which of the following funding challenges does your community experience most often?
(Select all that apply) *

- ☒ Too much administrative burden
- ☒ Not enough staff capacity to apply
- ☐ Hard to track funding opportunities
- ☒ Hard to meet match requirements
- ☐ Awareness of programs is low
- ☒ Awards take too long
- ☐ Reporting requirements too difficult
- ☐ Other:

What resources or support would most help your agency access recovery or mitigation funding? *

Staff, funding
.....

Does your locality have land-use or zoning rules (such as floodplain development, slope stability, access roads)? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

If yes, what barriers or constraints do these rules create during disaster recovery or mitigation?

Slows the process but is needed

Are there areas in your jurisdiction where land-use decisions have exacerbated all hazards risk or slowed recovery? *

Some

Are you aware of other regional or statewide resilience initiatives (e.g., flood resilience programs, disaster recovery networks, resilience hubs, or state-led preparedness initiatives)? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☒ Unsure

If yes, please list any initiatives, agencies, or organizations currently doing related work.

.....

Do you feel that resilience and recovery work in your area is currently duplicated, under-coordinated, or fragmented? *

- ☐ Yes - major duplication
- ☒ Yes - some duplication
- ☐ No duplication, but not coordinated
- ☐ Well-coordinated
- ☐ Unsure

What coordination gaps do you see across county or state lines? *

Local resources to stay focused this task

.....

How significant is outdoor recreation (trails, rivers, parks, tourism-related businesses) to your community's economy and identity? *

- ☒ Very significant
- ☐ Moderately significant
- ☐ Somewhat significant
- ☐ Not significant
- ☐ Unsure

Were any recreation-related assets in your jurisdiction impacted by Hurricane Helene or other recent disasters (e.g., trail closures, damaged river access, park infrastructure, tourism disruptions)? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

If yes, please briefly describe the impacts:

New River Trail State park parking and trail were damaged and Claytor Lake State Park and New River had an extremely large amount of flood debris.

What barriers most affect your ability to repair, reopen, or restore recreation assets after disasters? *

- ☐ Permitting or land-use regulations
- ☐ Funding limitations
- ☒ FEMA eligibility or complexity
- ☐ Staffing or contractor capacity constraints
- ☐ Coordination challenges across agencies or jurisdictions
- ☐ Other:

In your view, what types of support or resources would most improve your community's resilience and recovery related to outdoor recreation and tourism? *

Funding and staff

How interested would your organization be in participating in a multi-state Appalachian Resiliency Network (a coalition of public, private, and non-profit organizations across the region)? *

- ☒ Very interested
- ☐ Somewhat interested
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Not very interested
- ☐ Not interested

What concerns or barriers would limit your participation? *

Time, funding and staff

Would you or someone from your organization be willing to participate in a short virtual interview to share deeper insights? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No

Would you be interested in the creation of a contact directory of people in the region with experience with disaster response, recovery, and preparedness, to connect communities who experience future disasters with people in the region who have relevant experience or expertise? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No

Would you consider attending one of the following conferences to discuss this topic further? *

Appalachian Carbon Forum, March 3-4, 2026, Morgantown, WV; Appalachian Studies Conference, March 19-21, 2026, Huntington, WV; New River Symposium, April 9-11, 2026, Boone, NC; and the National Adaptation Forum, May 12-14, 2026, Pittsburgh, PA.

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No

Is there anything else we should know about your local challenges, recovery experience, or coordination needs? *

N/A

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Appalachian Resiliency Network – Response and Recovery Survey

Appalachian Disaster Resilience Survey

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Your Information - Name, Title, Organization, Location *

Krystal Gibbons, Executive Director, Tennessee's Community Assistance Corp, Morristown, TN

Has your community been impacted by and/or involved with Hurricane Helene or another extreme weather event in the past 5 years? *

- ☒ Yes - significant impact
- ☐ Yes - moderate impact
- ☐ Yes - minor impact
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

Which functional areas were most stressed during recent disasters? (Select all that apply) *

- ☒ Emergency operations coordination
- ☒ Evacuation/swiftwater response
- ☒ Communication with state agencies
- ☒ Sheltering
- ☒ Damage assessment
- ☒ Volunteer management
- ☒ Supply/resource logistics
- ☒ Recovery planning
- ☒ Hazard mitigation planning

☐ Other:

Which administrative or regulatory challenges most affect your ability to respond or recover effectively? *

- ☐ Permitting delays
- ☐ Land-use or zoning limitations
- ☒ Cross-county or cross-state coordination barriers
- ☒ Confusion about funding eligibility
- ☐ Slow decision-making from higher-level agencies
- ☒ Lack of access to shared data systems
- ☐ Other:

Please provide an example of a coordination or permitting barrier you've encountered.

We ran into situations where disaster survivors were hesitant to ask for help or sign up for services because they had been given so much incorrect information. One gentleman would not sign up for our programs because he was told by someone they were sending him a new mobile home and it was coming out of NC. He missed his first opportunity to get a new home. Thankfully, we had another round of funding come through and we are in the process of building his home now. He has lived in an inadequate shelter for over a year. Permitting has been hard because we do a lot of work in Cocke County and they didn't require permits when some of the homes that we are reconstructing were built so we have had to start from the beginning.

.....

How familiar are you with state and federal disaster funding programs (FEMA, BRIC, HMGP, CDBG-DR, ARC, USDA, etc.)? *

- ☐ Very familiar
- ☒ Somewhat familiar
- ☐ Not very familiar
- ☐ Not at all familiar

Which of the following funding challenges does your community experience most often? (Select all that apply) *

- ☐ Too much administrative burden
- ☒ Not enough staff capacity to apply
- ☒ Hard to track funding opportunities
- ☐ Hard to meet match requirements
- ☐ Awareness of programs is low
- ☒ Awards take too long
- ☐ Reporting requirements too difficult
- ☐ Other:

What resources or support would most help your agency access recovery or mitigation funding? *

Recovery funds are slow to make their way down to the folks that need them the most. It would be wonderful if we had someone dedicated to disaster and ready to go when the disaster happened. We don't have that capacity so it is adding the extra work to plates that are already too full.

Does your locality have land-use or zoning rules (such as floodplain development, slope stability, access roads)? *

☒ Yes

☐ No

☐ Unsure

If yes, what barriers or constraints do these rules create during disaster recovery or mitigation?

elevation certificate, specialized foundation systems, additional cost, construction delays

Are there areas in your jurisdiction where land-use decisions have exacerbated all hazards risk or slowed recovery? *

In response to a surge in applications for camper, RV, and tiny home developments (over 50 applications), the county voted to change zoning laws requiring new developments to be at least 500 feet away from existing homes. This decision aims to prevent overcrowding, but some residents felt this, along with other regulations, might slow down the housing recovery. The need to rebuild while adhering to National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) guidelines to prevent future disasters. There is confusion over requirements for elevating homes, with many properties deemed substantially damaged.

Are you aware of other regional or statewide resilience initiatives (e.g., flood resilience programs, disaster recovery networks, resilience hubs, or state-led preparedness initiatives)? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☒ Unsure

If yes, please list any initiatives, agencies, or organizations currently doing related work.

.....

Do you feel that resilience and recovery work in your area is currently duplicated, under-coordinated, or fragmented? *

- ☐ Yes - major duplication
- ☐ Yes - some duplication
- ☒ No duplication, but not coordinated
- ☐ Well-coordinated
- ☐ Unsure

What coordination gaps do you see across county or state lines? *

I feel like there was a lot of confusion and miscommunication.

How significant is outdoor recreation (trails, rivers, parks, tourism-related businesses) to your community's economy and identity? *

- ☒ Very significant
- ☐ Moderately significant
- ☐ Somewhat significant
- ☐ Not significant
- ☐ Unsure

Were any recreation-related assets in your jurisdiction impacted by Hurricane Helene or other recent disasters (e.g., trail closures, damaged river access, park infrastructure, tourism disruptions)? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

If yes, please briefly describe the impacts:

Rafting - river access caused major tourism disruptions

What barriers most affect your ability to repair, reopen, or restore recreation assets after disasters? *

- ☐ Permitting or land-use regulations
- ☒ Funding limitations
- ☐ FEMA eligibility or complexity
- ☐ Staffing or contractor capacity constraints
- ☐ Coordination challenges across agencies or jurisdictions
- ☐ Other: _____

In your view, what types of support or resources would most improve your community's resilience and recovery related to outdoor recreation and tourism? *

Unknown

How interested would your organization be in participating in a multi-state Appalachian Resiliency Network (a coalition of public, private, and non-profit organizations across the region)? *

- ☒ Very interested
- ☐ Somewhat interested
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Not very interested
- ☐ Not interested

What concerns or barriers would limit your participation? *

Time constraints

Would you or someone from your organization be willing to participate in a short virtual interview to share deeper insights? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No

Would you be interested in the creation of a contact directory of people in the region with experience with disaster response, recovery, and preparedness, to connect communities who experience future disasters with people in the region who have relevant experience or expertise? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No

Would you consider attending one of the following conferences to discuss this topic further? *

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- ☒ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No

Is there anything else we should know about your local challenges, recovery experience, or coordination needs? *

None

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Your Information - Name, Title, Organization, Location *

Chris Schroeder - Vice President of Disaster Recovery & Resilience, Appalachia Service Project (ASP) - Johnson City, TN [chris.schroeder@asphome.org / 423-612-7050]

Has your community been impacted by and/or involved with Hurricane Helene or another extreme weather event in the past 5 years? *

- ☒ Yes - significant impact
- ☐ Yes - moderate impact
- ☐ Yes - minor impact
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

Which functional areas were most stressed during recent disasters? (Select all that apply) *

- ☒ Emergency operations coordination
- ☒ Evacuation/swiftwater response
- ☒ Communication with state agencies
- ☒ Sheltering
- ☒ Damage assessment
- ☒ Volunteer management
- ☒ Supply/resource logistics
- ☒ Recovery planning
- ☒ Hazard mitigation planning
- ☒ Other:
Donations management; LTRG activation/planning; continuity of operations/continuity of government planning; short term needs coordination (food, water, clothing, shelter, medicine, etc.); unmet needs coordination; short- and long-term housing needs

Which administrative or regulatory challenges most affect your ability to respond or recover effectively? *

- ☒ Permitting delays
- ☒ Land-use or zoning limitations
- ☒ Cross-county or cross-state coordination barriers
- ☒ Confusion about funding eligibility
- ☒ Slow decision-making from higher-level agencies
- ☒ Lack of access to shared data systems

☐ Other:

Please provide an example of a coordination or permitting barrier you've encountered.

State and Federal officials too scared to make actionable decisions right away or until "more information is available", etc.
.....

How familiar are you with state and federal disaster funding programs (FEMA, BRIC, HMGP, CDBG-DR, ARC, USDA, etc.)? *

- ☒ Very familiar
- ☐ Somewhat familiar
- ☐ Not very familiar
- ☐ Not at all familiar

Which of the following funding challenges does your community experience most often? (Select all that apply) *

- ☒ Too much administrative burden
- ☒ Not enough staff capacity to apply
- ☐ Hard to track funding opportunities
- ☐ Hard to meet match requirements
- ☐ Awareness of programs is low
- ☒ Awards take too long
- ☐ Reporting requirements too difficult

- ☒ Other:
Funding is way too restrictive, with too many strings attached. And takes too long to arrive/become actionable.

What resources or support would most help your agency access recovery or mitigation funding? *

Additional advocacy for more funding - local resources can't match the needs on their own.

Does your locality have land-use or zoning rules (such as floodplain development, slope stability, access roads)? *

☒ Yes

☐ No

☐ Unsure

If yes, what barriers or constraints do these rules create during disaster recovery or mitigation?

FEMA's floodplain mapping is very out of date in this region, it's inconsistent in how that information is maintained, and also how it is managed/enforced when a disaster happens.

Are there areas in your jurisdiction where land-use decisions have exacerbated all hazards risk or slowed recovery? *

Municipalities are very wary of building homes back in floodplain areas, but it can be done successfully.

