



STATE OF MINNESOTA

Office of Governor Mark Dayton

116 Veterans Service Building ♦ 20 West 12th Street ♦ Saint Paul, MN 55155

October 19, 2016

The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Through:

Andrew Velasquez III, Regional Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency, Region V
536 South Clark Street, Floor 6
Chicago, IL 60605

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 request you declare a major disaster for the State of Minnesota as a result of heavy rainstorms and flooding during the period of September 21-24, 2016.

The summer of 2016 was exceptionally stormy and rainy in Minnesota. Heading into the fall, the soils across much of the state were saturated. Our lakes and rivers had high volumes of water for the time of year. The meteorological and hydrological conditions were primed for flash flooding if we received heavy rains. Those rains fell in late September.

The National Weather Service issued a flash-flood watch the afternoon of September 20 for the next two days, as a weather system stalled across southern Minnesota. The atmosphere was ripe with moisture, as indicated by near record precipitable water values. That evening, heavy rains fell on south central Minnesota, especially in Waseca

County. A flash-flood warning was issued, but no major issues were reported. More than 2.5 inches of rain fell over a short period of time, creating very wet antecedent conditions heading into the night of September 21.

That evening, and again during the overnight hours of September 22, much heavier and more widely spread rains fell across the southern half of Minnesota. The hardest hit area spanned the south central counties of Blue Earth, Waseca, Steele, and Freeborn. Official 48-hour rainfalls amounts exceeded 10 inches in the Waseca area. Local rivers rose to major flood stage – in some cases establishing new records – in a matter of hours and remained high for days. The Minnesota River at Savage did not go below flood stage until October 2 and the ground is still saturated across southern Minnesota.

The deluge of water overpowered roadways, storm drains, sanitary sewers, lift stations, wells, and residential sump pumps. Much of the flooding occurred far from rivers, streams, and lakes. The rains fell and simply had nowhere to drain. Tragically, the water flowed into hundreds of homes, businesses, and public facilities.

The Minnesota Emergency Operations Plan was implemented on September 22 and our state emergency operations center became operational that same day. On September 27, I issued an emergency executive order declaring a peacetime state of emergency in the counties of Anoka, Blue Earth, Cottonwood, Dodge, Faribault, Fillmore, Freeborn, Goodhue, Hennepin, Houston, Le Sueur, Mower, Nicollet, Olmsted, Ramsey, Rice, Scott, Sibley, Steele, Wabasha, Waseca, Washington, and Winona.

Because of our extreme seasonal freeze/thaw cycles, most houses in Minnesota are built on fully excavated basements. The majority of those lower levels are finished as essential living space. Heating, ventilating and air conditioning systems, water heaters, and other major appliances are installed in our basements. The floodwaters of late September spoiled these living spaces, destroyed furnishings, and damaged furnaces and water heaters beyond repair.

This event has been particularly cruel to individuals and households. This is the fourth recent major flood to strike this part of the state, following disasters in 2010 (FEMA-1941-DR), 2013 (FEMA-4131-DR), and 2014 (FEMA-4182-DR). Without the support of FEMA Individual Assistance (IA) to recover from the previous floods, homeowners have had to bear the costs of repairing their homes and systems without help. The repetitive losses are taking a significant toll on homeowners – both financial and

emotional. Many of the worst impacted people are elderly without the additional financial resources to deal with an unexpected major expense.

Winter is fast approaching. October 15 marked the start of our winter heating season. Families without safe and reliable heat need help and they need it very soon. I am deeply concerned that, as the weather gets colder, property owners will switch their heat back on to stay warm and to prevent their water pipes from freezing. A furnace that has been submerged without being properly dried, cleaned, and repaired will rust from the inside out. If a furnace isn't functioning properly, carbon monoxide poisoning is a very real and dangerous threat.

Another serious health and safety issue is people without a working furnace will turn to alternate heat sources such as space heaters, kitchen ovens, wood fires, and gas grills. These are very dangerous options and dramatically raise the risk of house fires and poisoning. Without heat, many of these homes will not dry out properly. Black mold and respiratory issues have already been reported.

Many people in the area will need significant financial help to stay warm this winter. The Minnesota Valley Action Council reports multiple instances of people turning on damaged and contaminated furnaces out of desperation. The organization administers the Minnesota Department of Commerce's Heating and Energy Assistance Program in southern Minnesota. That program is currently out of money and unable to help pay for heating system repairs.

These issues and many more have caused great emotional stress to residents in the flooded area. The Minnesota Department of Health reports a significant spike in the demand for behavioral health services. From school children to the elderly, people are upset by the changes to their routines, stressed by temporary living arrangements, struggling with scarcity, and worried about the coming winter. A school superintendent from the area expressed his concern how this tragedy and the suffering it has brought is effecting student ability to focus on learning. Without heat and hot water, having lost clothing and personal items in the flood, students are focused on safety and survival. School counsellors and staff are doing their best to help their students, but learning is currently secondary to coping.

Discouragement is a real problem for many flood victims. In Steele County, home and business owners simply did not have time to take protective measures when the

Straight River rose at an unprecedented rate. Many of the people who suffered damage in the 2010 flood (FEMA-1941-DR) were hit hard this time, too. The prospect of again doing the work and bearing the costs of repairing flood damaged properties and replacing expensive systems and appliances is a crushing blow. Minnesotans are very resilient, but this time they need help.

