COLORADO
Governor Jared Polis

**REQUEST FOR PRESIDENTIAL DISASTER DECLARATION**
**COVER LETTER**
**MAJOR DISASTER OR EMERGENCY**

September 26, 2025

The Honorable Donald J Trump
The President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Through: Katherine Fox
Acting Regional Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency Region VIII
Denver Federal Center
Building 710, Box 25267
Denver, CO 80225-0267

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 implemented by 44 C.F.R. § 206.36, the State of Colorado requests a Major Disaster Declaration, FEMA Public Assistance for Categories A, C, D, F and G support for the Lee Fire and Elk Fire and the concurrent devastating mudslides and debris flows, occurring August 2nd through August 29th, 2025, for Rio Blanco County.

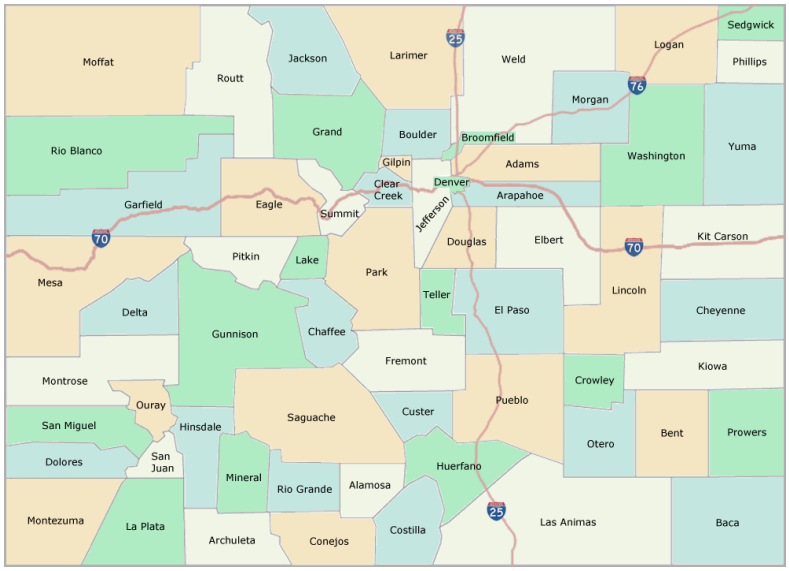
The affected jurisdiction of Rio Blanco County declared a state of emergency on August 3, 2025. I verbally declared a state disaster emergency and activated the State Emergency Operations Plan on August 3rd at approximately 11:26 AM due to the Lee and Elk Fires. I also authorized deploying the Colorado National Guard to assist with fire suppression and made over $18.5 million available for suppression, response, consequence management, mitigation, and recovery efforts. This verbal declaration was later memorialized in the written Executive Order D 2025 015.

The disaster and its aftermath threaten the United States' energy production and transportation. The energy production infrastructure at risk produces approximately 2 billion cubic feet of natural gas daily, which accounts for between 2% and 5% of the United States' daily

consumption. Additionally, the infrastructure at risk is responsible for transporting up to 10 percent of the nation's natural gas.

***Weather Background***

Western Colorado experienced a very destructive and disruptive drought, numerous wildland fires, and subsequent burn scar flooding between August 2 and August 29, 2025. The U.S. Drought Monitor indicated Exceptional Drought (D4), the highest on the scale from 0-4, encroached upon a large portion of northwestern Colorado in early to mid-August 2025. The last time the state of Colorado had a D4 drought demarcation was in May 2023, when 0.32% of the state was covered. In comparison, by August 2025, 7% of the state had been designated as D4. The very dry conditions, dry fuels, and extreme fire weather conditions added to the threat for rapidly growing wildland fires and were major contributing factors in the Lee and Elk fires.




By late August 2025, strong periods of monsoonal moisture brought relief to additional wildfire growth; however, the heavy rainfall rates over post-wildfire regimes triggered multiple debris flows and reports of flash flooding[1].

***Description of Damage***

In collaboration with FEMA, the State can demonstrate a considerable need for Public Assistance with infrastructure damage assessments in the affected counties. FEMA validated $27,491,064 in damages, notably for Category F (utility systems) damages. As this is only a preliminary glance at some of the damages incurred due to significant wildfire, and subsequent flooding and debris flows, we anticipate additional entities and costs to be added over time. A detailed breakdown of the Joint Preliminary Damage Assessment (JPDA) findings is found in Enclosure B.

