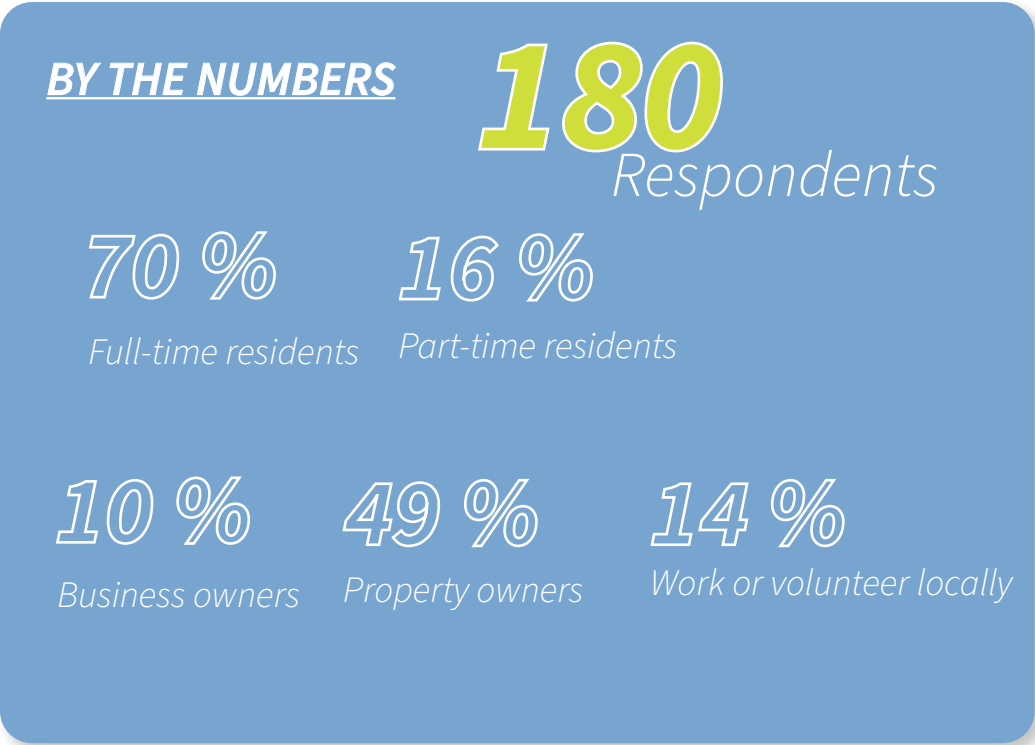


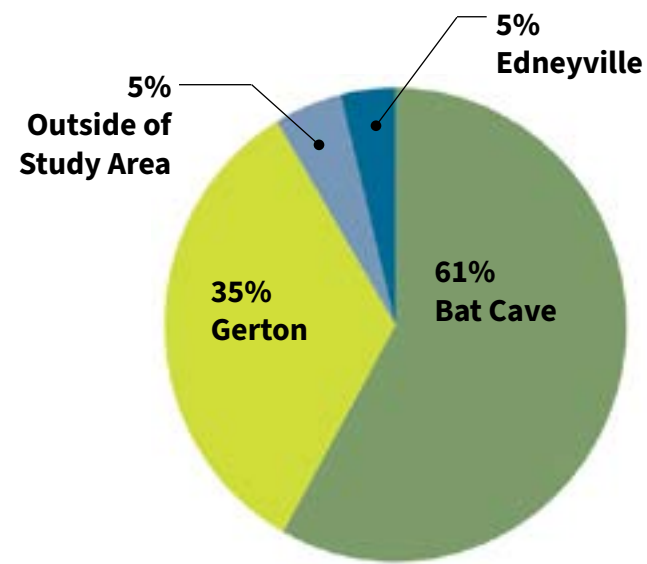
Community Engagement

Public Survey Results

An online community survey was conducted in the Summer of 2025 by Henderson County. The survey was shared on the Henderson County website, and access links were distributed via a mailing to all residents of the gorge in Henderson County, as well as presented on flyers that were distributed in various localities throughout the community. The survey was also available for attendees to complete at the community meeting held on August 19, 2025. Below is a summary of the results of this survey.



What communities do respondents identify with



What respondents say are the biggest impacts within two weeks after Helene (Top 5)

1. *Damage to private roads/driveways/bridges*
2. *Limited access to roads/transportation*
3. *Loss of community spaces*
4. *Damage to personal property*
5. *Security concerns (looters/scavengers/tourists)*

Other impacts that are still present

- Limited access to essential services
- Closures affecting childcare/work/learning
- Injury/health impacts
- Difficulty accessing food/prescriptions/supplies

*The top 5 impacts within two weeks after the storm have changed overtime indicating that improvements from the impacts immediately after the storm have occurred but needs for assistance continues.

What respondents ranked as the highest recovery priorities

1. Rebuild roads & bridges back as they were
2. Rebuild roads & bridges stronger/more resilient (even if cost/ROW increases)
3. Connect residents to recovery resources (grants/nonprofits, etc.)
4. Support local businesses to aid economic recovery
5. Rebuild housing
6. Restore environment & special natural places (incl. Reforestation)
7. Support tourism-reliant local businesses
8. Home repair resources
9. Rebuild septic/sewer/water to be more disaster-resistant
10. Restore trails & recreation with emergency access

Do respondents agree with county-facilitated septic repair if it includes a future-development limit.



