



CHARLIE CRIST
GOVERNOR

April 10, 2009

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

Through: Mr. Major Phil May
Regional Administrator - FEMA Region IV
3003 Chamblee Tucker Road
Atlanta, Georgia 30341

RE: April Flooding -- Request for Major Disaster Declaration

Dear President Obama:

Under the provisions of § 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 Florida as a result of severe storms, flooding, flash flooding, straight-line winds and tornadoes with an Incident Period beginning March 26, 2009, and continuing. I have determined that the severity and magnitude of these storms is so significant that effective response is beyond the capabilities of the state and the affected local governments and that supplementary federal assistance is necessary. I am specifically requesting: Public Assistance (Category A-G) for **Bay, Calhoun, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson, Jefferson, Liberty, Okaloosa, Santa Rosa, Walton and Washington** counties and Hazard Mitigation Grant Assistance for the entire state. The state's Enhanced State Hazard Mitigation Plan was approved in September 2008. In the coming days the state may submit additional requests for preliminary damage assessments (PDA) and further county designations for federal assistance under these programs.

I am also requesting direct federal assistance for work and services to save lives and protect property. At present, the state requests technical assistance in the following areas: Geospatial Information Systems (GIS), flood plain mapping, flood inundation modeling, river forecast modeling and interpretation of the 500 year flood map and high resolution oblique imagery. GIS and other modeling assistance are needed because the state does not possess the technical expertise to perform these activities alone. The state also requests swift water rescue support, mass care support to include meals and water, and assistance from the U.S. Department of Transportation to assist with road closures and detouring, as well as other technical support as it relates to encroaching water on federal highways.

Commencing March 26, 2009, a series of storm systems has affected the southeastern United States with flooding rains, severe thunderstorms and tornadoes. During the period March 26-28, the Panhandle incurred significant flooding as rainfall amounts in excess of 10 inches fell across much of the region. This system also impacted adjacent river basins in southern Alabama, resulting in major river flooding along most rivers that flow into the Panhandle. Widespread flooding resulted in numerous water rescues, particularly in Okaloosa County. Major river flooding has occurred along the Choctawhatchee, Chipola, Shoal, and Ochlockonee Rivers in the Panhandle. Flooding along the Blackwater River in Santa Rosa County during this time period damaged 30 homes in the vicinity of Milton. Eight tornado touchdowns have been reported across North Florida since March 26. Tornado damage was reported at the Washington County Correctional Facility on March 27. Severe thunderstorms during the March 26-28, time period produced 15 separate reports of straight line wind damage in North Florida.

On March 31, the second in a series of severe weather systems moved across North Florida. The system produced another round of severe thunderstorms and exacerbated existing flooding conditions along the Panhandle rivers. Rainfall amounts of 3-5 inches fell over much of the area with additional tornado damages to residences in Jackson and Suwannee counties. Following this second round of heavy rainfall, the Chipola River at Altha crested at 30.66 feet (the 4th highest level on record and comparable to the Spring 1998 flood). At least 150 homes were damaged by flooding along the Chipola River in Calhoun County. Law enforcement also conducted two water rescues. The Ochlockonee River at Havana crested at 33.45 feet (the 3rd highest flood on record), which is just below the Tropical Storm Fay 2008 crest of 33.71 feet. This intense rainfall and resulting flash flooding damaged a number of roadways. On April 3, US 20, near the Ochlocknee River, was closed forcing a number of residential evacuations. The Choctawhatchee River, near the Town of Bruce, crested at 20.52 feet (8 feet above flood and 5th highest crest on record dating back to 1920) and still remains in major flood status. Dozens of homes have been affected along the Choctawhatchee from Washington County southward to Walton County.