Rio Blanco County is the 6th largest county in Colorado, spanning over 3,200 square miles, more than twice the size of the state of Rhode Island. This county is located in the Northwest part of the state and is primarily composed of range land, wetland, and forest land. Though the county is large in land mass, it is home to fewer than 7,000 people, concentrated in two small towns, Meeker and Rangely. The remaining residents reside in sparsely populated rural areas of the county. The localized impact of this disaster is over $4,000 per resident in the county. Rio

[1] Summer 2025 Western Colorado Drought & Wildfires Summary Report Prepared by the National Weather Service, WFO Boulder CO and WFO Grand Junction CO to evaluate weather conditions leading up to, during, and following the Lee Fire and Elk Fire, September 17, 2025.

Blanco County relies on outdoor recreation, hunting, and agriculture as economic drivers; however, energy production is the main economic engine.

***Impacts on the Oil and Gas Industry***

Rio Blanco County is home to large oil and gas companies. These companies are the most significant job providers in the county, and they drive the entire region's economy. The unique geology of the region, specifically the Piceance Basin, is one of the cornerstones of American energy production. The basin produces approximately 2 billion cubic feet of natural gas every day. This makes up between 2 and 5% of the United States' daily consumption.

The vast natural gas resources of the Piceance Basin are contained within a challenging geological setting. The gas is primarily classified as "tight gas," meaning it is trapped within unconventional, continuous reservoirs of sandstone and shale formations characterized by extremely low permeability.[2] . ExxonMobil has described the rock as being as dense as concrete.[3] Unlike conventional gas fields, where hydrocarbons accumulate in discrete, localized pockets, the gas in the Piceance Basin is dispersed throughout the geologic formation, making extraction impossible through traditional vertical drilling alone.[4]

**The Piceance Basin holds mean resources of 66.3 trillion cubic feet (Tcf) of natural gas, positioning it as the second-largest natural gas basin in the United States. (Guidroz)**

This geological reality necessitates the application of advanced American technology, particularly horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing. These techniques are used to create extensive artificial fracture networks deep underground, liberating the trapped gas and allowing it to flow to the wellbore at economically viable rates.[5] The Piceance Basin has served as a critical proving ground for the very innovation that has fueled America's energy revolution. Major operators have pioneered proprietary technologies in the basin, such as ExxonMobil's "Fast Drill process and Multi-zone Stimulation Technology with Just-in-Time Perforation," a system capable of accessing up to 50 distinct gas-bearing zones from a single well pad.[6]

This reliance on advanced technology creates a unique and critical vulnerability; the processes of drilling, pumping massive volumes of fluid for hydraulic fracturing, and compressing the extracted gas for transport are all highly dependent on a constant, reliable, and high-capacity supply of electricity. The very geology that makes the Piceance Basin a world-class resource simultaneously makes its production exceptionally vulnerable to disruptions in the electrical grid. For a tight gas field, a power outage is not a temporary inconvenience; it is a complete and immediate production shutdown.

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[2] Guidroz, Walter S. "Statement of Walter S. Guidroz." Department of Interior Statement Before the Committee on Natural Resources, 2018, https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/uploads/oil_shale_in_western_co.pdf. Accessed 18 September 2025.

[3] ExxonMobil. "ExxonMobil Expands Natural Gas Processing Capacity in Piceance Basin." Investor Memo, https://ir.exxonmobil.com/news-releases/news-release-details/exxonmobil-expands-natural-gas-processing-capacity-piceance/. Accessed 18 September 2025.

[4] Guidroz, 2018.

[5] ExxonMobil.

[6] *Ibid.*

The electricity for this industry is provided by two Rural Electric Associations: White River Electric Association (WREA) and Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association (Tri-State). Tri-State produces the electricity and uses high-voltage transmission lines to distribute electricity throughout Western Colorado and the Four Corners area. WREA provides direct service to customers. Both entities suffered extensive damage to their infrastructure from the Lee and Elk fires. Both the primary and secondary transmission lines for electricity feeding the oil and gas industry in this area suffered over $24 million in damage from these fires. The remaining tertiary backup transmission line is now the only line sustaining this industry. This tertiary line, also known as the CA line, has been de-energized for the majority of the last two decades and has not been reinforced, maintained, nor has the line been protected by cutting back vegetation over that timeframe. WREA also serves an electric drilling rig, sodium bicarbonate (baking soda) mines, and several ranches and homes in the Piceance Basin that are at risk if the CA line is compromised or if the repair of the primary and secondary lines is hindered.

