



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

September 21, 2015

The President
The White House
Washington, D. C. 20500

Through: Robert J. Fenton, Jr.
Regional Administrator
Federal Emergency Management
Agency, Region IX
Oakland, California, 94607-4052

Dear Mr. President:

I very much appreciate your concern and personal call last week regarding California's wildfires.

Pursuant to Section 401 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, 42 U.S.C. Sections §§ 5121-5207 (Stafford Act), and Title 44 of the Code of Federal Regulations Section 206.36, I hereby request you declare a major disaster for in the State of California as a result of the Butte Fire burning in Amador and Calaveras Counties.

The Butte Fire began in Amador County on September 9, 2015, quickly spreading through Calaveras County. Given this fire's rate of spread, size, and intensity, scientists consider it to be a "megafire," which behaves differently than typical wildfires. Megafires expand quickly and unpredictably, thriving on dead trees, dry vegetation, and wind conditions. Winds propel burning embers far ahead of the existing fire, accelerating fire growth at a pace that is very difficult to control. Four years of extreme drought conditions have parched our landscapes and created millions of dead trees that have increased California's vulnerability to these types of fires.

The Butte Fire has burned over 70,760 acres and it is already considered the 12th most destructive wildfire in California's history. Presently, it is only 74 percent contained. It has destroyed more than 475 homes and 343 nonresidential properties and threatened over 6,000 single residences and hundreds of nonresidential properties. While we have initiated preliminary damage assessments, 53 parcels still need to be validated. The assessments are confirming approximately 95 percent validation of destruction. As such, the number of destroyed homes may increase by over 50 homes. More than 12,000 residents were issued mandatory evacuation orders necessitating the opening of 11 shelters in Amador and Calaveras Counties. Presently, three shelters continue to support nearly 100 residents.

The most significant impacts of the Butte Fire are located in Calaveras County. Due to the fire's rapid rate of spread, many residents had little time to flee, and some required rescue by firefighters and local law enforcement. Tragically, the Butte Fire has taken two lives. Several residents are missing and our emergency responders anticipate the number of fatalities could grow.

The devastation and disruption caused by the Butte Fire is extraordinary. Thousands have been made homeless by the fire. Schools throughout the area were closed. The fire destroyed nearly 500 utility poles causing the loss of power and telephone service to thousands of residents. The Sierra Vista communications site was burned over causing telephone and power transmission to be lost, resulting in the local California Highway Patrol losing telephone communication. Five cell towers are operating on back-up power systems. While there is no damage to the water system infrastructure, water pressure has been lost as a result of the firefighting efforts. Calaveras County Water District has issued a Boil Water Notice for its Sheep Ranch Water System. This system serves approximately 100 residences.

On September 11, 2015, I declared a State of Emergency as a result of the Butte Fire under the California Emergency Services Act. The Office of Emergency Services activated our State Operations Center as well as the Inland Regional Operations Center. The State's Emergency Operations Plan was implemented and all necessary state assets were deployed, including the California National Guard. Calaveras and Amador Counties also activated their local Emergency Operations Centers. Both the Calaveras County and the City of Angels Camp declared local emergencies.

Nearly 5,000 firefighters, including California National Guard members, were deployed to fight the fire. Over a hundred local law enforcement officers and several emergency managers from neighboring counties have been deployed to assist with the response through the State's mutual aid process. The California Department of Social Services is assisting with shelter operations and is providing accommodations to individuals with access and functional needs. The Department of Social Services is also coordinating with Calaveras County to assist in identifying long-term solutions for displaced residents, including the monitoring of 13 known community care licensing facilities. The American Red Cross, Salvation Army, and Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster are providing support to the community and disaster survivors.

Huge amounts of wreckage and debris must be expeditiously removed to eliminate the immediate threat to lives, public health and safety. Fast debris removal is also necessary to community rebuilding and economic recovery of impacted communities. It is estimated there are more than 500 properties that require major debris removal, each averaging 100 tons of debris that must be removed. Debris hazards, including asbestos, heavy metals, structural debris, ash, concrete foundations, and metals pose a public health and safety concern and threaten the health of the local environment.

Insurance information has not been fully assessed as many residents still remain homeless or displaced and have not been able to provide specific insurance information to the assessment teams. We expect some portion of the disaster survivors have insurance coverage, but we anticipate many have no insurance coverage or are underinsured. The California Department of Insurance identified 12 insurance carriers reporting a total of 647 property claims to date of which 219 are considered a total loss. This number of total loss claims is less than half the number of destroyed homes. This information did not distinguish between owner-occupied and rental properties.

