

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
STATE OF MONTANA

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LT. GOVERNOR

December 24, 2025

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Through: Katherine Fox, Acting FEMA Region VIII Administrator

Dear Mr. President,

Under the provisions of Section 501 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, 42 U.S.C. §§ 5121-5207 (the Stafford Act), and 44 C.F.R. § 206.36, I respectfully request that you issue an emergency declaration for the State of Montana in response to a catastrophic damaging high-wind events in Montana that severely impacted the Fort Belknap Indian Community.

Summary:

On December 17, 2025, a historic, long-duration high-wind event and associated blizzard caused widespread destruction across Montana. Driven by strong cold fronts undercutting an atmospheric river, the storm produced gusts between 60 and 90 miles per hour (MPH) in valleys and over 100 MPH in mountainous regions. The impact was nearly statewide, with 43 of 56 counties recording gusts of 70 MPH or greater. In northeastern Montana, these winds combined with heavy snow to create life-threatening blizzard conditions lasting up to five hours.

Most critically, the storm caused structural failure of the roof of the water holding tank supplying the Fort Belknap Indian Community. This damage has exposed the community's primary water source to environmental contamination, necessitating a boil order for approximately 700 homes, 3 food establishments, a detention facility that houses up to 20 inmates, a critical access hospital, and 30 tribal offices who now all require an immediate emergency drinking water supply.

Impacts:

In response to this catastrophe, I have signed Executive Order 11-2025, declaring a state of disaster. The State Emergency Coordination Center is at Full Activation to manage the extensive infrastructure damage and service disruptions.

Infrastructure and Utility Disruptions

- Widespread utility damage left over 65,000 customers without power, with some rural areas requiring several days for restoration due to snapped poles and downed lines.
- Significant travel impacts occurred statewide, including the closure of I-15 and US-191 due to debris, fallen power lines, and "severe driving conditions".
- State agencies, including the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) and the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC), have been mobilized for debris clearance and emergency signage.

Fort Belknap Indian Community Cascading Effects The impact on the Fort Belknap Indian Community is particularly dire due to unique demographic and geographic challenges:

- **Vulnerable Populations:** Many households in the community are multi-generational, housing a high concentration of vulnerable populations, including children and the elderly, who are at increased risk during a water crisis.
- **Local Capacity:** Due to the community's rural and isolated nature, combined with limited local resources, the local government does not have the internal capacity to fund or implement the necessary repairs
- **Cost and Duration:** Uncertain and expected high repair costs, extended timelines for restoring clean and safe water to the community, and the need to sustain long-term water delivery and distribution solutions during the repair period, in an extremely isolated and rural part of the State, exceed the Fort Belknap Indian Community's local capacity.
- **Winter Urgency:** With the onset of winter and bitter cold, it is imperative to restore a safe, reliable, and climate-protected water supply to prevent a secondary public health crisis.

While I have authorized the use of the State Disaster and Emergency Appropriation Fund, these resources are severely depleted by many other recent state-issued emergencies and Presidential Disaster Declarations, many of which remain active and continue to draw on state resources.

These include:

State-Issued Emergencies and Disasters (SFY 2020-2025):

- EO-2-2020: COVID-19 State of Emergency
- EO-3-2020: Extension of COVID-19 Emergency
- EO-4-2021: Energy Emergency
- EO-8-2021: June Windstorm
- EO-11-2021: Drought Emergency
- EO-12-2021: Wildland Fire Emergency
- EO-4-2022: Spring Flooding
- EO-1-2023: April Flooding
- EO-2-2023: Memorial Day Flooding

- EO-8-2024: May Flooding
- EO-9-2024: July Windstorm
- EO-10-2024: Miles City Windstorm
- EO-11-2024: Hamilton and Stevensville Windstorm
- EO-4-2025: Anaconda Manhunt Emergency
- EO-7-2025: Montana State Prison Water Supply Emergency
- EO-9-2025: Winter Flood
- EO-11-2025: Damaging High-Winds

Federally Declared Emergency Declarations (EMs) Since 2025: Total Costs

- FEMA-3630-EM-MT - Severe Storms and Flooding - \$5 million

Federally Declared Fire Management Assistance Grants (FMAGs) Since 2020: Total Costs

- FEMA-5343-FM-MT -Huff Fire- \$338,885
- FEMA-5344-FM-MT-Bobcat Fire-\$6.1 million
- FEMA-5345-FM-MT -Snider/Rice Complex Fire-\$2 million
- FEMA-5346-FM-MT-Bridger Foothills Fire-\$6.1 million
- FEMA-5392-FM-MT-Robertson Draw Fire- \$2 million
- FEMA-5399-FM-MT-Buffalo Fire- \$334,005
- FEMA-5403-FM-MT-PF Fire-\$1.5 million
- FEMA-5406-FM-MT-Richard Spring Fire- \$5.1 million
- FEMA-5480-FM-MT -River Road East Fire- \$9.4 million
- FEMA-5507-FM-MT-Horse Gulch Fire- \$705,162
- FEMA-5611-FM-MT - Windy Rock Fire- \$55.9 million
- FEMA-3630-EM-MT - Severe Storms and Flooding

Open Presidential Disaster Declarations: Total Costs

- FEMA-4508-DR-MT: COVID-19 Pandemic-\$74.2 million
- FEMA-4655-DR-MT: 2022 Severe Storms and Flooding-\$39.7 million
- FEMA-4726-DR-MT: 2023 Spring Flooding-\$5.1 million
- FEMA-4745-DR-MT: 2023 Spring Flooding-\$1.8 million
- FEMA-4801-DR-MT: 2024 Spring Flooding-\$4.6 million
- FEMA-4813-DR-MT: 2024 Missoula Windstorm-\$8.2 million

Given the severity and complexity of this emergency, I respectfully request FEMA's assistance through an Emergency Declaration. Federal support is essential to ensure the health and safety of the affected population by helping address three critical needs resulting from the damage to the Ft. Belknap water tank:

- First, urgent support is needed to repair the water tank. The integrity of this facility remains compromised due to the severe damage caused by the high-wind event. Without repair, the community will remain on a boil order as this is their only water source.
- Second, federal assistance is essential to help secure a reliable and safe drinking water supply for the Ft. Belknap community. The current conditions have rendered the existing water source unsafe due to possible environmental contamination from exposure to the elements. The community lacks an alternative water source, and the

logistics required to provide daily drinking water for over 700 households to this isolated community are substantially challenging. Federal support is needed to ensure continued water delivery while working toward permanent repairs.

- Third, the financial burden of this unanticipated second disaster in two weeks has placed significant strain on local and state resources. The scale of response and recovery required exceeds available funding and capacity. Federal assistance is critical to help offset the costs associated with emergency protective measures, infrastructure stabilization, water system restoration, and long-term recovery planning.

Should this request be approved, I certify that the State of Montana will assume all applicable non-federal cost shares as required under the Stafford Act.

I have designated Delila Bruno, Administrator for Montana Disaster & Emergency Services, as the State Coordinating Officer for this request. She will serve as the primary point of contact for all coordination related to this emergency. Jake Ganieany, Bureau Chief will serve as the Deputy State Coordinating Officer for this emergency.

Sincerely,



Greg Gianforte
Governor