



STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

CHRISTOPHER T. SUNUNU
Governor

February 17, 2023

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden Jr.
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Through: Lori Ehrlich
Regional Administrator
FEMA Region 1, Boston, MA 02110

RE: Request for Presidential Major Disaster Declaration

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 CFR § 206.36, I respectfully request that a major disaster be declared for the State of New Hampshire (NH). This request is a result of a severe weather event that occurred on December 22-25, 2022, that overwhelmed state and local resources and required an immediate and urgent response, impacting 8 of the state's 10 counties. At the peak of the incident, flash flooding and severe wind prompted numerous local Emergency Operations Centers to open, downed many trees that blocked roads, left residents with no power or heat, and required the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) to open and provide coordination for information sharing and resource support. This request includes a designation of the full Public Assistance Program for Belknap, Carroll, Coos, and Grafton counties and a statewide designation of the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program.

As a direct result of the incident, NH sustained major damages to state and local infrastructure that led to numerous requests for state assistance. Reported damages were concentrated in Belknap, Carroll, Coos, and Grafton counties where the wind was most severe; however, other areas of the state saw intense wind and flooding that threatened public safety and damaged infrastructure. The impact of this event was felt throughout the local mutual aid and state systems as personnel and assets were diverted to the incident area. The response consumed staff time and exhausted available resources due to significant flash flooding and heavy winds that caused extensive roadway destruction and left debris that restricted travel and emergency operations. Fortunately, there were no deaths or serious injuries associated with this incident.

This severe weather event was preceded by heavy snowfall across the State of New Hampshire. Rapid warming occurred on December 23, creating an abundant runoff from snow melt accompanied by extreme rainfall. This combination created water flow and runoff that many culverts did not have the capacity to handle. The snow that remained on the trees became wet and heavy, and combined with severe winds, caused trees and limbs to fall causing severe damages across the state and widespread power outages over the Christmas weekend. By

1830 on December 23, there were 133,883 power outages reported, which prompted local communities to open warming centers and overnight shelters as temperatures dropped drastically overnight.

Based on Initial Damage Assessments (IDA) reported by the communities, the Director of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (HSEM), Robert M. Buxton, requested a Joint Preliminary Damage Assessment (PDA) on January 6, 2023. The assessment was conducted from January 17 through January 27, 2023, by teams composed of representatives from local, state, and federal agencies. The validation and documentation collection effort continued through February 15, 2023. Joint PDAs were completed in 50 New Hampshire communities. Additionally, three State agencies — Department of Transportation, Department of Natural and Cultural Resources and NH Division of Ports and Harbors and one private non-profit utility providing critical services, New Hampshire Electric Co-op (NHEC) — completed PDAs. The effects of this incident are evident as demonstrated in the Public Assistance Enclosure B.

Current state and local damages have been verified at \$1,965,549 (\$1.42 per capita) from this event. An additional amount was verified by FEMA for four additional counties: Merrimack at \$271,573, Rockingham County at \$542,175, Strafford County at \$162,780 and Sullivan County at \$160,373, which brings the state's total to \$3,102,420 (\$2.25 per capita), exceeding the state indicator. Although these counties did not meet their monetary threshold to request a Major Disaster Declaration, the financial and economic impact felt by the communities remains. The figures captured in Enclosure B reflect uninsured losses for all the above-named counties and only those that meet FEMA project eligibility at initial review; the overall losses were significantly higher and are some are expected to rise. As described in Enclosure B below, over 46.68% (\$1,448,250) of the Public Assistance cost estimate involved Public Utilities (CAT F), another 37.09% (\$1,150,668) of the costs involved debris removal and cleanup operations (CAT A). Other permanent work, including Category C (Roads and Bridges), Category E (Buildings and Equipment) and Category G (Parks and Recreation), have a current assessment of \$404,569, which is 13.04% of the Public Assistance cost estimate. Emergency work, Category B (Emergency Protective Measures), are estimated at \$98,934 in damages, which is 3.19% of the total Public Assistance cost estimate. These percentages highlight the impact to public infrastructure in this event. We anticipate these costs to increase as communities and state partners continue to gather additional costs and damage information for both emergency and permanent work.

Across the state, the communities that sustained the most eligible damage regarding the PDA assessment include Gilford, Hanover, Plymouth, Freedom, and Alton. Additionally, multiple state agencies experienced damages from this event, including NH Division of Ports and Harbors, as did the NH Electric Co-op, a private non-profit utility.