Are you aware of other regional or statewide resilience initiatives (e.g., flood resilience programs, disaster recovery networks, resilience hubs, or state-led preparedness initiatives)? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

If yes, please list any initiatives, agencies, or organizations currently doing related work.

We are (ASP). Let's talk. [chris.schroeder@asphome.org / 423-612-7050]

Do you feel that resilience and recovery work in your area is currently duplicated, under-coordinated, or fragmented? *

- ☐ Yes - major duplication
- ☐ Yes - some duplication
- ☒ No duplication, but not coordinated
- ☐ Well-coordinated
- ☐ Unsure

What coordination gaps do you see across county or state lines? *

Communities are still (understandably) still looking down and in at their own needs, not up and out at the future, the region, etc.

How significant is outdoor recreation (trails, rivers, parks, tourism-related businesses) to your community's economy and identity? *

- ☒ Very significant
- ☐ Moderately significant
- ☐ Somewhat significant
- ☐ Not significant
- ☐ Unsure

Were any recreation-related assets in your jurisdiction impacted by Hurricane Helene or other recent disasters (e.g., trail closures, damaged river access, park infrastructure, tourism disruptions)? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

If yes, please briefly describe the impacts:

Parks, trails, access roads, campsites, bridges, supporting infrastructure, etc.

What barriers most affect your ability to repair, reopen, or restore recreation assets after disasters? *

- ☐ Permitting or land-use regulations
- ☐ Funding limitations
- ☐ FEMA eligibility or complexity
- ☐ Staffing or contractor capacity constraints
- ☐ Coordination challenges across agencies or jurisdictions
- ☒ Other: All of the above.

In your view, what types of support or resources would most improve your community's resilience and recovery related to outdoor recreation and tourism? *

Flexible funding, additional local/municipal administrative capacity.

How interested would your organization be in participating in a multi-state Appalachian Resiliency Network (a coalition of public, private, and non-profit organizations across the region)? *

- ☒ Very interested
- ☐ Somewhat interested
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Not very interested
- ☐ Not interested

What concerns or barriers would limit your participation? *

None.

Would you or someone from your organization be willing to participate in a short virtual interview to share deeper insights? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No

Would you be interested in the creation of a contact directory of people in the region with experience with disaster response, recovery, and preparedness, to connect communities who experience future disasters with people in the region who have relevant experience or expertise? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No

Would you consider attending one of the following conferences to discuss this topic further? *

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- ☒ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No

Is there anything else we should know about your local challenges, recovery experience, or coordination needs? *

Thank you for all your work here. This is a critical conversation that Appalachia needs. I'm willing and excited to get more involved.

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Your organization's experience is essential. This short survey will help us understand:

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Your Information - Name, Title, Organization, Location *

Shari Mefford, HOME Rehab Program Administrator, TCAC, Morristown, TN

Has your community been impacted by and/or involved with Hurricane Helene or another extreme weather event in the past 5 years? *

- ☒ Yes - significant impact
- ☐ Yes - moderate impact
- ☐ Yes - minor impact
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

Which functional areas were most stressed during recent disasters? (Select all that apply) *

- ☐ Emergency operations coordination
- ☐ Evacuation/swiftwater response
- ☐ Communication with state agencies
- ☒ Sheltering
- ☐ Damage assessment
- ☐ Volunteer management
- ☐ Supply/resource logistics
- ☐ Recovery planning
- ☐ Hazard mitigation planning
- ☐ Other:

Which administrative or regulatory challenges most affect your ability to respond or recover effectively? *

- ☐ Permitting delays
- ☐ Land-use or zoning limitations
- ☐ Cross-county or cross-state coordination barriers
- ☒ Confusion about funding eligibility
- ☐ Slow decision-making from higher-level agencies
- ☒ Lack of access to shared data systems
- ☒ Other: Unfulfilled promises from help agencies.

Please provide an example of a coordination or permitting barrier you've encountered.

Disaster happens quickly, but recovery takes time. It is often a slow process with overwhelming amounts of information. When one (or two or more) agency tells a survivor they will help but doesn't, it makes it much more challenging for those of us who do want to help but have to go through rigidly defined channels.

How familiar are you with state and federal disaster funding programs (FEMA, BRIC, HMGP, CDBG-DR, ARC, USDA, etc.)? *

- ☐ Very familiar
- ☐ Somewhat familiar
- ☒ Not very familiar
- ☐ Not at all familiar

Which of the following funding challenges does your community experience most often? (Select all that apply) *

- ☐ Too much administrative burden
- ☐ Not enough staff capacity to apply
- ☒ Hard to track funding opportunities
- ☒ Hard to meet match requirements
- ☒ Awareness of programs is low
- ☒ Awards take too long
- ☐ Reporting requirements too difficult
- ☐ Other:

What resources or support would most help your agency access recovery or mitigation funding? *

A central database for funding opportunities that is easy to understand and clearly explains programs would be phenomenal!

Does your locality have land-use or zoning rules (such as floodplain development, slope stability, access roads)? *

☒ Yes

☐ No

☐ Unsure

If yes, what barriers or constraints do these rules create during disaster recovery or mitigation?

The biggest thing we've faced is elevation to mitigate flooding. We had one family bring us their FEMA Elevation Certificate report only to discover it was horribly incorrect. Things like that significantly delay recovery.

Are there areas in your jurisdiction where land-use decisions have exacerbated all hazards risk or slowed recovery? *

Not in my experience.

Are you aware of other regional or statewide resilience initiatives (e.g., flood resilience programs, disaster recovery networks, resilience hubs, or state-led preparedness initiatives)? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☒ No
- ☐ Unsure

If yes, please list any initiatives, agencies, or organizations currently doing related work.

.....

Do you feel that resilience and recovery work in your area is currently duplicated, under-coordinated, or fragmented? *

- ☐ Yes - major duplication
- ☐ Yes - some duplication
- ☒ No duplication, but not coordinated
- ☐ Well-coordinated
- ☐ Unsure

What coordination gaps do you see across county or state lines? *

There are so many agencies helping, and it is impossible to know who is being helped by whom and how.

How significant is outdoor recreation (trails, rivers, parks, tourism-related businesses) to your community's economy and identity? *

- ☐ Very significant
- ☐ Moderately significant
- ☒ Somewhat significant
- ☐ Not significant
- ☐ Unsure

Were any recreation-related assets in your jurisdiction impacted by Hurricane Helene or other recent disasters (e.g., trail closures, damaged river access, park infrastructure, tourism disruptions)? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

If yes, please briefly describe the impacts:

All of Cocke County - trails, rivers, campgrounds, etc. - was closed for months. Many people lost their jobs because of such closures.

What barriers most affect your ability to repair, reopen, or restore recreation assets after disasters? *

- ☐ Permitting or land-use regulations
- ☐ Funding limitations
- ☐ FEMA eligibility or complexity
- ☐ Staffing or contractor capacity constraints
- ☐ Coordination challenges across agencies or jurisdictions
- ☒ Other: Unsure

In your view, what types of support or resources would most improve your community's resilience and recovery related to outdoor recreation and tourism? *

This is not my area of expertise.

How interested would your organization be in participating in a multi-state Appalachian Resiliency Network (a coalition of public, private, and non-profit organizations across the region)? *

- ☒ Very interested
- ☐ Somewhat interested
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Not very interested
- ☐ Not interested

What concerns or barriers would limit your participation? *

We would want to make sure such a network was well organized and managed.

Would you or someone from your organization be willing to participate in a short virtual interview to share deeper insights? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No

Would you be interested in the creation of a contact directory of people in the region with experience with disaster response, recovery, and preparedness, to connect communities who experience future disasters with people in the region who have relevant experience or expertise? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No

Would you consider attending one of the following conferences to discuss this topic further? *

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- ☒ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No

Is there anything else we should know about your local challenges, recovery experience, or coordination needs? *

Thank you for your interest in helping this area recover and grow through its struggles.

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Your Information - Name, Title, Organization, Location *

Seth Long, Executive Director, HOMES, inc.

Has your community been impacted by and/or involved with Hurricane Helene or another extreme weather event in the past 5 years? *

- ☒ Yes - significant impact
- ☐ Yes - moderate impact
- ☐ Yes - minor impact
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

Which functional areas were most stressed during recent disasters? (Select all that apply) *

- ☐ Emergency operations coordination
- ☒ Evacuation/swiftwater response
- ☒ Communication with state agencies
- ☒ Sheltering
- ☒ Damage assessment
- ☒ Volunteer management
- ☒ Supply/resource logistics
- ☒ Recovery planning
- ☒ Hazard mitigation planning
- ☒ Other:

Permanent Housing, another one was mitigation related to repairing existing housing

Which administrative or regulatory challenges most affect your ability to respond or recover effectively? *

- ☐ Permitting delays
- ☐ Land-use or zoning limitations
- ☐ Cross-county or cross-state coordination barriers
- ☒ Confusion about funding eligibility
- ☒ Slow decision-making from higher-level agencies
- ☐ Lack of access to shared data systems
- ☒ Other: Arduous compliance and bonding issues related to CDBG-DR funds

Please provide an example of a coordination or permitting barrier you've encountered.

Fema not consulting/working with local perspectives of non-profit housing development organizations working in our community for decades.

How familiar are you with state and federal disaster funding programs (FEMA, BRIC, HMGP, CDBG-DR, ARC, USDA, etc.)? *

- ☒ Very familiar
- ☐ Somewhat familiar
- ☐ Not very familiar
- ☐ Not at all familiar

Which of the following funding challenges does your community experience most often?
(Select all that apply) *

- ☒ Too much administrative burden
- ☐ Not enough staff capacity to apply
- ☐ Hard to track funding opportunities
- ☐ Hard to meet match requirements
- ☐ Awareness of programs is low
- ☒ Awards take too long
- ☐ Reporting requirements too difficult

☒ Other:

We learned we did not have a capacity problem but a flexible resource problem, It was amazing how much work we could do with less restrictive state funds then the slower more restrictive compliance heavy federal funds

What resources or support would most help your agency access recovery or mitigation funding? *

After the 2022 EKY flood we did amazing work with the unrestricted donation that came to us quickly. Money should come quick and be flexible to established organization on the ground that have a solid track history

Does your locality have land-use or zoning rules (such as floodplain development, slope stability, access roads)? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☒ No
- ☐ Unsure

If yes, what barriers or constraints do these rules create during disaster recovery or mitigation?

.....

Are there areas in your jurisdiction where land-use decisions have exacerbated all hazards risk or slowed recovery? *

no

.....

Are you aware of other regional or statewide resilience initiatives (e.g., flood resilience programs, disaster recovery networks, resilience hubs, or state-led preparedness initiatives)? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

If yes, please list any initiatives, agencies, or organizations currently doing related work.

Fahe Foundation for Appalachian Kentucky

Do you feel that resilience and recovery work in your area is currently duplicated, under-coordinated, or fragmented? *

- ☐ Yes - major duplication
- ☐ Yes - some duplication
- ☒ No duplication, but not coordinated
- ☐ Well-coordinated
- ☐ Unsure

What coordination gaps do you see across county or state lines? *

It has 44 months since the flood and no houses have been built using CDBG-DR funds

How significant is outdoor recreation (trails, rivers, parks, tourism-related businesses) to your community's economy and identity? *

- ☒ Very significant
- ☐ Moderately significant
- ☐ Somewhat significant
- ☐ Not significant
- ☐ Unsure

Were any recreation-related assets in your jurisdiction impacted by Hurricane Helene or other recent disasters (e.g., trail closures, damaged river access, park infrastructure, tourism disruptions)? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

If yes, please briefly describe the impacts:

Secondary roads are broken at creek banks, culverts clogged streams are full of sediment and debris causing quicker flooding events with less rain fall

What barriers most affect your ability to repair, reopen, or restore recreation assets after disasters? *

- ☐ Permitting or land-use regulations
- ☒ Funding limitations
- ☐ FEMA eligibility or complexity
- ☐ Staffing or contractor capacity constraints
- ☐ Coordination challenges across agencies or jurisdictions
- ☐ Other:

In your view, what types of support or resources would most improve your community's resilience and recovery related to outdoor recreation and tourism? *

Razing abandoned properties that did not participate in the flooding, repairing secondary roads that tourist are not feeling safe to drive on.
.....

