

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
STATE OF MONTANA

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June 28, 2024

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Through: Nancy Dragani, FEMA Region VIII Administrator

Dear Mr. President,

Under the provisions of Section 401 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, 42 U.S.C. §§ 5121-5207 (Stafford Act) and 44 C.F.R § 206.36, I respectfully request a major disaster declaration for the flooding disaster that occurred during May 5th, 2024 – May 9th, 2024. I am requesting the counties of Blaine, Chouteau, Fergus, Hill, Judith Basin, Petroleum, Pondera, Teton, Toole, and Wheatland along with two Indian Reservations (Rocky Boy's and Fort Belknap) located within these counties.

Weather Conditions:

In early May, a strong slow-moving low-pressure system moved into the Great Basin. This system intensified tapping into a layer of Pacific moisture. During this period the storm moved slowly over northeast Montana, with deep moisture continuing to pivot around the low-pressure point. This produced heavy precipitation across central Montana. Late spring storms produce large amounts of wet snow especially at high elevations with rain at lower elevations accompanied by gusty winds. This storm, however, was special in its intensity and longevity. The duration and simultaneous factors of strong winds and heavy, wet snow made this event notable. This storm had gusts of wind in the range of 70 miles per hour (mph) with a few areas exceeding 80 mph. There were also 270 reports of gusts equal to or greater than 55 mph. This wind, with the combination of heavy snow, snapped trees 20 to 40 feet above the ground, taking out many powerlines. Snowfall totals include 6-12" in Southwest Montana, 12" in the Rocky Mountain Front, and 1-3 feet in the Little Belt Mountains with the highest being 4 feet of snow. The Bear Paw Mountains received 3.5 to 7" with a max of 8" of precipitation.

Summary:

This storm event involved rain, snow, and high winds across a large geographic area in central Montana. Public infrastructure, including rural roads, culverts, retaining walls, and electric infrastructure, sustained damages from this multi-hazard incident. While some repairs have already been completed, there are several areas that endured complex extensive damages that will require time, funding, and engineering support to bring back to pre-disaster condition. Most of the impacted areas are extremely rural or are considered Indian Reservation land with a small tax base spread out over a large area. The factors listed above make recovery from this disaster beyond the capabilities of the local emergency fund and the Montana State Disaster fund.

Impacts:

During the event, I activated the State Emergency Coordination Center on May 8th, 2024, according to the procedures and protocols outlined in our state emergency plan to assist with response and recovery efforts. MT DES staff were embedded within the counties and tribes affected to provide technical recovery assistance. Due to the rural locations of some of the affected counties, the damages included in the Enclosure B are only a snapshot of the total impacts from the disaster. Wind, water, and snow knocked down trees, washed out culverts and roads, and caused water intrusion into buildings. Many of these roads act as single point access routes to occupied homes. Often, if there is an alternate route, the detour puts an undue burden on the citizens of that community.

The Indian Reservations endured similar impacts as the counties, but also incurred damages specific to the function of the community. Fort Belknap Indian Community incurred severe washouts and damage to the main road that provides access to their Sundance and powwow grounds. Damage from this event is actively preventing the tribe from performing events of cultural significance because the site is currently inaccessible. Rocky Boy's Indian Reservation had severe impacts to multiple tribally owned homes along with damage to retaining walls near the school and track. Rural communities and Indian Reservations have small local government staff and limited budgets, with part-time or even volunteer emergency managers.

Several rural electric co-ops (Fergus Electric, Sun River Electric, and Marias Electric) servicing the requested counties were also heavily impacted. Since this storm system was so large, the direct cause of the damage to electric systems varied by location. Some electric systems had lines snap due to weight of heavy, wet snow while others had poles snap or lines damaged due to treefall and strong winds. Regardless of the direct cause of damage, these co-ops needed to quickly repair their systems and return electricity to their customers to prevent long term impacts to the communities they service. Without the opportunity to recoup costs through the Public Assistance Program, these rural electric cooperatives may not be able to effectively recover from this current disaster and could be financially devastated by the next disaster if losses are not recouped within a reasonable time.

