



# Trump’s crypto dinner adds to ethics concerns

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Smoky Mountains Hiking Club volunteers Rick Waggener, left, and Brian Woods install new steps near Icewater Spring. PROVIDED BY FRANKLIN LAFOND

# Report: Only a fraction of Helene funding needed was appropriated

Jacob Biba  
Asheville Citizen Times | USA TODAY NETWORK

State and federal lawmakers have only appropriated \$5.95 billion for Tropical Storm Helene recovery efforts, according to a state report released by the Governor’s Recovery Office of Western North Carolina, or GROW NC. The figure is just a fraction of the nearly \$60 billion needed to rebuild the region after the storm barreled through Western North Carolina last September.

The May 15 quarterly report details funds appropriated by federal and state lawmakers as of March 31.

- The funds, according to the report, include:
- \$1.57 billion the North Carolina General Assembly passed across four bills since Helene hit. (Data related to appropriations from the state’s latest disaster relief bill weren’t included in the report, as those funds weren’t made available to state agencies until April 16.)
  - \$4.1 billion in federal funds dedicated to direct assistance and grants.
  - \$261 million in existing state funds have been re-directed toward the response and recovery effort

In May, North Carolina Gov. Josh Stein pressed state lawmakers for \$891 million more for recovery, and has asked federal lawmakers and President Donald Trump for billions of dollars more in additional funding since taking office in January.

Of the \$1.57 billion appropriated by state lawmakers, \$272 million was designated as loans for local governments and businesses, according the report, and \$325 million was designated as state matching funds to draw down dollars from federal programs, while other funds remain unspent.

“Some state appropriations require certain conditions to be met before expenditure,” the report’s authors write. “For example, \$120 million was appropriated for the State Home Reconstruction and Repair Program, which the state may begin spending upon completing federally reimbursable contractor procurements.”

See FUNDING, Page 2A

# Threat of new tariffs on Apple, EU shakes stocks

Zac Anderson and Bart Jansen  
USA TODAY

President Donald Trump reignited trade tensions ahead of the Memorial Day weekend with back-to-back social media posts May 23 targeting Apple and the European Union, sending global markets into turmoil after weeks of deescalation provided some reprieve.

Trump has made tariffs on imports a centerpiece of his economic agenda. His goal is to raise billions of dollars and to encourage manufacturers to make products in the United States. Many economists say consumers end up paying the price.

In a morning message on his platform Truth Social, Trump warned Apple CEO Tim Cook of a new 25% import tax if their trademark iPhones are not made in the United States. A half hour later, Trump wrote that he was recommending a 50% tariff on the European Union starting June 1.

“I just said, it’s time that we play the game the way I know how to play the game,” Trump later told reporters.

“I’m not looking for a deal. We’ve set the deal. It’s at 50%,” the president told reporters of the EU, which exported \$606 billion in goods to the United States in 2024, led by pharmaceuticals. Trump said the tariffs will go in effect if European companies don’t relocate

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# Volunteers needed to install logs on AT trail on June 7



Word from the Smokies  
Holly Kays

Somewhere after 2 p.m. on a sunny Wednesday in mid-March, the chaotic wind of a descending helicopter whipped the calm skies above the Appalachian Trail near Icewater Spring Shelter. Four people — two Smoky Mountains Hiking Club volunteers and two Appalachian Trail Conservancy employees — waited at the intersection of the Boulevard and Appalachian trails, watching the bundle of black locust logs suspended below the chopper come to a gentle rest in the small forest opening.

It was a “joyous occasion,” said Franklin LaFond, one of the two SMHC representatives present that afternoon and chairman of the club’s Appalachian Trail Maintainers Committee. It took only about 20 minutes to complete two drops delivering 80 locust logs to the remote site, but LaFond and his companions had been on standby at Newfound Gap for three days, waiting for the signal to book it three miles up the trail to meet the helicopter. That vigil followed a year’s worth of planning.

“I think sometimes, in the Smokies in particular, people don’t realize how remote that part of the AT is and how many logistics go into keeping the trail in good shape for hikers,” said Anne Sentz, regional manager for the Appalachian Trail Conservancy. “So I think stories like this are really important because it provides that perspective.”

The locust logs were intended for a heavily eroded half-mile stretch of the Appalachian Trail that’s been on SMHC’s project list for at least six years. In addition to the approximately 1,500 Appalachian Trail thru-hikers who pass through each spring, the trail is popular with day hikers headed to Charlies Bunion and overnight backpackers staying at nearby Icewater Spring Shelter. It’s also built along a steep slope in an area of the park prone to heavy rainfall. Much of the trail has been washed down to bare rock. Park weather monitoring stations show that Newfound Gap averages nearly 74 inches of precipitation each



The locust logs await an airlift from the staging area at Oconaluftee Overlook, less than a mile south of Newfound Gap, as the helicopter picks up a bundle of supplies destined for LeConte Lodge. PROVIDED BY ANNE SENTZ/APPALACHIAN TRAIL CONSERVANCY

year, while park headquarters near Gatlinburg, Tennessee, sees 58 inches and Oconaluftee Visitor Center near Cherokee typically gets 23 inches.

“It’s a much different situation up there,” said Dick Ketelle, who serves as SMHC’s district supervisor for the AT between Newfound and Davenport gaps. “So

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## Trail work

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what this project is about is trying to stabilize the trail tread by putting in better drainage features that we're going to build with these locust logs, building steps, and putting in features to try to retain soil and keep it from all washing away."

