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Major Disaster Assistance from the Disaster Relief Fund: State Profiles

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Summary

The primary source of funding for federal assistance authorized by a major disaster declaration is the Disaster Relief Fund (DRF), which is managed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Major disaster declarations have occurred in every U.S. state since FY2000, with obligations for each incident ranging from a few hundred thousand dollars to more than \$31 billion.

This report summarizes DRF actual and projected obligations as a result of major disaster declarations at the national level for the period FY2000 through FY2015. CRS profiles for each state and the District of Columbia are linked to this report. Information on major disaster assistance from the DRF for tribal lands, U.S. territories, and freely associated states is available upon request. This report also includes lists of additional resources and key policy staff who can provide more information on the emergency management issues discussed.

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Overview

The Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (Stafford Act, P.L. 93-288) authorizes the President to issue major disaster declarations in response to certain incidents that overwhelm the capabilities of tribal, state, and local governments. The Stafford Act defines a major disaster as

any natural catastrophe (including any hurricane, tornado, storm, high water, wind-driven water, tidal wave, tsunami, earthquake, volcanic eruption, landslide, mudslide, snowstorm, or drought), or, regardless of cause, any fire, flood, or explosion, in any part of the United States, which in the determination of the President causes damage of sufficient severity and magnitude to warrant major disaster assistance under this chapter to supplement the efforts and available resources of states, local governments, and disaster relief organizations in alleviating the damage, loss, hardship, or suffering caused thereby.¹

Major disaster declarations can authorize several types of federal assistance to support response and recovery efforts following an incident. The primary source of funding for federal assistance following a major disaster is the Disaster Relief Fund (DRF), which is managed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). While this fund also provides assistance as a result of emergency declarations and Fire Management Assistance Grants,² major disaster declarations historically account for the majority of obligations from the DRF.

This report provides a national overview of actual and projected obligations funded through the DRF as a result of major disaster declarations between FY2000 and FY2015. In addition to providing a national overview, the electronic version of this report includes links to CRS products that summarize actual and projected obligations from the DRF as a result of major disaster declarations in each state and the District of Columbia. Each state profile includes information on the most costly incidents and impacted localities. In both the national and state-level products, information is provided on the types of assistance that have been provided for major disasters.

Many other federal programs that provide assistance following a major disaster are not funded through the DRF. While the specific agencies and programs called upon will vary from one disaster to another, an overview of selected programs can be found in CRS Report R42845, *Federal Emergency Management: A Brief Introduction*, coordinated by Bruce R. Lindsay.

Major Disaster Declarations: FY2000-FY2015

A total of 936 major disaster declarations were made between FY2000 and FY2015. These declarations resulted in more than \$133.6 billion in actual and projected obligations from the DRF. There was a high level of variation in the amount of actual and projected funding obligated for major disasters each year, with more than \$48.6 billion in actual and projected obligations for disasters in FY2005 alone. **Figure 1** displays the actual and projected obligations for all major disaster declarations each fiscal year.

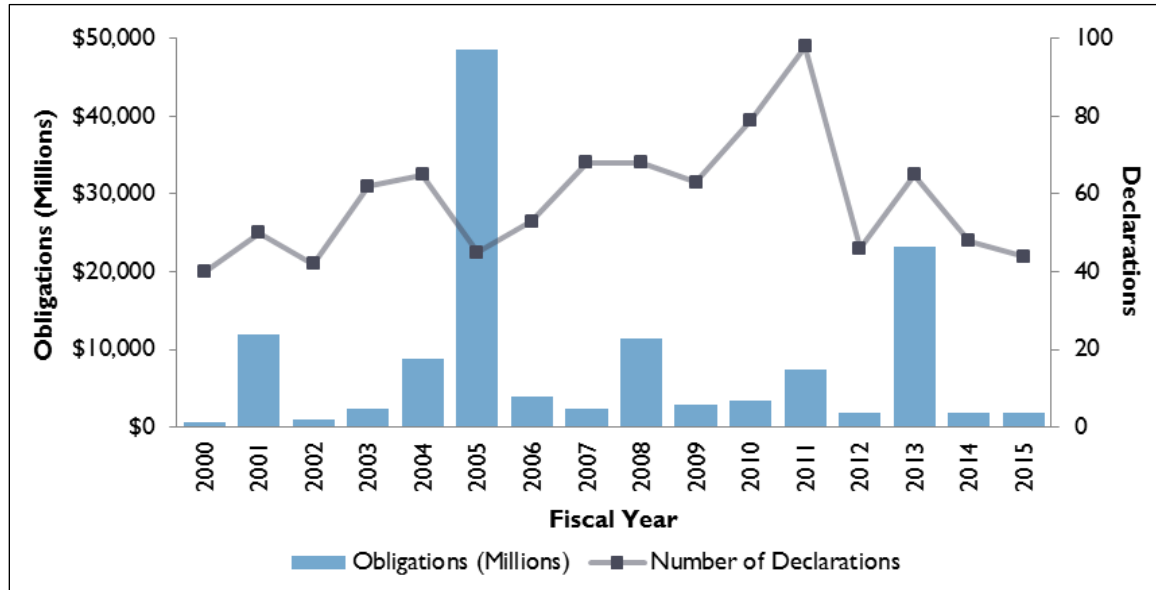
¹ P.L. 93-288, 42 U.S.C. §5122(2)