How interested would your organization be in participating in a multi-state Appalachian Resiliency Network (a coalition of public, private, and non-profit organizations across the region)? *

- ☐ Very interested
- ☒ Somewhat interested
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Not very interested
- ☐ Not interested

What concerns or barriers would limit your participation? *

Time, we are busy building houses, the DR funds are just starting to hit the ground.

Would you or someone from your organization be willing to participate in a short virtual interview to share deeper insights? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No

Would you be interested in the creation of a contact directory of people in the region with experience with disaster response, recovery, and preparedness, to connect communities who experience future disasters with people in the region who have relevant experience or expertise? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No

Would you consider attending one of the following conferences to discuss this topic further? *

Appalachian Carbon Forum, March 3-4, 2026, Morgantown, WV; Appalachian Studies Conference, March 19-21, 2026, Huntington, WV; New River Symposium, April 9-11, 2026, Boone, NC; and the National Adaptation Forum, May 12-14, 2026, Pittsburgh, PA.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☒ No

Is there anything else we should know about your local challenges, recovery experience, or coordination needs? *

no

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Appalachian Resiliency Network – Response and Recovery Survey

Appalachian Disaster Resilience Survey

For organizations involved in disaster response, recovery, and preparedness (Local Government, EM, Fire/Rescue, EMS, Swiftwater Teams, Hospitals, and Others)

The Appalachian Resiliency Network (ARN) is a new regional network that seeks to improve disaster preparedness, response, and recovery by building relationships to share best practices across communities and organizations, identify common challenges and solutions, and support one another during the next disaster.

Your organization's experience is essential. This short survey will help us understand:

- real-world barriers to effective disaster response and recovery
- appetite for participating in a multi-state resiliency network

Your responses will directly inform the 2026 Action Plan and shape future coordination across Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia.

The ARN is currently being spearheaded by a number of organizations including Appalachian Citizens' Law Center, Appalachian Voices, National Parks Conservation Association, New River Conservancy, Ohio River Valley Institute, and Volgenau Climate Initiative.

Your Information - Name, Title, Organization, Location *

David Lumsden, Board Chairman, WV Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster

Has your community been impacted by and/or involved with Hurricane Helene or another extreme weather event in the past 5 years? *

- ☒ Yes - significant impact
- ☐ Yes - moderate impact
- ☐ Yes - minor impact
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

Which functional areas were most stressed during recent disasters? (Select all that apply) *

- ☐ Emergency operations coordination
- ☐ Evacuation/swiftwater response
- ☐ Communication with state agencies
- ☒ Sheltering
- ☒ Damage assessment
- ☐ Volunteer management
- ☐ Supply/resource logistics
- ☒ Recovery planning
- ☐ Hazard mitigation planning
- ☐ Other:

Which administrative or regulatory challenges most affect your ability to respond or recover effectively? *

- ☐ Permitting delays
- ☐ Land-use or zoning limitations
- ☐ Cross-county or cross-state coordination barriers
- ☒ Confusion about funding eligibility
- ☒ Slow decision-making from higher-level agencies
- ☐ Lack of access to shared data systems
- ☐ Other:

Please provide an example of a coordination or permitting barrier you've encountered.

Slow state contracting for funded case management programs (multiple disastersf)

How familiar are you with state and federal disaster funding programs (FEMA, BRIC, HMGP, CDBG-DR, ARC, USDA, etc.)? *

- ☐ Very familiar
- ☒ Somewhat familiar
- ☐ Not very familiar
- ☐ Not at all familiar

Which of the following funding challenges does your community experience most often?
(Select all that apply) *

- ☐ Too much administrative burden
- ☒ Not enough staff capacity to apply
- ☒ Hard to track funding opportunities
- ☐ Hard to meet match requirements
- ☒ Awareness of programs is low
- ☐ Awards take too long
- ☐ Reporting requirements too difficult
- ☐ Other:

What resources or support would most help your agency access recovery or mitigation funding? *

Funded disaster case management programs

Does your locality have land-use or zoning rules (such as floodplain development, slope stability, access roads)? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

If yes, what barriers or constraints do these rules create during disaster recovery or mitigation?

These issues impact long-term recovery

Are there areas in your jurisdiction where land-use decisions have exacerbated all hazards risk or slowed recovery? *

Unsure

Are you aware of other regional or statewide resilience initiatives (e.g., flood resilience programs, disaster recovery networks, resilience hubs, or state-led preparedness initiatives)? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

If yes, please list any initiatives, agencies, or organizations currently doing related work.

Through VOAD a number of programs; FEMA funded, state administered DCMP's

Do you feel that resilience and recovery work in your area is currently duplicated, under-coordinated, or fragmented? *

- ☐ Yes - major duplication
- ☒ Yes - some duplication
- ☐ No duplication, but not coordinated
- ☐ Well-coordinated
- ☐ Unsure

What coordination gaps do you see across county or state lines? *

Unsure

How significant is outdoor recreation (trails, rivers, parks, tourism-related businesses) to your community's economy and identity? *

- ☒ Very significant
- ☐ Moderately significant
- ☐ Somewhat significant
- ☐ Not significant
- ☐ Unsure

Were any recreation-related assets in your jurisdiction impacted by Hurricane Helene or other recent disasters (e.g., trail closures, damaged river access, park infrastructure, tourism disruptions)? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☒ No
- ☐ Unsure

If yes, please briefly describe the impacts:

.....

What barriers most affect your ability to repair, reopen, or restore recreation assets after disasters? *

- ☐ Permitting or land-use regulations
- ☐ Funding limitations
- ☐ FEMA eligibility or complexity
- ☒ Staffing or contractor capacity constraints
- ☐ Coordination challenges across agencies or jurisdictions
- ☐ Other:

In your view, what types of support or resources would most improve your community's resilience and recovery related to outdoor recreation and tourism? *

Strategic Planning;
.....

How interested would your organization be in participating in a multi-state Appalachian Resiliency Network (a coalition of public, private, and non-profit organizations across the region)? *

- ☒ Very interested
- ☐ Somewhat interested
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Not very interested
- ☐ Not interested

What concerns or barriers would limit your participation? *

Time available

Would you or someone from your organization be willing to participate in a short virtual interview to share deeper insights? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No

Would you be interested in the creation of a contact directory of people in the region with experience with disaster response, recovery, and preparedness, to connect communities who experience future disasters with people in the region who have relevant experience or expertise? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No

Would you consider attending one of the following conferences to discuss this topic further? *

Appalachian Carbon Forum, March 3-4, 2026, Morgantown, WV; Appalachian Studies Conference, March 19-21, 2026, Huntington, WV; New River Symposium, April 9-11, 2026, Boone, NC; and the National Adaptation Forum, May 12-14, 2026, Pittsburgh, PA.

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No

Is there anything else we should know about your local challenges, recovery experience, or coordination needs? *

No

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Appalachian Resiliency Network – Response and Recovery Survey

Appalachian Disaster Resilience Survey

For organizations involved in disaster response, recovery, and preparedness (Local Government, EM, Fire/Rescue, EMS, Swiftwater Teams, Hospitals, and Others)

The Appalachian Resiliency Network (ARN) is a new regional network that seeks to improve disaster preparedness, response, and recovery by building relationships to share best practices across communities and organizations, identify common challenges and solutions, and support one another during the next disaster.

Your organization's experience is essential. This short survey will help us understand:

- real-world barriers to effective disaster response and recovery
- appetite for participating in a multi-state resiliency network

Your responses will directly inform the 2026 Action Plan and shape future coordination across Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia.

The ARN is currently being spearheaded by a number of organizations including Appalachian Citizens' Law Center, Appalachian Voices, National Parks Conservation Association, New River Conservancy, Ohio River Valley Institute, and Volgenau Climate Initiative.

Your Information - Name, Title, Organization, Location *

.....
Evangeline Richie, Director of Housing & Community Development, SERCAP, Inc.

Has your community been impacted by and/or involved with Hurricane Helene or another extreme weather event in the past 5 years? *

- ☒ Yes - significant impact
- ☐ Yes - moderate impact
- ☐ Yes - minor impact
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

Which functional areas were most stressed during recent disasters? (Select all that apply) *

- ☐ Emergency operations coordination
- ☒ Evacuation/swiftwater response
- ☐ Communication with state agencies
- ☒ Sheltering
- ☐ Damage assessment
- ☐ Volunteer management
- ☒ Supply/resource logistics
- ☒ Recovery planning
- ☐ Hazard mitigation planning
- ☐ Other:

Which administrative or regulatory challenges most affect your ability to respond or recover effectively? *

- ☐ Permitting delays
- ☐ Land-use or zoning limitations
- ☐ Cross-county or cross-state coordination barriers
- ☐ Confusion about funding eligibility
- ☒ Slow decision-making from higher-level agencies
- ☐ Lack of access to shared data systems
- ☐ Other:

Please provide an example of a coordination or permitting barrier you've encountered.

Households were ready to move forward with repairs and contractors had been identified, but work could not proceed until both the environmental review clearance and local permitting approvals were finalized. These processes are often handled by different entities and cannot always occur concurrently, particularly when federal disaster recovery funds are involved. As a result, projects that could otherwise be completed quickly may face delays of several weeks or longer.

.....

How familiar are you with state and federal disaster funding programs (FEMA, BRIC, HMGP, CDBG-DR, ARC, USDA, etc.)? *

- ☒ Very familiar
- ☐ Somewhat familiar
- ☐ Not very familiar
- ☐ Not at all familiar

Which of the following funding challenges does your community experience most often? (Select all that apply) *

- ☒ Too much administrative burden
- ☐ Not enough staff capacity to apply
- ☒ Hard to track funding opportunities
- ☒ Hard to meet match requirements
- ☐ Awareness of programs is low
- ☐ Awards take too long
- ☐ Reporting requirements too difficult
- ☐ Other:

What resources or support would most help your agency access recovery or mitigation funding? *

Access to disaster recovery and mitigation funding would be strengthened through additional technical assistance, planning resources, and capacity-building support. Many federal and state funding programs involve complex compliance requirements, including environmental reviews and reporting obligations, which can be challenging for rural-serving organizations with limited staff capacity. Flexible pre-development funding for engineering, environmental reviews, and project design, along with improved coordination and guidance from funding agencies, would help our organization prepare projects more effectively and deploy recovery resources more quickly in rural communities.

Does your locality have land-use or zoning rules (such as floodplain development, slope stability, access roads)? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

If yes, what barriers or constraints do these rules create during disaster recovery or mitigation?

While these land-use and zoning regulations are important for protecting public safety and environmental resources, they can create challenges during disaster recovery and mitigation efforts. Requirements related to floodplain development standards, elevation requirements, slope stability, and access road specifications can increase project costs and extend timelines for households attempting to repair or rebuild after a disaster. In some cases, properties located in flood-prone areas or on steep terrain require additional engineering reviews, site modifications, or mitigation measures before permits can be issued. These requirements can delay construction and make recovery projects more complex, particularly for low- and moderate-income households in rural communities with limited resources.

Are there areas in your jurisdiction where land-use decisions have exacerbated all hazards risk or slowed recovery? *

Yes. In some areas, historic land-use decisions have contributed to increased vulnerability to natural hazards and can complicate recovery efforts. For example, development in flood-prone areas, low-lying floodplains, and locations with limited drainage infrastructure can increase the risk of repeated damage during major storm events. In more mountainous or rural areas, steep slopes and limited road access can also make rebuilding and infrastructure repair more difficult after disasters. These conditions can slow recovery because projects may require additional engineering assessments, environmental reviews, or mitigation measures before repairs or reconstruction can move forward.