A third storm system moved across North Florida on April 2-3, producing another 5-10 inches of rainfall. The majority of rainfall associated with this system fell across southern Georgia and the Suwannee Valley region of North Florida. As a result of this intense rainfall, several rivers flowing into the Suwannee Valley are cresting near or above record levels. The Withlacoochee River at Pinetta (near the Florida/Georgia border) crested near 88.5 feet which far exceeds the previous record of 85.8 feet recorded on April 5, 1948. The Alapaha River flowing into Hamilton County is also cresting at historic levels (29.8 feet), exceeding the 1948 flood of record by more than 2 feet. The Suwannee River near Ellaville is forecast to crest around 66 feet on April 12.

If so, it would be the 2nd highest crest on record. The Santa Fe River at Three Rivers Estates is forecast to rise above major flood on April 11, and major flood damage to homes is expected. The Suwannee River near Dowling Park is forecast to approach the 1973 flood level of 58.8 feet next week. These levels would inundate a large assisted living facility (Advent Christian Village) that flooded during the 1973 floods. Major flooding is also forecast downstream along the lower Suwannee River next week. Crests are not forecast to reach the lower Suwannee until mid-April, and river modeling projects that moderate to major flooding is anticipated. Additional impacts to residences and infrastructure are likely as these crests flow southward towards the mouth of the Suwannee River. Residences along the river are likely to experience flood damage.

On April 3, the Florida Medical Examiner's Office confirmed 2 fatalities related to flooding. Widespread rainfall totals of 10-15 inches have been recorded since March 26, which has produced impacts similar to the flooding experienced during Tropical Storm Fay in this region during August, 2008. Altogether, these series of severe weather systems has resulted in the second major disaster to hit North Florida in the last 12 months.

The flooding that has occurred thus far has also caused a significant stress on local agriculture crop production. Many row crops (e.g., corn, wheat and oats) were already planted and will need to be replanted due to high moving water destroying planted fields. If not replanted in the coming weeks, these growers will lose a large percentage of their total production for the growing season. Vegetable growers have been impacted as well. Those impacted will have until April 15 (or thereabouts) to replant or lose their market window. In general, replanting will largely depend on the land drying before that date. If not, these growers lose one production cycle. At present, it is looking doubtful that producers will be able to double crop (planting one crop after the other is harvested) this season, thus reducing area total production.

In response to the succession of severe weather events and flooding, on April 1 and 7, 2009, I declared a state of emergency for Alachua, Bay, Calhoun, Columbia, Dixie, Escambia, Franklin, Gadsden, Gilchrest, Gulf, Hamilton, Holmes, Jackson, Jefferson, Lafayette, Leon, Levy, Liberty, Madison, Okaloosa, Santa Rosa, Suwannee, Taylor, Wakulla, Walton and Washington counties and directed the State Coordinating Officer to execute the state's Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan in accordance with Section 401 of the Stafford Act (see Executive Order 09-81). Of the 26 counties under a state of emergency, 18 of them are recognized as a fiscally constrained county (there is a total of 30 statewide). The term "fiscally constrained county" is defined as each county for which the value of one mill will raise no more than \$5 million annually, based on the property valuations and tax data annually published by the Department of Revenue.

On April 3 and 7, 2009, the state coordinating officer made a formal request to FEMA for joint PDA teams to determine the magnitude of damage caused by this flooding event. Preliminary estimates of the types and amount of assistance needed under the Stafford Act are tabulated in Enclosure B.

Since activation on April 1, the following information illustrates the nature and amount of state and local resources that have been or will be used to alleviate the conditions of this disaster:

