



## OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

September 21, 2015

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 very much appreciate your concern and personal call last week regarding California's wildfires.

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 hereby request you declare a major disaster in the State of California as a result of the Valley Fire burning in Lake, Napa, and Sonoma Counties.

The Valley Fire began in Lake County on September 12, 2015, burning 40,000 acres in less than 12 hours and quickly spread through Lake, Napa, and Sonoma Counties. Given this fire's rate of spread, size, and intensity, scientists consider it to be a "megafire," which behaves differently than typical wildfires. Megafires expand quickly and unpredictably, thriving on dead trees, dry vegetation, and wind conditions. Winds propel burning embers far ahead of the existing fire, accelerating fire growth at a pace that is very difficult to control. Four years of extreme drought conditions have parched our landscapes and created millions of dead trees that have increased California's vulnerability to these types of fires.

Presently, the Valley Fire continues its path of destruction. It is already considered the fourth most destructive wildfire in California's history, devastating several communities and key parts of rural Lake County. As of the date of this letter, the Valley Fire has burned over 75,111 acres and is only 69 percent contained. It has destroyed 1,238 homes and threatened over 7,600 single residences and 150 nonresidential properties. More than 19,300 residents were issued mandatory evacuation orders necessitating the opening of 18 shelters in Lake and Napa counties. Presently, several hundred residents remain in eight shelters.

Due to the fire's rapid rate of spread through rural and isolated communities, many residents had

little time to flee and some required rescue by firefighters and local law enforcement. Tragically, the Valley Fire has taken three lives and seriously injured four firefighters. Several residents remain unaccounted for, and our emergency responders anticipate the number of fatalities could grow.

The devastation and disruption caused by the Valley Fire is extraordinary. Thousands have been made homeless by the fire. Thirty schools were closed and many remain closed. Major roads were damaged or destroyed. The fire destroyed nearly 1,000 utility poles causing the loss of power to thousands of residents. Five local power plants were disabled. Many essential drinking water systems have been completely destroyed, and numerous others are running on emergency back-up power. Additionally, over 25,000 feet of fiber lines burned, destroying critical infrastructure used in public safety communications such as radio towers, state intercom radio systems, and numerous law enforcement vaults and towers.

This is the third fire to significantly impact Lake County within the last three months. On July 29, 2015, the Rocky Fire burned 69,438 acres and destroyed 43 residences. A few weeks later, on August 9, 2015, the Jerusalem Fire burned 25,118 acres and destroyed six residences. Shortly after these fires were contained, but before the debris and destruction could be removed, the Valley Fire began, decimating the towns of Cobb and Middletown and nearly destroying several other communities in the county.

On September 13, 2015, I declared a State of Emergency as a result of the Valley Fire under the California Emergency Services Act. The Office of Emergency Services activated our State Operations Center as well as the Inland and Coastal Regional Operations Centers. The State's Emergency Operations Plan was implemented and all necessary state assets were deployed, including the California National Guard. Lake, Napa, and Sonoma counties also activated their local Emergency Operations Centers. All three counties declared local emergencies and Napa and Lake Counties further declared a local public health emergency due to the toxic contaminants of the fire.

The State of California, local governments, community based organizations, and volunteers have taken extraordinary steps to respond to the Valley Fire. More than 4,500 firefighters were deployed to fight the fire, including California National Guard members. In addition, 35 law enforcement agencies and more than a dozen emergency managers from neighboring counties have been 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 Department of Social Services is also coordinating with Lake County to assist in identifying long term solutions for displaced residents. The American Red Cross, Salvation Army, and Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster are providing support to the community and disaster survivors. The University of California Davis's Medical Reserve Corps activated to care for large or burned animals.

Huge amounts of wreckage and debris must be expeditiously removed to eliminate the immediate threat to lives, public health, and safety. Fast debris removal is also necessary to enable community rebuilding and economic recovery of impacted communities. It is estimated that there are more than 1,500 properties within a 100 square mile radius that require major debris removal, each averaging 100 tons of debris that must be removed. Debris hazards, including asbestos, heavy metals, structural debris, ash, concrete foundations, and metals pose a public health and safety concern and threaten the health of the local environment.

