



Dear SMHC Members,

Below I have copied portions of a Trails Situational Awareness Report sent to GRSM Park volunteers by the Park Staff responsible for roads and trails maintenance. Please be aware of the possible hazards when driving and hiking in the Park. It appears that the Balsam Mountain, Big Creek and Cataloochee areas should be avoided. We do not need to add to the Park's difficulties by being in the wrong place and having Park resources diverted to assist us.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Steve Dunkin
President, SMHC

"All,

I'm sure most of you are now aware, yet wanted me to make sure for your situational awareness, of some locations in our Park that have been impacted and damaged from this storm for your work and future work planning.

The Cataloochee valley has been impacted at various levels on all roads and trails. The upper valley road is the worst road and is not passable to vehicles. We have placed a gate at the bridge near the intersection with the horse camp road with a DI lock. The other roads are impacted yet can be accessed if necessary if you are in a high clearance 4wd and go SLOW.

ALL trails in the Cataloochee valley have been impacted with various levels of erosion and flooding damage and the only two foot log bridges that survived were the ones located on Pretty Hollow Trail.

The Heintooga Road, (the one way gravel road section from the Balsam Mountain Road at the picnic area to the two way gravel road Straight Fork), has numerous washouts and slides along its length and one slide approximately 9.9 miles down is a slide below the road that has eroded into the middle of the road and is impassible. There are cones placed at all these locations.

Straight Fork Road, (the two way road that starts just past the Cherokee Fish Hatchery on Big Cove Road), has numerous washouts and slides as well. There are also cones placed at all of these locations.

Big Creek Trail has damage on the trail throughout its length with several sections along the creek missing wall and trail tread. The 70' steel bridge 5 miles up the trail near BCS 37 is completely washed out as well as the bridge abutments.

Swallow Fork Trail is missing the footlog bridge a mile up from the junction with Big Creek Trail.

Gunter Fork Trail has a significant landslide that took out the trail tread in a 100' section.

At the same time we have also seen many miles of trails with really low impacts in this zone and the overall tree blowdown density is low. We are continuing to assess the trails on the eastern end of the Park in TN and NC to find the western edge of the damage.

We are working closely with the BCO to share this information to inform visitors.

If you have knowledge of damage out there from Helene please feel free to pass it on to me or one of the FMD supervisors so we can assess it."

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