

United States Senate

July 25, 2017

The Honorable Brock Long
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20472

Dear Administrator Long:

I write with concern about FEMA's denial of Montana's request for a Fire Management Assistance Grant declaration for the Lodgepole Complex Fire in Garfield and Petroleum Counties. On July 23, 2017, when Governor Bullock submitted a request for the Fire Management Assistance Grant declaration for the Lodgepole Complex Fire, the FEMA Region VIII Regional Administrator denied this request. Due to the size of the complex as well as the natural conditions feeding it, I request further information about why the Governor's request was denied and for FEMA to reconsider this declaration.

Weather conditions in eastern Montana have provided ample conditions for the fire to quickly grow and cause maximum destruction. Well into this week, the weather forecast includes hot temperatures and extremely low humidity. Such conditions have allowed the Lodgepole Complex, which consists of the Bridge Coulee Fire, the South Breaks Fire, the Barker Fire, and the Square Butte Fire, to burn through 250,000 acres. As of the afternoon of July 24, the Complex is only twenty percent contained and has already destroyed twelve homes.

While Governor Bullock's declaration has mobilized additional state resources and the Montana National Guard to help combat the wildfires, the State remains in need of federal assistance in order to ensure the safety of not only Garfield and Petroleum Counties, but also the surrounding region.

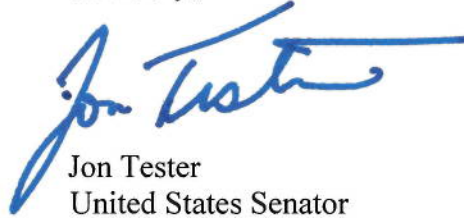
For these reasons, I am requesting answers to the Regional Administrator's decision to deny the State's request for Fire Management Assistance Grant funding, including the Regional Administrator or designee's denial of the State's request based on:

1. The conditions that existed at the time of the State's request;
2. Whether or not the fire or fire complex threatens such destruction as would constitute a major disaster
3. The threat to lives and improved property, including threats to critical facilities/infrastructure, and critical watershed areas
4. Availability of State and local firefighting resources

5. High fire danger conditions, as indicated by nationally accepted indices such as the National Fire Danger Ratings System; and
6. Potential major economic impact

Finally, I strongly urge FEMA to reconsider Montana's request for Fire Management Assistance Grant funding as it battles the Lodgepole Complex Fire. Based on our conversations, I appreciate your pledge to work together and thank you in advance for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Jon Tester
United States Senator