
MEDICAL LAKE
WASHINGTON
Endeavoring to make these fires known for the remarkable recovery more than the devastating losses

GRAY ROAD FIRE STATISTICS

START DATE: 8/18/2023

638 PERSONNEL ASSIGNED

SIZE: 10,085 ACRES

240 HOMES

326 TOTAL STRUCTURES LOST

1 FATALITY

PROTECTING HEALTH, SAFETY, AND WELFARE

$8M

Cleanup

Hazard Assessment
Tree Removal
Debris Removal
Disposal of Hazardous Waste

$29M

Infrastructure Improvements

Private Wells to Municipal Water
Fire Flow and 70 Hydrants Added
Septic Systems to Sewer Lines
Connected Network of Roads

$33M

Temporary Housing

Challenging Market Conditions
Accommodate Displaced Families
55 Cabins
22 RV Sites with Full Hookups

IMPORTANT
DISASTER RECOVERY NEEDS

Providing for Public Health and Safety

Improving Infrastructure Resiliency

Reducing Risk and Vulnerability



Emergency Management Update

Briefing to the House Innovation, Community & Economic Development, and Veterans Committee

January 12, 2024

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Washington Military Department

Gray and Oregon Road Fires, Aug 18 – Sep 1, 2023

- Record or near record temperatures
- Record fuels dryness
- Near record low humidity (single digits)
- **25 – 30 mph winds**
- 2 fatalities
- 29,000 acres burned
- 369 primary homes lost, the most in any Washington wildfire

2023 Gray and Oregon Road Fires – State and Federal Assistance

- Federal Assistance:
  - 3 Oct Major Disaster declaration request for Individual Assistance (IA) submitted to FEMA
- State Assistance:
  - $1.25 Million from the Governors Emergency Assistance Fund (GEAF) for asbestos testing, transitional housing assistance, disaster case management services, and other needs assistance.
  - $2.5 Million from the Department of Commerce's Emergency Fund and an additional $1.25 Million of the GEAF for uninsured private property debris removal.

Individual Assistance for Spokane Fires

Support for Spokane Wildfire Recovery:

Primary Homes Damaged by Fires (Validated): 369 Destroyed, 2 Major, 15 Minor, 2 Affected

Emergency funds provided to survivors through grant agreements with Spokane County:

- Private Property Debris Removal: Assisting 25 uninsured homeowners with Asbestos testing and debris removal
  - 48 homeowners are underinsured and in need of debris removal assistance (will assist if funds available)
- Disaster Case Management Services (DCM): DCM being provided by Salvation Army under contract with Spokane County.
- Transitional Housing Assistance: Funds providing supplies for Local Organizations building transitional housing units for survivors.
- Other Needs Assistance: RV winterization materials, Utility reconnection on properties, and more.

State Individual Assistance Program

- Significant challenges receiving federal Individual Assistance (IA) declarations
- Legislature funded disaster assistance following Nov 21 floods, and an IA study
- EMD is creating rules to guide a state IA program (WAC), ECD Feb – Mar 2024
- Will submit a decision package for the 25-27 biennium requesting permanent program funding for Individual Assistance for the following:
  - Access to the Disaster Response Account to facilitate this support to individuals, max authorization of $13 million per biennium available for this program.
- Under this new program the state would reimburse counties and tribes for individual assistance for the following programs (Max award per household = $42,500, matching FEMA's max for similar assistance)
  - Housing assistance: Extended sheltering assistance, Rental assistance, Home repair and home replacement
  - Disaster-Caused Unmet Needs
  - Recovery Support- Disaster Case Management and other admin support

Extreme Weather Grant

$300,000 was provided last year for EMD to administer grants to local governments and federally recognized tribes for costs to respond to community needs during periods of extremely hot or cold weather or in situations of severe poor air quality from wildfire smoke.

Costs eligible for reimbursement under this grant:

- Establishing and operating warming and cooling centers:
  - Including rental of equipment, purchase of supplies and water, staffing, and other associated costs
- Transporting individuals and their pets to warming and cooling centers
- Purchasing fans or other supplies needed for cooling of congregate living settings
- Providing emergency sheltering such as rental of a meeting space and/or convention center;
- Minor retrofitting or establishing facilities within warming and cooling centers that are pet friendly in order to permit individuals to evacuate with their pets;
- Other activities necessary for life safety during a period of extremely hot or cold weather or in situations of severe poor air quality from wildfire smoke, as determined by the department.

<u>To date only one jurisdiction (King County) has requested reimbursement for qualifying shelter expenses and has yet to complete the process.</u>

State Public Infrastructure Assistance Program

- Multiple disasters not rising to the level of a federal public assistance (PA) declaration highlight the need for state assistance
  - For every disaster receiving a federal PA declaration at least 10 others do not
- State capability to assist with local and tribal infrastructure repairs is limited to non-existent
- Examples of unmet local PA needs
  - Aberdeen floods
  - 2023 fires – Debris removal
  - Emergency protective measures
- House Bill 2020 establishing PA program in RCW 38.52 submitted as agency request legislation
  - Requesting update of RCW 38.52 to place a state PA program into statute.
  - $575,000 for contract support to build out a state level PA program (Similar to process conducted for State Individual Assistance build out)
  - $5 million be added to the Governor's Emergency Assistance Fund specifically for PA

Wildfire Mitigation Challenges

- **Challenge:** federal grants for wildfire mitigation projects are slow to award, often delaying the needed risk-reduction actions for years.
  - **Recommendation:** Provide dedicated state funds for prioritized wildfire risk-reduction projects that counties and tribes can quickly access when needed.
- **Challenge:** In the post-fire landscape, regulatory constraints often hinder reseeding and other time-sensitive efforts to stabilize hillsides, protect waterways, and reduce further damages.
  - **Recommendation:** Explore options and opportunities under SEPA and other state-level regulations to *expedite* urgent, incident stabilization projects in and around burn areas.
- **Challenge**: Using prescribed fire is an effective method of reducing wildfire risk, yet the public has limited awareness of its benefits and remain skeptical– even resistant– to its use.
  - **Recommendation**: Equip local entities, like conservation districts and fire districts, to conduct public information campaigns about prescribed fire and controlled burns.

Capacity-Building Next Steps

- Request funding to fully fund the state individual assistance program
- Request funding for a study to determine best practices and recommendations for the state public infrastructure assistance program
- Request funding to create an Incident Management Assistance Team (IMAT) in EMD to be able to provide response and recovery assistance to tribes and local jurisdictions experiencing incidents and disasters
- Scope and request funding for a local emergency management assistance grant to increase tribal and county EM capacity