

STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

CHRISTOPHER T. SUNUNU
Governor

February 15, 2024

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Through: Lori A. Ehrlich
Regional Administrator
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Federal Emergency Management Agency Region I
220 Binney Street
Cambridge, MA 02142

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 respectfully request that a major disaster be declared for the State of New Hampshire. This request is due to impacts from severe storms and flooding from December 17-December 21, 2023, that overwhelmed State and local resources requiring an immediate and urgent response and resulted in damages being validated through the Joint Preliminary Damage Assessment (PDA) process in Belknap, Carroll, Coos, Grafton, Hillsborough, Merrimack, Rockingham, Sullivan, and Strafford counties.

I, hereby request a designation of the full Public Assistance Program for Belknap, Carroll, Coos, Grafton, Hillsborough, Merrimack, Rockingham, Sullivan, and Strafford counties, and a statewide designation of the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program.

As a direct result of the incident, roads throughout the state were undermined, roadside shoulders, ditches, and adjacent slopes were washed away. State and local culverts along with other drainage structures were overwhelmed from water and debris. In some parts of the State there was already significant snowpack that combined with the rain resulted in increased amounts of runoff. These damages presented a hazard to the travel of the public, as well as obstacles for first responders in preserving public health and safety. Significant flooding caused extensive destruction and left debris that restricted travel and emergency operations on state, local, and private roadways. Flooding and road damage left residents trapped in their homes and prevented access by emergency personnel. The impact of the response to this event was felt throughout the local mutual aid and state systems as personnel and assets were diverted to the incident area.

A Weather Impact Summary, which has additional information, was requested and received from the National Weather Service (NWS) and has been provided as an enclosure to this letter. The State of New Hampshire began to see impacts from the strong low-pressure system on December 17, 2023, through December 21, 2023. Prior to the storm, NWS issued a briefing package that highlighted that the greatest impacts would be significant for flooding, wind, coastal waters and elevated for coastal flooding.

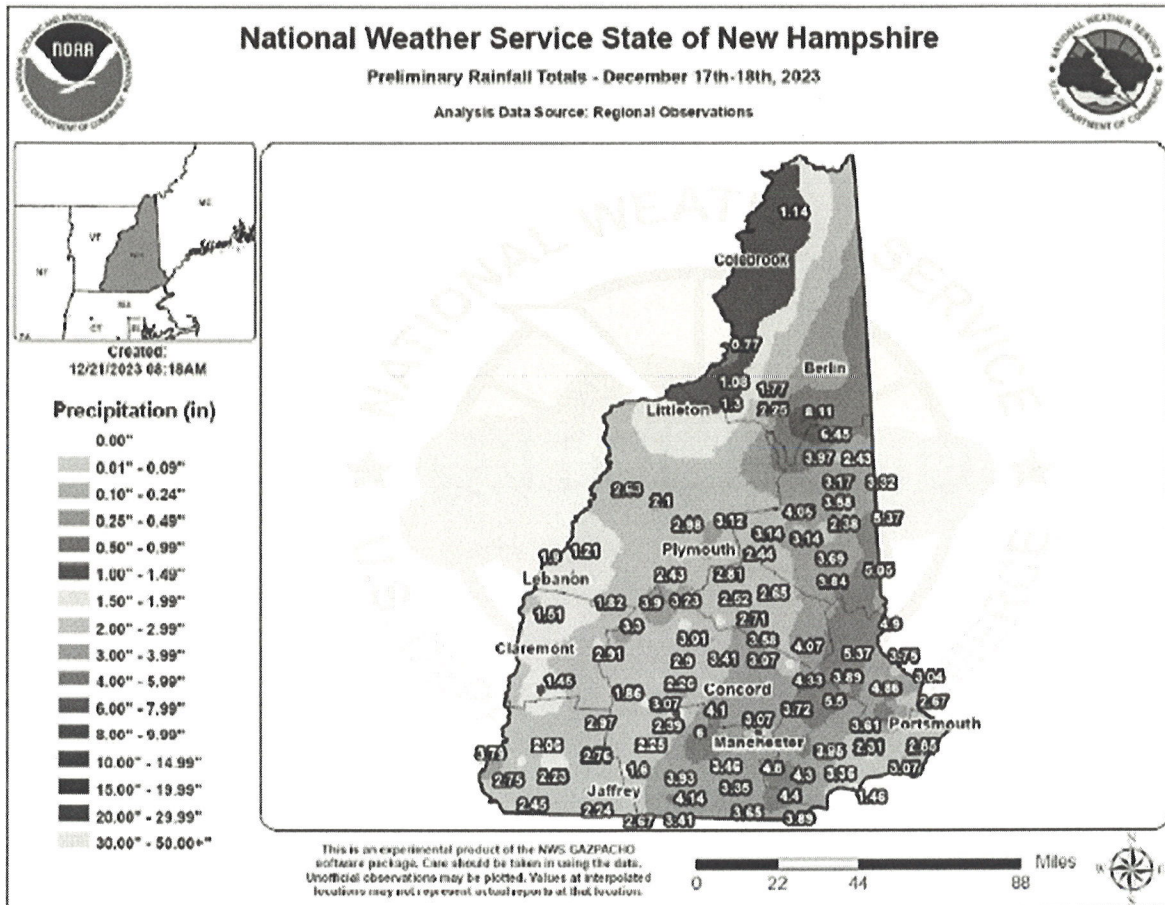
On December 18, the Department of Safety Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (HSEM) participated in a weather briefing with NWS Gray, Maine, due to the anticipated impacts of the system. In the afternoon the same day, HSEM hosted calls with the Emergency Support Functions (ESFs) and then the local communities.