Are you aware of other regional or statewide resilience initiatives (e.g., flood resilience programs, disaster recovery networks, resilience hubs, or state-led preparedness initiatives)? *

☒ Yes

☐ No

☐ Unsure

If yes, please list any initiatives, agencies, or organizations currently doing related work.

Yes. Several regional and statewide initiatives support resilience and disaster recovery across North Carolina and the Appalachian region of Virginia. In North Carolina, the North Carolina Office of Recovery and Resiliency and the North Carolina Division of Emergency Management lead major recovery and hazard mitigation efforts. In Virginia, similar work is coordinated through the Virginia Department of Emergency Management and the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, which support resilience planning, housing recovery, and community preparedness initiatives in Appalachian communities.

Do you feel that resilience and recovery work in your area is currently duplicated, under-coordinated, or fragmented? *

- ☐ Yes - major duplication
- ☒ Yes - some duplication
- ☐ No duplication, but not coordinated
- ☐ Well-coordinated
- ☐ Unsure

What coordination gaps do you see across county or state lines? *

Coordination gaps often occur across county and state lines due to differences in program requirements, permitting processes, and funding timelines. Neighboring jurisdictions may operate under separate administrative systems and eligibility criteria, which can make it difficult to coordinate regional disaster recovery or mitigation projects. In rural areas, this can lead to delays in project implementation, inconsistent access to resources, and challenges aligning infrastructure, housing recovery, and hazard mitigation efforts across communities that share similar risks but fall under different jurisdictions. Strengthening regional coordination and information sharing could help improve consistency and efficiency in recovery efforts.

How significant is outdoor recreation (trails, rivers, parks, tourism-related businesses) to your community's economy and identity? *

- ☒ Very significant
- ☐ Moderately significant
- ☐ Somewhat significant
- ☐ Not significant
- ☐ Unsure

Were any recreation-related assets in your jurisdiction impacted by Hurricane Helene or other recent disasters (e.g., trail closures, damaged river access, park infrastructure, tourism disruptions)? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

If yes, please briefly describe the impacts:

Yes. Recent storm events, including Hurricane Helene, have impacted recreation-related assets in parts of the region. Communities experienced temporary trail closures, damage to river access points, erosion along greenways and trails, and impacts to park infrastructure such as shelters, parking areas, and access roads. These disruptions can also affect tourism-related businesses that rely on outdoor recreation, highlighting the importance of resilient infrastructure and restoration efforts to support both community use and the local outdoor recreation economy.

What barriers most affect your ability to repair, reopen, or restore recreation assets after disasters? *

- ☐ Permitting or land-use regulations
- ☐ Funding limitations
- ☐ FEMA eligibility or complexity
- ☐ Staffing or contractor capacity constraints
- ☐ Coordination challenges across agencies or jurisdictions

☒ Other:

The primary barriers to repairing or restoring recreation assets after disasters are limited funding for repair and mitigation, permitting and environmental review requirements, and staffing capacity in rural communities. Many parks, trails, and river access points require coordination with multiple agencies before repairs can begin, which can extend project timelines. In addition, smaller localities and nonprofit partners often have limited resources to manage grant applications, engineering assessments, and project oversight needed to restore recreation infrastructure in a timely manner.

In your view, what types of support or resources would most improve your community's resilience and recovery related to outdoor recreation and tourism? *

Additional funding for infrastructure repair and resilience improvements, along with technical assistance for grant applications, project planning, and permitting, would help communities restore outdoor recreation assets more quickly after disasters. Support for engineering assessments and mitigation planning would also strengthen long-term resilience for recreation and tourism infrastructure.

How interested would your organization be in participating in a multi-state Appalachian Resiliency Network (a coalition of public, private, and non-profit organizations across the region)? *

- ☒ Very interested
- ☐ Somewhat interested
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Not very interested
- ☐ Not interested

What concerns or barriers would limit your participation? *

Potential barriers to participation could include limited staff capacity, competing program priorities, and the administrative time required to engage in regional initiatives. For many rural-serving organizations, participation depends on ensuring that collaboration efforts are well-coordinated, provide clear value, and align with existing programs and resources.

Would you or someone from your organization be willing to participate in a short virtual interview to share deeper insights? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No

Would you be interested in the creation of a contact directory of people in the region with experience with disaster response, recovery, and preparedness, to connect communities who experience future disasters with people in the region who have relevant experience or expertise? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No

Would you consider attending one of the following conferences to discuss this topic further? *

Appalachian Carbon Forum, March 3-4, 2026, Morgantown, WV; Appalachian Studies Conference, March 19-21, 2026, Huntington, WV; New River Symposium, April 9-11, 2026, Boone, NC; and the National Adaptation Forum, May 12-14, 2026, Pittsburgh, PA.

☐ Yes

☒ Maybe

☐ No

Is there anything else we should know about your local challenges, recovery experience, or coordination needs? *

Rural communities in our region often face capacity and resource limitations that can slow disaster recovery and mitigation efforts. Smaller local governments and nonprofit partners may have limited staff to manage complex grant requirements, permitting processes, and project oversight. Strengthening technical assistance, regional coordination, and access to flexible planning and pre-development funding would help rural communities better prepare for disasters and implement recovery and resilience projects more efficiently.

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Appalachian Resiliency Network – Response and Recovery Survey

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Your organization's experience is essential. This short survey will help us understand:

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- appetite for participating in a multi-state resiliency network

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Your Information - Name, Title, Organization, Location *

Pam Johnson, Sr VP of Partnerships & Programs, Fahe, Berea, KY

Has your community been impacted by and/or involved with Hurricane Helene or another extreme weather event in the past 5 years? *

- ☒ Yes - significant impact
- ☐ Yes - moderate impact
- ☐ Yes - minor impact
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

Which functional areas were most stressed during recent disasters? (Select all that apply) *

- ☒ Emergency operations coordination
- ☒ Evacuation/swiftwater response
- ☒ Communication with state agencies
- ☒ Sheltering
- ☒ Damage assessment
- ☒ Volunteer management
- ☒ Supply/resource logistics
- ☒ Recovery planning
- ☒ Hazard mitigation planning

☐ Other:

Which administrative or regulatory challenges most affect your ability to respond or recover effectively? *

- ☐ Permitting delays
- ☒ Land-use or zoning limitations
- ☐ Cross-county or cross-state coordination barriers
- ☒ Confusion about funding eligibility
- ☒ Slow decision-making from higher-level agencies
- ☒ Lack of access to shared data systems
- ☐ Other:

Please provide an example of a coordination or permitting barrier you've encountered.

.....

How familiar are you with state and federal disaster funding programs (FEMA, BRIC, HMGP, CDBG-DR, ARC, USDA, etc.)? *

- ☒ Very familiar
- ☐ Somewhat familiar
- ☐ Not very familiar
- ☐ Not at all familiar

Which of the following funding challenges does your community experience most often?
(Select all that apply) *

- ☒ Too much administrative burden
- ☒ Not enough staff capacity to apply
- ☒ Hard to track funding opportunities
- ☒ Hard to meet match requirements
- ☒ Awareness of programs is low
- ☒ Awards take too long
- ☐ Reporting requirements too difficult
- ☐ Other:

What resources or support would most help your agency access recovery or mitigation funding? *

It would be helpful to engage with state partners early/right after the disaster to begin conversations about long term recovery.
.....

Does your locality have land-use or zoning rules (such as floodplain development, slope stability, access roads)? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☒ No
- ☐ Unsure

If yes, what barriers or constraints do these rules create during disaster recovery or mitigation?

Are there areas in your jurisdiction where land-use decisions have exacerbated all hazards risk or slowed recovery? *

No, land use decisions are not slowing recovery down. The variety of funds flowing is what slows our work down and complicates how recovery is funded.

Are you aware of other regional or statewide resilience initiatives (e.g., flood resilience programs, disaster recovery networks, resilience hubs, or state-led preparedness initiatives)? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

If yes, please list any initiatives, agencies, or organizations currently doing related work.

Fahe's Housing Can't Wait Coalitions in KY and Helene, ASP's Rapid Rebuild Consortium, ACLC's Appalachian Flood Resilience Coalition, Central Appalachian Network's Community Resilience Adaptation Working Group, and county LTRGs.

Do you feel that resilience and recovery work in your area is currently duplicated, under-coordinated, or fragmented? *

- ☐ Yes - major duplication
- ☒ Yes - some duplication
- ☐ No duplication, but not coordinated
- ☐ Well-coordinated
- ☐ Unsure

What coordination gaps do you see across county or state lines? *

Boots on the ground organizations doing work are not always well coordinated, which keeps a system from being developed that tracks who's been helped overall. There will continue to be duplication until a shared system is created and utilized across all partners.

How significant is outdoor recreation (trails, rivers, parks, tourism-related businesses) to your community's economy and identity? *

- ☐ Very significant
- ☒ Moderately significant
- ☐ Somewhat significant
- ☐ Not significant
- ☐ Unsure

Were any recreation-related assets in your jurisdiction impacted by Hurricane Helene or other recent disasters (e.g., trail closures, damaged river access, park infrastructure, tourism disruptions)? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

If yes, please briefly describe the impacts:

WNC lost all of their tourism, which was their economic driver. Parts of EKY also were greatly affected by damaged tourism access.

What barriers most affect your ability to repair, reopen, or restore recreation assets after disasters? *

- ☐ Permitting or land-use regulations
- ☒ Funding limitations
- ☐ FEMA eligibility or complexity
- ☐ Staffing or contractor capacity constraints
- ☐ Coordination challenges across agencies or jurisdictions
- ☐ Other:

In your view, what types of support or resources would most improve your community's resilience and recovery related to outdoor recreation and tourism? *

Business development relies on housing for the workforce, and there is a need to find balance and coordination between housing and economic development resources.
.....

How interested would your organization be in participating in a multi-state Appalachian Resiliency Network (a coalition of public, private, and non-profit organizations across the region)? *

- ☒ Very interested
- ☐ Somewhat interested
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Not very interested
- ☐ Not interested

What concerns or barriers would limit your participation? *

The biggest concern would be the amount of time it would take to participate.

Would you or someone from your organization be willing to participate in a short virtual interview to share deeper insights? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No

Would you be interested in the creation of a contact directory of people in the region with experience with disaster response, recovery, and preparedness, to connect communities who experience future disasters with people in the region who have relevant experience or expertise? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No

Would you consider attending one of the following conferences to discuss this topic further? *

Appalachian Carbon Forum, March 3-4, 2026, Morgantown, WV; Appalachian Studies Conference, March 19-21, 2026, Huntington, WV; New River Symposium, April 9-11, 2026, Boone, NC; and the National Adaptation Forum, May 12-14, 2026, Pittsburgh, PA.

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No

Is there anything else we should know about your local challenges, recovery experience, or coordination needs? *

Fahe is a regional network of boots on the ground organizations that provide affordable housing across Appalachia. With the presence of increasingly devastating disasters, we've invested in a dedicated Disaster Resilience Team that provides application writing, grant administration and management, regulatory compliance, TA, and a variety of services to expand access to resources for Members and their communities. We sit at regional tables to ensure our Members' perspectives are considered. With all of these groups/coalitions being developed, it would be great to coordinate amongst them and ensure there isn't duplication of efforts and identify a targeted approach to convenings in the region.

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Appalachian Resiliency Network – Response and Recovery Survey

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Your organization's experience is essential. This short survey will help us understand:

- real-world barriers to effective disaster response and recovery
- appetite for participating in a multi-state resiliency network

Your responses will directly inform the 2026 Action Plan and shape future coordination across Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia.

The ARN is currently being spearheaded by a number of organizations including Appalachian Citizens' Law Center, Appalachian Voices, National Parks Conservation Association, New River Conservancy, Ohio River Valley Institute, and Volgenau Climate Initiative.