**"The oil and gas industry, agricultural producers, and wildlife are the backbone of our community"**

**- Callie Scritchfield, Rio Blanco County Commissioner**

Due to the limited capacity of the CA line, natural gas loads coming out of the Piceance Basin are now restricted. In addition, electrical reliability is subpar due to the aging condition of the CA line. If this line is damaged or taken out of service, there will be no source of electricity to the Piceance Basin and natural gas energy production and transmission in the Basin will cease. There are continued wildfire threats to the CA line, putting it at further risk of failure. The two Rural Electric Associations began limited repairs; however, they do not have the financial resources to repair these lines without significant rate hikes to their customers, including the oil and gas industry, which will inevitably cause a reduction in investment in the Piceance Basin.

This disaster directly threatens the current administration's core policy objectives of Executive Order 14154, "Unleashing American Energy," achieving energy dominance, and ensuring the security of the nation's critical infrastructure. The failure to provide immediate and robust federal assistance will result in a significant, prolonged reduction in domestic energy supply, introduce volatility into energy markets, and cause substantial economic damage to a vital energy-producing region. This outcome would directly undermine the nation's economic and national security interests.

**Table: Economic Impact Analysis of the Piceance Gas Industry**

| Economic Indicator | Value | Source(s) | Regional Significance |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Regional (Delta, Garfield, Gunnison, Mesa, Moffat, Rio Blanco Counties)** | $1.08 Billion | Economic Contribution of the Oil and Gas Industry in the Piceance Basin - Colorado Mesa University, accessed September 18, 2025, | Represents 9.2% of the total regional economy. |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **GDP Contribution** | | https://www.coloradomesa.edu/energy/documents/economic-contribution-of-oil-and-gas-in-the-piceance.pdf | |
| **Total Jobs Supported** | 10,959 | “” | A primary source of employment for Northwest Colorado. |
| **Total Labor Income** | $737.2 Million | “” | Provides high-wage jobs that support local communities. |
| **Economic Driver** | Primary | Building Economic Resilience in Western Colorado's Oil and Gas Communities, accessed September 18, 2025, https://www.rff.org/publications/reports/building-economic-resilience-in-western-colorados-oil-and-gas-communities/ | The health of the regional economy is directly tied to the oil and gas industry. |

***Financial Impossibility for Rural Utilities***

The White River Electric Association (WREA) and Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association are rural electric associations. They do not have the $24.7 million in capital reserves needed to fund the reconstruction of the destroyed transmission lines. Their only viable path to financing these repairs is through debt, which must be serviced by significant rate hikes passed on to all customers.

***The Unbearable Burden of Rate Hikes***

These rate increases would have a devastating dual impact. For the rural residents of Rio Blanco County, many of whom are on fixed or low incomes, a major utility rate hike creates a severe "energy burden," forcing families to make impossible choices between paying for electricity and affording other necessities like food, medicine, and housing. For the oil and gas operators, where electricity is a primary operational cost, a massive rate hike would render extraction in the Piceance Basin less competitive and economically unviable. This would directly lead to a sharp reduction in new investment and a potential curtailment of current operations.

***Regional Economic Collapse***

A reduction in oil and gas investment would have catastrophic ripple effects across the regional economy. As the primary economic engine, the industry's health is directly tied to the region's prosperity. A decline would jeopardize the $1.08 billion it contributes to the regional GDP and the nearly 11,000 jobs it supports, leading to widespread unemployment, a collapse in local tax revenue, and the failure of countless supporting businesses.

***Concurrent Flood Damage***
Additionally, the fires primarily impacted forest lands owned by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) that make up the main watershed for this region, the White River Basin. The damage caused by the fires and the subsequent flooding and debris flows caused downstream impacts. Roads, bridges, and culverts have been overwhelmed by debris. The debris-clogged roads and overwhelmed culverts do more than damage infrastructure; they sever lifelines, isolating rural residents, hindering emergency response, and disrupting the agricultural economy that relies on these routes for transport.

