

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 22, 2024

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden:

We write to request an update on Governor Inslee's request for a Major Disaster Declaration for the Gray and Oregon Road fires that occurred in Spokane County from August 18 to August 25, 2023. Governor Inslee sent the request October 4, 2023. Now, 110 days later, those that were impacted by the fires are still patiently awaiting a response as to whether they can expect federal resources to aid in their recovery efforts. It is imperative to the survivors and the larger Spokane County Community that they have this information to move forward and rebuild.

The Oregon and Gray Road fires burned more than 22,484 acres and destroyed over 710 structures, including 366 homes. That is more homes destroyed than any other fire in Washington state history, and led to more than 1,000 residents being displaced during the emergency event with many still lacking permanent housing. We commend our first responders, community leaders, and the state for how they have come together during these devastating events to help survivors. Now, Spokane County is working to develop a path to long-term recovery and a key element to recovery is knowing whether federal aid is on the way.

Spokane County determined that critical recovery and infrastructure projects associated with the Oregon and Gray Road fires will cost the city approximately \$63M dollars. Specifically, Silver Lake residents are still on private wells or lake water, and need fire hydrants to assist with community safety. Access to the west side of Silver Lake is limited to a narrow one way in, one way out road due to excess debris from the fire. They are also in the process of building a temporary housing facility for emergency use and short-term vacation rentals for city income. In addition, many survivors are uninsured or underinsured and are still struggling to rebuild their homes. Spokane County is already experiencing subzero temperatures this year and many of these individuals and families are in temporary housing, such as mobile and motor homes that may not be weatherized, as they await a final determination on federal resources.

Federal assistance through the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Individual Assistance program would help tremendously with defraying the cost for these projects and expediting getting these individuals the resources they need. Assistance, as requested by the Governor from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Environmental Protection Agency, is also critical to assist with debris management and disposal, particularly to protect local waterways from contaminants.

Spokane County faces the risk of destructive and deadly wildfires, like the Gray and Oregon Road fires, every fire season. The Greater Spokane Area is the largest urban wildlife interface in the state and is the 4th most at-risk community in the state for wildfires. The community needs to begin to rebuild and mitigate against future disasters now. That is why we are requesting an immediate update on when a determination on the Gray and Oregon Road Major Disaster Declaration request will be made. We also strongly urge you to approve the Major Disaster Declaration request to ensure Spokane County, and specifically the Medical Lake and Elk communities, can access the federal resources they urgently need to continue to respond to this tragedy.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Cathy McMorris Rodgers". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Cathy" being particularly prominent.

Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Member of Congress

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Maria Cantwell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Maria" being particularly prominent.

Maria Cantwell
United States Senator