

Spectrum details internet progress, obstacles

Iris Seaton

Asheville Citizen Times
USA TODAY NETWORK

When Tropical Storm Helene tore through Western North Carolina on Sept. 27, not only did it leave behind loss of life and widespread destruction, it also knocked out essential services such as water, electricity and phone connectivity.

Helene also knocked out internet service, essential for school remote learning and people who work from home, among other things.

Spectrum, the largest internet provider in the region, offered a statement to the Citizen Times regarding the many outages still affecting residents of Western North Carolina.

Scott Pryzwansky, a spokesperson

for Spectrum, first linked local issues with internet access to loss of power in many areas.

"We have over 3,000 field leaders, technicians and engineers actively working around the clock to access and repair any damage to our network as a result of Helene and its aftermath," Pryzwansky said in an email.

"Much of the customer impact remains loss of commercial power. Once power is restored to homes, streets and neighborhoods, Spectrum customers are seeing their services come back online."

He added that teams are gaining more access as harder hit areas are cleared, and said that Spectrum teams are given authority to work in areas by "power companies and local authorities" when it is deemed safe.

Why is my internet still out with the power back on?

There are a few reasons why customers may have power but not service - or vice versa - according to Spectrum. Network hubs require power to deliver service to nearby areas, meaning that even if an area has power, the same area may still be without service if outages are still active in the area where the hub is located.

Additionally, the Spectrum network in WNC sustained over 227 miles of "considerable damage," meaning that even with power restored to areas where hubs are located, many of these hubs may have been damaged or destroyed in the storm. Some of the repairs involve tasks such as boring underneath river and bridge locations to make repairs.

When will my Spectrum service start working again?

Unfortunately, even Spectrum officials couldn't give a firm answer due to the many variables and areas of WNC where work must be done.

Emergency restoration procedures do dictate that cable service can be repaired as soon as power companies have restored power and ensured the safety of the area. However, with substantial damage to Spectrum's physical infrastructure needed for internet services to work, power may not be all that's needed for restoration in many areas in and around Asheville.

Iris Seaton is the trending news reporter for the Asheville Citizen Times, part of the USA TODAY Network. Reach her at iseaton@citizentimes.com.

Park's highest peak reclaims historic name



Holly Kays

Word from the Smokies

Long before the Great Smokies' highest peak was named in 1859 for Thomas Clingman, a U.S. senator who would later become a Confederate brigadier general, the Cherokee people knew it by a different name — Kuwohi, meaning "mulberry place." Following a Sept. 18 decision by the U.S. Board on Geographic Names and years of grassroots advocacy from the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI), that name has been restored.

For members of all three Cherokee tribes — the EBCI, Cherokee Nation, and United Band of Keetoowah — the decision has proved both joyful and emotional. Mary Crowe, who together with her fellow EBCI member Lavita Hill led the name change effort, said she saw friends and relatives shed tears at the news.

"It was humbling," she said. "It was beautiful."

"Cherokee people talk about their ancestors as if they're right above the trees," said Kim Smith, Southern Appalachian community conservation specialist for The Wilderness Society and an EBCI member. Kuwohi, formerly known as Clingmans Dome, is the highest peak within the tribe's ancestral homeland and offers a sweeping view of treetops throughout the Great Smoky Mountains. It's "the closest place you'll be to our ancestors," Smith said.

"For me, being able to take my family there now and know that the people that visit will be saying our language, it's like my ancestors can hear the healing that the next generation gets to have that they weren't able to experience or witness," Smith said. "But because we're there and we're still connected, through us, they have that healing."

The Cherokee people have a long and rich history in the Great Smoky Mountains, but at many points throughout the last 300 years, that cultural tradition has been threatened. In the 1830s, most of the Cherokee were forced to leave their homeland and march west to Oklahoma on the deadly Trail of Tears, and from the late 1800s through the mid-1900s, many children were forcibly taken from their homes and native communities to attend Indian boarding schools, a practice often described as cultural genocide. As a result, some knowledge has been lost. For instance, nobody is sure why the 6,643-foot mountain was called "mulberry place," when mulberries aren't known to grow above 3,500 feet. But doubtless, there was a reason.

"We know mulberry is a medicine to our people," said Crowe. "We were told that our medicine people went there, we were told that our prophets and our spiritual people would go there."

"When we're talking about narratives that have been passed down for tens of thousands of years, there is knowledge to them," Smith added. "There is purpose that that message would continue to be transferred from one generation to the next."

Today, many Native communities, including the EBCI, are experiencing an era of cultural resurgence as their members seek to reconnect with a heritage that came close to being destroyed. Smith hopes her grandchildren will someday be born into a world "where progress has been substantial and creating spaces where their identity is accepted and valued" is the norm.

Crowe and Hill's campaign to change the name started with a Facebook post.