Streams, irrigation ditches, and valleys that convey water have filled with silt and sediment. The water that travels through this basin contributes to water used for drinking, recreation, fish habitat, livestock, and irrigation. The nutrients and sediment in the water threaten downstream water treatment plants with infrastructure damage and poor drinking water quality. The multi-year drought compounds the issue;  the quality of the water coming from this watershed is problematic, and the decreased quantity of water exacerbates the problem.

The debris in this watershed and the post-fire flooding impacts threaten structures, homes, and businesses downstream. The trees and organic material burned by these fires threaten public safety due to a number of "hazard trees". There are nearly 300 hazard trees on or near public and government property that threaten the safety of people, property, and infrastructure. An aggressive and thoughtful strategy is needed to safely and efficiently remove these hazardous trees.

Rio Blanco County is steeped in agriculture. The impacts of drought, fire, and flooding caused considerable challenges for this community, where many residents make their livelihood through farming and ranching. Hundreds of acres of grazing and farm land were destroyed by the fire, making those areas unusable to farmers and ranchers. Alternate farming and ranching land is not easy to come by, and the loss of these resources caused a massive strain on producers, limiting their ability to care for their land and animals, and therefore, to make a living. In addition, post-fire-flooding also adversely impacted waterways used by livestock. The low quantity and low quality of water in Rio Blanco County put residential drinking water, hundreds of heads of livestock, and county natural resources at risk.

***Local and State Response***
Fire suppression and response coordination for fires that exceed local agency capabilities are supported and coordinated through the Colorado Division of Fire Prevention and Control (DFPC), a sister Division to the Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (DHSEM), also housed in the Department of Public Safety. DFPC provides nation-leading, state-of-the-art early detection technologies through multiple media, as well as coordinates and provides financial support for aggressive initial attack on unwanted fires such as the Lee and Elk fires. This coordination is done through a robust regional, statewide and national fire-based resource coordination network comprised of local, regional, state, tribal, and federal suppression resources and agreements. While this strategy is effective approximately 98% of the time, when extreme fire conditions exist, such as during the Lee and Elk fires, it is impossible to stop all fires from becoming large, prolonged disasters.

Both State and local government resources have been and will continue to be utilized to alleviate the conditions of this disaster. Colorado is well-versed in disaster response and recovery. State and local government leaders ensure coordinated response and recovery efforts focus on collaboration and whole community needs.

The verbal declaration I gave for the Lee and Elk fires activated the State Emergency Operations Plan, triggering coordination through the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC). DHSEM's Field Operations staff were deployed to Rio Blanco County to support the county's EOC operations and resource requests. DHSEM Field Operations staff maintained a physical presence within the county during the entirety of active fire suppression operations and maintained a presence during the following weeks. DHSEM staff worked closely with county staff to conduct a series of damage assessments and gain a better understanding of disaster-caused impacts and damages, including:

- The size, terrain, complexity, and incident management level of the two fires exceeded those resources available locally, requiring outside ground, aviation, and incident management resources to be ordered for suppression at a cost of over $18.6 million in State funding for these two fires.
- Hosting regular meetings with the county and regional partners to ensure PA-eligible and PA-eligible impacts were captured and to identify and prioritize unmet needs
- Convening the State Recovery Task Force (SRTF) to gather state and federal partners together to ensure cross-coordination, and understanding of the breadth of recovery concerns facing Rio Blanco County, and work towards finding solutions
- Activating the Economic, Infrastructure, and Natural Cultural Resources (to include agriculture) Recovery Support Functions to determine subject-matter specific recovery concerns and determine solutions that incorporate partners from all levels of government and non-governmental organizations
- Conducting virtual and in-person assessments to gather data on reported disaster-caused damage, including Initial Damage Assessment with local partners, SRTF Assessments (including hydrology, public health, natural resources, agriculture, and infrastructure analysis), data validation and state verification assessments, and the JPDA with FEMA, state, and local partners
- Coordinating with federal and state partners to determine possible programmatic solutions to disaster-caused impacts, including:
    - **Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS):** The State is working with NRCS to deploy the **Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program**. This program is vital for addressing immediate threats within the burn scar, such as removing debris from critical waterways and implementing erosion control measures to stabilize high-risk slopes. However, while essential for watershed health, the EWP program is not authorized to fund the reconstruction of public electrical transmission infrastructure or county-maintained roads and bridges.
    - **U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA):** Colorado is directing affected agricultural producers to FSA programs such as the **Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP)** for grazing losses and the **Emergency Conservation Program (ECP)** for fence and farmland repair. These programs provide crucial support to individual producers but cannot fund repairs

to public infrastructure like county roads, water control facilities, or public utilities.