Your Information - Name, Title, Organization, Location *

Russell County Board of Supervisors, Supervisor District 5

Has your community been impacted by and/or involved with Hurricane Helene or another extreme weather event in the past 5 years? *

- ☒ Yes - significant impact
- ☐ Yes - moderate impact
- ☐ Yes - minor impact
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

Which functional areas were most stressed during recent disasters? (Select all that apply) *

- ☐ Emergency operations coordination
- ☒ Evacuation/swiftwater response
- ☒ Communication with state agencies
- ☒ Sheltering
- ☒ Damage assessment
- ☐ Volunteer management
- ☐ Supply/resource logistics
- ☐ Recovery planning
- ☐ Hazard mitigation planning
- ☐ Other:

Which administrative or regulatory challenges most affect your ability to respond or recover effectively? *

- ☐ Permitting delays
- ☐ Land-use or zoning limitations
- ☐ Cross-county or cross-state coordination barriers
- ☒ Confusion about funding eligibility
- ☒ Slow decision-making from higher-level agencies
- ☐ Lack of access to shared data systems
- ☐ Other:

Please provide an example of a coordination or permitting barrier you've encountered.

FEMA resources are dreadfully slow in being allocated and then paid

How familiar are you with state and federal disaster funding programs (FEMA, BRIC, HMGP, CDBG-DR, ARC, USDA, etc.)? *

- ☒ Very familiar
- ☐ Somewhat familiar
- ☐ Not very familiar
- ☐ Not at all familiar

Which of the following funding challenges does your community experience most often?
(Select all that apply) *

- ☐ Too much administrative burden
- ☐ Not enough staff capacity to apply
- ☐ Hard to track funding opportunities
- ☒ Hard to meet match requirements
- ☐ Awareness of programs is low
- ☒ Awards take too long
- ☐ Reporting requirements too difficult
- ☐ Other:

What resources or support would most help your agency access recovery or mitigation funding? *

local/regional funding for those issues not meeting agency eligibility, and for match funding if and when required
.....

Does your locality have land-use or zoning rules (such as floodplain development, slope stability, access roads)? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☒ No
- ☐ Unsure

If yes, what barriers or constraints do these rules create during disaster recovery or mitigation?

.....

Are there areas in your jurisdiction where land-use decisions have exacerbated all hazards risk or slowed recovery? *

Yes

.....

Are you aware of other regional or statewide resilience initiatives (e.g., flood resilience programs, disaster recovery networks, resilience hubs, or state-led preparedness initiatives)? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☒ Unsure

If yes, please list any initiatives, agencies, or organizations currently doing related work.

.....

Do you feel that resilience and recovery work in your area is currently duplicated, under-coordinated, or fragmented? *

- ☐ Yes - major duplication
- ☐ Yes - some duplication
- ☐ No duplication, but not coordinated
- ☒ Well-coordinated
- ☐ Unsure

What coordination gaps do you see across county or state lines? *

Little across counties, agency coordination across state lines

How significant is outdoor recreation (trails, rivers, parks, tourism-related businesses) to your community's economy and identity? *

- ☐ Very significant
- ☒ Moderately significant
- ☐ Somewhat significant
- ☐ Not significant
- ☐ Unsure

Were any recreation-related assets in your jurisdiction impacted by Hurricane Helene or other recent disasters (e.g., trail closures, damaged river access, park infrastructure, tourism disruptions)? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☒ No
- ☐ Unsure

If yes, please briefly describe the impacts:

nothing long term

What barriers most affect your ability to repair, reopen, or restore recreation assets after disasters? *

- ☐ Permitting or land-use regulations
- ☐ Funding limitations
- ☐ FEMA eligibility or complexity
- ☐ Staffing or contractor capacity constraints
- ☐ Coordination challenges across agencies or jurisdictions
- ☒ Other: lock of available funding and FEMA delays

In your view, what types of support or resources would most improve your community's resilience and recovery related to outdoor recreation and tourism? *

adequate and accessible funding

How interested would your organization be in participating in a multi-state Appalachian Resiliency Network (a coalition of public, private, and non-profit organizations across the region)? *

- ☐ Very interested
- ☒ Somewhat interested
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Not very interested
- ☐ Not interested

What concerns or barriers would limit your participation? *

would have to know much more about operations and scope of services to make a decision

Would you or someone from your organization be willing to participate in a short virtual interview to share deeper insights? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☒ Maybe
- ☐ No

Would you be interested in the creation of a contact directory of people in the region with experience with disaster response, recovery, and preparedness, to connect communities who experience future disasters with people in the region who have relevant experience or expertise? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☒ Maybe
- ☐ No

Would you consider attending one of the following conferences to discuss this topic further? *

Appalachian Carbon Forum, March 3-4, 2026, Morgantown, WV; Appalachian Studies Conference, March 19-21, 2026, Huntington, WV; New River Symposium, April 9-11, 2026, Boone, NC; and the National Adaptation Forum, May 12-14, 2026, Pittsburgh, PA.

- ☐ Yes
- ☒ Maybe
- ☐ No

Is there anything else we should know about your local challenges, recovery experience, or coordination needs? *

No

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Appalachian Resiliency Network – Response and Recovery Survey

Appalachian Disaster Resilience Survey

For organizations involved in disaster response, recovery, and preparedness (Local Government, EM, Fire/Rescue, EMS, Swiftwater Teams, Hospitals, and Others)

The Appalachian Resiliency Network (ARN) is a new regional network that seeks to improve disaster preparedness, response, and recovery by building relationships to share best practices across communities and organizations, identify common challenges and solutions, and support one another during the next disaster.

Your organization's experience is essential. This short survey will help us understand:

- real-world barriers to effective disaster response and recovery
- appetite for participating in a multi-state resiliency network

Your responses will directly inform the 2026 Action Plan and shape future coordination across Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia.

The ARN is currently being spearheaded by a number of organizations including Appalachian Citizens' Law Center, Appalachian Voices, National Parks Conservation Association, New River Conservancy, Ohio River Valley Institute, and Volgenau Climate Initiative.

Your Information - Name, Title, Organization, Location *

Austin Caldwell

Has your community been impacted by and/or involved with Hurricane Helene or another extreme weather event in the past 5 years? *

- ☐ Yes - significant impact
- ☒ Yes - moderate impact
- ☐ Yes - minor impact
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

Which functional areas were most stressed during recent disasters? (Select all that apply) *

- ☐ Emergency operations coordination
- ☐ Evacuation/swiftwater response
- ☒ Communication with state agencies
- ☒ Sheltering
- ☒ Damage assessment
- ☐ Volunteer management
- ☒ Supply/resource logistics
- ☐ Recovery planning
- ☐ Hazard mitigation planning
- ☐ Other:

Which administrative or regulatory challenges most affect your ability to respond or recover effectively? *

- ☐ Permitting delays
- ☐ Land-use or zoning limitations
- ☐ Cross-county or cross-state coordination barriers
- ☐ Confusion about funding eligibility
- ☒ Slow decision-making from higher-level agencies
- ☐ Lack of access to shared data systems
- ☐ Other:

Please provide an example of a coordination or permitting barrier you've encountered.

Communication

How familiar are you with state and federal disaster funding programs (FEMA, BRIC, HMGP, CDBG-DR, ARC, USDA, etc.)? *

- ☐ Very familiar
- ☐ Somewhat familiar
- ☒ Not very familiar
- ☐ Not at all familiar

Which of the following funding challenges does your community experience most often?
(Select all that apply) *

- ☐ Too much administrative burden
- ☒ Not enough staff capacity to apply
- ☐ Hard to track funding opportunities
- ☒ Hard to meet match requirements
- ☐ Awareness of programs is low
- ☐ Awards take too long
- ☐ Reporting requirements too difficult
- ☐ Other:

What resources or support would most help your agency access recovery or mitigation funding? *

N/A

Does your locality have land-use or zoning rules (such as floodplain development, slope stability, access roads)? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

If yes, what barriers or constraints do these rules create during disaster recovery or mitigation?

Unsure

Are there areas in your jurisdiction where land-use decisions have exacerbated all hazards risk or slowed recovery? *

Unsure

Are you aware of other regional or statewide resilience initiatives (e.g., flood resilience programs, disaster recovery networks, resilience hubs, or state-led preparedness initiatives)? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☒ No
- ☐ Unsure

If yes, please list any initiatives, agencies, or organizations currently doing related work.

.....

Do you feel that resilience and recovery work in your area is currently duplicated, under-coordinated, or fragmented? *

- ☐ Yes - major duplication
- ☐ Yes - some duplication
- ☐ No duplication, but not coordinated
- ☐ Well-coordinated
- ☒ Unsure

What coordination gaps do you see across county or state lines? *

Unsure

.....

How significant is outdoor recreation (trails, rivers, parks, tourism-related businesses) to your community's economy and identity? *

- ☐ Very significant
- ☐ Moderately significant
- ☒ Somewhat significant
- ☐ Not significant
- ☐ Unsure

Were any recreation-related assets in your jurisdiction impacted by Hurricane Helene or other recent disasters (e.g., trail closures, damaged river access, park infrastructure, tourism disruptions)? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

If yes, please briefly describe the impacts:

.....

What barriers most affect your ability to repair, reopen, or restore recreation assets after disasters? *

- ☐ Permitting or land-use regulations
- ☐ Funding limitations
- ☒ FEMA eligibility or complexity
- ☐ Staffing or contractor capacity constraints
- ☐ Coordination challenges across agencies or jurisdictions
- ☐ Other:

In your view, what types of support or resources would most improve your community's resilience and recovery related to outdoor recreation and tourism? *

Knowing what the organization needs and strategy.
.....

How interested would your organization be in participating in a multi-state Appalachian Resiliency Network (a coalition of public, private, and non-profit organizations across the region)? *

- ☒ Very interested
- ☐ Somewhat interested
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Not very interested
- ☐ Not interested

What concerns or barriers would limit your participation? *

Time. Working and school

Would you or someone from your organization be willing to participate in a short virtual interview to share deeper insights? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☒ No

Would you be interested in the creation of a contact directory of people in the region with experience with disaster response, recovery, and preparedness, to connect communities who experience future disasters with people in the region who have relevant experience or expertise? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☒ Maybe
- ☐ No

Would you consider attending one of the following conferences to discuss this topic further? *

Appalachian Carbon Forum, March 3-4, 2026, Morgantown, WV; Appalachian Studies Conference, March 19-21, 2026, Huntington, WV; New River Symposium, April 9-11, 2026, Boone, NC; and the National Adaptation Forum, May 12-14, 2026, Pittsburgh, PA.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☒ No

Is there anything else we should know about your local challenges, recovery experience, or coordination needs? *

I went out twice during the Helene Recovery but I am not familiar or part of any sort of agency

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Appalachian Resiliency Network – Response and Recovery Survey

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Your organization's experience is essential. This short survey will help us understand:

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- appetite for participating in a multi-state resiliency network

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Your Information - Name, Title, Organization, Location *

Sara Gottlieb, Appalachians Freshwater Director - South, The Nature Conservancy, Atlanta, GA

Has your community been impacted by and/or involved with Hurricane Helene or another extreme weather event in the past 5 years? *

- ☒ Yes - significant impact
- ☐ Yes - moderate impact
- ☐ Yes - minor impact
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

Which functional areas were most stressed during recent disasters? (Select all that apply) *

- ☐ Emergency operations coordination
- ☐ Evacuation/swiftwater response
- ☐ Communication with state agencies
- ☐ Sheltering
- ☐ Damage assessment
- ☐ Volunteer management
- ☐ Supply/resource logistics
- ☒ Recovery planning
- ☒ Hazard mitigation planning
- ☐ Other:

Which administrative or regulatory challenges most affect your ability to respond or recover effectively? *

- ☐ Permitting delays
- ☐ Land-use or zoning limitations
- ☐ Cross-county or cross-state coordination barriers
- ☐ Confusion about funding eligibility
- ☒ Slow decision-making from higher-level agencies
- ☒ Lack of access to shared data systems
- ☐ Other:

Please provide an example of a coordination or permitting barrier you've encountered.

Federal funding flowing to many entities but not official coordination between them; some coordination is happening informally and through CHIRAM/similar efforts but there is no dedicated staffing or funding for this.
.....