Even for those residents who have insurance coverage, major challenges remain to recovering their lives. Calaveras County is a rural mountain community and has very little available rental or temporary housing to accommodate homeowners during the rebuilding process. As a result, many of these residents will need to seek temporary housing a long distance away from Calaveras County. This relocation will add undue hardship for families with school children or whose jobs are in the affected area. Additionally, victims may permanently relocate outside of Calaveras County, further hindering the community's ability to recover.

Calaveras County's unemployment rate is 6.7 percent which is higher than the State's average, and the County has few major employers. Also, more than 25 percent of the community is over 65 and is presumably living on a fixed income. More than 17 percent of the population is identified as being "disabled." A breakdown of Individual Assistance Program demographics is presented directly below:

	Population*	Average of Persons Below Poverty Level*	Median Household Income*	Percent Elderly (over 65 yrs)*	Percent Disabled**	Percent Pre-Disaster Unemployment***
National		15.4%	\$53,046	14.5%	12.6%	5.3%
California	37,253,956	15.9%	\$61,094	12.9%	10.6%	6.2%
Calaveras	45,578	10.9%	\$55,295	25.1%	17.6%	6.7%

* 2009-2013 U.S. Census

** 2014 U.S. Census

*** Bureau of Labor

California has suffered multiple disasters in the past year, which have severely impacted its resources. In October 2014, California received a Presidential Major Disaster Declaration for the South Napa Earthquake and has received ten Fire Management Assistance Grants to battle fires in the state. I have also proclaimed states of emergency for four storm events throughout the state in the past 12 months. Additionally, there have been 69 major fires and over 5,345 fire starts in California since January 2015. The acreage burned this year is nearly triple the acres burned in 2014. Presently, over 11,000 firefighters are battling five active fires that are burning nearly 400,000 acres, displaced thousands, and resulted in injuries and loss of life. To protect lives and property from this increased fire threat, State government has provided over \$200 million in emergency funding for additional wildfire fighting in the last two years.

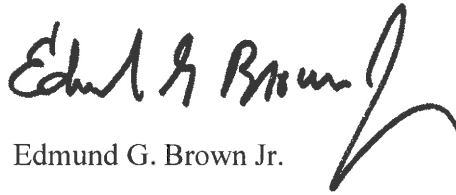
The past four years of extreme drought have also impacted the State's resources. The State has contributed more than three billion dollars in funds and capital investments responding to the impacts of the drought. These resources provide funding for immediate relief to impacted communities and established emergency programs to protect drinking water supplies, provide emergency food aid, fund emergency housing needs, support devastated farming communities, and protect endangered fish and other animals from the drought. In addition to increasing the State's firefighting capacity and budget, I have proclaimed four states of emergency for wildfires in just the last twelve months, including a statewide declaration of emergency on July 31, 2015, due to numerous fires that were raging simultaneously. Additionally, the drought conditions and the burned topography have created a dangerously high probability of floods, debris flow, and mudslides with the slightest amount of precipitation.

I have determined this incident is of such severity and magnitude an effective response is beyond the capabilities of the state and affected local governments and that supplemental federal assistance is necessary. I am specifically requesting all Individual Assistance Programs for Calaveras County, including the Individuals and Households Program, Transitional Sheltering Assistance, Disaster Case Management, Disaster Unemployment Assistance, Crisis Counseling and Disaster Legal Services, Hazard Mitigation statewide; and any other Stafford Act disaster assistance programs that may be appropriate for the declared counties. I am also requesting U.S. Small Business Administration disaster loans and funds from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Emergency Loan Program.

I certify for this major disaster the State and local governments will assume all applicable non-federal shared costs as required by the Stafford Act. I have designated the Director of the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services, Mark Ghilarducci, as the State Coordinating Officer for this request. Mr. Ghilarducci will work with FEMA in continuing to assess damages and may provide more information or justification on my behalf.

Thank you very much for considering this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Edmund G. Brown Jr.", with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Edmund G. Brown Jr.

Enclosures

OMB No. 1660-0009/FEMA Form 010-0-13

A: Individual Assistance

B: Public Assistance

C: Requirements for Other Federal Agency Programs

D: Historic and Current Snowfall Data