

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

January 21, 2026

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

Dear Mr. President:

We write in strong support of Governor Jared Polis's appeals of the Administration's recent denials of two requests for Presidential Major Disaster Declarations in Colorado: (1) the Lee and Elk Fires in Rio Blanco County, and (2) the historic flooding that impacted La Plata, Archuleta, and Mineral Counties in Southwest Colorado. Each event independently meets the statutory and practical criteria for a Major Disaster Declaration, and the consequences of continued denial will be severe, long-lasting, and far more costly if left unaddressed. Disaster funds are critical for the safety and well-being of some of Colorado's most rural residents.

## **Lee and Elk Fires – Rio Blanco County**

The Lee and Elk Fires burned more than 150,000 acres between August 2 and August 29, 2025, causing widespread destruction to homes, rangeland, transportation infrastructure, and critical energy infrastructure. FEMA has validated more than \$27 million in damages, approximately \$4,000 per resident of rural Rio Blanco County.

Due to damage sustained during the fires, oil and gas operators in Rio Blanco County are currently unable to operate at full capacity and are relying on a highly limited contingency system – effectively a “backup of the backup” transmission configuration. This leaves production vulnerable to further disruption and prevents the region from reaching its normal output levels, with ripple effects for local employment, state and local tax revenue, and national energy supply.

Further delay of disaster assistance places the financial burden of repairing damaged electric transmission infrastructure directly on local utility customers. White River Electric Association has a limited ability to absorb these extraordinary disaster-related costs, and ratepayers in this rural community may face significant price increases to cover repairs that would otherwise be eligible for federal Public Assistance. These compounding impacts will result in reduced energy production and higher electricity costs in the region, and pose a serious threat to the long-term economic stability of Rio Blanco County.

## **Southwest Colorado Flooding – La Plata, Archuleta, and Mineral Counties**

From October 11 through October 14, 2025, record-breaking rainfall caused catastrophic flooding, debris flows, and channel instability throughout Southwest Colorado. FEMA has

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already validated more than \$13.8 million in eligible damages, with additional losses still being identified. Homes, businesses, wastewater systems, roads, and drinking water infrastructure sustained extensive damage.

The State's appeal underscores a critical and urgent reality: without federal assistance to stabilize river channels and repair damaged infrastructure, these communities face a cycle of repeated flooding and recurring losses. Failure to address the underlying damage now will virtually guarantee continued destruction during future high-water events, increasing costs to taxpayers while placing residents, businesses, and local economies at ongoing risk. Federal assistance at this stage is not only necessary for recovery, it is essential to prevent foreseeable and preventable damage from disasters in the years ahead.

A Presidential Major Disaster Declaration for each of these events would unlock Public Assistance and Hazard Mitigation programs that are indispensable to recovery, mitigation, and long-term resilience. Both disasters meet FEMA's administrative threshold for federal assistance and demand urgent action.

We respectfully urge you to reconsider your initial denials and approve Governor Polis's appeals for Major Disaster Declarations for the Lee and Elk Fires and the Southwest Colorado flooding. Doing so will help protect communities, reduce future federal and local costs, and ensure that rural Coloradans are not left to shoulder the financial burden of disaster recovery alone.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator



Jeff Hurd  
Member of Congress



John Hickenlooper  
United States Senator



Jeff Crank  
Member of Congress

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Jason Crow  
Member of Congress



Lauren Boebert  
Member of Congress



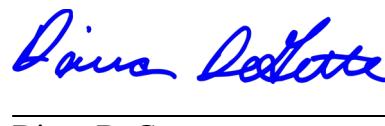
Joe Neguse  
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Gabe Evans  
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Brittany Pettersen  
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