On December 22, the Town of Gilford's highway department began conducting damage control townwide. There were about 15 roads that needed to be closed due to downed trees. The highway department used trucks to push debris off the roadways. The melting snow and rainfall caused some minor and some major washouts on town roads. Extreme water flows and debris clogged numerous culverts; two culverts failed completely. The town had to run the sewer pumps on generators as they had lost power to the pump stations. There were scattered power outages throughout the entire town. On Governor's Island, there was so much brush, debris and downed trees that parts of the island were inaccessible. Some town roads sustained severe damage. One road had an entire culvert collapse, a headwall collapsed on another culvert, and roads were washed out due to water having no place to dissipate to because of snowbanks along the road shoulders. Verified damages estimated at \$86,512.

Prior to the weather event, the Town of Plymouth had an estimated 5" of snow on the ground. This weather event brought warm temperatures that melted the snow and added an additional 5" of rain. The town received

an estimated 3” of rain within the first three hours of the storm making impact. Due to the flooding caused by the snow melt and the severe rain, multiple roads in the town sustained severe damages. On Hunt Road, the culvert failed causing water to run down the hill, washing out the center of the road. On Texas Hill Road, the entire system of culverts failed due to the immense amount of water washing out gravel from the road that clogged the culverts. FEMA has verified \$68,717 in damages.

Extremely high tides coupled with the eastern wind caused pieces and parts of the seawall to blow across the parking lot and access road. NH Division of Ports and Harbors had to do emergency work to clear that road. Their fuel system got flooded out. Ports and Harbor had to get an environmental contractor to inspect the system to make sure the pumps were not compromised. The state office in the harbor got flooded, which caused the need for inspections in case of mold. There was extensive damage to the floors and walls of the building. The biggest issues they had was the breakdown of the seawall, the fuel tank issues, and the cleanup in Rye Harbor. In Hampton, NH Division of Ports and Harbors was responsible for the clearing of debris from the roadways consisting of stone, rocks, gravel, and sand. FEMA verified \$82,084 in damages.

In response to the December 22-25, 2022, weather storm event, NHEC immediately began engaging in multi-county coordinated debris removal and emergency protective measures. NHEC’s Emergency Response Team organized contractors, mutual aid teams, and pre-staged NHEC staff in anticipation of system damage. NHEC used a balance of force account labor and equipment, and mutual aid contractors, and contract labor for the immediate response. Immediate efforts included moving snow, ice, tree debris, cutting, clearing, and removing damaged NHEC equipment for public safety and facilitating repairs to the NHEC electric system. NHEC provided barricades and “wire guards” for public safety at scenes of downed conductors, trees, and blocked roads. NHEC made temporary repairs to critical infrastructure to restore power until permanent repairs were/are possible, including repairs of broken electrical poles, crossarms and associated hardware. Response teams determined approximately 100 broken electrical poles. Through the coordinated efforts with contractors and mutual aid entities, NHEC ensured that damaged transformers, switch gear, conductors were replaced, and began the permanent repairs to the NHEC electrical infrastructure. At least one NH island sustained 17 broken electrical poles. The hazardous conditions of gusty wind, heavy rain, and alternating freezing and thawing temperatures delayed response to another island to permit access. As the storm abated, statewide power restoration evolved with the coordinated efforts of NHEC, mutual aid contractors, other electrical co-ops, and public power. Residents on multiple Lake Winnepesaukee islands remained without power for several weeks. NH Electric Co-op sustained a verified \$2,097,862 in damages across six counties.

Throughout state communities, roads were undermined, and roadside shoulders, ditches, and adjacent slopes were washed away. State and local culverts, pipe headwalls, and other drainage structures were overwhelmed with water and debris causing damage or complete destruction to the drainage system and surrounding areas and infrastructure. Water that would have normally been conveyed by the drainage system was forced to detour to other areas not designed to handle such flows. The volume of debris caused by this weather event was notable. These damages presented a hazard to the travel of the public, as well as obstacles for first responders in preserving public health and safety. Some of the washouts carried dirt and cobble onto private property, and large amounts of debris were deposited on roads thus making them impassable. The extensive damage to state, local, and private roads in these communities trapped residents in their homes and prevented access by emergency personnel.

Individual Assistance requests from residents have been managed by the state, and two (2) cases have been reported to date. Additional cases are possible. None of the existing cases have been moved to long term recovery as of this date. Local communities reported minor damages to private properties, and some motor

vehicles were totaled due to falling trees; most were insurable damages. The state has reached out to help residents locate additional assistance programs that they may qualify for.

The Department of Safety, including State Police and Emergency Communications (i.e., State Public Safety Answering Points), responded to emergency calls for assistance from residents, visitors, and towns. Between the hours of 1700-1800 hrs. on December 23, 2022, the Public Safety Answering Point processed 972 calls from the local communities. Call logs illustrate several requests for assistance due to downed trees and power lines. Utility poles were toppled by winds or heavy wet snow. State agencies also responded to call out requests from towns for state assistance.