The NWS storm update that was issued on December 18, 2023, reiterated that rivers were anticipated to continue to rise. Several waterways took days to fully recede to non-flood stage. A flood stage report issued by the NWS confirmed that four rivers were still at flood stage until December 21, 2023. It is important to note that this does not illustrate how significant the impacts were on non-gauged streams and tributaries throughout the state.

As part of the NWS Weather Impact Summary, it was stated that, "Between 2 to 3 [inches] of rainfall fell across most areas, except the Connecticut River Valley and leese of the White Mountains, where 1 to 2 [inches] fell. The heaviest rainfall, where for to locally 8+ [inches] of rainfall was reported, occurred in a band from eastern slopes of the White Mountains, down along the Maine/New Hampshire border and into the Merrimack River Valley."

The below graphic shows the estimated rainfall between December 17-18, 2023.

Rainfall Estimate December 17-18, 2023



The NWS attributes the cause of the major stream and river flooding to the heavy rainfall in addition to the rapid snowmelt, partially frozen ground, and saturated soil.

The graphic below shows the snow water equivalent before the incident began December 17, 2023, and the snow water equivalent in the middle of the incident.

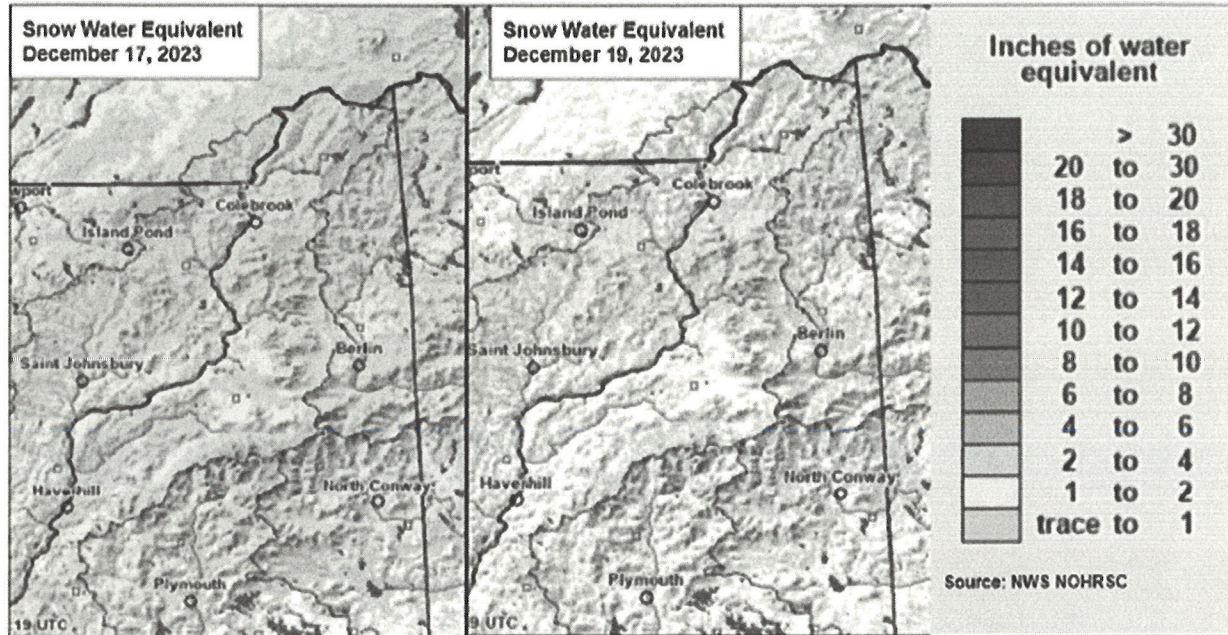
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Satellite Estimated Snowmelt for Storm



