



GOVERNOR GREG ABBOTT

March 18, 2016

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Through: Regional Administrator Tony Robinson
FEMA Region 6
Denton, Texas

RE: Request for Presidential Disaster Declaration – Major Disaster

Dear Mr. President:

Under the provisions of Section 401 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, 42 U.S.C. §§ 5121-5207 (Stafford Act) and implemented by 44 CFR § 206.36, I request that you declare a major disaster for the State of Texas as a result of severe storm, tornadoes, straight-line winds and flooding that began on March 7, 2016, and continues as many rivers remain in a major flood stage.

In response to the current situation, I have taken the appropriate action under state law by directing the execution of the state's emergency plan and by declaring a state of disaster, for the counties listed below, on March 14, 2016.

I am requesting that you declare the following counties as a disaster for Individual Assistance and Public Assistance (Categories A and B including Direct Federal Assistance): Jasper, Orange and Newton counties.

INCIDENT OVERVIEW

A torrential rain event during the first full week of March 2016 featuring record March rain in Texas unleashed major river flooding, rising to historic levels in some areas. On March 7, a strong upper level storm system stalled over northern Mexico and southwest Texas.

The strong upper-level system from northern Mexico and southwest Texas produced severe thunderstorms, which moved through north Texas and propagated four confirmed EF-1

tornadoes. These tornadoes affected Stephenville in Erath County, Tolar in Hood County, Kerens/Malakoff in Navarro and Henderson counties and Cool in Parker County.

After producing damaging tornadoes, the weather system transitioned into a heavy rain and widespread significant flash flooding event that occurred across parts of northern and east Texas from March 8–12. In addition to the slow moving upper level storm, a front stalled over east Texas. This feature became a focus mechanism for heavy rain for a prolonged period. The prolonged heavy rainfall led to significant flash flooding and major ravine flooding along several rivers including portions of the main stem of the Sabine, Neches and Trinity Rivers.

Many locations across east Texas reported over 10 inches of rainfall, with some receiving over 18 inches, from March 8–12 while numerous other areas reported between six to 10 inches of rain at the same time. All of this rainfall combined with nearly saturated ground conditions. To add to the already deteriorating conditions in Texas, heavy rains in adjacent river basins in Louisiana produced efficient runoff of water into the Texas river basins.

The rainfall was so intense that a few areas broke all-time March rainfall records. Records below cover the last 60 years and represent March records, not the entire year. The Sabine River crushed a previous record crest near Burkeville by over five feet, topped a 1913 record east of Bon Wier and topped an unofficial record from 1884 in Deweyville.

The excessive and record-setting rainfall produced major river flooding that occurred and is still occurring across eastern portions of Texas, including the Trinity, Neches and Sabine river basins. A record flood wave occurred along the Sabine River which serves as the Texas–Louisiana border. Moderate to major river flooding will be present in numerous locations throughout late March 2016.

The lower Sabine River gauge at the City of Orange in Orange County crested the night of March 16, 2016, at 7.62 feet. While this was not a flood of record, it is significant because the flood of record at that location occurred with storm surge related to flooding produced by Hurricane Ike. It is important to note that the crest of 7.62 feet at this location is the highest that has ever been recorded in association with river flooding (as opposed to storm surge flooding).

A record amount of water (release of 207,644 cubic feet per second, or about 1.5 million gallons per second) flowed out of the Toledo Bend Reservoir resulting in extensive flooding downstream of this reservoir to homes and agricultural areas along and near the Sabine River in Sabine, Newton and Orange counties. In comparison, only half of that amount, 100,000 cubic feet per second, flows over Niagara Falls during tourist season. This record flooding resulted in the closure of Interstate 10 at the Texas–Louisiana border and forced lengthy detours for many motorists. The flooding is so extensive that the community of Deweyville was completely cut off and inundated with water.

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In the community of Orange, floodwaters will be slow to recede as large marsh areas surrounding the flooded areas will be slow to drain. Further complicating the slow drainage, a railroad is acting like a levee and holding water back.

More rainfall is in store for already flood areas. Some rivers, such as the lower Trinity River, are forecast to remain in flood stage for weeks.

Thousands of Texans salvaged anything they could from their flood-damaged homes as they evacuated from many areas, including the Caddo Lake area, the cities of Deweyville, Orange and Pinehurst and parts of Newton County. The evacuations in Deweyville, Orange and Pinehurst were mandatory. Orange County evacuated approximately 9,000 residents while Newton County evacuated approximately 3,500 residents. Many of these residents will face long-term sheltering as they try to rebuild their lives and homes.