Pursuant to the severity of this storm, December 23, 2022, I executed the State Emergency Operations Plan (SEOP) with the activation of the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) to a Partial Level. While I did not declare a State of Emergency in NH, the nature and amount of state and local governmental resources that have been or will be used to alleviate the conditions of this disaster are as follows:

1. The SEOC was partially activated at 0800 hours on December 23, 2022, following reports of flooding and severe wind damages from local communities and was staffed until 1900 hours on December 25, 2022, when all communities had been contacted to confirm the need for state assistance and coordinated resources were no longer required. After the closure of the SEOC, the HSEM Duty Officer remained on call on a 24/7 basis to coordinate any additional needs that the local communities may need from the State.
2. Emergency Support Functions (ESFs) that were activated at the time of the SEOC activation included Emergency Management (ESF 5), and Public Information (ESF 15). Other ESFs provided support by monitoring the incident including Transportation (ESF 1); Communications and Alerting (ESF 2); Mass Care, Housing and Human Services (ESF 6); Health and Medical (ESF 8); Agriculture, Cultural and Natural Resources (ESF 11); Energy (ESF 12); and Law Enforcement (ESF 13).
3. The Department of Transportation coordinated transportation, public works, and engineering needs across the state. Numerous roads across the state required debris removal and repairs to infrastructure.
4. The American Red Cross provided support and resources for sheltering needs.
5. Sixteen (16) communities activated or partially activated their local Emergency Operations Centers (EOC) to coordinate their response efforts, assess damages, monitor road closures, and respond to emergency calls.

The state is actively managing recovery efforts for eight (8) disasters (DR 4329, DR 4355, DR 4370, DR 4371, DR 4457, DR 4614, DR 4622, and DR 4624, five (5) of which were declared within a 22-month period between August 2017 and July 2019. If granted, this would be the third federally declared disaster the state has experienced in the last 18 months. The following list of incidents capture events over the last six (6) years in which state and local jurisdictions expended a considerable amount of their own funds for response and recovery efforts. These events resulted in Federally Declared Disasters that all have ongoing recovery operations at this time:

- July 29- August 2, 2021- FEMA- 4624- DR-
 - On the heels of the July 17-19, 2021, storm, NH state was struck by a second storm which was characterized by two rounds of rainfall, the first of which took place July 29-30, 2021, and the second of which took place August 1-2, 2021. The two rainfall events occurred less than 48 hours apart. There was limited time between the end of the first round of rainfall and the start of the second. There is hydrological data supporting the connection between the two rounds of flash flooding the continuation of above average water levels in rivers and reservoirs in

- southwestern New Hampshire between the two dates supported a logical and scientific decision that led to these two events being considered as a single natural disaster.
- The Town of Acworth in Sullivan County was the hardest hit community during this event. The heavy rains washed out 75% of the town's road infrastructure and numerous culverts. Flooding caused damages to 29 of the town's roads, prompting the complete closure of 12 of those. Crane Brook Road, for example, sustained such significant damage that the town employed engineer estimated that none of road was salvageable, and the road would need to be rebuilt completely. The Town of Acworth alone sustained an estimated \$1,394,639 in damages from this event.
 - Throughout these communities, roads were undermined, and roadside shoulders, ditches, and adjacent slopes were washed away. State and local culverts, pipe headwalls, bridges, and other drainage structures were overwhelmed with water and debris causing damage or complete destruction to area infrastructure.
 - The state continues to actively work with applicants to submit recovery projects to FEMA for Federal reimbursement.
- July 17-19, 2021- FEMA- 4622- DR
 - Five to eight inches of rain had already fallen within the previous 30-day period. This area of the state typically sees around 4-5 inches of rainfall throughout the entire month of July, meaning the area was on track to be well above the average for monthly precipitation. Soil moisture and river levels were above average at the start of the rainfall event that caused the flooding on July 17-19, 2021. Two rounds of widespread, heavy precipitation moved through southwestern New Hampshire on the evening of July 17, 2021.
 - A combination of very warm, moist air and slow-moving clusters of thunderstorms deposited more than 2-4 inches of rainfall across the disaster area, with the highest official rainfall report being 6.90 inches in the Town of Jaffrey. Most of the precipitation fell within a period of less than 12 hours, with estimated rainfall rates as high as 3 inches per hour reported at times.
 - According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Atlas data, the recurrence interval of a rainfall event of this magnitude is once every 25 to 50 years, with isolated areas with the highest rainfall amounts, such as Jaffrey, experiencing a 1% probability event (a recurrence interval of 100 years). Extensive flooding was reported in several towns across southwestern New Hampshire through the early morning hours of July 18, and flood waters did not fully recede along river and streams in the impacted area until July 19.
 - The state continues to work with applicants from this disaster to submit projects for reimbursement from FEMA.
 - January 20, 2020, and ongoing: FEMA-4516-DR
 - The COVID-19 Pandemic has put an incredible amount of strain on State and local resources and response capabilities. The length and sheer magnitude of this disaster has far exceeded any that the State has experienced in the past. To date, 373,327 people have tested positive in New Hampshire for COVID-19 and 2,973 people have died because of the virus. NH State continues to coordinate with Federal and local partners to process projects for reimbursement for costs expended in response to the COVID 19 disaster.
 - July 11-12, 2019: FEMA-4457-DR
 - A flash flooding event caused significant damages to towns in Grafton County. The recurrence interval of a rainfall event of the magnitude that occurred during this incident is once every 1,000 years, or 0.1% chance annually according to NOAA Atlas-14 data.

