



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

December 20, 2017

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 would first like to thank you for issuing an Emergency Declaration on December 8, 2017, and for the assistance the federal government has provided in response to the Southern California wildfires. Also, we especially would like to thank the Federal Emergency Management Agency for the continued support for the Northern California wildfires beginning in October 2017. 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 respectfully request you declare a major disaster in the State of California as a result of the devastating wildfires burning in Southern California for weeks.

Beginning on December 4, 2017, warm temperatures, fierce Santa Ana winds, and low humidity caused the National Weather Service to issue multiple Red Flag Fire Warnings for all of Southern California. That same day, the Thomas Fire ignited in Ventura County, scorching over 270,000 acres and destroying over 1,000 structures over the past 15 days. On December 10 alone, the Thomas Fire grew by more than 50,000 acres, impacting Ventura and Santa Barbara counties. This fire continues to erratically burn and is only 60 percent contained.

Unfortunately, the destruction from the Thomas Fire is not yet over. Between the evening of December 15 and the morning of December 16, the strong Santa Ana winds in Santa Barbara County caused the fire to shift towards a populated area, forcing thousands of additional residents to immediately evacuate their homes, closing more roadways, and causing more power outages. Over 14,000 residents are currently under mandatory evacuations, and thousands more

are under voluntary evacuations, in Santa Barbara as a result of the Thomas Fire. As it stands right now, the Thomas Fire is the second largest and seventh most destructive fire in California history. The area of destruction currently spans more than 40 miles by 20 miles. Officials predict this fire will inevitably cause more destruction before it is eventually contained.

In addition to the Thomas Fire burning out of control, much of Southern California was impacted by a series of wildfires resulting from the same Red Flag Warning Fire conditions. On December 5, two fires began in Los Angeles County: the Creek Fire and the Rye Fire, which burned over 20,000 acres and destroyed over 100 structures. The following day, the Skirball Fire also ignited in Los Angeles County, which burned 475 acres, closed Interstate 405, and threatened both the renowned Getty Center and the University of California Los Angeles campus.

These fire conditions have been extraordinarily dangerous. The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CALFIRE) uses a color code system for forecasting fire threats. For the first time in its history, on December 7, CALFIRE elevated the fire threat to purple, the highest level, for portions of Southern California, warning that the weather conditions presented an extreme risk of fire. Hours later, the Lilac Fire erupted in San Diego County and burned over 4,100 acres and destroyed over 150 structures, resulting in several injuries and the death of multiple livestock. Extreme winds reached 70 miles per hour, nearly the strength of a hurricane.

On December 5, I declared a State of Emergency in Ventura and Los Angeles counties, and on December 7, I declared a State of Emergency in San Diego and Santa Barbara counties. The Office of Emergency Services activated the State Operations Center and the Southern Regional Operations Center. In addition, the State activated its Emergency Plan and deployed all available state assets. Over 8,700 firefighters were deployed to fight these fires, including California National Guard air and ground forces. The State of California also requested 50 out of state engine strike teams consisting of 250 engines. Twelve states — Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Nevada, Oregon, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming — have deployed resources to help battle the fires. Multiple law enforcement agencies and emergency managers from neighboring counties are deployed to assist with the response through the State's mutual aid system. The California Department of Social Services is assisting with shelter operations and is providing accommodations to individuals with access and functional needs. The American Red Cross, Salvation Army, and Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster are providing support to the community and disaster survivors. Additionally, the Federal Emergency Management Agency approved Fire Management Assistance Grants for each of the fires.

The devastation caused by these fires is extraordinary. The Thomas Fire claimed the life of a 70-year-old woman who died in a vehicle accident while trying to evacuate. Many first responders have been injured, and tragically, a 32-year-old CALFIRE engineer perished while battling the blaze. More than 200,000 Californians evacuated and were forced to seek temporary shelter. Many residents had little time to flee due to the rapid and erratic rate of spread through the rural

terrain. The fires caused the closure of schools throughout the affected communities, impacting more than 130,000 students. The University of California, Los Angeles was even forced to close its campus following the fire outbreak. These fires have damaged and continued to threaten critical infrastructure, including utilities and roadways.

We are conducting joint preliminary damage assessments with the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the U.S. Small Business Administration as conditions permit access to the impacted areas. Based on the Individual Assistance Preliminary Damage Assessments completed to date, there are over 1,000 residences destroyed by the fires. Due to the unpredictable winds and Red Flag weather conditions, the number of homes destroyed may further increase. With regard to Public Assistance, while Preliminary Damage Assessments have been requested, access is limited because the Thomas Fire continues to burn and officials have been unable to verify the extent of the damages. However, given past fires and initial estimates for these fires, we expect the damages to well exceed the requirements for federal assistance.

As a result of these destructive fires, large amounts of debris must be expeditiously removed to eliminate the immediate threat to public health and safety. Prompt removal of the debris is also necessary to enable community rebuilding and economic recovery of impacted communities. Debris hazards, including asbestos, heavy metals, ash, and metals pose a direct threat to public health and safety and threaten the environment. On December 8, Ventura County health officials declared a local health emergency, finding contaminated wildfire-generated debris poses an imminent threat to the public health. We anticipate the other counties will be doing the same.

We also anticipate many residents will be left homeless or displaced for an extended period of time. Although it is anticipated that some portion of the disaster survivors have insurance coverage, it is expected many survivors in the impacted communities will have no insurance coverage or will be underinsured. Even for those survivors who have insurance coverage, major challenges remain to obtain temporary housing and attempt to rebuild their lives. Portions of the impacted Southern California counties have very little available rental or temporary housing to accommodate homeowners during this rebuilding process. This sudden demand for temporary or rental housing comes at a time while many Southern California communities were already experiencing a limited rental market. Coupled with the sheer number of destroyed and damaged homes, this poses a significant challenge during the recovery process.

California has suffered several major disasters in the past year, which have severely impacted and stretched its resources. Indeed, California has endured an unprecedented and historic fire season thus far. Just two months ago, Northern California was ravaged by some of the largest wildfires in California's history, which resulted in a Major Disaster Declaration providing Public Assistance and Individual Assistance (FEMA-4344-DR-CA). Additionally, I proclaimed states of emergency for 19 fire events throughout the State since July 2017 and there have been over 8,747 fire starts in California since January 2017. Further, beginning in December 2016, California began experiencing what would be three months of severe winter storms associated


with several atmospheric river systems. Those storms caused unprecedented widespread flooding and resulted in three separate Major Disaster Declarations (FEMA-4301-DR-CA, FEMA-4305-DR-CA, and FEMA-4308-DR-CA) and an Emergency Declaration that provided sheltering commodities for displaced residents due to the potential failure of the emergency spillway at the Oroville Dam (FEMA-3381-EM-CA).

These fires collectively caused extensive damage to primary residences and infrastructure and continue to pose a direct threat to public health and safety. I have determined this incident is of such severity and magnitude that an effective response is beyond the capabilities of the State and affected local governments and supplemental federal assistance is necessary. I am specifically requesting Public Assistance and all Individual Assistance Programs for Los Angeles, San Diego, Santa Barbara, and Ventura counties, 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 for your concern and leadership during this difficult time in our state.

Sincerely,


Edmund G. Brown, Jr.

Enclosure(s)