The NWS provided a table below that summarizes the flooding related products issued for the December 17-21, 2023, incident.

Flood Watch/Warning/Advisory Product Summary Count

Flood Product	Event Count
Flood Watch	1
River Flood Warning	26
Flash Flood Warning	3 (1 Considerable)
Areal Flood Warning	6
Areal Flood Advisory	2

The NWS also provided information of streamflow data compared to historical normal that illustrated the runoff from this incident exceeded the July 9-17, 2023, declared disaster FEMA-DR-4740-NH. The graphic below shows the observed streamflow data in 2023 and forecasted values for 2024.

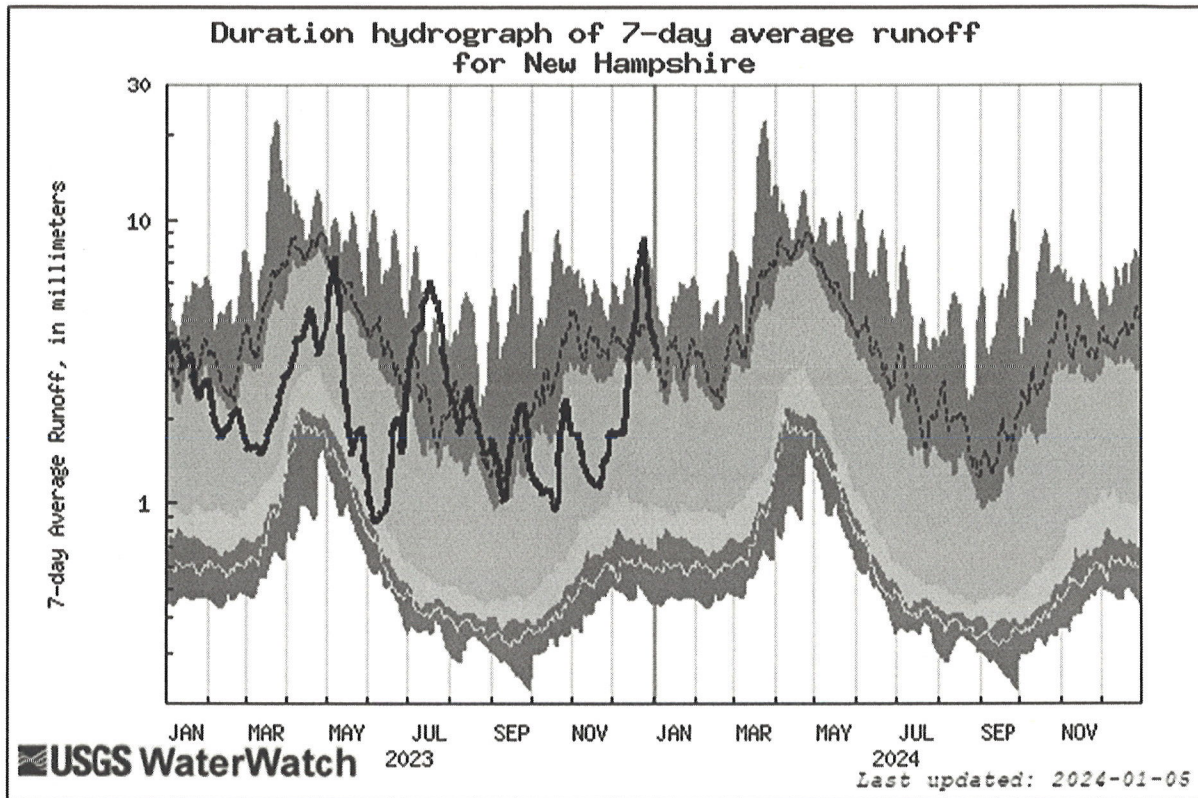
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Streamflow Data Compared to Historical Normals