How familiar are you with state and federal disaster funding programs (FEMA, BRIC, HMGP, CDBG-DR, ARC, USDA, etc.)? *

- ☐ Very familiar
- ☒ Somewhat familiar
- ☐ Not very familiar
- ☐ Not at all familiar

Which of the following funding challenges does your community experience most often? (Select all that apply) *

- ☒ Too much administrative burden
- ☒ Not enough staff capacity to apply
- ☐ Hard to track funding opportunities
- ☒ Hard to meet match requirements
- ☐ Awareness of programs is low
- ☐ Awards take too long
- ☐ Reporting requirements too difficult
- ☐ Other:

What resources or support would most help your agency access recovery or mitigation funding? *

not sure

Does your locality have land-use or zoning rules (such as floodplain development, slope stability, access roads)? *

☒ Yes

☐ No

☐ Unsure

If yes, what barriers or constraints do these rules create during disaster recovery or mitigation?

not sure

Are there areas in your jurisdiction where land-use decisions have exacerbated all hazards risk or slowed recovery? *

not sure

Are you aware of other regional or statewide resilience initiatives (e.g., flood resilience programs, disaster recovery networks, resilience hubs, or state-led preparedness initiatives)? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

If yes, please list any initiatives, agencies, or organizations currently doing related work.

I have heard about resilience hubs in at least one state but can't remember where that was.

Do you feel that resilience and recovery work in your area is currently duplicated, under-coordinated, or fragmented? *

- ☐ Yes - major duplication
- ☒ Yes - some duplication
- ☐ No duplication, but not coordinated
- ☐ Well-coordinated
- ☐ Unsure

What coordination gaps do you see across county or state lines? *

Land management agencies across jurisdictions don't have regularoty requirements to coordinate, so they often just don't.

How significant is outdoor recreation (trails, rivers, parks, tourism-related businesses) to your community's economy and identity? *

- ☐ Very significant
- ☐ Moderately significant
- ☒ Somewhat significant
- ☐ Not significant
- ☐ Unsure

Were any recreation-related assets in your jurisdiction impacted by Hurricane Helene or other recent disasters (e.g., trail closures, damaged river access, park infrastructure, tourism disruptions)? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☒ No
- ☐ Unsure

If yes, please briefly describe the impacts:

.....

What barriers most affect your ability to repair, reopen, or restore recreation assets after disasters? *

- ☐ Permitting or land-use regulations
- ☐ Funding limitations
- ☐ FEMA eligibility or complexity
- ☒ Staffing or contractor capacity constraints
- ☐ Coordination challenges across agencies or jurisdictions
- ☐ Other:

In your view, what types of support or resources would most improve your community's resilience and recovery related to outdoor recreation and tourism? *

Informational hubs where it's easy to find information about closures, recovery activities, volunteer opportunities, etc.

.....

How interested would your organization be in participating in a multi-state Appalachian Resiliency Network (a coalition of public, private, and non-profit organizations across the region)? *

- ☒ Very interested
- ☐ Somewhat interested
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Not very interested
- ☐ Not interested

What concerns or barriers would limit your participation? *

Time, ongoing participation in other networks/collaboratives

Would you or someone from your organization be willing to participate in a short virtual interview to share deeper insights? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No

Would you be interested in the creation of a contact directory of people in the region with experience with disaster response, recovery, and preparedness, to connect communities who experience future disasters with people in the region who have relevant experience or expertise? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No

Would you consider attending one of the following conferences to discuss this topic further? *

Appalachian Carbon Forum, March 3-4, 2026, Morgantown, WV; Appalachian Studies Conference, March 19-21, 2026, Huntington, WV; New River Symposium, April 9-11, 2026, Boone, NC; and the National Adaptation Forum, May 12-14, 2026, Pittsburgh, PA.

- ☐ Yes
- ☒ Maybe
- ☐ No

Is there anything else we should know about your local challenges, recovery experience, or coordination needs? *

TNC is very busy implementing work via large agreements with the USFS; we have a small number of staff able to work across boundaries and outside the requirements of those agreements.

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Appalachian Resiliency Network – Response and Recovery Survey

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Your organization's experience is essential. This short survey will help us understand:

- real-world barriers to effective disaster response and recovery
- appetite for participating in a multi-state resiliency network

Your responses will directly inform the 2026 Action Plan and shape future coordination across Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia.

The ARN is currently being spearheaded by a number of organizations including Appalachian Citizens' Law Center, Appalachian Voices, National Parks Conservation Association, New River Conservancy, Ohio River Valley Institute, and Volgenau Climate Initiative.

Your Information - Name, Title, Organization, Location *

Mallory Martin, Coordinator, Southeast Landscape of the Future Initiative (SELF), NC

Has your community been impacted by and/or involved with Hurricane Helene or another extreme weather event in the past 5 years? *

- ☒ Yes - significant impact
- ☐ Yes - moderate impact
- ☐ Yes - minor impact
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

Which functional areas were most stressed during recent disasters? (Select all that apply) *

- ☒ Emergency operations coordination
- ☒ Evacuation/swiftwater response
- ☒ Communication with state agencies
- ☒ Sheltering
- ☒ Damage assessment
- ☒ Volunteer management
- ☒ Supply/resource logistics
- ☒ Recovery planning
- ☒ Hazard mitigation planning
- ☒ Other: lack of coordination prior to disaster

Which administrative or regulatory challenges most affect your ability to respond or recover effectively? *

- ☐ Permitting delays
- ☐ Land-use or zoning limitations
- ☒ Cross-county or cross-state coordination barriers
- ☐ Confusion about funding eligibility
- ☒ Slow decision-making from higher-level agencies
- ☐ Lack of access to shared data systems
- ☒ Other: capacity for local implementation for recovery and resilience actions

Please provide an example of a coordination or permitting barrier you've encountered.

Federal landholding agencies (USFS, NPS, FWS) lack of coordination across agency boundaries

How familiar are you with state and federal disaster funding programs (FEMA, BRIC, HMGP, CDBG-DR, ARC, USDA, etc.)? *

- ☒ Very familiar
- ☐ Somewhat familiar
- ☐ Not very familiar
- ☐ Not at all familiar

Which of the following funding challenges does your community experience most often?
(Select all that apply) *

- ☐ Too much administrative burden
- ☒ Not enough staff capacity to apply
- ☒ Hard to track funding opportunities
- ☒ Hard to meet match requirements
- ☐ Awareness of programs is low
- ☒ Awards take too long
- ☐ Reporting requirements too difficult
- ☐ Other:

What resources or support would most help your agency access recovery or mitigation funding? *

Resilience actions are well known and documented; local communities lack the resources and capacity to implement;
.....

Does your locality have land-use or zoning rules (such as floodplain development, slope stability, access roads)? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☒ No
- ☐ Unsure

If yes, what barriers or constraints do these rules create during disaster recovery or mitigation?

.....

Are there areas in your jurisdiction where land-use decisions have exacerbated all hazards risk or slowed recovery? *

Debris removal in large rivers was more destructive than the Hurricane.

.....

Are you aware of other regional or statewide resilience initiatives (e.g., flood resilience programs, disaster recovery networks, resilience hubs, or state-led preparedness initiatives)? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

If yes, please list any initiatives, agencies, or organizations currently doing related work.

NC Resilience Office and Governor's Recovery Office for Western NC (GROW NC) are active in recovery at local and community levels. Check <https://www.rebuild.nc.gov/document-terms/office-recovery-and-resiliency>

Do you feel that resilience and recovery work in your area is currently duplicated, under-coordinated, or fragmented? *

- ☐ Yes - major duplication
- ☒ Yes - some duplication
- ☐ No duplication, but not coordinated
- ☐ Well-coordinated
- ☐ Unsure

What coordination gaps do you see across county or state lines? *

Totally lacking; virtually no coordination across state lines, some at county levels. Tremendous lack of coordinating resources and investments across jurisdictions.

How significant is outdoor recreation (trails, rivers, parks, tourism-related businesses) to your community's economy and identity? *

- ☒ Very significant
- ☐ Moderately significant
- ☐ Somewhat significant
- ☐ Not significant
- ☐ Unsure

Were any recreation-related assets in your jurisdiction impacted by Hurricane Helene or other recent disasters (e.g., trail closures, damaged river access, park infrastructure, tourism disruptions)? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

If yes, please briefly describe the impacts:

Trails damaged, public access eliminated, landslide closures, rafting season closed, damaged infrastructure

What barriers most affect your ability to repair, reopen, or restore recreation assets after disasters? *

- ☐ Permitting or land-use regulations
- ☐ Funding limitations
- ☐ FEMA eligibility or complexity
- ☐ Staffing or contractor capacity constraints
- ☒ Coordination challenges across agencies or jurisdictions
- ☐ Other:

In your view, what types of support or resources would most improve your community's resilience and recovery related to outdoor recreation and tourism? *

Overarching coordination of natural resource recovery and resilience at a landscape scale to maximize the impact of available funding.
.....

How interested would your organization be in participating in a multi-state Appalachian Resiliency Network (a coalition of public, private, and non-profit organizations across the region)? *

- ☐ Very interested
- ☒ Somewhat interested
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Not very interested
- ☐ Not interested

What concerns or barriers would limit your participation? *

Geographic scope is somewhat outside my area of emphasis. Perhaps there should be a complementary effort in the Southern Appalachian area of impact - NC, TN, SC, GA, AL

Would you or someone from your organization be willing to participate in a short virtual interview to share deeper insights? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No

Would you be interested in the creation of a contact directory of people in the region with experience with disaster response, recovery, and preparedness, to connect communities who experience future disasters with people in the region who have relevant experience or expertise? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No

Would you consider attending one of the following conferences to discuss this topic further? *

Appalachian Carbon Forum, March 3-4, 2026, Morgantown, WV; Appalachian Studies Conference, March 19-21, 2026, Huntington, WV; New River Symposium, April 9-11, 2026, Boone, NC; and the National Adaptation Forum, May 12-14, 2026, Pittsburgh, PA.

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No

Is there anything else we should know about your local challenges, recovery experience, or coordination needs? *

The cross boundary coordination approach is critical and needs to extend throughout the Southeastern geography for effective leveraging of resources, sharing capacity, reducing fragmentation of efforts, and better alignment of investments.

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Appalachian Resiliency Network – Response and Recovery Survey

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Your organization's experience is essential. This short survey will help us understand:

- real-world barriers to effective disaster response and recovery
- appetite for participating in a multi-state resiliency network

Your responses will directly inform the 2026 Action Plan and shape future coordination across Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia.

The ARN is currently being spearheaded by a number of organizations including Appalachian Citizens' Law Center, Appalachian Voices, National Parks Conservation Association, New River Conservancy, Ohio River Valley Institute, and Volgenau Climate Initiative.

Your Information - Name, Title, Organization, Location *

Kevin Byrd, Executive Director, New River Valley Regional Commission, Radford, VA

Has your community been impacted by and/or involved with Hurricane Helene or another extreme weather event in the past 5 years? *

- ☐ Yes - significant impact
- ☒ Yes - moderate impact
- ☐ Yes - minor impact
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

Which functional areas were most stressed during recent disasters? (Select all that apply) *

- ☐ Emergency operations coordination
- ☐ Evacuation/swiftwater response
- ☐ Communication with state agencies
- ☐ Sheltering
- ☒ Damage assessment
- ☐ Volunteer management
- ☐ Supply/resource logistics
- ☐ Recovery planning
- ☐ Hazard mitigation planning

☒ Other: Getting state and federal funds to impacted property owners.

Which administrative or regulatory challenges most affect your ability to respond or recover effectively? *

- ☐ Permitting delays
- ☐ Land-use or zoning limitations
- ☐ Cross-county or cross-state coordination barriers
- ☐ Confusion about funding eligibility
- ☒ Slow decision-making from higher-level agencies
- ☐ Lack of access to shared data systems
- ☐ Other:

Please provide an example of a coordination or permitting barrier you've encountered.

