



WELCOME TO THE

Blue Ridge Parkway Post-Helene Wildfire Risk Reduction Project Open House

The National Park Service will remove hazardous, storm-generated tree debris from areas with elevated wildfire risk across the Blue Ridge Parkway in North Carolina and Virginia. This work, which is expected to begin in summer 2026, responds to the extensive canopy loss caused by Hurricane Helene. The main goal is to reduce wildfire risk by removing burnable organic material—commonly referred to as “fuels” in wildland fire management.

The National Park Service will remove downed vegetation from Parkway lands, targeting accumulated fuels that:

- present a clear risk of wildfire to communities, homes, and other resources; and
- create a safety hazard for emergency responders, staff, visitors, and/or adjacent landowners.

Debris removal will occur at select sites that were identified by expert analysis as being at elevated risk, within the following corridors:

- Galax and Hillsville, 292 acres between milepost 205 and 215
- Laurel Springs, 129 acres between milepost 249 and 267
- Boone, 769 acres between milepost 280 and 300
- Linville Falls, 527 acres between milepost 310 and 319
- Little Switzerland, 325 acres between milepost 324 and 341
- Asheville, 829 acres between milepost 374 and 396



To learn more, please visit
<https://parkplanning.nps.gov/BLRIFuelReduction>



Wildfire Risk Reduction: What to Expect on the Ground

Phase 1 (Years 1–2): Active Removal

The first phase involves removing downed and damaged vegetation that increases fuel loads or blocks safe access. Healthy trees will remain unless removal is strictly necessary for safe access, and areas containing sensitive cultural or natural resources will be avoided to the greatest extent practicable. Operations will include the use of heavy equipment and trucks within established staging areas. Crews will also construct temporary access roads and culverts. Although some of the work will be visible, vegetative buffers adjacent to the mainline road corridor will be used to screen project work where feasible. On-site burn piles will be used to dispose of woody debris in areas where it cannot be removed, and silt fences will be placed where needed to protect waterways and wetlands.



Phase 2 (Years 3–5): Restoration and Revegetation

Once debris removal is complete, crews will restore the land by removing temporary roads, regrading disturbed ground, and loosening compacted soils. Disturbed areas will be seeded with native plants and stabilized using natural mulch or erosion-control blankets. Visitors may see planting crews, small equipment, and temporary fencing or signs. Invasive plants will be managed using a combination of mechanical and approved herbicide treatments.



Phase 3 (Year 5+): Long-Term Recovery

The final phase focuses on monitoring and supports natural regrowth. Occasional planting or seeding may occur where needed, and invasive plant control will continue to help native vegetation thrive.





What Visitors Can Expect

Safety Closures, Changing Conditions, and How Access Will Improve over Time

During active removal operations, worksites will be closed to visitor use. Visitors can expect temporary disruptions and traffic delays due to one-lane closures, when necessary, but no full closures to the road from this project are expected.

This project includes measures to screen removal operations from view, minimize disturbance near designated viewpoints, and restore disturbed areas following work. However, visitors and neighbors can expect to see and hear heavy equipment near worksites, including loaders, grapple saws, chippers, helicopters, and logging trucks. They may also encounter signs and flags where debris is being removed.

Although short-term inconveniences are expected, these actions directly support long-term access. By removing hazardous fuel and restoring access, the National Park Service is working to ensure the Parkway remains open, safe, and resilient—supporting its mission under Secretarial Order 3426: *Ensuring National Parks Are Open and Accessible*.





Hurricane Helene Damage and Wildfire Risk on the Blue Ridge Parkway

Severe damage from Hurricane Helene left large concentrations of downed and damaged trees across many areas of the Blue Ridge Parkway. This woody material can increase the risk of damaging wildfire for nearby communities, private homes, park resources, and infrastructure. Firefighters and first responders have emphasized that limited access in the affected areas creates unsafe conditions for fire-suppression operations and restricts their ability to establish effective fire lines.

