

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

August 24, 2026

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C., 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We strongly support Governor Jared Polis' request on August 23, 2026, for a Presidential Major Disaster Declaration with Public and Individual Assistance for Custer and Pueblo Counties, Colorado, in response to the Aspen Acres Fire and Public Assistance for Ouray County in response to the Gold Mountain Fire. Both fires burned during June, July, and August 2026. As part of this request, Governor Polis has also requested the Hazard Mitigation Assistance Grant Program for the affected counties.

In June 2026, extreme heat, prolonged drought, and high winds up to 100 miles per hour contributed to two mega fires in Colorado within 48 hours. The Gold Mountain Fire burned approximately 40,000 acres in Ouray County, Colorado, and the Aspen Acres Fire burned over 102,000 acres across Custer County and Pueblo County, Colorado. Together, these fires destroyed drinking water and electric utility infrastructure, and over 800 structures and 324 homes. The burn scars from both fires contributed to significant post-fire flooding and debris flows that destroyed additional homes, buildings, and electric, water, and transportation infrastructure. On August 16, a significant rain event resulted in one fatality in Beulah, Colorado.

Both fires occurred immediately before the Fourth of July during the summer's peak tourism season, disrupting lodging, recreation, hospitality, outfitter, and guide businesses. Repeated fire, flood, and debris flow closures have limited visitation and disrupted tourism along the U.S. 550 corridor in Ouray and San Juan Counties, and in Beulah, Rye, and Westcliffe, Colorado. State and federal emergency response officials expect these disruptions to continue through the remainder of the summer season, with flood warnings and business closures continuing to cause cancellations while agricultural producers lose livestock, fencing, and grazing lands. In already isolated rural communities, the ongoing road closures are limiting access to work, schools, pharmacies, medical care, and other essential services.

Governor Polis has requested a Presidential Major Disaster Declaration for the Aspen Acres Fire and Gold Mountain Fire. With over \$17 million in validated damages, and with significant gaps in private insurance coverage, the Aspen Acres Fire meets the Federal Emergency Management Administration's threshold for both Public and Individual Assistance. Losses incurred due to the Gold Mountain Fire meet FEMA's threshold for Public Assistance.

Successful recovery is essential to restoring the counties' economies, which depend on clean drinking water, tourism, agriculture, outdoor recreation, and hunting and fishing. Without additional support, residents could face potentially insurmountable barriers to rebuilding homes and businesses, increased drinking water and electric utility costs, and the loss of important habitat and grazing lands. In addition, these communities face ongoing hazards from the post-fire burn scars, including debris, burned trees, and threats to water quality and drinking water infrastructure.

As you are aware, a Presidential Major Disaster Declaration unlocks federal assistance programs, including Hazard Mitigation Assistance Grants, that are indispensable to recovery, mitigation, and long-term resilience. These communities urgently need federal relief to rebuild. We thank you in advance for your expedited review and approval of the Governor's request for a Major Disaster Declaration.

Sincerely,



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



Jeff Hurd
Member of Congress



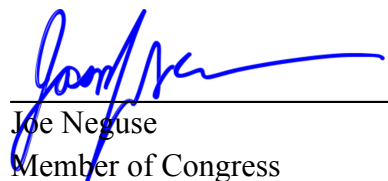
John Hickenlooper
United States Senator



Brittany Pettersen
Member of Congress



Lauren Boebert
Member of Congress



Joe Neguse
Member of Congress



Jeff Crank
Member of Congress



Diana DeGette
Member of Congress



Jason Crow
Member of Congress



Gabe Evans
Member of Congress