- **Bureau of Land Management (BLM):** As the fires originated on and primarily impacted BLM land, coordination is underway on **post-fire rehabilitation and restoration efforts**. These actions are designed to mitigate long-term ecological damage and reduce future risks on federal lands. The BLM's mandate, however, does not extend to the repair of infrastructure owned by Rio Blanco County or the Rural Electric Associations.

At the local level, county emergency managers served as a major link to understanding the disaster's impacts and protecting residents. In conjunction with DHSEM, local emergency managers worked with county public works, parks, water systems experts, rural electric cooperatives, oil and gas producers, and other stakeholders to ensure disaster-caused damages didn't pose an immediate threat to residents. They ensured up-to-date damage information was reported to the state, stakeholders, and community members, providing situational awareness through multiple formats, including social media alerts and posts. Emergency managers held numerous meetings to plan, discuss outlooks, develop preparedness measures, and identify response actions to ensure effective coordination and communication of efforts. As the forefront of operations, DHSEM staff stayed connected at the local level to keep everyone informed within the chain of command. More information regarding local and state capacity to respond to the full extent of impacts from this disaster can be found in the subsequent "Local and State Capacity" sections.

The State, FEMA, and local partners conducted a hybrid JPDA. As damage data was submitted, state and federal partners reviewed documents, pictures, videos, and maps. Through virtual assessment, the JPDA team was able to verify fire-caused damage that occurred to private non-profit utilities WREA and Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association. An in-person site visit was conducted on September 16, 2025 to verify all damages that could not be verified through the virtual assessment. The site visit focused on property owned by Rio Blanco County (roads, culverts, landfill, water conservancy district, and debris) and the State (Colorado Parks and Wildlife and Colorado Department of Transportation). JPDA team findings are summarized in Enclosure B.

***Hazard Mitigation***

The fire started on BLM, not on local or state-controlled land. It spread to impact local, state, and privately owned land, with a huge impact on rural electric infrastructure. WREA has a tree-trimming budget that varies from $100,000 to $150,000 annually to mitigate fires. The lines that are located on Federal lands carry additional stipulations that can be difficult to navigate; however, once approved, the mitigation costs increase to include mitigation on Federal lands as well. Tri-State also participates in fire mitigation and has spent approximately $280,373 on the Meeker-Rangely line between 2020 and 2024, and $27,265 was spent on the Meeker-Axial line in 2021.

WREA also actively engages in line mitigation through its use of a "Fire Protection Mode", an operational mode that includes system de-energization and implementing proactive outages. WREA participates in strategic planning with other cooperatives, such as with Tri-State, and is a partner in state hazard and wildfire mitigation plans. Additional mitigation assistance was being

sought by WREA through the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP 5423) to further reduce wildfire fuels through the removal of trees and vegetation from their right-of-ways along their lines. This project was under review at the time of the fires and no physical work had started.

***Infrastructure Damage by Category***

***Category A: Debris Removal***

**Description of Damage**

Mudslide debris has and continues to have a tremendous impact on the county. Rio Blanco County has cleared large amounts of debris from roadways to maintain safety. While the debris has been removed from the roadways, it will ultimately need to be moved to a final disposal site. This will be a challenge and a financial drain during a difficult time for the county. Additionally, the State of Colorado anticipates the need for assistance to remove hazard trees from areas on or near public and government-owned property. The hazard trees pose a threat to the safety of people, property, and infrastructure. Additionally, debris caused the breach of an earthen dam, allowing a tremendous amount of silt to flow into fish ponds, impacting wildlife and recreational fishing. The dredging to clear the pond will cost over $1 million and take over 3 months to complete.

**Cost Estimate:** $2,117,239

The percentage of the total eligible PA cost estimate for Category A is 8%

***Category B: Emergency Protective Measures***

**Description of Damage**

There are significant costs associated with Emergency Protective Measures. However, both the Lee and Elk fires received Fire Management Assistance Grants (FMAG) and costs associated with Category B work are currently covered by the FMAG awards and therefore not included in this request.