It was great that Virginia created the VDAF program; however, it has taken a very long time to launch the program and get funds to impacted properties.
.....

How familiar are you with state and federal disaster funding programs (FEMA, BRIC, HMGP, CDBG-DR, ARC, USDA, etc.)? *

- ☒ Very familiar
- ☐ Somewhat familiar
- ☐ Not very familiar
- ☐ Not at all familiar

Which of the following funding challenges does your community experience most often? (Select all that apply) *

- ☐ Too much administrative burden
- ☐ Not enough staff capacity to apply
- ☐ Hard to track funding opportunities
- ☐ Hard to meet match requirements
- ☐ Awareness of programs is low
- ☒ Awards take too long
- ☐ Reporting requirements too difficult

☒ Other:

The NRVRC provides administration support for many of these programs. The challenge has been getting decisions from state and federal leaders because they lack staffing or people are not empowered to make decisions.

What resources or support would most help your agency access recovery or mitigation funding? *

We have sufficient resources, just not good decision making at higher levels.

Does your locality have land-use or zoning rules (such as floodplain development, slope stability, access roads)? *

☒ Yes

☐ No

☐ Unsure

If yes, what barriers or constraints do these rules create during disaster recovery or mitigation?

Some local governments do not have staffing capacity for their floodplain management program which slows down applications.

Are there areas in your jurisdiction where land-use decisions have exacerbated all hazards risk or slowed recovery? *

Policies have not been an issue in the NRV, just regulatory staffing capacity in some communities.

Are you aware of other regional or statewide resilience initiatives (e.g., flood resilience programs, disaster recovery networks, resilience hubs, or state-led preparedness initiatives)? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

If yes, please list any initiatives, agencies, or organizations currently doing related work.

Resilient Virginia

Do you feel that resilience and recovery work in your area is currently duplicated, under-coordinated, or fragmented? *

- ☐ Yes - major duplication
- ☐ Yes - some duplication
- ☐ No duplication, but not coordinated
- ☒ Well-coordinated
- ☐ Unsure

What coordination gaps do you see across county or state lines? *

Some aspects are well coordinated, but others are not simply because of how funding flows through different sources (ie-nonprofit, state, federal)

How significant is outdoor recreation (trails, rivers, parks, tourism-related businesses) to your community's economy and identity? *

- ☒ Very significant
- ☐ Moderately significant
- ☐ Somewhat significant
- ☐ Not significant
- ☐ Unsure

Were any recreation-related assets in your jurisdiction impacted by Hurricane Helene or other recent disasters (e.g., trail closures, damaged river access, park infrastructure, tourism disruptions)? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

If yes, please briefly describe the impacts:

New River boat launches; Bisset Park in Radford; Claytor Lake debris removal

What barriers most affect your ability to repair, reopen, or restore recreation assets after disasters? *

- ☐ Permitting or land-use regulations
- ☒ Funding limitations
- ☐ FEMA eligibility or complexity
- ☐ Staffing or contractor capacity constraints
- ☐ Coordination challenges across agencies or jurisdictions
- ☐ Other:

In your view, what types of support or resources would most improve your community's resilience and recovery related to outdoor recreation and tourism? *

Communities need to designate a recovery coordinator and this is often not the emergency management staff.

How interested would your organization be in participating in a multi-state Appalachian Resiliency Network (a coalition of public, private, and non-profit organizations across the region)? *

- ☐ Very interested
- ☐ Somewhat interested
- ☒ Neutral
- ☐ Not very interested
- ☐ Not interested

What concerns or barriers would limit your participation? *

Available time because we are busy with Helene recovery and will be for the foreseeable future.

Would you or someone from your organization be willing to participate in a short virtual interview to share deeper insights? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No

Would you be interested in the creation of a contact directory of people in the region with experience with disaster response, recovery, and preparedness, to connect communities who experience future disasters with people in the region who have relevant experience or expertise? *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No

Would you consider attending one of the following conferences to discuss this topic further? *

Appalachian Carbon Forum, March 3-4, 2026, Morgantown, WV; Appalachian Studies Conference, March 19-21, 2026, Huntington, WV; New River Symposium, April 9-11, 2026, Boone, NC; and the National Adaptation Forum, May 12-14, 2026, Pittsburgh, PA.

- ☐ Yes
- ☒ Maybe
- ☐ No

Is there anything else we should know about your local challenges, recovery experience, or coordination needs? *

We learned a lot following Helene and we're continuing to learn more as funds are slowly coming to communities in need.

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Google Forms

Appendix C – Conference Summaries

APPALACHIAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE – TESTING THE CONCEPT

Conference Overview

The Appalachian Studies Association Conference served as the first major stakeholder engagement opportunity for the Appalachian Resiliency Network (ARN) feasibility study. More than simply attending the conference, the project team used the event to introduce the emerging ARN concept, solicit feedback, and begin testing whether there was interest in a more coordinated regional approach to disaster resilience.

As part of the conference, I co-presented the ARN concept alongside Brendan Muckian-Bates of the Appalachian Citizens' Law Center. The session introduced attendees to the origins of the project, its concept partners, the support provided through the Volgenau Climate Initiative, and the six strategic lenses that would ultimately guide the feasibility study. The presentation was intentionally designed to be interactive, combining a live Mentimeter survey with facilitated discussion among participants representing nonprofit organizations, researchers, community advocates, planners, and resilience practitioners from across Appalachia.

The conference also proved significant in another way. It marked the beginning of what became an iterative research process. Rather than simply validating the original concept, participants challenged assumptions, identified additional organizations, and introduced topics that had not been fully considered when the project began. Most notably, conversations with attendees from Eastern Kentucky highlighted the critical role of mutual aid organizations during disaster response and recovery. Those discussions prompted a broader examination of mutual aid networks, Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster (VOADs), Long-Term Recovery Groups (LTRGs), and other community-based organizations operating throughout Central Appalachia.

By the conclusion of the conference, the feasibility study had already begun to evolve beyond its original focus on a summit and network toward a broader examination of the existing resilience ecosystem.

What I Heard

Although participants represented a wide range of backgrounds and experiences, several consistent themes emerged during both the presentation and facilitated discussion.

Perhaps the strongest message centered on relationships. Participants repeatedly emphasized that successful disaster response and long-term recovery often depend

less on formal organizational structures than on trusted local relationships established long before disasters occur. Community organizations, churches, volunteer groups, and informal networks frequently became the first points of contact when residents sought assistance.

Participants also described significant challenges navigating federal and state recovery programs. While funding opportunities often existed, the application processes, documentation requirements, and administrative complexity created substantial barriers for smaller communities and organizations with limited staff capacity. These discussions closely aligned with themes that later emerged through the stakeholder survey and subsequent conference engagements.

Communication emerged as another recurring concern. Participants noted that information often remained fragmented among agencies, organizations, and levels of government, making it difficult for communities to identify available resources, understand recovery processes, or coordinate ongoing efforts. Several participants suggested that improving communication among existing organizations could produce greater benefits than creating entirely new programs.

The live Mentimeter survey reinforced these observations. Approximately half of the participants reported that their communities had experienced Hurricane Helene or another significant flooding event within the previous five years, while emergency operations coordination emerged as one of the functional areas experiencing the greatest stress during recent disasters.

Perhaps the most unexpected outcome involved discussions surrounding mutual aid. Conversations with practitioners from Eastern Kentucky highlighted the importance of community-based support networks that frequently operate outside traditional emergency management structures. This introduced an entirely new line of inquiry for the feasibility study and ultimately expanded the initiative inventory to include mutual aid organizations alongside more traditional resilience organizations.

Key Takeaways

- Relationships consistently emerged as the foundation of effective community resilience.
- Trusted local organizations frequently bridge gaps that formal disaster systems cannot.
- Rural communities continue to face significant administrative barriers when accessing disaster assistance.
- Mutual aid organizations represent an important, and sometimes overlooked, component of Appalachia's resilience ecosystem.
- Stakeholders expressed greater interest in improving coordination among existing organizations than creating entirely new institutions.

How This Conference Shaped the Study

The Appalachian Studies Association Conference represented the first opportunity to test the ARN concept with a regional audience and it fundamentally shaped the direction of the feasibility study.

Rather than simply validating the original proposal, I felt led to broaden the perspective. Discussions revolved around understanding the organizations, partnerships, and informal networks already supporting resilience throughout Appalachia.

The conference also introduced several topics that became recurring themes throughout the remainder of the study, including relationship infrastructure, communication barriers, and community-based resilience. In many respects, the Appalachian Studies Association Conference marked the point at which the feasibility study evolved from evaluating a concept to examining an ecosystem.

NEW RIVER SYMPOSIUM – REFINING THE FRAMEWORK

Conference Overview

The New River Symposium represented the second major conference engagement for the feasibility study and marked an important evolution in the project. Whereas the Appalachian Studies Association Conference focused on testing the initial concept, the New River Symposium provided an opportunity to refine the study's emerging framework and gather targeted feedback from practitioners working directly in watershed management, conservation, planning, local government, emergency management, and community development.

As part of the symposium, I hosted a double presentation and facilitated roundtable discussion centered on the ARN concept and the feasibility study. Approximately 30 participants engaged in structured discussions organized around the project's six strategic lenses: recreation economies, administrative barriers, availability of funding, land-use regulations, ground-truthing and duplication, and government appetite for coordination. Rather than presenting a predetermined solution, participants were asked to critically evaluate each lens and identify barriers, opportunities, and existing initiatives that should be considered as part of the study.

This engagement represented a significant step forward in the research process. The facilitated discussions generated detailed practitioner feedback that not only validated many of the findings from the stakeholder survey, but also refined the project's understanding of implementation challenges, funding barriers, regional coordination, and the role of recreation and watershed stewardship in long-term resilience.

What I Heard

The roundtable discussions consistently demonstrated that Appalachia does not lack organizations committed to resilience. Instead, participants described a landscape where organizations often work toward common goals but struggle to coordinate their efforts across jurisdictional boundaries, funding programs, and institutional responsibilities. Several participants noted that there is considerable interest in collaboration but relatively little organizational capacity dedicated to facilitating it. Coordination remains everyone's priority but no one's primary responsibility. As the saying goes, "when it belongs to everyone, it belongs to no one."

Funding emerged as another dominant theme. Participants described a system that is less constrained by the absolute availability of funding than by the complexity of accessing it. Reimbursement delays, fragmented planning grants, lengthy application processes, inconsistent awareness of funding opportunities, and limited technical capacity all contribute to significant implementation challenges, particularly for smaller local governments and rural communities. Several participants observed that communities with the greatest need often possess the fewest resources to pursue available funding.

The discussion surrounding existing organizations proved especially valuable. Participants identified numerous organizations already engaged in disaster recovery, watershed restoration, conservation, and community development, including ReImagine Appalachia, MountainTrue, RiverLink, Cooperative Extension, Councils of Government, CHIRAM, and GROW NC. While these organizations were widely recognized for the quality of their work, participants consistently identified coordination and visibility as persistent gaps. The discussion reinforced one of the central conclusions of this feasibility study: the opportunity lies less in creating new organizations than in helping existing organizations work more effectively together.

Land use and long-term planning also generated meaningful discussion. Participants questioned policies that encourage rebuilding infrastructure exactly as it existed before disasters rather than incorporating resilience improvements during recovery. Others noted that local governments often have little opportunity to pause, coordinate, and consider long-term resilience while simultaneously responding to the immediate demands of disaster recovery.

Finally, discussions surrounding recreation economies reinforced an important finding that continued throughout the study. Participants described parks, rivers, trails, and outdoor recreation assets as critical components of community recovery, quality of life, and economic resilience and not just nice-to-have amenities. They also highlighted the need for better systems to communicate which recreational assets remain open or accessible following disasters, recognizing that outdoor spaces often play an important role in restoring a sense of normalcy for residents and visitors alike.