Explanation - Percentile classes						
lowest-10th percentile	5	10-24	25-75	76-90	95	90th percentile-highest
Much below Normal	Below normal	Normal	Above normal	Much above normal		Runoff

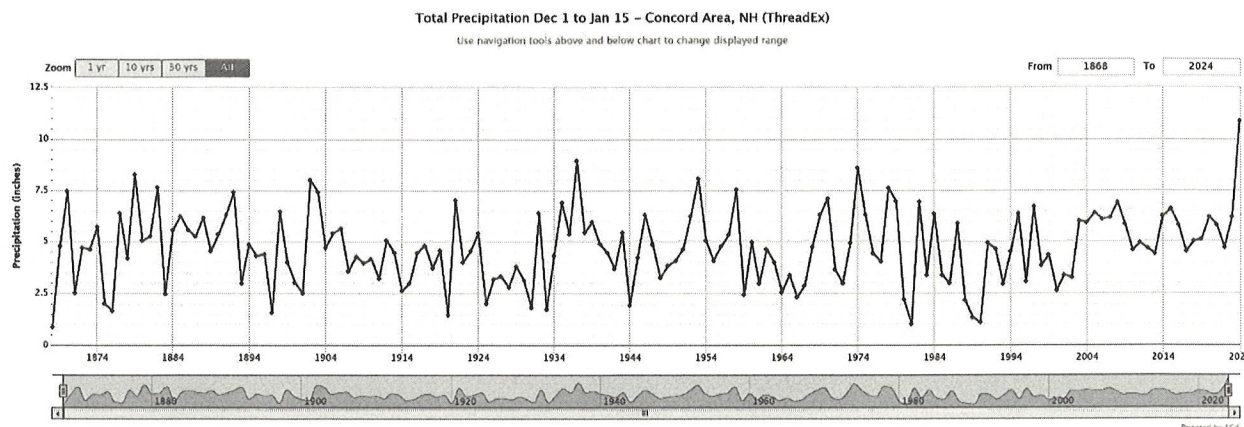
On January 17, 2024, NWS Gray posted on their social media website a graphic highlighting the total precipitation from December 1, 2023, to January 15, 2024. Within the post, NWS Gray stated that Concord has recorded its wettest first half of winter, which includes both rainfall and liquid equivalent of snowfall of 10.87 inches.

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Prior to 2024, the next closest record was in 1937 where the total precipitation was 8.92 and after that was 1974 with a total 8.59.

NH HSEM staff began the Initial Damage Assessments (IDAs) while response efforts were still ongoing knowing the magnitude of impacts to local and state infrastructure was so severe. Based on IDAs reported by local communities and state agencies, the Director of HSEM Robert M. Buxton, requested the Joint PDA process on December 21, 2023, and they began on January 2, 2024.

On December 27, 2023, NH HSEM staff and FEMA Region I Recovery staff completed a coordinating call discussing the onset of the Joint PDAs. It was noted to FEMA during this call that a Weather Impact Summary had not been received by the National Weather Service and therefore an end-date for the incident period could not be established for the purposes of Joint PDAs.

The Joint PDAs were requested for the following counties: Belknap, Carroll, Cheshire, Coos, Grafton, Hillsborough, Merrimack, Rockingham, Strafford, and Sullivan. Damages were reported in all 10 counties – see attached map accompanying this letter. This map highlights the known impacts as of December 26, 2023. The effects of this incident in the State of New Hampshire are evident as demonstrated in the Public Assistance enclosure B.

More than 30 Joint PDAs were completed that captured damages in nine different counties. From data collected during the IDA process that the State of New Hampshire completed, more than \$4 million in damages were reported from the severe storms and flooding that began on December 17, 2023.