- A state of emergency was declared on April 1, 2009 (see Executive Order(s) 09-81; see also Executive Order 09-87 designating additional counties).
- The State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) has been activated since 0700 hours on April 1, 2009.
- ESF 1 (Transportation/Public Works) has deployed 160 road signs, 100 reflective cones, 869 barricades to assist counties with washed out roadways and 50,000 sand bags to curtail river flooding. ESF 1 has also deployed 5 bridge inspection teams (10 personnel total) and provided asphalt milling services.
- ESF 16 has deployed 10 watercraft/15 personnel and 1 helicopter to assist counties with Search & Rescue and local evacuations. A total of 15 law enforcement officers have been deployed to assist with road security. 4 dispatchers have been deployed to assist with county law enforcement operations.
- The SEOC has deployed 19 joint FEMA/State PDA teams to conduct Individual and Public Assistance damage assessments.
- A State Management Team (White Team)(consisting of 10 personnel) has been deployed to the SEOC to assist with operations and planning.
- A State Management Team (Gold Team) (consisting of 15 personnel) has been deployed to Walton County to coordinate preliminary damage assessments for impacted Panhandle counties. The state's Mobile Command Vehicle has been deployed with this team to support their operations.
- A Reconnaissance Planning Cell (consisting of 7 personnel) has been established in the SEOC to assess current river conditions. The Florida Civil Air Patrol (1 aircraft) is currently flying missions over flooded waterways and taking aerial photography of areas of concern and reporting this information back to the cell for planning purposes.
- The SEOC has also added 9 GIS to the Planning Section to support ongoing planning and response activities. One GIS specialist has been deployed to Hamilton County Emergency Operation Center to assist their Planning Section.
- Two county emergency operations center support teams (consisting of 6 personnel each) have been deployed to Madison and Hamilton Counties.

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- On April 8, the SEOC activated the State Logistics Resource Center and deployed logistics personnel to the facility to assist with operations.
- ESF 6 (Mass Care) has distributed over 2,815 meals and snacks to displaced families.
- On April 7, ESF 1 & 3 closed U.S. 41 at the Alapaha River due to high water and flood conditions. On April 8, ESF 1 & 3 closed U.S. 90 at the Suwannee River due to high water and flood conditions.

I certify that for this major disaster, the state and local governments will assume all applicable non-federal shares of costs required by the Stafford Act. Total expenditures are expected to exceed \$ 20.9 million, in accordance with the table in Enclosure D.

In accordance with 44 CFR § 206.208, the state of Florida agrees that it will, with respect to direct federal assistance:

1. Provide, without cost to the United States, all lands, easements and rights-of-ways necessary to accomplish the approved work;
2. Hold and save the United States free from damages due to the requested work, and shall indemnify the Federal Government against any claims arising from such work;
3. Provide reimbursement to FEMA for the non-federal share of the cost of such work in accordance with the provisions of the FEMA-State Agreement; and
4. Assist the performing federal agency in all support and local jurisdictional matters.

In addition, I anticipate the need for debris removal, which poses an immediate threat to lives, public health and safety. Pursuant to §§ 403 and 407, of the Stafford Act, 42 U.S.C. §§ 5170b and 5173, the state agrees to indemnify and hold harmless the United States of America for any claims arising from the removal of debris or wreckage for this disaster. The state agrees that debris removal from public and private property will not occur until the landowner signs an unconditional authorization for the removal of debris.

As of the date of this letter, record flooding continues along the Alapaha and Withlacoochee Rivers that flow into the middle portion of the Suwannee River. The tributaries flowing into these main stem rivers are also flooding. Local and state reconnaissance teams are reporting flooding well outside of the 100-year flood plain and in some cases, outside of the 500-year flood plain. Flooding of local, state and federal highways continues to impact transportation throughout the region. Impassable and washed out roadways are severely impacting the local and state economy. Flooding has also inundated hundreds of homes and businesses in this region.

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Once these floodwaters fully recede later this month, we expect many counties to report hundreds of uninsured homes suffering either complete destruction or major damage.

In summary, your assistance is urgently needed. I have designated Ruben D. Almaguer as the State Coordinating Officer for this request. He will work with FEMA and may provide further information or justification on my behalf. Thank you again for your support of Florida.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Charlie Crist", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Charlie Crist

Enclosure

cc: Ruben D. Almaguer, State Coordinating Officer