

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20510**

March 10, 2020

The Honorable Donald J. Trump  
President  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write in urgent support of Oregon Governor Kate Brown's request for a Presidential Major Disaster Declaration for three Oregon counties (Umatilla, Union and Wallowa), as well as the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) impacted by historic flooding one month ago. The three counties and the CTUIR suffered damages severe enough to qualify for the Public Assistance program. Further, the Governor is requesting Individual Assistance for Umatilla County and the CTUIR, and the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) for the entire state of Oregon for that time period.

From February 5, through February 9, 2020, a number of eastern Oregon communities suffered significant losses from severe weather. Snowfalls of up to 20 inches in some elevations followed by rains and snowmelt left this rural region devastated by one of the worst floods the area has suffered in decades. Those historic floods combined with erosion, landslides and mudslides led to destruction that placed significant stresses on local emergency resources and financial hardship for Oregonians living and working in these small communities.

In Umatilla County, emergency responders, search-and-rescue volunteers and the Oregon National Guard rescued dozens of residents who were trapped in dangerous circumstances. The National Guard rescued 54 people, the largest number ever recorded in Oregon due to a natural hazard. Despite the best efforts of the community, one woman died trying to escape her home in the mountains.

The tragedy could have been greater had it not been for the compassionate efforts of rural residents throughout the region. In one Pendleton neighborhood, city employees drove a front-end loader through four feet of flood waters strong enough to carry train cars and large trees, to rescue trapped residents. In the small town of Milton-Freewater, the Corps of Engineers and the local Water Control District worked tirelessly through the night to keep the levee from breaching within city limits. In Union County, Elgin residents worked for hours filling sandbags to protect their community from rising waters coming from two directions: Phillips Creek and the Grande Ronde River.

Public damages to roads, bridges, levees, irrigation infrastructure, school sports fields and utilities have totaled more than \$26 million thus far. In addition, the Governor estimates the total cost for the Individuals and Households program at more than \$4 million.

Hundreds of homes were damaged or destroyed, several with private wells that are now unable to provide clean drinking water. Around 90% of the damaged homes were uninsured, with many of the residents in these rural neighborhoods economically disadvantaged. Unfortunately, Umatilla County had a housing shortage before the event. Affordable rental housing is nearly nonexistent, particularly within a reasonable commuting distance of the impacted areas.

In addition to the impacts on housing, hundreds of residents cannot return to work. Nine businesses suffered significant losses, two of which are larger manufacturers employing a total of 360 people. Smaller affected businesses, such as an auto repair shop, an agricultural supplier, and a veterinarian clinic, lacked flood insurance since their facilities were outside the 100-year flood plain.

In the western part of Umatilla County, the agricultural and energy sectors were harmed. Debris from the Umatilla River clogged the intake area of an irrigation canal used by the Hermiston Irrigation District. Three thousand farmers will not have water for crops until canals are repaired. The Umatilla Electric Cooperative lost poles and over 42 miles of electrical lines were damaged during the event.

Oregon communities desperately need resources in order to start recovering from these historic losses. A Major Disaster Declaration will enable local governments to seek reimbursement for a large share of their costs and losses. It will allow homeowners and businesses to be eligible for loans, insurance relief, and other valuable assistance. Individual assistance will allow vulnerable residents to seek greatly needed resources to regain a safe and secure home.

We thank you in advance for your expedited review of this declaration request and look forward to working with you to rebuild Oregon's towns and economies.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey A. Merkley  
U.S. Senator



Ron Wyden  
U.S. Senator



Greg Walden  
Member of Congress

John A. H. ...  
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