Current local and state damages have been validated and exceed the State indicator \$2,534,653 (\$1.84 per capita). It is understood that the figures captured in Enclosure B reflect uninsured losses and the overall costs were significantly higher. The Joint PDAs validated damages to Category A - Debris Removal, Category B - Emergency Protective Measures, Category C - Roads and Bridges, Category E - Buildings & Equipment, Category F - Public Utility, and Category G - Parks & Other. At the conclusion of the Joint PDAs \$2,642,481 were validated in eligible Public Assistance damages.

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Emergency protective measures were widespread throughout the entire incident period. Multiple swift water rescues and other types of emergency responses were performed in several different locations throughout the incident period:

- Nearly 20% of entities that completed an Initial Damage Assessment with NH HSEM reported that they had individuals cut off from critical services. The Town of Conway (Carroll County) reported that at least 1,000 individuals were cut off and at least a half dozen communities were not even able to estimate the impact in totality.
- On December 18, in Salem (Rockingham County) the Fire Department responded to a tree that came down onto a residence. Thankfully no injuries were reported.
- On December 18, in Campton (Grafton County) the Fire Department responded to a residence where the roof had reportedly blown off. Thankfully no injuries were reported.
- On December 18, in Carroll (Coos County) the Police Department was notified a vehicle submerged in flood waters.
- On December 18, in Wentworth (Grafton County) the Police Department was notified of a vehicle trapped on a roadway in floodwaters.

Fortunately, there were no deaths recorded by the NH Department of Justice, Office of the Chief Medical Examiner because of the severe storm and flooding. Data is unavailable to provide a clear response on if there were any serious injuries during the incident period.

Town of Jackson, Carroll County | Due to impacts from the incident period, the Town sustained damages to Category C - Roads and Bridges and Category G - Parks & Other. The Town reported that at least 30 individuals were cut off from critical services due to flood waters during the incident period. Damages resulted in the closure of the Jackson Falls area, which is listed in the National Park Wild and Scenic River program. Numerous trails within the park were washed out causing it to be closed. The Town recently completed a project of a walkway near the scenic river, which they reported was in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. This will need to be repaired to ensure this population will be able to utilize this trail in the future. At the conclusion of the Joint PDA, the Town had \$124,238 (\$120.85 per capita) in validated damages.

Town of Conway, Carroll County | Due to impacts from the incident period, not only were lifesaving emergency protective measures taken but numerous damages were sustained to both public and private nonprofit organizations infrastructure. For example, the Conway Historical Society, which leases spaces to the Robert Frost Charter School, had approximately 3.5 feet of water in the building. This resulted in substantial damage to the property that still is not usable to students. The Conway Congregational Church also was impacted significantly. The Town reported that at least 1,000 individuals were cut off from critical services due to flood waters during the incident period and over 25 individuals were displaced as a direct result of damages to residences. At the conclusion of the Joint PDA, the Town of Conway and eligible entities located within that community had \$295,186 (\$30.05 per capita) in validated damages.

Town of Gorham, Coos County | Due to impacts from the incident period, the Town sustained damages to Category C - Roads and Bridges and Category G - Parks & Other. There were numerous roads that were washed out, undermined, or sustained culvert damage. The Town reported at least 10 individuals were displaced as a direct result of damages to residences. At the conclusion of the Joint PDA, the Town had \$95,426 (\$35.37 per capita) in validated damages.

Town of Sugar Hill, Grafton County | Due to impacts from the incident period, the Town sustained damages to Category C - Roads and Bridges. The Town reported that at least 40 individuals were cut off from critical services due to flood waters during the incident period. Most damages were a direct result of either fallen trees or flood waters. The Town reported that only half of the residents had power back on December 19, 2024. At the conclusion of the Joint PDA, the Town had \$41,069 (\$63.48 per capita) in validated damages.

In total, nearly 100 Individual Assistance requests from residents have been managed by the state with the assistance from 211 NH. Local communities reported damages to private properties including basement flooding, washed out driveways and large amounts of gravel and some residences being completely uninhabitable due to impacts. NH Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) is being utilized to assist with coordinating assistance, where appropriate. Impacts though significant are not enough for the State to have requested the Individual Assistance programs through FEMA. NH HSEM has been in regular communication with the United States Small Business Administration and is prepared to pursue a Rural Agency Declaration should a Public Assistance declaration be granted.