² Emergency declarations and Fire Management Assistance Grants will be discussed briefly under “Other FEMA Assistance Funded Through the DRF.” For more information on the types of declarations authorized under the Stafford Act, see CRS Report R42702, *Stafford Act Declarations 1953-2015: Trends, Analyses, and Implications for Congress*, by Bruce R. Lindsay and Francis X. McCarthy.

In **Figure 1**, obligations associated with each declaration are reported in the fiscal year in which the major disaster was declared. However, disaster response and recovery expenses are often incurred over several years following an incident, including some of the incidents from FY2000 to FY2015. To account for the total amount of federal assistance ultimately obligated for major disasters, the obligations data used throughout this report reflects actual obligations as well as obligations projected under FEMA-approved spending plans.

Figure 1. DRF Actual and Projected Obligations for Declared Major Disasters and Number of Declared Major Disasters, by Fiscal Year

Obligations are in millions of dollars.



Source: CRS analysis of FEMA DRF obligations and major disaster declarations data as of December 2015.

Note: Actual and projected obligations are recorded in the fiscal year in which the major disaster was declared.

Types of Assistance Provided for Major Disasters

A major disaster declaration can authorize funding for different purposes, depending on the needs of the state. These purposes include:

- *Public Assistance*, which is used by tribal, state, or local governments, or certain private nonprofit organizations to provide emergency protective services, conduct debris removal operations, and repair or replace damaged public infrastructure;
- *Individual Assistance*, which provides direct aid to impacted households;
- *Hazard Mitigation Assistance*, which funds mitigation and resiliency projects and programs, typically across the entire state;
- *FEMA administrative costs* associated with each disaster declaration;³ and

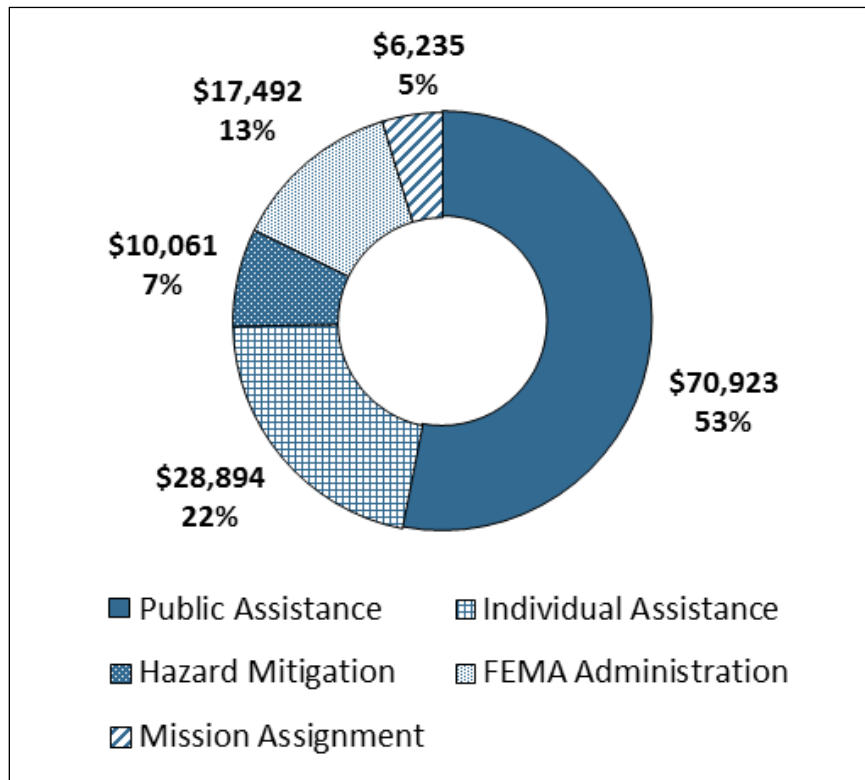
³ For more information concerning what is included in FEMA Administrative Costs, see U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Federal Emergency Management Agency: Opportunities Exist to Strengthen Oversight of Administrative Costs for Major Disasters*, GAO-15-65, December 17, 2014, <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-15-65>.