What NEW opportunities do respondents prefer

Highest-rated NEW opportunities

- Reinforce fire departments to withstand disasters
- Address environmental & natural resource risks (flooding, landslides, wildfire, habitats, water quality)
- Improve communication & emergency alerts (gauges, sirens, etc.)
- Plan land use & “build back safer” to reduce future damage
- Expand funding for local fire/rescue
- Identify a Community Resource Center (e.g., at fire stations)

Moderately-rated NEW opportunities

- Affordable housing support

Lowest-rated NEW opportunities

- Sidewalks/pathways/bike lanes

“

We are small community that needs to improve somethings but not everything due to a storm. We like and love what we had ..we just need a few changes nothing new and no new added cost to us!

”

“

We need to carefully limit growth in this area and realize challenges of steep slopes and unique natural features of the protected land system and biodiversity. Prioritize completing the trail loop envisioned by Conserving Carolina to enhance the state park system beyond Chimney rock

”

“

We don’t want Gerton to be Gatlinburg or Pigeon Forge, my family had been here generations and don’t want to be pushed (further) out by developers or more out of state buyers.

”

Overall Themes from Public Survey Results

Environmental Resilience

Respondents desired information on addressing slope stability and landslides, repairing streams and riparian zones, debris removal, reforestation, and invasive species management.

Recreation Access

The community emphasized the importance of restoring trails and river access while ensuring emergency ingress/egress routes, safety, and ongoing maintenance were prioritized.

Infrastructure & Access

Respondents said that roads and bridges are the top priority, with concerns about private drive/bridge failures, unsafe crossings, erosion control, and the need for reliable emergency access.

Housing & Affordability

Respondents voiced concerns about locals being able to repair and return home, preventing displacement, and addressing rising costs.

Emergency Preparedness

Strengthening volunteer fire capacity, improving backup power and water supplies, clearer alert and evacuation systems, and installing river gauges for real-time monitoring was important to respondents.

Community Support & Navigation

There was interest in creating a community hub or resource center to guide residents through recovery and connect them with help more efficiently.

Tourism & Economy

Respondents stated that balancing support for small local businesses with management of traffic, parking, and worries about “disaster tourism” and looting.

Smart Land Use & Rebuilding

There is an overall desire for stricter development regulations in hazard-prone areas, rebuilding standards that reduce future risk, and protecting the area’s rural character.

Comparing Survey Results Between Communities

Hickory Nut Gorge in Henderson County consists of two distinct communities. Because each community differs in both landscape terrain and population makeup, their survey responses reflected these differences.

Key Differences in Impacts

Bat Cave: Highest impacts from damage to private roads/bridges (mean 4.08) and limited access to transportation (3.90).

Gerton: Impacts centered on personal property (3.61) and health concerns (3.38); road/bridge impacts were lower (~2.8).

Bat Cave’s top concerns are mobility & access, while Gerton’s focus is property loss & wellbeing.

Immediate Recovery Needs

Bat Cave also emphasized connection to recovery resources (4.16).

Gerton highlighted septic/sewer and home repair resources (3.9–4.0) along with roads.

Shared priority: Rebuilding roads & bridges was top for both, though Bat Cave rated slightly higher (4.61 vs 4.27).

Restoration Priorities

Bat Cave: Support for local businesses (4.14) and environmental restoration (3.95).

Gerton: Strongest on environmental restoration (4.00), with business support (3.7) and community center (3.65) secondary.

Bat Cave leans more to economic recovery, Gerton to environmental resilience.

New Opportunities

Bat Cave: Rated almost all options above 4.3, especially environmental protection (4.50) and fire department resilience (4.47).

Gerton: Top was funding for fire/rescue (4.44), followed by recreation infrastructure (4.24) and land use planning (4.10).

Both communities value emergency readiness, but Bat Cave’s urgency is stronger across all opportunities.

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“Big Thoughts for Recovery” from Public Meeting

Category	Description	# of Mentions	% of 74 Comments
Environmental Resilience	Restore the river/streams for beauty, resilience, and recreation; riparian buffers; erosion control; debris removal; vegetation to prevent landslides.	28	38%
Recreation Access	Bike/pedestrian infrastructure; riverwalk; trails; community gathering spaces; parks; safe access to recreation and waterways.	21	28%
Infrastructure & Access	Stronger bridges/roads, stormwater systems, utilities, waste/transfer stations, and transportation improvements.	18	24%
Housing & Affordability	Rebuild homes, provide housing assistance, expand affordable options, support uninsured/underinsured residents.	14	19%
Emergency Preparedness	Community emergency plans, communication systems, warning alarms, fire safety, disaster readiness education.	10	14%
Community Wellbeing & Culture	Protect rural character, celebrate heritage and biodiversity, community-led projects, rebuild community center, provide trauma counseling and social services	8	11%
Tourism & Economy	Support for local businesses, infrastructure services	7	9%