Pursuant to the intensity of this severe storm and flooding, from December 17-December 21, 2023, I executed the State Emergency Operations Plan (SEOP) with the activation of the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) to a partial activation level. While I did not declare a State of Emergency in New Hampshire, the nature and amount of State and local governmental resources that have been or will be used to alleviate the conditions of this disaster are as follows:

1. The SEOP was executed on December 18, 2023, and I instructed the Director of HSEM to activate and staff the SEOC. At 1100 hours on December 18, 2023, the SEOC opened at an Enhanced Monitoring activation level. Only 90 minutes after opening the SEOC, the status changed to a Partial Activation. The SEOC was activated to monitor the situation, coordinate state response activities and to respond to local requests for assistance and resources, if necessary. The SEOC returned to steady state at 0800 hours on December 20, 2023, and did not reopen.

The Director was in contact with the appropriate Emergency Support Function (ESF) lead agencies to ensure an adequate and timely response to the needs of our state, should a need have been identified. NH HSEM utilizes WebEOC and an incident was created titled, "2023 – 015 Rain Event 18 DEC," to allow state and local agencies to log requests or actions taken because of the storm.

A total of 13 communities activated or partially activated their local emergency operations centers to coordinate their response efforts, assess damages, monitor road closures, and respond to emergency calls for service.

Nearly a dozen mission task requests were entered into WebEOC due to needs in local communities. These requests varied from the Town of Conway indicating a need of water for a shelter being opened or the Town of Tamworth indicating a need of signage due to flooding

in the community. The SEOC Mission Task Coordinator handled these requests with the appropriate ESFs.

Though at the State level Community Lifelines remained green throughout the entirety of the incident, individual communities were unable to maintain a green status for their individual lifelines. Impacts were experienced in all eight of the Community Lifelines.

Power outages and the associated impacts were monitored by staff in the SEOC. The outages peaked on December 18, 2023, around 10AM with over 50,000 outages reported across the four utility companies. A news release was issued due to these conditions.

Before and after the SEOC activation, the NH HSEM Duty Officer remained on an on-call basis 24/7, to coordinate the needs of local communities during the recovery phase.

2. ESFs that were coordinated with during the Activation included: Transportation (ESF 1), Communications & Alerting (ESF 2), Public Works and Engineering (ESF 3), Fire Fighting (ESF 4), Emergency Management (ESF 5), Mass Care, Housing, and Human Services (ESF 6), Health and Medical (ESF 8), Energy (ESF 12), Public Safety and Law Enforcement (ESF 13), Volunteer Management (ESF 14), Public Information (ESF 15), and Military Support (ESF 16).
3. The NH DOT coordinated transportation, public works, and engineering needs across the state. Numerous roads across the state required debris removal and repairs to infrastructure.

The NH DOT Division of Operations Bureau of Transportation Systems, Management & Operations (TSMO) maintains 24/7 staffing to address needs immediately as they arise within the State. Between the hours of midnight on December 17, 2023, and midnight on December 20, 2023, an average of eight staff were on duty in the TSMO each day who answered over 1,300 phone calls and nearly 7,500 radio communications. Two days during the incident period nine staff were utilized. There were an additional six district offices that supported the operations throughout the event, which their data is not represented within the previous information.

In total, nearly 140 roads were logged in WebEOC as having been impacted during the incident period. The road closure board in WebEOC documents impacts to both local and state roadways and is monitored by the NHTSMO and the SEOC.

4. The NH Department of Environmental Services (DES) monitored and coordinated response to storm impacts to rivers, dams, and drinking water and wastewater systems. DES was available to field phone calls, for dam inspections and additional monitoring of streams, as the need arose following flash flooding and washouts.

Over the course of December 18, 2023, DES monitored rainfall amounts, river flows and lake levels to determine where dam related issues may occur. Several phone calls were received by DES from NH State Police and dam owners informing DES about high water levels and potential dam related issues. Mostly DES was notified of high water occurring at dams in the

Pemigewasset River and Androscoggin River watersheds; however, no significant dam related impacts occurred in these areas and issues were managed by local officials and dam owners.

