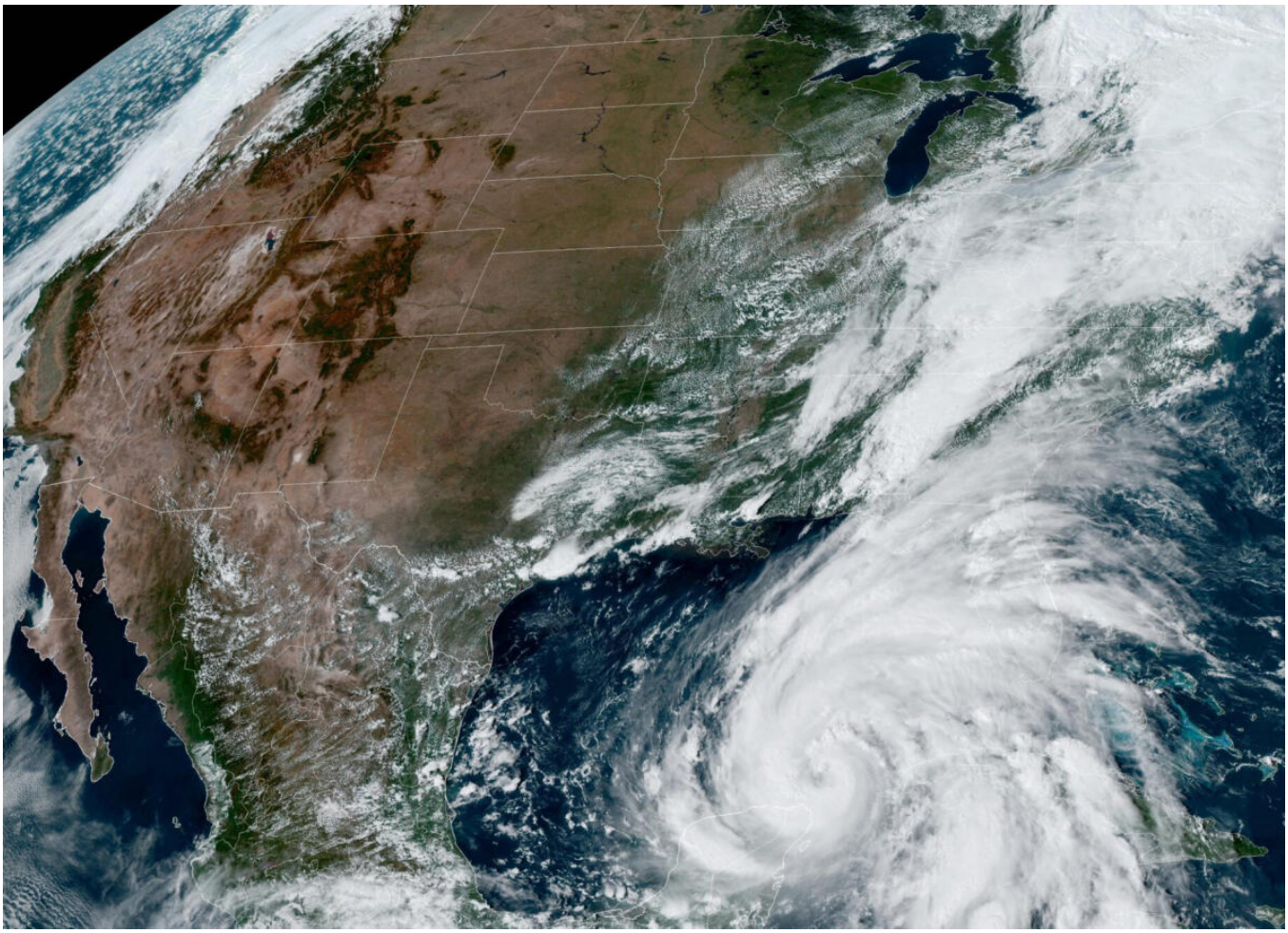

Helene Walloping Florida And More

Editor , Thomas Lark

Well, Hurricane Hugo it ain't.

At least not yet. As I write this, Thursday morning, Hurricane Helene is pelting the Piedmont with related rain; not part of the hurricane proper but driven ahead of it as a kind of precipitation precursor.

I well recall Hugo. Thirty-five years ago this month, I'd just turned 21. I went to bed the night before, dismissing Hugo as a lot of hype.

We'll probably be just fine, I thought, dozing off.

Yep, I slept right through it. And when I woke the next morning, I raised the blinds, expecting the same old, same old.

Instead, I was gobsmacked. Every single one of our white pines had fallen over. They were felled like so many dominoes. We ended up without power for three days. Such was the scene all over the area: downed trees, downed powerlines, no electricity, no hot water or no water at all and on and on.

Not fun.

The damage from Hugo was unprecedented. It even felled countless trees as far west as Watauga County. And it was only a Category III hurricane.

So is Helene. And according to meteorologist Jonathan Erdman of the Weather Channel, in the past century, we've seen 37 hurricanes reach the top level of Category V.

Right now, heavy rainfall and saturated ground (the kind of thing that makes trees fall over on to powerlines) appear to be the greatest threats facing us in *The Lincoln Herald's* coverage area. Tornadoes have been reported from Florida to Gaston County. But the local threat evidently went away earlier this morning. According to the United States National Weather Service, we're under a tropical storm warning. Yet the most we're likely to contend with hereabouts is four or more inches of rain.

Our mountain areas are a different story. Flashfloods are affecting Lake Lure, Old Fort and other parts of the Blue Ridge and Black Mountains farther north and west. "Catastrophic floods" has been the phrase local weathermen have used, citing an estimated total of 18 inches of rain. Sliding mud, rocks and land are distinct possibilities.

Heavy winds, perhaps of gale-force strength (25 miles an hour), may be on the way. The National Weather Service warns of the potential for falling tree limbs. Some roads may become unnavigable, due to falling *débris*.

As always, drivers are urged never to try crossing flooded sections of roadways, as it only takes a foot of water to carry away your car. If you see water flooding a roadway before you (sections of low-lying Lowell and the South Fork River come to mind), turn around, lest you're drowned.

To learn more, see the Website at www.readync.gov.