***Category C: Roads and Bridges***

**Description of Damage**

Rio Blanco County incurred damage to numerous roads and road components including, surfaces, shoulders, ditches, and drainage structures (culverts). Stretches of more than four county roads experienced damage resulting from the floods that followed the Lee and Elk Fires. These roads and road components were greatly impacted by mudflows and debris clogging.

**Cost Estimate:** $366,836

The percentage of the total eligible PA cost estimate for Category C is 1%

***Category D: Water Control Facilities***

**Description of Damage**

The Colorado Parks and Wildlife's earthen dam was breached, and the stability of the dam was damaged during flooding after the fires. The damage from the breach extended to the campgrounds, picnic tables, and day-use fishing ponds. This area will require analysis to determine how to restore the dam to ensure safety and prevent further damage when rain and flooding happen again.

**Cost Estimate:** $200,000
The percentage of the total eligible PA cost estimate for Category D is 1%

***Category E: Public Buildings and Contents***

**Description of Damage**

There were no significant costs associated with Public Building and Equipment damage documented during the JPDA. Once Rio Blanco County completely assesses the damages, there may be additional damage identified at a later date.

**Cost Estimate:** $0.00

The percentage of the total eligible PA cost estimate is 0%

***Category F: Public Utilities***

**Description of Damage**

There was substantial damage to multiple public utilities. The White River Electric Association (WREA) provides electricity to the Piceance Basin, home to large oil and gas industry partners. Their primary and secondary transmission lines were significantly damaged, causing their tertiary line to be energized to support energy customers in the area. Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association also experienced major damage to its transmission infrastructure. In addition, the county incurred damage to a broadband tower.

**Cost Estimate:** $24,675,988

WREA distribution and transmission asset replacement = $23,697,309
Tri-State transmission asset replacement = $883,415
Rio Blanco County Broadband Tower replacement = $95,264

The percentage of the total eligible PA cost estimate for Category F is 90%

***Category G: Parks, Recreational, and Other Facilities***

**Description of Damage**

The county's landfill fencing was burned and requires replacement of posts, wire, and labor. The landfill pond will also require dredging due to the heavy amount of silt caused by flooding after the fires.

**Cost Estimate:** $131,000

The percentage of the total eligible PA cost estimate for Category G is less than 1%

***Colorado's Disaster History***

Colorado is no stranger to disasters. Year over year, we begin to see them more frequently. Fire and floods have become all too common. Drought conditions have spiked fire occurrences over the last few years, causing more intense burns. In the long term, this causes additional risks for post-fire flooding and mudslides. The list of disaster declarations below includes the challenges Colorado faces with wildfire and highlights the constant need to prioritize resources for concurrent incidents.