Water flooded Interstate 10, which is still closed at the Texas-Louisiana border as the swollen Sabine River continues to spread water over the roadway.

In order to support the Texas jurisdictions affected by this devastating storm, on March 13, 2016, at 12:00 p.m., the State Operations Center (SOC) increased its response level to Level III (Increased Readiness Conditions). On March 15, 2016, the SOC increased its readiness level to Level II to support the increased state response needed in affected areas.

RESPONSE OVERVIEW

State agencies have been coordinating through the Texas Division of Emergency Management to provide assistance as requested and needed by local jurisdictions. Evacuations have been a focus in all affected areas. Many residents have been evacuated, including evacuations of two nursing homes and the relocation of a shelter located in the flood zone.

The Texas Military Department (TMD), in conjunction with Texas Task Force 1, has conducted 85 missions with 40 rescues and conducted 351 evacuations. The Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) has flown over 39 hours of total rescue flight areas in Newton County, Deweyville and Orange and provided law enforcement support across the areas. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) assisted with evacuations, welfare checks and law enforcement operations. The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) provided two high-water rescue teams. The Emergency Medical Task Force has also assisted with evacuations.

TxDOT continues to provide debris cleanup with crews monitoring barricades and assisting with multiple road closures, including IH 10 at the Texas–Louisiana border. The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality continues to monitor any issues with any drinking water and wastewater facilities along the Sabine River that may potentially be impacted by the floodwater.

The Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM) continues to support coordination of the state response for the disaster from the State Operations Center in Austin with field staff

providing support in the affected areas. The Texas A&M Forest Service has provided Incident Management Teams and Geographic Information Systems.

Health and human services agencies such as the Department of Aging and Disability Services (DADS) are in contact with home health agencies serving individuals in the impacted areas. Multiple home health agencies are coordinating evacuation efforts for their clients. The Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) has provided an AMBUS and ambulance strike teams to support medical evacuations.

The Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) has provided livestock inspectors to continue to provide animal needs assessments in the impacted counties. They are working with local animal care and sheltering facilities and organizations to determine their operational status and needs. They are actively conducting local animal agriculture damage and needs assessments in Jasper, Newton and Orange counties.

Many state agencies and organizations have provided support to victims including the Texas A&M Engineering Extension Service, Texas Task Force 1 TMD, TPWD, DPS, TDEM, TxDOT, DSHS, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, The University of Texas at Austin Center for Space Research, Civil Air Patrol, Public Utility Commission of Texas, Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, DADS, Texas Health and Human Services Commission and TAHC.

Local Government

Local law enforcement, fire, EMS, public works, public utilities and emergency management spent countless hours evacuating residents, debris clearing, responding to stranded motorists and travelers, and weather-related rescues. Human services operations continued to support locals through ongoing winter weather and flooding concerns along the state's major river basins.

Voluntary Agency Assistance

Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOADs) have been very active throughout Texas, beginning with providing many services for the March severe weather event as well as recovery efforts for the May/June severe weather, Eagle Pass flooding, Hidden Pines wildfires, October flooding events and December severe storms and tornadoes. Due to the large number of disasters throughout Texas in 2015, many VOAD resources (financial and personnel) are depleted and operating with little to no funding. Resources are mostly donor-based and dependent upon the economic climate.

VOADs provided mass care sheltering, feeding, bulk distribution, reunification, damage assessments, emergency food boxes, shower units, clothing distribution, clean-up kits, direct financial assistance such as gift cards, personal care and comfort kits, medical kits, blankets, and many more services throughout the response. These resources, however, are not a long-term recovery solution.

Voluntary agency statistics through March 17, 2016:

- Eight shelters with a peak population of 499 on March 15, 2016
- More than 700 clean up and comfort kits distributed.
- More than 17,000 meals, snacks and drinks served
- More than 500 family food boxes and 300 cases of water
- More than 250 debit cards totaling \$26,700
- More than 300 client cases opened

Behavioral Health Impacts

The behavioral health impact continues to develop for an event that has been ongoing for much of the state since the severe weather in May and June and then again in October and December of 2015. Individuals, first responders and communities from across Texas continue to respond to the impacts from tornadoes, heavy rain and severe flooding. Reports from behavioral health providers in the field indicate that staff, consumers and behavioral health services have been significantly impacted.

As behavioral health personnel respond daily to new and ongoing events across the state, many survivors wonder when this dangerous weather is ever going to end, which is leaving them feeling anxious and distressed, including intrusive thoughts and sleep disturbances. For those who have already been through a recent flood or tornado event, the thought of more bad weather has resulted in additional distress and hyper-vigilance, delaying their ability to begin the emotional recovery process.

