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Texas Hill Country Reels from Catastrophic Floods That Killed 82, Including 28 Children, as Search for Missing Persists

As torrential rain turned the Guadalupe River into a deadly torrent, Camp Mystic and surrounding communities faced devastation. With 82 confirmed dead and dozens missing, Texas first responders and volunteers confront rising waters and mounting heartbreak

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Officials search along the banks of the Guadalupe River in Hunt, Texas, on Saturday, July 5, 2025, following a deadly flash flood that devastated the area.

KERRVILLE, Texas — Search-and-rescue teams are pressing on through riverbanks and treacherous waters in central Texas, where a devastating July 4th weekend downpour left at least

82 people dead, including 28 children, and 41 others missing.

The catastrophic flash floods, triggered by up to 15 inches of rain in mere hours, turned the serene Guadalupe River into a deadly force, ravaging summer camps, homes, and communities across the Texas Hill Country. As families await news of loved ones and volunteers rally to support survivors, the region faces a daunting recovery amid fears of more rain. The floods, which struck in the early hours of July 4, were fueled by a slow-moving storm system that dumped 5 to 11 inches of rain across the Hill Country, with one gauge in Mason County recording over 18 inches in 24 hours. The Guadalupe River surged to 37.52 feet in Hunt, the second-highest level on record, surpassing the 1987 flood that killed 10, and rose 26 feet in just 45 minutes in Kerrville. Kerr County, northwest of San Antonio, suffered the heaviest toll, with 68 confirmed deaths, including 28 children, many from Camp Mystic, a nearly century-old Christian summer camp for girls along the river. At least 10 girls and one counselor from the camp remain missing, despite exhaustive efforts involving over 400 first responders, 14 helicopters, and dozens of canines.

The tragedy at Camp Mystic has shaken the region. Of the 750 campers present, many were evacuated in dramatic rescues, with counselors guiding girls through cabin windows to higher ground. “The camp was completely destroyed,” said 13-year-old camper Elinor Lester, who was airlifted to safety. “It was really scary. Everyone I know personally is accounted for, but there are people missing that I know of and we don’t know where they are.”

Among the confirmed victims was 8-year-old Renee Smajstrla. “Renee has been found and while not the outcome we prayed for, the social media outreach likely assisted the first responders in helping to identify her so quickly,” her uncle, Shawn Salta, wrote on Facebook. “We are thankful she was with her friends and having the time of her life.”

Stories of heroism and heartbreak have emerged. Glenn Juenke, a night security guard at Camp Mystic, saved campers by placing them on mattresses to float to safety. “I witnessed firsthand the courage and faith that your daughters displayed during some of the most terrifying moments of their young lives,” Juenke told CNN. In Ingram, Julian Ryan, 27, died after punching through a trailer window to save his fiancée and two sons, who survived by floating on a mattress. “He died a hero, and that will never go unnoticed,” his sister, Connie Salas, told a U.S. network. Erin Burgess of Bumble Bee Hills recounted clinging to a tree with her son as her boyfriend and dog were swept away, later found alive. “My son and I floated to a tree where we hung onto it, and my boyfriend and my dog floated away,” she told the Associated Press. “He was lost for a while, but we found them.”

The floods caught many by surprise due to their speed and intensity. The National Weather Service (NWS) issued a flood watch at 1:18 p.m. on July 3, followed by a flash flood warning at 1:14 a.m. on July 4 and a flash flood emergency at 4:03 a.m., urging residents to “SEEK HIGHER GROUND NOW!” However, Kerrville City Manager Dalton Rice said the deluge’s rapid onset defied predictions. “This happened very quickly, over a very short period of time, that could not be predicted, even with the radar,” he said. Critics, including U.S. Representative Joaquin Castro, have pointed to federal budget cuts at the NWS and NOAA, noting that the Austin/San Antonio office was short-staffed, with two vacant meteorologist positions and no permanent warning coordination meteorologist after Paul Yura’s retirement in April 2025. “When you have flash flooding, there’s a risk that if you don’t have the personnel to do that analysis, do the predictions in the best way, it could lead to tragedy,” Castro said on CNN. NWS officials, however, insisted that warnings were timely, with cellphone alerts sent at 4:03 a.m.

Texas Governor Greg Abbott expanded a state disaster declaration to include Kerr, Travis, Burnet, Williamson, Bexar, and other counties, emphasizing a relentless search for survivors. “They will continue in the darkness of night. They will be taking place when the sun rises in the morning,” he said on July 4. President Donald Trump signed a federal disaster declaration for Kerr County on July 6, pledging support and announcing a visit on July 11. “These families are enduring an unimaginable tragedy, with many lives lost, and many still missing,” he wrote on Truth Social. “Our Brave First Responders are on site doing what they do best.”

The Hill Country’s geography, with its steep terrain and Balcones Escarpment, amplifies flood risks by channeling water into valleys. “This can cause devastating flash flooding in a hurry,” said meteorologist John Schumacher. The region’s history of deadly floods—1987, 1998, 2015, and a San Antonio flood three weeks prior—highlights its vulnerability. Continued rain through July 6 prompted new flash flood warnings, with the Kerr County Sheriff’s Office noting a potential 1- to 2-foot rise in the Guadalupe River and Johnson Creek.

Recovery efforts are underway, with volunteers like Alma Garcia from San Antonio delivering meals and clothing. “The destruction is more than we thought it was going to be,” Garcia said, handing a t-shirt to a soaked resident. The Dallas Cowboys, Houston Texans, and NFL Foundation each donated \$500,000 for relief, while country singer Robert Earl Keen announced a benefit concert for Kerrville. Kerr County Judge Rob Kelly, whose own property was damaged, described the long road ahead: “It’s gonna be a long time before we’re ever going to be able to clean it up much less rebuild it.”