***Recent State Disaster Declarations***

| 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 | 2025 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| • D 2021 064 - Severe Winter Weather Conditions in Colorado<br>• *D 2020 003 - Presence of Coronavirus Disease 2019 in Colorado<br>• D 2021 123 - Muddy Slide Fire in Routt County<br>• D 2021 126 - Interstate 70 Disruptions from Flooding, Mudslides, and Debris Flow<br>• D 2021 127 - Burn Scar Flooding, Mudslides, and Rockslides in Multiple Counties | • *D 2022 004 - Marshall Fire and Straight-Line Winds in Boulder County<br>• D 2022 019 - Bent's Fort and Fort Lyons Fires in Otero and Bent Counties<br>• D 2022 024 - High Park Fire in Teller County<br>• D 2022 025 - Ute Pass Fire in La Plata County<br>• D 2022 030 - Menkhaven Fire in Conejos County<br>• D 2022 039 - Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza | • D 2023 002 - Extreme Cold Temperatures Throughout Colorado<br>• D 2023 010 - Gageby Creek Fire in Bent County<br>• *D 2023 011/019 - June 2023 Severe Weather and Flooding in Arapahoe, Cheyenne, Douglas, El Paso, Elbert, Kit Carson, Lincoln, Logan, Baca, Jefferson, Kiowa, Prowers, Teller and Washington Counties<br>• D 2023 012 - Spring Creek Fire in Garfield County<br>• D 2023 013 - Titan Fire in Las Animas County<br>• D 2023 015 - Lowline Fire in Gunnison County<br>• D 2023 021 - Iron Fire in Moffat County<br>• D 2023 022 - Hazardous Materials Incident in Fremont County | • D 2024 002 - Extreme Cold Temperatures Throughout Colorado<br>• D 2024 006 - U.S. 50 Blue Mesa Middle Bridge Closure in Gunnison, Hinsdale, and Montrose Counties<br>• D 2024 008 - Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in Weld County<br>• D 2024 010 - Currant Creek Fire in Delta County<br>• D 2024 011 - Alexander Mountain Fire in Larimer County<br>• D 2024 012 - Stone Mountain Fire in Boulder and Larimer Counties<br>• D 2024 013 - Quarry Fire in Jefferson County<br>• D 2024 014 - Flooding and Debris Flow in Ouray County<br>• D 2024 016 - Pearl Fire in Larimer County<br>• D 2024 017 - Hurricane Milton<br>• D 2024 018 - Extreme Winter Storm Throughout Colorado | • D 2025 010 - Declaring a Disaster Emergency Due to a Severe Weather Event Resulting in Dangerous Fire Conditions in Delta, Mesa, and Montrose Counties<br>• D 2025 012 - Early Wildfire Response and Reduce Fire Risk<br>• D 2025 013 - HazMat Incident in Pueblo County<br>• **D 2025 015 - Elk and Lee Fires in Rio Blanco and Garfield Counties**<br>• D 2025 016 - Leroux Fire in Delta County<br>• D 2025 017 - Oak Fire in Archuleta County<br>• D 2025 018 - Crosho Fire in Rio Blanco and Routt Counties |
| | | | | *Resulted in Presidential Major Disaster Declarations |

Since July 2024, fifteen state disaster declarations have been made. Eleven of those were related to dangerous fire conditions and fire response. DHSEM has coordinated with the Governor's Office to obtain additional funding to address the impacts of these disasters. However, additional funding is made available through the Colorado Disaster Emergency Fund (DEF) or the Disaster Resilience and Recovery (DRR) fund, both of which are not standalone, annually appropriated funds. Therefore, when a disaster occurs, the DEF and DRR are sourced from a

myriad of State budgets and are not currently sufficient to address the impacted communities' needs. The table below outlines the disasters that have occurred since last July that have resulted in the State spending its own funds, including to assist counties.

***State Funds Utilized Since July 2024***

| Incident Name | Requested Assistance Date | Funds Transferred to the DEF |
|---|---|---|
| D 2024 008 - Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in Weld County | 7/5/2024 | $3,500,000.00 |
| D 2024 010 - Currant Creek Fire in Delta County | 7/28/2024 | $157,000.00 |
| D 2024 011 - Alexander Mountain Fire in Larimer County | 7/29/2024 | $5,445,000.00 |
| D 2024 012 - Stone Mountain Fire in Boulder and Larimer Counties | 7/30/2024 | $2,960,000.00 |
| D 2024 013 - Quarry Fire in Jefferson County | 7/31/2024 | $4,839,000.00 |
| D 2024 014 - Flooding and Debris Flow in Ouray County | 8/13/2024 | $4,900,000.00 |
| D 2024 016 - Pearl Fire in Larimer County | 9/16/2024 | $566,000.00 |
| D 2024 018 - Extreme Winter Storm | 11/6/2024 | $245,000.00 |
| D 2025 010 - Declaring a Disaster Emergency Due to a Severe Weather Event Resulting in Dangerous Fire Conditions in Delta, Mesa, and Montrose Counties | 7/10/2025 | $1,889,700.00 |
| D 2025 015 - Elk and Lee Fires in Rio Blanco and Garfield Counties | 8/3/2025 | $18,597,000.00 |
| D 2025 016 - Leroux Fire in Delta County | 8/4/2025 | $41,000.00 |
| D 2025 017 - Oak Fire in Archuleta County | 8/10/2025 | $1,367,000.00 |
| D 2025 018 - Crosho Fire in Rio Blanco and Routt Counties | 8/12/2025 | $3,857,000.00 |
| D 2025 012 - Early Wildfire Response and Reduce Fire Risk | 8/14/2025 | $2,500,000 |
| D 2025 013 - HazMat Incident in Pueblo County | 8/21/2025 | $300,000.00 |
| Total spent by the State over the last twelve months = $51,163,700 | | |

***Exceeded Capacity***
Agencies that were impacted by the Lee and Elk fires range from local and state governments to independent utility companies and private property owners. The White River Electric Association (WREA) was one of the hardest hit, its damage cost estimates surpassing $22 million. WREA is a small rural electric association with only 26 staff members. The extensive damage caused by the fire outweighs the capability and capacity of WREA to repair and rebuild /without federal assistance. The criticality of this operation and the urgency of getting its infrastructure up and running is detailed in the *Description of Damage* section above.