While we have initiated preliminary damage assessments, many residents remain homeless or

displaced and have not been available to provide specific insurance information to the assessment teams. We expect that some portion of the disaster survivors have insurance coverage; however, we anticipate many have no insurance coverage or are underinsured. According to American Community Survey, 61 percent of the total residents in Lake County have mortgages and presumably are required to have insurance coverage. The Department of Insurance identified 12 insurance carriers reporting a total of 1,268 property claims to date, of which 538 are considered a total loss. This number of total loss claims is less than half the number of destroyed homes. This information did not distinguish between owner-occupied and rental properties.

Even for those residents who have insurance coverage, major challenges remain to recovering their lives. Lake County is isolated and generally rural, and has very little available rental or temporary housing to accommodate homeowners during the rebuilding process. As a result, many of these residents will need to seek temporary housing a long distance from Lake County. This relocation will add undue hardship for families with school children or whose jobs are in the affected area. Additionally, some victims may permanently relocate outside of Lake County, further hindering the community’s ability to recover.

Lake County’s unemployment rate is 8.3 percent, which is well above the State’s average, and the County has few major employers. Additionally, in the five most impacted cities in the County, one-fourth to one-half of the residents rely on CalFresh, the State’s food assistance program. Given the lack of available housing and hotels within Lake County, the Office of Emergency Services is establishing base camps to house first responders and emergency management personnel who are supporting local officials, freeing up the limited amount of temporary housing and hotels to shelter disaster survivors.

A breakdown of Individual Assistance Program demographics is presented directly below:

	Population*	Average of Persons Below Poverty Level*	Median Household Income*	Percent Elderly (over 65 yrs)*	Percent Disabled**	Percent Pre-Disaster Unemployment***
National		15.4%	\$53,046	14.5%	12.6%	5.3%
California	37,253,956	15.9%	\$61,094	12.9%	10.6%	6.2%
Lake County	64,665	25%	\$36,548	19.8%	19.4%	8.3%

\* 2009-2013 U.S. Census

\*\* 2014 U.S. Census

\*\*\* Bureau of Labor

California has suffered multiple disasters in the past year, which have severely impacted its resources. In October 2014, California received a Presidential Major Disaster Declaration for the South Napa Earthquake and has received ten Fire Management Assistance Grants to battle fires in the state. I have also proclaimed state of emergencies for four storm events throughout the state in the past 12 months. Additionally, there have been 69 major fires and over 5,345 fire starts in California since January 2015. The acreage burned this year is nearly triple the acres burned in 2014. Presently, over 11,000 firefighters are battling five active fires that are burning nearly 400,000 acres, displaced thousands, and resulted in injuries and loss of life. To protect lives and property from this increased fire threat, State government has provided over \$200 million in emergency funding for additional wildfire fighting in the last two years.

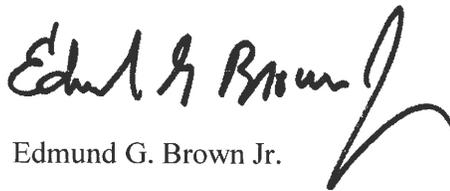
The past four years of extreme drought have also impacted the State's resources. The State has contributed more than three billion dollars in funds and capital investments responding to the impacts of the drought. These resources provide funding for immediate relief to impacted communities and established emergency programs to protect drinking water supplies, provide emergency food aid, fund emergency housing needs, support devastated farming communities, and protect endangered fish and other animals from the drought. In addition to increasing the State's firefighting capacity and budget, I have proclaimed four states of emergency for wildfires in just the last twelve months, including a statewide declaration of emergency on July 31, 2015, due to numerous fires that were raging simultaneously. Additionally, the drought conditions and the burned topography have created a dangerously high probability of floods, debris flow, and mudslides with the slightest amount of precipitation.

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 all Individual Assistance Programs for Lake County, 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 very much for considering this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Edmund G. Brown Jr.", with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Edmund G. Brown Jr.

Enclosures

OMB No. 1660-0009/FEMA Form 010-0-13

A: Individual Assistance

B: Public Assistance

C: Requirements for Other Federal Agency Programs

D: Historic and Current Snowfall Data