The Blue Ridge Parkway staff, with the help of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the Appalachian-Piedmont-Coastal Zone fire management staff, the US Forest Service, the NPS Washington Support Office, and expert consultants have identified specific sites along the Parkway that present the highest risk to life and property.



Reducing hazardous fuels in these areas is essential to decreasing fire intensity, creating safer access routes, and increasing the ability of firefighters to protect life and property from damaging wildfire.

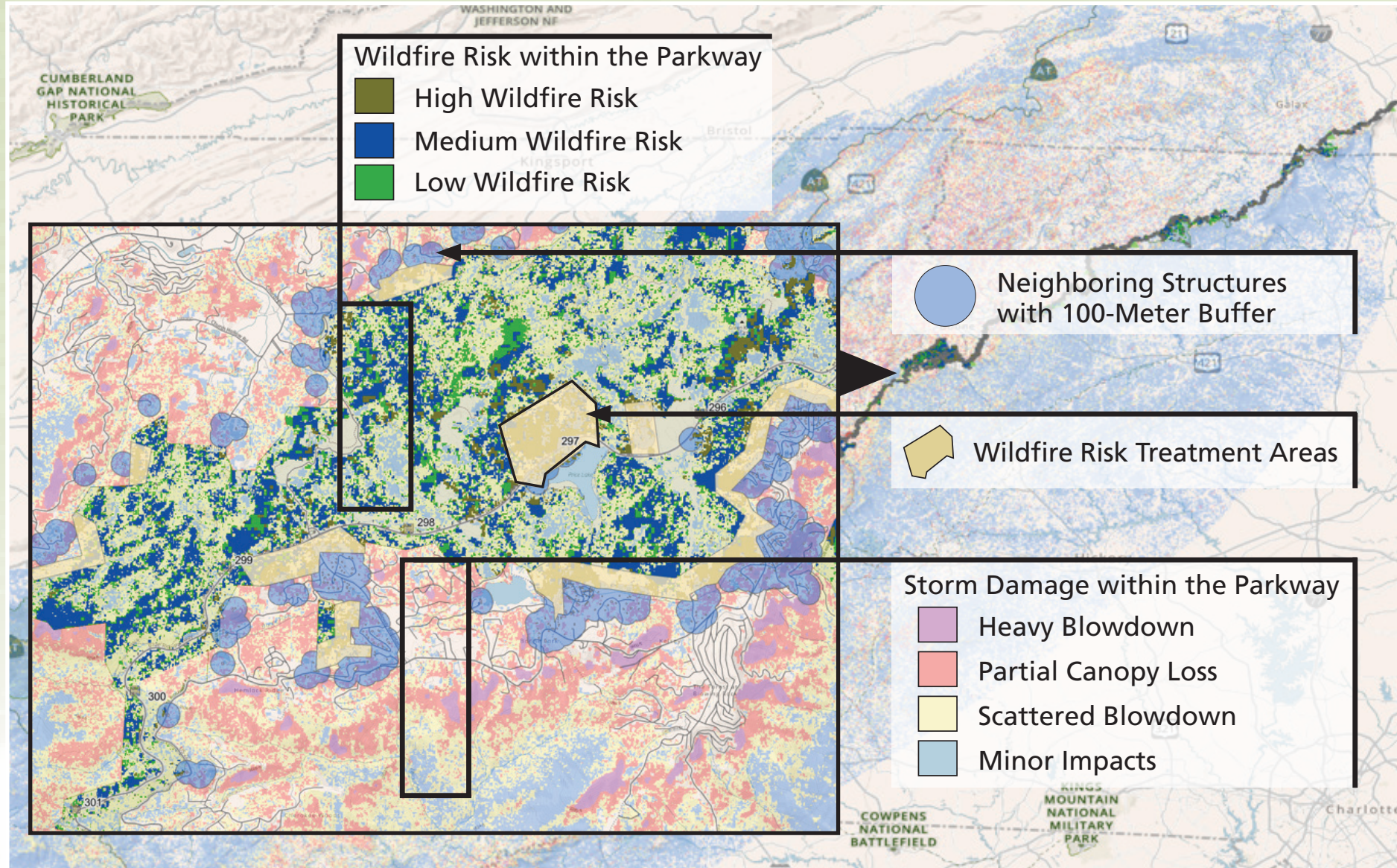
This project will reduce fuels while protecting sensitive natural and cultural resources to the greatest extent feasible. Through these risk-reduction actions, the National Park Service aims to safeguard communities, enhance emergency response capabilities, and support long-term forest resilience along the Parkway.