The State of Colorado has already invested over $51.1 million in this disaster and other disasters since July 2024. The State simply does not have the capacity to help WREA, Tri-State, and Rio Blanco County with more than $27 million for recovery after the $18.6 million it has already invested for this disaster. For this reason, the State is requesting support for this critical region from our federal partners. Without federal assistance, WREA would likely be unable to support a full rebuild of the primary and secondary lines that were damaged by the fire, leaving the tertiary CA line to be the only power source supplying the Piceance Basin. At this time, there is no backup in place for the CA line. If this line were damaged or de-energized, numerous oil, gas, and mining operations would be out of power. This would have massive impacts to the economy on a local, regional, and potentially national level. The FEMA PA program is the only federal program that can provide the needed assistance to Rio Blanco County and the impacted entities. Without FEMA Public Assistance being approved for this disaster, there will be substantial negative impacts to the County, the State, the Rural Electric Associations, the oil and gas industry, and the entire nation.

***Hazard Mitigation Grant Program***
The State of Colorado also requests the activation of the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) for Rio Blanco County. The catastrophic nature of this disaster, and its cascading impacts, created not only immediate recovery needs but also a long-term, multi-year threat that requires a proactive mitigation strategy. Public Assistance is essential for repairing current damage, but only HMGP can provide the resources necessary to break the cycle of repeated disasters and build a more resilient community for the future.

The Lee and Elk fires have fundamentally altered the landscape of Rio Blanco County, leaving the area highly vulnerable to catastrophic debris flows and flash flooding for the next five to ten years. This is not a hypothetical risk; it is a certainty, and is already happening. Activating HMGP is a cost-effective investment in the long-term safety and security of Rio Blanco County, its residents, and its critical infrastructure.

With HMGP funding, the State and its local partners can implement high-impact mitigation projects tailored to the post-wildfire environment. Potential projects include:

- **Watershed and Debris Flow Mitigation:** Implementing critical post-fire mitigation measures such as erosion control, slope stabilization, the construction of debris basins, and upgrading culverts to protect downstream infrastructure and water supplies from debris flows.

- **Enhanced Warning and Planning:** Investing in advanced early warning systems for flash floods and debris flows and providing funding to update local hazard mitigation plans to incorporate the new realities of the post-fire landscape.
- **Wildfire Risk Reduction for Critical Infrastructure:** Hardening essential public facilities and utilities against future wildfires through the use of ignition-resistant materials and the strategic implementation of hazardous fuels reduction programs in the wildland-urban interface.

The activation of HMGP is not an ancillary request; it is a core component of a comprehensive and responsible recovery strategy. It will empower the State of Colorado to move beyond simple reconstruction and actively reduce future risk, protecting lives, property, and the vital energy infrastructure that is of national importance.

***Certification and Appointments***

I certify that for this major disaster, the State of Colorado and local governments will assume all applicable non-federal shared costs as required by the Stafford Act. *The State of Colorado anticipates the need for debris removal operations as well. Pursuant to sections 403 and 407 of the Stafford Act, 42 U.S.C. § 5170b and 5173, the State agrees to indemnify and hold harmless the United States of America for any claims arising from the removal of debris or wreckage from this disaster to the extent permitted by law. The State agrees that eligible debris removal from public and private property will not occur until the landowner signs an unconditional authorization for the removal of debris.*

Colorado designates Kevin R. Klein, Director of the Colorado Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, as the Governor's Authorized Representative, and Trevor Denney, Director of the Colorado Office of Emergency Management, as the State Coordinating Officer for this request. They will work with the Federal Emergency Management Agency and provide further information or justification on my behalf.

Sincerely,

Jared Polis
Governor

Attachments

*OMB No. 1660-0009/FEMA Form 010-0-13*
*Enclosure B: Public Assistance*