



The Honorable Henry D. McMaster
Office of the Governor
Attention: Boards and Commissions
1205 Pendleton St
Columbia, SC 29201

November 6, 2024

Dear Governor McMaster:

Soon after winds from Hurricane Helene subsided, SC Forestry Commission personnel began assessing the damage to the state's forest resources. Our agency's preliminary assessment of the damage indicates an approximately \$194 million impact to the forestry community of South Carolina. This conservative estimate includes \$83 million to timber, \$51 million to forest-based businesses, and \$60 million to urban forests.

The damage to timberland occurred across 210,000 acres, of which roughly 78% was privately owned land. This conservative estimate does not include impacts to infrastructure such as forest roads and stream crossings or the cost of reforestation. Some of these costs will be partially covered by the USDA Farm Services Agency's Emergency Forest Restoration Program and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service's Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

The average number of days of production lost by the forest-based businesses was 2.5, which accounts for roughly 1% of annual mill output. This translates to approximately \$51 million including direct, indirect and induced impact.

Losses due to Hurricane Helene were exacerbated by recent mill closures and the resulting poor market conditions. With the loss of markets, the impacts of this storm are being felt statewide. It is expected that many landowners will not be able to salvage their damaged timber, increasing the financial hardship from this disaster. Additionally, this lack of salvage will increase reforestation costs and wildfire risk, as this dead and downed timber adds to fuel loadings.

The SC Forestry Commission has applied for \$13 million in supplemental funding from the USDA Forest Service to improve our ability to assist our constituents recover from Helene. Included in this request are funds to provide revised forest management plans, treat invasive species, help communities restore their urban forests, and purchase additional firefighting equipment.

However, private forest landowners and forest-based businesses lack adequate tools to recover from natural disasters. Unlike other commodities, they do not have access to crop insurance or safety net programs, leaving them vulnerable after events like hurricanes. Additional federal funding is needed, via a robust supplemental funding response, to help forest landowners recoup their losses in timber value and to assist forest-based businesses that could not operate during and immediately after the storm.

Thank you for your service to our great state. I look forward to working with you to help South Carolina recover from this disaster.

Sincerely,

Scott L. Phillips
Scott L. Phillips
State Forester

OUR MISSION

Protect, promote and enhance South Carolina's forests for the benefit of all.

OUR VISION

Healthy forests, resilient communities, impeccable service