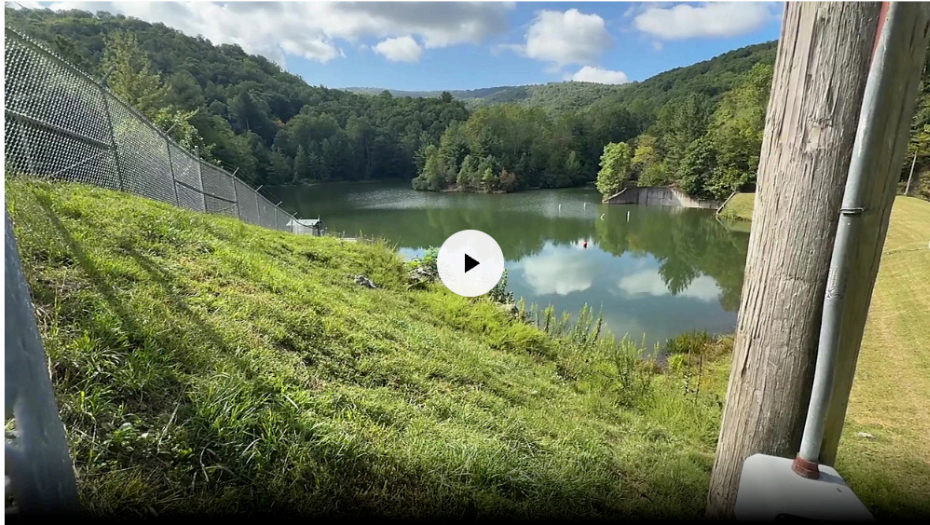




With the town population ranging from around 780 to 20,000 throughout the year, and a ski resort in town, Beech Mountain's town manager said shutting the town is not ideal. (Spectrum News 1/Rose Eiklor)

BY ROSE EIKLOR | MOUNTAIN
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Beech Mountain town is still seeking funds to fix its dam damaged by Helene two years ago. Officials said they need to fix it before the next major storm comes, or the results could be catastrophic.

Standing outside Buckeye Lake, Town Manager Bob Pudney said the town could not accept a denial to fix the dam. He added that the repairs are not a want for the community, but a critical need.

When Helene hit, the area flooded, causing major damage to the dam. It caused a portion of the lake to be unusable. Workers have since dredged about 60% to regain what was lost.

The town has spent more than a million dollars on assessments to come up with a plan.

"We don't have the ability to release emergency floodwaters to control it so that is either an overtopping and loss of the dam entirely or the inability to control flow downstream. So this is critical," Pudney said.

Pudney warned that another severe weather event might be disastrous since a dam failure could leave all of Beech Mountain without water.

"What do I do when the dam has failed, we have cleaned up downstream, hopefully there has been no loss of life. But there certainly will be property damage and there's no water to the town," Pudney said. "What do I do as town manager? Do I turn off the power and evacuate the town? What do we do?"

He said that so far the experts they've talked to can't answer that question.

With the town population ranging from around 780 to 20,000 throughout the year, and a ski resort in town, he said shutting the town is not ideal.

Pudney says town leaders are hoping to get ahead of the dam failing. They want to drain the lake and have another water source so they can repair the lake and get it back to how it was before Helene.

That plan comes at a cost of \$54 million.

"We don't even have the capacity to borrow that money. We reached out to USDA, a number of government lending agencies, and we don't have that capacity to borrow that type of money," Pudney said.

Pudney says so far the town has secured \$20 million, but they need around \$30 million more to get started. For now, he hopes town leaders will find the best possible way to get funding because, to the people in Beech Mountain, the situation is dire.

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