Key Takeaways

- Communities consistently expressed a willingness to collaborate but lacked dedicated capacity to sustain coordination.
- Funding challenges are driven as much by administrative complexity and limited capacity as by the availability of resources.
- Appalachia already possesses a robust network of organizations working on resilience-related issues, though coordination among them remains inconsistent.
- Watershed resilience, land use, recreation, housing, and community development are deeply interconnected and should be considered together.
- Participants consistently encouraged strengthening existing organizations and partnerships rather than creating parallel structures.

How This Conference Shaped the Study

The New River Symposium marked the point where the feasibility study shifted from evaluating the Appalachian Resiliency Network concept to refining the framework that ultimately guided the remainder of the project.

The facilitated discussions provided strong validation for the six strategic lenses while also identifying important refinements. Administrative barriers, funding complexity, and government appetite for coordination emerged as particularly significant themes, while participants broadened the conversation to include implementation capacity, watershed-scale collaboration, and the importance of recreation economies as part of long-term community resilience.

Perhaps most importantly, the symposium reinforced that resilience is fundamentally interdisciplinary. Participants consistently connected issues of conservation, housing, transportation, land use, outdoor recreation, economic development, and emergency management, demonstrating that meaningful resilience planning cannot occur within traditional organizational or disciplinary silos.

The symposium also strengthened confidence that the study's findings were not unique to a single conference or stakeholder group. Many of the themes identified during the Appalachian Studies Association Conference reappeared during these discussions, providing additional evidence that the challenges facing Central Appalachia are both widespread and consistent.

Discussion by Strategic Lens

- Recreation Economies

- Parks, rivers, and trails contribute to recovery and community well-being.
- Improve communication about recreational asset availability following disasters.
- Administrative Barriers
 - Strong appetite for coordination, but insufficient capacity to sustain it.
 - Cross-jurisdictional collaboration remains difficult.
- Availability of Funding
 - Funding awareness and application processes are major barriers.
 - Small communities often lack the staff needed to pursue available resources.
- Ground-Truthing and Duplication
 - Existing organizations are accomplishing significant work.
 - Greater visibility and coordination would reduce duplication and improve efficiency.
- Land-Use and Planning
 - Recovery should create opportunities to build back more resiliently.
 - Land-use decisions should better reflect future risk rather than past conditions.
- Government Appetite
 - Communities often lack the time and flexibility to coordinate while actively responding to disasters.

NATIONAL ADAPTATION FORUM – VALIDATING THE FINDINGS

Conference Overview

The National Adaptation Forum represented the final major conference engagement conducted as part of the feasibility study. Unlike the previous conferences, which focused primarily on Appalachian communities and regional practitioners, the National Adaptation Forum brought together professionals from across the United States working in climate adaptation, emergency management, housing, infrastructure, public health, planning, conservation, philanthropy, and community resilience.

Five educational sessions were documented and synthesized during the conference, each examining resilience through a different lens. Collectively, they explored rural resilience, economic recovery, implementation challenges following Hurricane Helene, governance and policy coordination, and the role of trusted community institutions in supporting long-term adaptation. Although national in scope, the sessions consistently reflected many of the same challenges and opportunities identified through the stakeholder survey, the Appalachian Studies Association Conference, and the New River Symposium.

Rather than introducing entirely new concepts, the National Adaptation Forum served as a validation exercise. It demonstrated that many of the challenges facing Central Appalachia are shared by rural communities throughout the country while reinforcing that Appalachia possesses unique strengths that position the region well for greater regional collaboration.

What I Heard

One of the strongest themes to emerge from the conference was the distinction between planning and implementation. Presenters consistently noted that most communities understand their vulnerabilities and have completed some level of resilience planning. The more persistent challenge lies in securing the staffing, funding, technical assistance, and institutional capacity necessary to move plans into action. This observation closely mirrored comments received through the stakeholder survey and both previous conference engagements.

Speakers also emphasized that successful resilience efforts depend upon relationships every bit as much as physical infrastructure. Throughout multiple sessions, presenters described trusted local organizations, peer networks, schools, and community institutions as essential components of resilience, particularly in rural communities where formal governmental capacity may be limited. These observations reinforced one of the report's recurring themes that resilience is fundamentally a function of relationships, trust, and collaboration as much as engineering or emergency management.

Another recurring discussion centered on governance and coordination. Participants frequently described the mismatch between disasters that occur across regional landscapes and governance systems that remain largely organized around local or state boundaries. Rather than advocating for new bureaucratic structures, presenters emphasized the importance of lightweight coordination, dedicated facilitation, and organizations capable of connecting existing efforts across disciplines and jurisdictions.

The conference also reinforced concerns surrounding coordination fatigue. Rural communities often find themselves participating in multiple planning initiatives, assessments, and grant programs simultaneously while operating with limited staff capacity. Presenters suggested that future resilience efforts should focus less on generating additional plans and more on helping communities implement the plans they already have.

Finally, several sessions highlighted the value of peer learning. Communities consistently benefit from practical examples, trusted relationships, and opportunities to learn directly from one another. Participants emphasized that successful resilience networks should prioritize sharing experiences, translating technical information into practical guidance, and creating mechanisms for continuous collaboration rather than functioning solely as information repositories.

Key Takeaways

- Rural communities consistently face greater implementation challenges than planning challenges.
- Relationship infrastructure is as important to resilience as physical infrastructure.
- Lightweight coordination models often outperform highly bureaucratic governance structures.
- Peer learning accelerates implementation by allowing communities to build upon one another's experiences.
- Successful resilience efforts focus on connecting existing organizations rather than replacing them.

How This Conference Shaped the Study

Unlike the previous two conferences, the National Adaptation Forum did not fundamentally alter the direction of the feasibility study. Instead, it significantly strengthened confidence in the study's direction.

Across five sessions and numerous conversations with practitioners from outside Appalachia, the conference repeatedly reinforced themes that had already surfaced through the stakeholder survey, the Appalachian Studies Association Conference, and the New River Symposium. Capacity limitations, relationship infrastructure, implementation support, governance fragmentation, and peer learning all emerged as recurring topics despite the conference's national audience and broad disciplinary focus.

The conference also helped refine the report's recommendations. Discussions surrounding Chief Resilience Officers, community resilience hubs, and cross-sector collaboration reinforced the idea that the Appalachian Resiliency Network should be viewed less as a standalone organization and more as connective infrastructure that strengthens communication, facilitates relationships, and supports implementation among organizations already serving the region.

Perhaps the most important outcome of the National Adaptation Forum was the realization that the questions explored throughout this feasibility study extend well beyond Central Appalachia. Communities across the country are grappling with many of the same issues: limited capacity, fragmented governance, increasing disaster frequency, and the challenge of translating planning into meaningful action. Appalachia's circumstances are unique but its challenges are not. That broader perspective increased confidence that the recommendations presented in this report reflect both regional experience and national best practices.

Five Sessions, One Message

Session	Primary Contribution to the Study
What Does Rural Resilience Look Like?	Validated the importance of relationship-based coordination and rural implementation capacity.
The Resilience Advantage	Reinforced connections between resilience, local economies, and long-term recovery.
From the Assessment to Reality	Confirmed that implementation, not planning, remains the greatest challenge for many communities.
Chief Resilience Officers as Policy Bridges	Strengthened recommendations related to governance, facilitation, and connective infrastructure.
Climate Adaptation through School-Community Hubs	Expanded the concept of resilience infrastructure to include trusted community institutions and social networks.

Appendix D

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Roger Waddell	Supervisor			District 2	Lee	VA
Brian Shoemaker	Supervisor			District 3	Lee	VA
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East Tennessee River Recovery & Resilience Initiative

Disaster Recovery • Jobs • Water Quality • Community Resilience

Target Counties: Carter • Johnson • Unicoi • Washington • Greene • Cocke

Overview

Hurricane Helene caused extensive damage to rivers, streams, and floodplains across Northeast Tennessee. While initial emergency response addressed major hazards, **significant cleanup and restoration needs remain** across smaller waterways, tributaries, and private lands.

This initiative proposes a **coordinated, county-supported recovery effort** using **existing Tennessee Department of Environment & Conservation (TDEC) funding pathways** to complete debris removal, stabilize eroded streambanks, restore riparian corridors, and support landowners, farmers, and local businesses—without requiring new legislation.

The Recovery Gap

Following the flood, the **U.S. Army Corps of Engineers** conducted contracted waterway cleanup focused primarily on **large debris and navigational hazards**. When those contracts concluded, substantial volumes of **smaller debris, embedded trash, and flood-distributed waste remained** in rivers, streams, and floodplains.

In the **six months since the close of federal cleanup contracts**, local and nonprofit crews have:

- Completed **200+ individual cleanup missions**
- Removed **200,000+ pounds of additional trash and debris from the Nolichucky River alone**
- Addressed debris embedded in banks, floodplains, and tributaries inaccessible to heavy equipment

This demonstrates a **clear, ongoing need** for focused, small-to-mid-scale recovery crews across all flood-impacted watersheds.

Watersheds Impacted

Significant unmet needs remain throughout the region, including the:

- **Nolichucky River**
- **Doe River**
- **Watauga River**
- **French Broad River**
- **Pigeon River**
- and their associated tributaries across all six counties

What This Initiative Delivers

1. Completion-Phase Debris Removal

- Targeted cleanup following federal contracts
- Removal of trash, flood debris, appliances, culverts, and vehicles
- Contractor support for large and hazardous materials
- Reduced flood risk and improved public safety

2. Streambank Stabilization & Riparian Restoration

- Repair of severely eroded banks using **modern, nature-based engineering**
- Boulder terracing, engineered woody structures, soil lifts, and revegetation
- Protection of roads, utilities, farmland, and river access points

3. Landowner, Agricultural & Business Support

- Assistance for waterfront property owners, farmers, and businesses
- Funding, best practices, and trained workforce for:
 - Erosion control
 - Riparian reforestation and restoration
 - Soil remediation and stormwater runoff management

4. Science-Based Best Management Practices

- Restoration guided by:
 - **University of Tennessee Agriculture Extension**
 - **Dr. Andrea Ludwig and the Tennessee Stream Team**
- Ensures work is measurable, defensible, and effective

5. Jobs & Local Workforce Development

- Dedicated, paid restoration workforce
- Local hiring in economically distressed counties
- Skilled jobs with long-term value in conservation and construction

How It Is Funded

This initiative leverages **existing TDEC funding mechanisms**, including:

- **Clean Water State Revolving Fund (SRF)** – water quality, sediment reduction, and resilience
- **Solid Waste Assistance Grants** – debris removal and disposal
- **Division of Water Resources (DWR) contracting capacity** – assessment, design, and implementation

With county and legislative support, these programs can be **prioritized and coordinated** for post-disaster recovery in Northeast Tennessee.

Why This Matters in 2026

- Brings **state and federal dollars directly into local communities**
- Produces **visible, on-the-ground results** constituents can see
- Supports **jobs, agriculture, clean water, and economic recovery**
- Complements—rather than duplicates—federal response efforts
- Positions East Tennessee as a leader in disaster recovery and resilience

This is a **practical, bipartisan investment** in the long-term health of our rivers and communities.

What We Are Asking

From County Commissions & Local Boards

- Letters of support
- Willingness to serve as project sponsors or partners
- Identification of priority river reaches and infrastructure risks

From State Representatives & Senators

- Support for TDEC administrative prioritization
- Advocacy for SRF and disaster-related funding focus in Northeast Tennessee
- Assistance coordinating agency engagement

We have **proven the need through action.**

Now we need your support to ensure this work continues **for the betterment of our communities.**

Partners & Collaborators

Nolichucky Outdoor Recreation Association (NORA) • Appalachian Resource Conservation & Development Council (ARC&D) • MountainTrue • Nolichucky Restoration Project • Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) • Tennessee Department of Agriculture • Tennessee Department of Forestry • Green Interchange • Appalachian Watershed Alliance • Pigeon River Outfitters Association • University of Tennessee Agriculture Extension • Tennessee Stream Team • Local governments, conservation districts, landowners, and volunteers

Contact:

Nolichucky Outdoor Recreation Association (NORA)

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