



STATE OF WASHINGTON
Office of the Governor

October 30, 2015

The Honorable W. Craig Fugate
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street SW
Washington, DC 20472

Dear Administrator Fugate:

Thank you for the relief that your agency has provided for Washington State communities affected by recent disasters. In the last few years, our state has endured more than its share of disasters, including some that have involved tragic loss of life. When called upon, FEMA and its Region 10 office have provided crucial assistance leading the federal response to these events Washington State has not gotten all the assistance it has requested, though, and I believe that FEMA should consider changes to allow people living in places like rural Washington to qualify for individual assistance.

This year Washington experienced the most devastating wildfire season in our state's history. Between June and September, over one million acres burned across the state. At 522,000 acres, the Okanagan Complex fire was the largest in state history, beating out 2014's Carlton Complex fire, which occurred just to its south. Across Washington between August 9 and September 10, the fires destroyed 146 homes and damaged nearly 500 more - two-thirds of which were uninsured or under-insured.

In order to assist in recovery at the state level, I have formed a Wildland Fire Council, led by the state Departments of Natural Resources and Commerce and the Military Department, to coordinate recovery efforts and assess plans, policies and resources related to wildfire preparedness, resiliency, response and recovery. This is particularly important as our state continues to endure more devastating wildfire seasons, directly related to climate change and anticipated by its projected impacts in the Pacific Northwest.

The federal government also has a critical role to play in getting counties and towns back on their feet after a disaster. One immediate action that FEMA should pursue is a change in policy to allow communities impacted by wildfires to better access the agency's individual assistance programs. I believe that FEMA's current standard does not adequately consider communities that are affected by wildfires - disasters which tend to impact large areas which can be sparsely populated, and over a matter of days or even weeks.



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In recent years, a number of Western states have seen their petitions for individual assistance declined in the aftermath of major wildfires. In 2014, this helped prompt the 19-state bipartisan Western Governors Association to call for a reevaluation of the criteria used to determine eligibility for such assistance. I joined with the Western Governors in arguing that “the federal government has an important role to play in responding to disasters and in helping communities and states in long-term recovery,” and that “the federal systems for evaluating and providing access to disaster aid programs should be reconsidered. In particular, federal agencies should reexamine the standards used for provision of Individual Assistance to better provide homeowners the aid they need to recover from wildfires and the other types of major disasters that are increasingly affecting Western states.”

Under the federal *Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act*, FEMA has the authority under current law to revisit its policy, via rulemaking, concerning the eligibility of homeowners affected by wildfires for individual assistance. I also understand that there is congressional interest in adjusting this criteria, and I support legislative action to address this issue if executive action is not taken.

As wildfire seasons grow more costly, particularly in the West, and as the federal government has an important role to play in helping local communities and economies recover, I encourage you to revise the process used in determining eligibility for FEMA’s individual assistance programs for communities impacted by these disasters.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Very truly yours,



Jay Inslee
Governor