

# HURRICANE HELENE

## DAMAGE ASSESSMENT: \$194 MILLION

November 1, 2024

### Timber damage

SC Forestry Commission personnel conducted flights to assess damage to forests. These flights, which began on September 28, located over 850 areas with timber damage. Agency foresters conducted ground checks to validate the data collected through these flights and to determine the volume loss associated with each damage category.

The counties with the heaviest losses in terms of value were Edgefield, Spartanburg, Pickens, McCormick and Aiken. The total timber damage was estimated to be \$83 million across a 20-county area. This value is strictly timber value and does not include damage to infrastructure, which is substantial but not quantified.

### Impact on forest industry

SC Forestry Commission staff surveyed a subset of the forest industry to determine the impacts of the storm on their operational capacity, facilities and wood resources as well as how the mills have been able to respond in the removal and utilization of storm-damaged wood. Survey results showed that the average number of days of production lost was 2.5, although none of those who responded indicated that their facility suffered direct damage from the hurricane.

To determine the economic impact of Hurricane Helene on South Carolina's forest products industry, we used proxy measures for lost operational time compared to the most recent economic impact analysis available. With an average of 2.5 days of lost operational time, we estimated that this accounted for roughly 1% of annual mill output, which translates to approximately \$51 million including direct, indirect and induced impact. Of this amount, \$32.4 million was estimated to be direct impact.

### Urban forest damage

Estimating damage to the urban forests across the state is very difficult. Across the South, metrics such as % canopy loss and value of trees lost are sometimes used. However, the most meaningful figure that was available in South Carolina was the estimated cost of urban wood waste disposal. The South Carolina Emergency Management Division, using a model provided by FEMA, estimates that approximately 3 million cubic yards of urban wood waste will have to be disposed of during the cleanup operations following Helene. At \$20 per cubic yards, this results in an estimate of approximately \$60 million in urban forest damage. This figure does not include the cost of replacing lost trees in cities and towns, and is therefore a conservative estimate.

All the figures mentioned above are preliminary and will be updated as more accurate data becomes available. A full damage assessment report is forthcoming.



SCFC chainsaw crews worked to clear trees from roads in the hardest-hit areas of the state for more than a week after the storm.