During the evening of December 18, 2023, DES observed high river levels on the Suncook and Piscataquog rivers and dispatched Dam Bureau personnel to mitigate any dam related issues. Dam Bureau personnel worked with local officials and downstream dam owners to mitigate the hazards on the Suncook River by increasing releases from Pittsfield Mill Dam in Pittsfield. On the Piscataquog River Dam Bureau personnel worked with local officials to voluntarily evacuate one residential building due to high water at Hadley Falls Dam in Goffstown. No damage to that residential building was reported to DES.

Over the course of December 19, 2023, DES worked with local officials and downstream dam owners along the Salmon Falls River to mitigate high flows out of Milton Three Ponds Dam in Milton. No damage to residential property downstream of Milton Three Ponds was reported to DES.

After the event, DES has reached out to several dam owners who experienced possible dam related issues as a result of the December 18, 2023, storm event. DES has also communicated with residents who experienced property damage along the Ossipee and Lamprey Rivers resulting from high flows during the storm event.

5. From December 17, 2023-December 21, 2023, the Department of Safety, Division of Emergency Services and Communications answered 6,245 calls to 911 which is a 17% increase from week before. Extreme call volume days were recorded on December 18, 2023, where more than 1,6000 calls were answered in a single day.

Additionally, a mission task request was submitted for ESF 2 requiring communications equipment to be deployed at a damage site on Route 302 in Hart's Location. This request was made as personnel on site making emergency repairs were having to travel more than 15 minutes to get cell phone service.

6. The SEOC was aware of three shelters that were opened and/or put on standby for individuals impacted by the incident. One was in Campton (Grafton County), the next in Conway (Carroll County), and the other was in Franconia (Grafton County).

A shelter was opened at their secondary shelter location in the Town of Conway (Carroll County). The primary shelter location was unable to be utilized due to rising flood waters that were in proximity to impacting onsite utilities. This was one of several shelters opened because of the incident. This example demonstrates the impacts to the Food, Hydration, and Shelter Community Lifeline.

7. The New Hampshire National Guard was called upon to assist with an aerial rescue of five individuals in the Town of Conway (Carroll County). Other resources were provided by ESF 9 (Search & Rescue) which was coordinated by the New Hampshire Fish and Game.

An additional 17 people were rescued by the Conway Fire Department as a result of life-threatening conditions. As mentioned in an earlier declaration request, in the summer of 2023, the Conway Fire Department had rescued 23 people. In an average year, there are only six to 10 rescues. This example demonstrates the impacts to the emergency services critical infrastructure sector and the Safety & Security Community Lifeline. Additional Safety & Security impacts have been outlined within this request.

8. ESF 4 received a mission task request for a Type III Swiftwater rescue team. ESF 4 activated the Statewide Fire Mobilization Plan which allowed for this team to be deployed and assist the Town of Conway (Carroll County).
9. The American Red Cross was prepared to provide support and resources for unmet sheltering needs within the state, should the need have arisen. A mission task request was fulfilled by ESF 14 by providing 20 muck-out kits to NH HSEM. These kits have essential items within them to assist individuals in cleaning up after areas are impacted by flood waters. All 20 of these kits were distributed to local communities by NH HSEM.

NH Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Public Health Services Bureau of Emergency Preparedness, Response and Recovery assisted with making phone calls to individuals with immediate needs who were impacted by this incident.

The State of New Hampshire continues to manage the recovery efforts for disasters, straining state, and local resources. The following is list of active disasters that the State of New Hampshire continues to work toward close out: FEMA-4329-DR (July 1, 2017-July 2, 2017, Severe Storm and Flooding in Coos and Grafton Counties), FEMA-4355-DR (October 29, 2017-November 1, 2017, Severe Storm and Flooding in Belknap, Carroll, Coos, Grafton, Merrimack, and Sullivan Counties), FEMA-4370-DR (March 2, 2018-March 8, 2018, Coastal Storm and Flooding in Rockingham County), FEMA-4457-DR (July 11, 2019-July 12, 2019, Severe Storm and Flooding in Grafton County), FEMA-4516-DR (January 20, 2020-May 11, 2023, COVID-19 statewide), FEMA-4622-DR (July 17, 2021-July 19, 2021, Severe Storm and Flooding in Cheshire County), FEMA-4624-DR (July 29, 2021-August 2, 2021, Severe Storm and Flooding in Cheshire and Sullivan Counties), FEMA-4693-DR (December 22, 2022-December 25, 2022, Severe Storm and Flooding in Belknap, Carroll, Coos, and Grafton Counties), and FEMA-4740-DR (July 9, 2023-July 17, 2023, Severe Storm and Flooding in Belknap, Carroll, Coos, Cheshire, Grafton, Rockingham, and Sullivan Counties).