Preliminary damage assessments (PDAs) conducted jointly by FEMA, the Minnesota Department of Public Safety, and county emergency managers were completed October 11-14.

The teams conducted Individual Assistance (IA) PDAs for Blue Earth, Freeborn, Steele, and Waseca counties. The assessors identified 1,148 uninsured households and \$10,149,383 in estimated program costs. The total estimated housing assistance need is \$9,014,817, nearly double the average amount of assistance provided to a medium state according to 44 CFR § 206.48. I believe the estimated amount of IA needs are understated by at least a third. Given the amount of damaged structures, the fact many homeowners were away at work when assessors stopped by, and the time constraints, not every home that sustained damage was inspected. Homeowners in Waseca continue to report damages.

The teams completed Public Assistance (PA) PDAs for Anoka, Blue Earth, Fillmore, Freeborn, Goodhue, Houston, Le Sueur, Rice, Steele and Waseca counties. Damage surveys provided visual observation of the extent of debris, emergency protective measures, and public infrastructure damage and verified \$8,305,313.04 in eligible damages, compared to Minnesota's statewide damage indicator of \$7,584,612.75. The average per capita loss in the nine southern Minnesota counties is \$34.94, nearly ten times the FEMA county indicator of \$3.61. That figure dramatically shows the high concentration of impacts from this incident.

This region of the state is mostly rural, with many towns and a few small cities. The hardest hit counties, per capita, were Waseca at \$90.58, Fillmore at \$76.63, and Houston at \$64.85. Some representative highlights of the damages, by category of work include:

Category A – The city of Waseca is dealing with a mountain of household flood debris. Personal property damaged by floodwaters and contaminated with sewage includes furniture, appliances, carpet, sheetrock, clothing, and other personal items. The costs for debris removal in Waseca County is \$11.81 per capita.

Category B – Significant emergency protectives measures were taken, including building temporary flood defenses, staffing road barricades, and conducting search and

rescue operations. In the city of Waseca, children had to escape from their basement bedrooms as floodwaters poured in. Forty-four residents of a nursing home in New Richland were evacuated and relocated to alternate facilities. The per capita costs for this category in Waseca County are \$17.21.

Category C – Damages to roads and bridges account for 62% of the total verified damages of \$5,133,561. Most of that damage is to township gravel roads. The main industry in the region is agriculture and these roadways are critical to the economic vitality of the area. Road damage in Fillmore County is \$68.11 per capita.

Category D – County-maintained drainage ditches are critical water control facilities in southern Minnesota. In Freeborn County, the damages for this category are \$4.49 per capita and certain to go higher as more parts of the system become accessible when the water recedes.

Category E – Downtown Waseca flooded the first night of the incident, inundating many buildings including the hockey arena/community center, library and city offices. The costs of cleaning up and repairing public buildings in Waseca County is \$10.22 per capita.

Category F – The city of St. Clair in Blue Earth County lost sanitary sewer services for eight days after its wastewater treatment plant was overcome by floodwaters. The city brought in temporary toilets, showers, and laundry facilities. The local school was closed for a couple days and when it reopened, the children had to use trailer-mounted restrooms for a week. The costs for this category in Blue Earth County are \$4.99 per capita.

Category G – Because the flooding was not confined to riverine areas, many parks and playgrounds across the region were submerged in floodwater. Counties, cities, and school districts must excavate and dispose of contaminated soils, sands, woodchips, etc., and replace them with clean materials. Additionally, playground equipment has to be cleaned before children can play on it again. A striking 10% of the total damages from this event are for parks and recreational facilities.

Despite all of these challenges, Minnesotans rose to the occasion and helped each other get through the response phase of this traumatic incident. Hurricane Matthew pulled many volunteers away, but our voluntary organizations still found the means to provide 1,104 meals, clean out hundreds of flooded homes, and provide mental health counseling for a total of more than 1,500 volunteer hours. The American Red Cross activated Multi-Agency Resource Centers in the cities of Waseca and Albert Lea. The Minnesota-

Wisconsin Baptist Convention provided shower and laundry facilities at St. Clair for a week. When the Waseca County emergency manager asked for help to keep their emergency operations center open 24/7, five counties and two cities provided staff for 10 days.

The State of Minnesota needs federal assistance to recover from this natural disaster. We continue working to closeout 10 open Stafford Act disasters. Minnesota's most recent federal disaster, FEMA-4182-DR, was declared in 2014 when a series of strong summer storms caused more than \$55,000,000 of damage in 37 counties and 3 tribal governments.

That same year, the Minnesota Legislature passed a bill creating a state-funded account for public disaster assistance when federal aid isn't available. I signed that bill into law. Since its enactment, I have authorized state disaster assistance for 13 incidents. In response to nine major storms this summer, Minnesota is providing more than \$10,000,000 in state-funded disaster relief to county, city, township, and tribal governments. The State of Minnesota has already borne high disaster costs in 2016, and now, with these devastating floods, we need help from the federal government.

Disaster assistance allowed for under the Stafford Act is clearly warranted. Without it, and given the already heavy burden of previous state and federal disasters, Minnesotans will struggle to return their communities to normalcy. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark Dayton".

Mark Dayton
Governor

cc: Commissioner Mona Dohman, Minnesota Department of Public Safety
Director Joe Kelly, Minnesota Division of Homeland Security & Emergency Management

Attached: FEMA Form 010-0-13

Enclosure A: Individual Assistance

Enclosure B: Public Assistance

Enclosure C: Other Federal Agency Programs