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- The flooding caused damages in towns that exceeded seven to 10 times their annual operating budgets. Campgrounds were flooded, prompting emergency swift water rescues, emergency road closures, and debris plugged a 16-foot-wide culvert, resulting in a dam-like structure that burst in the middle of the night, sending a 15-foot wall of water downstream in several communities. The water washed away roads, culverts, berms, and a local racetrack that is a major economic staple in the area. State infrastructure, including snowmobile, hiking, and other recreational trails that are essential to the New Hampshire economy, were damaged and closed to the public for many weeks.
- NH is still actively managing recovery efforts for this disaster. Towns in Grafton County were hit particularly hard in this event and were still recovering from DR 4355 and DR 4329 when this flash flooding event occurred. Many of the same areas that suffered flooding and damages to their infrastructure in DR 4355 saw new and more significant damage following this flash flooding event. The economic strain that resulted from these back-to-back disasters has left some towns ill-equipped to manage another disaster.
- March 13-14, 2018: FEMA-4371-DR
 - A severe winter storm resulted in significant snowfall in all 10 counties and required a comprehensive statewide snow removal response by local and state agencies. Blizzard conditions caused hundreds of traffic accidents and vehicles off the road, forced over 500 school closures, and delayed or canceled transit, rail and flights across much of the state.
 - NH is still actively managing administrative functions for this disaster declaration.
- March 2-8, 2018: FEMA-4370-DR
 - Strong winds, significant storm surge up to three (3) feet, and coastal flooding caused widespread damages to infrastructure and the seawall in Rockingham County. At the peak of the incident, wave heights reached upwards of 18 feet.
 - NH is still actively managing recovery efforts for this disaster. Seawall repairs and mitigation will take multiple years to complete due to project complexity.
- October 29 – November 1, 2017: FEMA-4355-DR
 - A low-pressure system combined with the remnants of Tropical Storm Philippe to produce a historic coastal storm that caused unprecedented winds and flooding across the entire state and resulted in power outages to over 270,000 customers and significant infrastructure damage.
 - NH is still actively managing recovery efforts for this disaster. Towns in Grafton County were hit particularly hard in this event and were still recovering from DR 4329 when this most recent flash flooding event occurred. Many of the same areas that suffered flooding and damages to their infrastructure in DR 4329 saw new and more significant damage following this flash flooding event.
- July 1-2, 2017: FEMA-4329-DR
 - Severe thunderstorms with heavy rain left widespread damages to state and local infrastructure. The storm resulted in flooded campgrounds that were evacuated to a local shelter and caused significant damages in Coos and Grafton Counties.
 - NH is still actively managing recovery efforts for this disaster. Towns in Grafton County were still recovering from DR 4316 when this most recent flash flooding event occurred. They had not had a chance to completely recover from a non-declared severe storm in July when they suffered additional flooding and damages to their infrastructure.

Given the severity and magnitude of this natural disaster, Federal assistance is necessary to supplement the efforts and available resources of the state and local governments to recover from disaster related losses. Additionally, as required by 44 CFR § 206.36 (c)(5), I certify that all state and local government obligations and expenditures for the current disaster will comply with all applicable cost sharing requirements of the Stafford Act.

Thank you for your consideration of this Major Disaster Declaration Request. I look forward to your response. Please do not hesitate to contact me or my staff with any questions.

Sincerely,



Christopher T. Sununu
Governor

*Enclosures: OMB No. 1660-0009/FEMA Form 010-0-13
Weather and Hydrological Summary, NWS Gray, ME
B: Supplemental Information for Public Assistance*