Calendar year 2023 was an extremely impactful year on state and local resources due to several serious weather events. The State of New Hampshire submitted a disaster declaration for eight Counties due to a severe winter storm and snowstorm that impacted communities from March 13, 2023-March 15, 2023. At the initial conclusion of Joint PDAs more than \$2,649,138 in damages were validated by FEMA. In late December 2023, I received notice that the original decision of a denial was upheld despite the submission of an appeal by our state.

On July 28, 2023, I submitted a major disaster declaration request due to severe storm and flooding that impacted communities on April 30-May 1, 2023. Though we did not exceed the Statewide indicator the local impacts in communities especially within Carroll County were substantial. The

Town of Ossipee (Carroll County) had a total of \$1,188,207 in validated damages, \$271.78 per capita and the Town of Madison had a total of \$116,215 in validated damages, \$45.31 per capita. This is significant considering these communities were impacted again this major disaster declaration request. FEMA issued a denial of this major disaster declaration request too.

The State maintains a State Hazard Mitigation Plan that was recently approved and adopted on September 27, 2023, under the 2023 State Mitigation Planning Policy Guide issued by FEMA. This updated plan outlines an over-arching goal to identify how climate change impacts natural hazards, as well as mitigation strategies. The plan addresses the impacts of the ever-changing frequency, timing, location, and extent of inland flooding. Additionally, the plan added a section that addresses high hazard potential dam vulnerabilities.

The impacts from the December 17, 2023-December 21, 2023, severe storm and flooding could have been more severe if mitigation work was not previously accomplished. The State of New Hampshire, in collaboration with the FEMA, has had progressing success in making use of available funds via Section 404 mitigation programs. Since Tropical Storm Irene (August 28, 2011), the State of New Hampshire has utilized over \$17,400,000.00 in Section 404 funding toward mitigation projects throughout the State. An Emergency Management Director of a community within Carroll County noted to HSEM staff after the storm that had the mitigation efforts not been so substantial after Tropical Storm Irene the damages and overall impacts would have been much more severe.

Several infrastructure projects have been funded through Hazard Mitigation Assistance (HMA) programs and Hazard Mitigation Grant Programs (HMGP) have increased the resiliency of the towns in the most impacted areas within this incident period. For example, the Towns of Alexandria, Campton, Groton, Plymouth, and Rumney have a combined 7 successful mitigation projects. These communities have approximately \$16,000 in verified damages. Additionally, through the FEMA Public Assistance Program, the State encourages communities to participate in Section 406 mitigation programs. Since 2011, nearly \$2 million has been obligated through the Section 406 mitigation program. Mitigation continues to be an important conversation that takes place with communities early in the recovery process.

Given the severity and magnitude of this natural disaster and the events that have transpired from the December 17-December 21, 2023, incident and since then, Federal assistance is necessary to supplement the efforts and available resources of the state and local governments to recover from disaster related losses. Additionally, as required by 44 CFR § 206.36 (c)(5), I certify that all state and local government obligations and expenditures for the current disaster will comply with all applicable cost sharing requirements of the Stafford Act.

For New Hampshire local jurisdictions, the greatest remaining unmet recovery need associated with this severe storm and flooding is financial assistance to help avoid economic shock to businesses and families through local property taxes. Without federal assistance the ability of the communities within the State of New Hampshire to recover in a timely manner and avoiding long-term economic damage is severely hindered.

Thank you for your consideration of this Major Disaster Declaration Request. I look forward to your response. Please do not hesitate to contact me or my staff with any questions.

Sincerely,



Christopher T. Sununu
Governor

Enclosures: OMB No. 1660-0009/FEMA Form 010-0-13
B: Estimated Stafford Act Requirements for Public Assistance
C: Estimated Assistance from Other Federal Agency Programs
National Weather Service, Weather Impact Summary