Without federal assistance, Texas does not have the ability or resources to meet or absorb the disaster behavioral health-related response and recovery needs and expenses associated with providing crisis-counseling services. If these costs are to be absorbed by the local provider, a direct negative impact will be experienced on both service delivery and the state's disaster response plan because funds designated for services to Texas' priority populations will be redirected to disaster response and recovery operations and not for the fund's intended purpose.

Residential and Business Impacts

Initial local assessments for Jasper, Newton and Orange have estimated 687 homes have been destroyed or received major damage and 4,460 homes have been affected or received minor damage. The National Geospatial Intelligence Agency (NGA) Southeast Preliminary Flooding Assessment of March 17, 2016, estimated 883 homes destroyed or receiving major damage and 669 homes affected or receiving minor damage along the Sabine River (see map attachment). Preliminary estimated business losses include 202 with major damage and 308 destroyed.

	Destroyed and Major	Minor and Affected
Local Assessments (DSO)	687	4,460
NGA*	883	669

*NGA data for destroyed homes includes both major and destroyed homes.

The following is detailed information on the impacted population, percentage below poverty level, median household income and percentage of elderly, disabled and pre-disaster unemployment rates.

March 2016 Severe Weather and Flooding Event					
	Average of Persons Below Poverty Level in percent	Median Household Income in dollars	Percent of Elderly (Age 65 and Older) in percent	Percent of Disabled (Under the Age of 65) in percent	Percent Pre-Disaster Unemployment (November 2015)
National Average	15.4	\$53,046.00	14.1	8.4	5.0
State Average	17.6	\$51,900.00	11.2	8.2	4.6
Counties					
Jasper	17.7	\$39,176	18.2	14.8	7.5
Newton	20.2	\$36,890	17.7	14.3	7.1
Orange	16.0	\$48,766	15.1	13.4	6.3

Data from U.S. Census Records; unemployment data from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Texas received three presidential disaster declarations in 2015 for the severe weather events from May 4 to June 22, 2015 (DR-4223-TX), October 22 to October 31, 2015 (DR-4245-TX), December 26, 2015 to January 21, 2016 (DR-4255-TX) and a Fire Management Assistance Grant (FMAG 5116) for the Hidden Pines Fire (Bastrop County) in October 2015. The state continues to work DR-4223-TX, DR-4245-TX and DR-4255-TX in addition to 10 open disasters, including major disasters such as Hurricanes Dolly, Rita and Ike, and the most destructive wildfires in Texas history, the 2011 wildfires. Of the 254 counties in Texas, 136 counties have been declared in one of these three major disaster declarations. Of those 136 counties, 27 of them have been declared in two or more of these disasters. The population of these counties under the three declarations is over 19.5 million people, who are 71 percent of the total population of Texas. Those 19.5 million people living in a Texas county hit by disaster is greater than the populations of 48 states. It has been a difficult year. The assistance received because of these earlier federal disasters has been vital, and many of the same communities are still in the

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recovery process from these earlier disasters, but assistance is still needed. In the past 12 months, the state has experienced numerous local flooding, tornado and wildfire events that in other states would have been considered major disasters.

CLOSING

Pursuant to 44 CFR § 206.36 (Major Disaster), this incident is of such magnitude and severity that effective response is beyond state and local capability, and supplementary federal assistance is necessary to save lives and protect property, public health and safety.

As a result of this disaster, the state of Texas is specifically requesting a major disaster declaration for:

- Individual Assistance including the Individuals and Households Programs (IA), Other Needs Assistance (ONA), Crisis Counseling, Disaster Unemployment Assistance, Disaster Legal Assistance, Disaster Case Management for Jasper, Orange and Newton counties; and
- Public Assistance Categories A-B including direct federal assistance for Jasper, Orange and Newton counties.

I am requesting Hazard Mitigation statewide.

I am also requesting U.S. Small Business Administration Disaster Loan Program for Physical and Economic Loss for all counties requesting Individual Assistance.

I have designated Nim Kidd as the Governor's Authorized Representative (GAR) and Paula Logan, Mike Miller, and Tom Polonis as the Alternate GAR. Nim Kidd is designated as the State Coordinating Officer and Traci Brasher is designated as the Deputy State Coordinating Officer for this request. Chief Kidd will work with the Federal Emergency Management Agency and will provide further information and justification on my behalf.

Sincerely,



Greg Abbott
Governor

GA:ktk

Enclosures: OMB No. 1660-0009/FEMA Form 010-0-13
NGA Map