Trail maintainers prefer to work with locust logs due to their resistance to decay, but this species doesn't grow near the work site and therefore had to be delivered from elsewhere. However, there was no easy way to transport them. The site is three miles from the nearest trailhead and inaccessible to the pack mules the park typically uses to deliver heavy materials to difficult-to-reach trail sections. The delivery would require a helicopter airdrop.

Unlike the rest of Great Smoky Mountains National Park's 850-mile trail network, the 72-mile stretch of the Appalachian Trail within its boundary is primarily managed and maintained by the Appalachian Trail Conservancy via the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club, the local trail club responsible for the Smokies section. SMHC and ATC first began discussing the operation at Ice-water Spring in 2019, but the COVID-19 pandemic derailed that conversation. The organizations renewed their planning efforts about a year ago.

"It all came together in January," LaFond said.

SMHC received a \$6,200 grant from the ATC's Tennessee license plate program to cover the cost of purchasing and transporting the materials, and a partnership with LeConte Lodge drastically decreased the project cost. The lodge sits atop the park's third-highest peak, and each year as it prepares for opening day it organizes a helicopter airlift to deliver the non-perishable supplies it will need for the season. LeConte Lodge allowed the ATC to add its locust log transport onto this airlift operation, absolving the nonprofit of the significant overhead fees and higher cost per load it would have incurred had it organized its own flight. The ATC was asked only to pay for the airtime to deliver two loads of logs.

"I don't know if we could afford to do that without working with LeConte, because those helicopter operations are



**A helicopter flies a load of supplies to LeConte Lodge March 19 before delivering 80 locust logs to the Appalachian Trail later that afternoon.**

really expensive,” Sentz said. “We’re really thankful to them for letting us piggyback onto their operation.”

But as the flight date drew closer, the project hit another snag. SMHC learned that all the bark had to be removed from the logs before they entered the park, a measure intended to prevent the introduction of invasive species. The lumber supplier wouldn't debark the logs, and because the company was located in the Balsam Grove area of Transylvania County, North Carolina, it would be extremely difficult for SMHC's largely Knoxville-based volunteer force to complete the task.

For help, LaFond reached out to the Carolina Mountain Club, which maintains 94 miles of the Appalachian Trail north of the park. Most CMC members reside in the Asheville area, much closer to the lumberyard. The email request for help debarking the logs found its way to Don Cooper, who leads CMC's Pisgah Friday Crew and lives in Hendersonville.

"It was in our neck of the woods, and I

said, 'Sure, we can jump in,' Cooper recalled.

He quickly asked what kind of machine SMHC had to help with the task, only to learn that the only tools were draw knives and elbow grease. On the day of the debarking, Cooper and his crew — along with LaFond, who had traveled to North Carolina to help — met outside of Brevard, carpooled about 15 minutes up to the lumberyard, and split into pairs. One person would use the draw knife, a tool with a blade running between its two handles, to scrape off the bark while the other held the log down.

“You took turns so you didn’t wear yourself out,” Cooper said. “That’s not to say there weren’t some sore shoulders the next day.”

After about four hours of work, the 10 volunteers headed back to the truck, 45 of the 80 logs scraped clean. The next morning, the Saturday crew led by Jan Onan returned to the site to finish up. The supplier then transported the logs to the park in time for the airdrop a few

days later. Without Carolina Mountain Club's help, LaFond said, the project "wouldn't have gotten off the ground."

In the months since, SMHC volunteers have begun to install some of the logs, but it's slow going. Reaching the worksite requires a six-mile roundtrip walk — for most hikers, that means three or four hours on the trail in addition to any time spent working. A larger volume of volunteers is needed to get the job done, and that's what SMHC hopes to get on National Trails Day, this year observed Saturday, June 7. Though the club will put participants to work on other Appalachian Trail projects in the Smokies, getting as many of those 80 logs in the ground as possible will be the day's priority.

“National parks historically have not had the resources to be able to do everything that’s needed on trails in the parks,” LaFond said. “They just don’t have the workforce, and even more so now with the federal cuts. The volunteers that we have in the park — and not just with the trails — are instrumental in keeping the park operational.”

National Trails Day gives people across the country a chance to be part of that effort, with more than 400 events planned. When it comes to keeping landscapes healthy, trails clear, and erosion in check, partnerships are key — a truth exemplified by the Icewater Spring project.

"There are so many miles of trail to maintain, and they don't maintain themselves," Cooper said. "Mother Nature doesn't just wait for someone to come prune a bush back."

To find a National Trails Day event near you, visit [AmericanHiking.org/national-trails-day/find-an-event](http://AmericanHiking.org/national-trails-day/find-an-event) . Registration for the SMHC event closes May 24 and is available at [SMHClub.org](http://SMHClub.org) . CMC will host an event on the AT near Hot Springs, North Carolina, with registration at [CarolinaMtnClub.org/event-form.cfm?eventid=30](http://CarolinaMtnClub.org/event-form.cfm?eventid=30) . Both clubs provide ample volunteer opportunities outside of National Trails Day as well.

*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](http://SmokiesLife.org) or reach the author at [hollyk@smokieslife.org](mailto:hollyk@smokieslife.org).*

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