Roads, schools, and electrical cooperative facilities had the highest-dollar damages for this event, totaling \$3,379,642.00 respectively. The per capita loss by county ranged from \$7.17 to \$166.24, well above the FEMA \$4.60 indicator threshold. The recovery resources and staffing capacity

these counties have access to are limited. The damages this event incurred to local roads and electrical systems is extensive, putting a financial burden on the communities and electrical co-ops. Furthermore, some of these counties were affected by, and are still recovering from, two declared flooding disasters from 2023.

Below are the emergencies and disasters that have occurred in the State of Montana in the past four years.

State Issued Emergencies and Disasters for SFY 2019, SFY 2020, SFY 2021, SFY 2022, and SFY 2023:

- EO 1-2019 - Emergency- Energy Emergency for harsh winter conditions - Statewide
- EO 2-2019 - Emergency - Winter Storm Emergency in Anaconda Deer Lodge County
- EO 3-2019 - Disaster - Spring Flooding Disaster
- EO 5-2019 - Disaster - Eight Counties, The Crow Indian Reservation and one town
- EO-10-2019 - Emergency - State of Emergency to meet the demand for aviation fuel and other fire suppression resources
- EO-13-2019 - Emergency - Flooding Emergency in one County
- EO-15-2019 - Emergency - Winter Storm Emergency Statewide
- EO-2-2020 - Emergency - State of Emergency to exist within the State of Montana related to the Communicable Disease COVID-19 Novel Coronavirus
- EO-3-2020 - Emergency - Amending Executive Order 2-2020 and providing the State of Emergency runs concurrent with the President's Emergency Declaration
- EO-4-2021 - Emergency - Energy Emergency
- EO-8-2021 - Emergency - June 8-10th Windstorm
- EO-11-2021 - Emergency - Drought
- EO-12-2021 - Wildland Fire
- EO-4-2022 - Disaster - Spring Flooding
- EO-1-2023 - April Flooding
- EO-2-2023 - Memorial Day Flooding
- EO-8-2024 - May Flooding

Federally Declared Disasters:

The State of Montana has had 11 Fire Management Assistance Grant Declarations since 2019.

- FEMA-5286-FM-MT - North Hills Fire
- FEMA-5324-FM-MT - Falling Star Fire
- FEMA-5343-FM-MT - Huff Fire
- FEMA-5344-FM-MT - Bobcat Fire
- FEMA-5345-FM-MT - Snider/Rice Complex Fire
- FEMA-5346-FM-MT - Bridger Foothills Fire
- FEMA-5392-FM-MT - Robinson Draw Fire
- FEMA-5399-FM-MT - Buffalo Fire
- FEMA-5403-FM-MT - PF Fire
- FEMA-5406-FM-MT - Richard Spring Fire

- FEMA-5480-FM-MT - River Road East Fire

The State of Montana is still in the recovery phase for six Presidential declarations that remain open and have liabilities against the state general fund.

- FEMA-4508-DR-MT -2020 Covid-19 Pandemic - 56 Counties
- FEMA-4608-DR-MT -2021 Northeast Windstorm - Five Counties
- FEMA-4623-DR-MT -2021 Richard Spring Fire - One County, One Tribe
- FEMA-4655-DR-MT -2022 Severe Storms and Flooding - Seven Counties
- FEMA-4726-DR-MT -2023 Spring Flooding - Seven Counties, One Tribe
- FEMA-4745-DR-MT -2023 Spring Flooding -Ten Counties

Should this request for a Major Disaster Declaration be approved, I certify that the state and local governments will assume all applicable non-federal shared costs as required by the Stafford Act. I have designated the Administrator of Montana's Disaster & Emergency Services Division, Delila Bruno, as the State Coordinating Officer for this request.

I look forward to your response. Please do not hesitate to contact me or my staff with any questions.

Sincerely,



Greg Gianforte
Governor

Enc – Enclosure “B”- Montana Preliminary Damage Assessment
OMB No. 1660-0009/ FEMA Form 010-0-13