Blue Ridge Parkway

North Carolina, Virginia

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Example of fire risk assessment conducted for all storm-damaged areas of the Blue Ridge Parkway, near mile marker 297 southwest of Boone.



Rebuilding Forest Resilience

Landscape restoration is integral to this project and begins even before removal operations are complete. The National Park Service is working with the US Forest Service, contractors, and other experts to protect resources and minimize work-related disturbance to the landscape. Work crews will avoid the most sensitive areas and ensure that equipment brought onto worksites is clean to limit the spread of invasive species. Where feasible, chipped, piled, or scattered wood will be left on-site in ways that support wildlife habitat, soil-nutrient cycling, and long-term forest succession.

Because heavy equipment is necessary in many locations, work will leave visible signs on the landscape—such as temporary access routes, soil compaction, ruts, staging areas, or piles of woody material. By loosening compacted soils, regrading temporary roads or skid trails, and spreading native seed mixes along with non-persistent cover crops, the National Park Service will help prevent soil erosion, encourage natural forest recovery, and reestablish native vegetation. Targeted reforestation and planting will support forest regrowth using salvaged plants when possible, and invasive plant management—using mechanical and, if necessary, herbicide treatments—will protect recovering ecosystems.

Restoration work will continue for several years, with some areas requiring monitoring and supplemental actions for several seasons as the landscape recovers.

These efforts reinforce the Parkway's long-standing commitment to preserving its forested character, scenic viewsheds, cultural resources, and ecological systems, ensuring the landscape can return as closely as possible to a pre-Helene state.



Before



After



Before



After

Historic before-and-after photos of the Blue Ridge Parkway in Virginia show landscape restoration work undertaken about 1941.



Safeguarding the Cultural, Natural, and Scenic Beauty of the Blue Ridge Parkway

Stretching 469 miles through the diverse natural and cultural setting of the southeastern Appalachian Mountains, the Blue Ridge Parkway is the nation's premier scenic and recreational motorway, designated in December 2024 as a National Historic Landmark. It is a pinnacle achievement of the American parkway movement and a masterwork of landscape architecture and transportation engineering, designed for leisurely, uninterrupted recreational driving free from commercial traffic or stop signs and offering visitors panoramic views, changing vistas, and miles of adjacent countryside.

The Parkway corridor also contains an exceptional range of significant natural resources. Rising from 600 to over 6,000 feet in elevation, it spans multiple geographic and vegetative zones across five mountain ranges, giving visitors access to high mountain passes, splendid natural "gardens" of flowering mountain plants, waterfalls and water gaps, deep forests, and upland meadows. The Parkway protects a wide

array of plant and animal species, including rare and endangered communities, and preserves expansive mountain landscapes extending far beyond the immediate roadside.

To preserve the designed landscape and the resources it encompasses, this project will implement mitigation measures to minimize resource impacts. Operations will be buffered from the mainline road corridor where feasible, and heavy-equipment use will occur only in areas already affected by storm damage. Sensitive areas—including wetlands, cultural resources, and rare plants—will be avoided.

Through careful planning, conservation measures, on-the-ground monitoring, and consultation with Tribal and state preservation partners, the National Park Service has ensured that the removal of hazardous debris will proceed while maintaining the beauty, integrity, and heritage of the Blue Ridge Parkway.