The sun rises over the Smokies' highest peak on a frosty October morning. The mountain was named Clingmans Dome in 1859, but following a Sept. 18 vote from the U.S. Board on Geographic Names, its traditional Cherokee name — Kuwohi, which means "mulberry place" — has been restored. PROVIDED BY STEVE REINHOLD/APPALACHIAN ADVENTURE COMPANY

Crowe works with an organization called Native Organizing Alliance, which worked on the effort to rename Mount Doane in Yellowstone National Park to First Peoples Mountain, recognizing the multiple tribes with ties to that area. When that change was approved in 2022, Crowe posted to her Facebook, saying that Great Smoky Mountains National Park should do the same.

The suggestion sparked a conversation between Crowe and Hill that resulted in them presenting a resolution at the very next EBCI Tribal Council meeting, asking the tribe to support restoring the Kuwohi name. The resolution received unanimous approval from Tribal Council and a signature from then-Principal Chief Richard Sneed.

This victory marked the beginning of a two-year effort to see the process through. The U.S. Board on Geographic Names, which falls under the U.S. Department of the Interior, has the final say on name changes to geographic features, and input from surrounding communities weighs heavily in its decisions. Crowe and Hill began attending city council and county commission meetings across the region, asking these local governmental bodies for support.

"We knew we would get opposition," Crowe said. "That was a given, but we were overwhelmed with the support that was given to us. We were very surprised and happy to be able to go into our counties and states, and the majority of them agreed to support us."

Notably, in April the Tennessee General Assembly unanimously passed a resolution supporting the effort introduced by Rep. Justin Jones and signed by Gov. Bill Lee. Buncombe County also passed a resolution in favor of renaming, and the City of Asheville issued a proclamation.

Meanwhile, the tribe was working to compile a formal application to submit to the U.S. Board on Geographic Names. The tribal government approved that document in January. Just over nine months later, the U.S. Board on Geographic Names made the change official — a "really incredible" turnaround compared to how long such decisions often take, Smith said. The speedy process, she said, reflects "the mindset of humanity," the progress the public is making "to understanding why place-names matter," and the effective structure of the effort itself.

"It was led by women, which is reflective of our cultural matrilineal value system," she said. "It was done with the right people in mind as far as allies and support structures. It was just done 'du-yu-go-dv-I,' the right way. And I think because everything lined up in the right way, it didn't have to suffer through a



U.S. Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland takes in the view from Kuwohi Tower, then called Clingmans Dome Tower, during an October 2023 visit to the site. As of Sept. 18, the mountain, tower, trail, visitor center and road have been renamed to include the traditional Cherokee name Kuwohi, which means "mulberry place." PROVIDED BY U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

long campaign period to get the support it needed to be successful."

Great Smoky Mountains National Park was among the many stakeholders that supported the name change, taking action to recognize the Cherokee connection to Kuwohi two years before the final vote took place. The park held its first Kuwohi Connection Days event in April 2022, shutting down what was then called Clingmans Dome Road for two consecutive mornings to allow for an educational program celebrating the mountain's cultural significance. The program was conducted in partnership with tribal elders, Cherokee community leaders and park rangers, and it included fifth graders from Cherokee, New Kituwah Academy, Swain East, Robbinsville, and Smokey Mountain elementary schools as well as seniors from Cherokee, Robbinsville and Swain high schools. The program repeated in fall 2022, this time expanding to three days, and it has been held every fall since.

"There was a desire to not just put words out there but to put action out into the world," said Great Smoky Mountains National Park Chief of Resource Education Stephanie Kyriazis. "It seemed something modest we could do would be to hold space for tribal kids and elders and community members and Cherokee language speakers to connect with the place that is sacred to them and to have that be an experience of cultural connection and continuity."

With the Kuwohi name now official, the park is embracing the change with enthusiasm. The board vote changed only the name of the mountain itself, but as soon as the vote took place, the park exercised its authority to rename



Mary Crowe and Lavita Hill smile atop 6,643-foot Kuwohi on a frosty October morning. Crowe and Hill have been leading efforts to restore the Kuwohi name since 2022. PROVIDED BY STEVE REINHOLD, APPALACHIAN ADVENTURE COMPANY

the road, visitor center, and tower associated with the mountain to reflect the Kuwohi name as well. These new names are already displayed in the park's online maps, and website text updates are in process. Sign production is now underway and is expected to take several months to complete.

"We are excited as the National Park Service to honor the many strands of culture that have interwoven on the Smokies over time," said Kyriazis, "and being able to have Cherokee place-names on the landscape, whether officially or as something that we can share with visitors, is something we very much embrace."

Holly Kays is the lead writer for the 29,000-member Smokies Life, a non-profit dedicated to supporting the scientific, historical, and interpretive activities of Great Smoky Mountains National Park by providing educational products and services such as this column. Learn more at SmokiesLife.org