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Ensuring a safe and secure homeland for all North Dakotans

Drought and Wildfire Related Programs and Projects

Two of the most detrimental natural hazards that occur across the United States, and most often times happen concurrently, are the hazards of droughts and wildfires. Droughts are a slow developing hazard that can last for weeks, months, or possibly years depending on the amount of precipitation a region is fortunate enough to receive. High temperatures, high winds, and low humidity can worsen drought conditions, and have a substantial effect on a community's access to drinkable water, recreational resources, and the rate of agricultural growth. When a community is in a state of drought, the chances of having uncontrollable wildfires, which generally begin unnoticed due to their location in the forest or countryside, increase significantly and can pose severe threats to human life and safety.

For these particular hazards, there are three (3) federal grant programs that have been developed to help mitigate, respond to, and manage the potential impacts that droughts and wildfires pose to the public, property, and infrastructure. These programs are available through FEMA with the ultimate goal of reducing risk to human life and safety, and hopefully reducing the overall cost of response and recovery operations on local, state, and federal tax payers as well.

Fire Management Assistance Grant (FMAG)

FMAG is a grant program available under the Public Assistance (PA) section of FEMA, and provides financial assistance through a 75% Federal and 25% local cost share to manage and control a declared fire on non-Federal public or private land that has the ability to create largescale destruction that would constitute a major disaster event.

While a fire is burning uncontrolled and threatening widespread destruction, either the Governor or a Governor's Authorized Representative (GAR) can submit a request to FEMA for an FMAG declaration. To expedite the declaration process, the initial request is submitted verbally by telephone to the FEMA Regional Administrator, with a Request for Fire Management Assistance Declaration completed after the fire has been controlled and the emergency has officially subsided.

The following criteria are located in 44 CFR Part 204.21, and are required to request a FMAG declaration:

1. Threat to lives and improved property, including threats to critical facilities/infrastructure, and critical watershed areas;
2. Availability of State and local firefighting resources;
3. High fire danger conditions, as indicated by nationally accepted indices such as the National Fire Danger Ratings System; and
4. Potential major economic impact.

Additionally, for FEMA to evaluate the above criteria, they require the State or Tribe to provide the following information in both the verbal and written FMAG declaration requests:

- Size of fire(s) in acres or square miles;
- Name, location, and population of community threatened;
- Number of primary and secondary residences and businesses threatened;
- Distance of fire to nearest communities;

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Governor

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Director – Department of Emergency Services

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- Number of persons evacuated to date, if applicable;
- Current and predicted (24-hour) weather conditions; and
- Degree to which State and local resources are committed to this fire and other fires in Federal, State, or local jurisdictions.

Once the FMAG is declared, the Regional Administrator and GAR will work together to develop an incident period which will identify a starting point for the event which will designate when firefighting activities began, and an ending point that designates when the fire was considered controlled and the emergency had subsided. Eligible costs for firefighting related activities that were incurred during the incident period can then be submitted for FEMA approval and reimbursement at the 75% Federal and 25% local cost shares. Eligible Work must be the legal responsibility of the applicant, required as a result of the declared fires, and located within the designated disaster area.

Eligible costs include, but are not limited to:

- Equipment and supplies;
- Labor costs;
- Travel and per diem;
- Temporary repairs of damage caused by firefighting activities;
- Mobilization and demobilization; and
- Limited Pre-positioning costs approved by the Regional Administrator.

Hazard Mitigation Assistance (HMA) Programs

Hazard mitigation is defined as “any sustained action taken to reduce or eliminate long-term risk to people and property from natural hazards and their effects.” Under the HMA branch of FEMA, there are two mitigation programs that help develop and fund projects that reduce or eliminate risks to communities, as well as to private properties and public infrastructure, caused by drought and wildfire. The first program is the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) which funds eligible mitigation activities with a 75% Federal, 10% State, and 15% local cost share. The second program is the Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM) Program which funds eligible mitigation activities with a 75% Federal and 25% local cost share. Both programs are available for the same types of projects, but the availability and amount of funding for the programs differs based on how they are authorized by the federal government.

HMGP is authorized by Section 404 of the Stafford Act, 42 U.S.C. 5170c, and is available when a state or federally recognized tribe receives a Presidential disaster declaration after a largescale natural hazard has occurred. In order to request HMGP be made available as part of the declared disaster event, the State or Tribe must have a current FEMA approved Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan (MHMP) and request HMGP during the declaration request process. The amount of available funding for HMGP is based on the estimated amount of total Federal assistance provided by FEMA to the State or Tribe as part of the declared disaster event. If the State or Tribe has a Standard MHMP, they will receive 15% of the total disaster assistance amount for HMGP, and if they have an Enhanced MHMP, they will receive up to 20%. HMGP funding is available statewide, not just for the jurisdictions that were damaged by the declared disaster event.

PDM is authorized by the Stafford Act, U.S.C. 5133, and all available funding is based on congressional appropriations. The program is nationally competitive, and has a 90 day application period that is opened annually. Once all applications have been submitted, they go through a National selection process to determine if they will be selected and funded by FEMA.

Both programs are considered all-hazard programs, meaning that they can fund projects related to any natural hazards, to include drought and wildfires. The following project types are hazard specific activities funded under HMGP and PDM to help prevent or reduce risk related to droughts and wildfires:

- **Hazardous Fuels Reduction**
 - Projects that remove vegetative fuels proximate to at-risk structures that, if ignited, pose a significant threat to human life and property, especially critical facilities.
- **Application of Ignition-Resistant Construction**
 - Projects that apply ignition-resistant techniques and/or non-combustible materials on new and existing homes, structures, and critical facilities to prevent damages and the spread of fire. This can also include the planting of fire resistant vegetation around communities and critical infrastructure to prevent the spread of wildfires.
- **Creation of Defensible Space**
 - Defensible Space projects create perimeters around homes, structures, and critical facilities through the removal or reduction of flammable vegetation to prevent damages and threats to human life from wildfires.
- **Aquifer Storage and Recovery**
 - Aquifer Storage and Recovery (ASR) projects serve primarily as a drought management tool, but can also be used to reduce flood risk and restore aquifers that have been subject to overdraft. The concept is to capture water when there is an abundant supply, store the water in subsurface aquifers, and recover water from the storage aquifer if and when there is a need. Storing water underground helps protect it from pollutants, evaporation, and weather events; and to maintain stream flow during periods of low flow.
- **Flood Diversion and Storage**
 - Flood Diversion and Storage (FDS) projects often are used to reduce flood risk, but also may be used to mitigate drought and improve ecosystem services. These projects involve diverting floodwaters from a stream, river, or other body of water into a conduit such as a canal, pipe, or wetland and storing them in an above-ground storage facility. Water is then slowly released, reducing flood risk as well as facilitating groundwater recharge/seepage.
- **Floodplain and Stream Restoration**
 - Floodplain and stream restoration (FSR) projects are used primarily to reduce flood risk and erosion by providing stable reaches, and may also mitigate drought impacts. FSR projects restore and enhance the floodplain, stream channel and riparian ecosystem's natural function. They provide baseflow recharge, water supply augmentation, floodwater storage, terrestrial and aquatic wildlife habitat, and recreation opportunities by restoring the site's soil, hydrology and vegetation conditions that mimic pre-development channel flow and floodplain connectivity.

For additional information about the programs listed above, please contact ND State Hazard Mitigation Officer, Justin Messner at jmessner@nd.gov or (701) 328-8109.