

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
STATE OF MONTANA

GREG GIANFORTE
GOVERNOR



KRISTEN JURAS
LT. GOVERNOR

August 25, 2023

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 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 in Montana during May 25, 2023 – June 30, 2023. I am requesting the counties of Carbon, Daniels, Fergus, Garfield, Golden Valley, Musselshell, Petroleum, Phillips, Stillwater, and Treasure to be included in this request.

Weather Conditions:

At the end of May, Montana received a ridge of high pressure and accompanying rainfall that stayed over the state until the end of June. Due to a previous flooding event in April, the soil had a high concentration of water levels which caused the rain to not be absorbed and flash flooding to occur. Repetitive flash flooding that occurred throughout the state was destructive and delayed initial recovery efforts.

The month of June is typically Montana's wettest month of the year. In June of 2023, some regions in the State of Montana received 350% above normal precipitation. This contributed to several areas in central and south-central Montana having record-breaking precipitation.

Summary:

Hundreds of miles of rural roads, bridges, culverts, etc., were affected. The public infrastructure damage is extensive, and with repairs actively being completed, the unexpected cost to return to pre-disaster condition is beyond the capabilities of the local emergency fund and state disaster fund.

Per the data shown in Enclosure B, one of the counties experienced a financial impact almost 300 times the per capita impact indicator threshold. Most of the impacted areas are extremely rural with a small tax base spread out over a large area, which makes recovery from a disaster more difficult and expensive for these communities compared to a more urban populated area. Also, the State of Montana is still actively recovering from the devastating Yellowstone flooding event from last year. This includes an ongoing large disaster debris removal project managed by the State, as well as the standup of recovery resources for the recent Presidentially declared disaster for the 2023 April Flooding. All these factors have caused a strain on recovery resources throughout the state.

Impacts:

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 damages from the disaster. Rural communities have small local government staff and limited budgets, with several part-time Emergency Managers. A lot of the road materials, such as State Historic Preservation Office approved fill must be imported from neighboring counties, some of which are more than 100 miles away. These rural counties often have difficulty acquiring bids for contracts due to their location, which lowers competition and drives rates up. Without the opportunity to recoup costs through the Public Assistance Program, these communities are vulnerable to financial devastation from the next disaster or unable to effectively recover from this current disaster.

Roads, bridges, and water control facilities had the highest-dollar damages for this event, totaling \$3,037,302 and \$356,700, respectively. The per capita loss by county ranged from \$9.25 to \$1,508.87, well above the FEMA \$4.44 indicator threshold. The recovery resources and staffing these counties have access to are limited, and the damages to county road and bridge systems are extensive, putting a financial burden on communities and straining the efficiency of transportation routes and the effectiveness of emergency response.

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

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-4437-DR-MT - 2019 Spring Flooding - Eight Counties
- FEMA-4508-DR-MT - 2020 Covid-19 Pandemic
- 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

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.

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Greg Gianforte". The signature is stylized with a large, looped "G" and a prominent "A".

Greg Gianforte
Governor