- *Mission Assignment*, which tasks and reimburses other federal entities that provide direct disaster assistance.

The decision concerning which types of assistance to provide is made either when the major disaster is declared or when the declaration is amended. For many major disasters, all of the assistance types outlined above are authorized. For others, some assistance types are not authorized. **Figure 2** compares the actual and projected obligations for different types of assistance provided as a result of a major disaster declaration from FY2000 to FY2015.

Figure 2. DRF Actual and Projected Obligations for Declared Major Disasters by Assistance Type, FY2000-FY2015

Obligations are in millions of dollars, truncated.



Source: CRS analysis of FEMA DRF obligation data as of December 2015.

Note: The specific assistance within each of the identified types may have changed in the period FY2000 to FY2015.

Other FEMA Assistance Funded Through the DRF

In addition to the major disaster assistance described above, there are other forms of assistance that are funded through the DRF. These include assistance associated with Emergency Declarations and with Fire Management Assistance Grants. The funding associated with these types of assistance typically results in lower obligation levels than assistance provided as a result of major disaster declarations, although there is significant variation across incidents.

- *Emergency Declarations* are often made at the time a threat is recognized in order to assist tribal, state, and local efforts prior to an incident. For the period

FY2000 through FY2015, total obligations for emergency declarations were just over \$2.37 billion.

- *Fire Management Assistance Grants* (FMAGs) provide aid for the control, management, and mitigation of fires. Total obligations for FMAGs from FY2000 through FY2015 were slightly more than \$1.21 billion.

FEMA Assistance Not Funded Through the DRF: National Flood Insurance Program

Floods represent a majority of all major disaster declarations nationwide. One of the primary sources of assistance for flooding events is the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), which is not funded through the DRF. For more information on the NFIP, please refer to CRS Report R44593, *Introduction to FEMA's National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP)*, by Diane P. Horn and Jared T. Brown.

Additional Resources

Many existing CRS products address issues related to the DRF, the disaster declaration process, and types of DRF assistance. Below is a list of several of these resources:

- CRS Report R41981, *Congressional Primer on Responding to Major Disasters and Emergencies*, by Francis X. McCarthy and Jared T. Brown
- CRS Report R43519, *Natural Disasters and Hazards: CRS Experts*, by Jennifer E. Lake and Amy Abel
- CRS Report R43784, *FEMA's Disaster Declaration Process: A Primer*, by Francis X. McCarthy
- CRS Report R43537, *FEMA's Disaster Relief Fund: Overview and Selected Issues*, by Bruce R. Lindsay
- CRS Report R44619, *FEMA Disaster Housing: The Individuals and Households Program—Implementation and Potential Issues for Congress*, by Francis X. McCarthy
- CRS Report R43990, *FEMA's Public Assistance Grant Program: Background and Considerations for Congress*, by Jared T. Brown and Daniel J. Richardson

State Profiles

In the electronic version of this report, **Table 1** includes links to CRS products that summarize major disaster assistance from the DRF for each state and the District of Columbia. Actual and projected obligations from the DRF as a result of major disaster declarations for tribal lands, American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau are available upon request.

Table 1. Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: State Profiles

State Profiles include declarations between FY2000 and FY2015

State	Profile
Alabama	CRS In Focus IF10058, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: Alabama</i>
Alaska	CRS In Focus IF10059, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: Alaska</i>
Arizona	CRS In Focus IF10060, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: Arizona</i>
Arkansas	CRS In Focus IF10061, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: Arkansas</i>
California	CRS In Focus IF10062, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: California</i>
Colorado	CRS In Focus IF10063, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: Colorado</i>
Connecticut	CRS In Focus IF10064, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: Connecticut</i>
Delaware	CRS In Focus IF10065, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: Delaware</i>
District of Columbia	CRS In Focus IF10066, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: District of Columbia</i>
Florida	CRS In Focus IF10067, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: Florida</i>
Georgia	CRS In Focus IF10068, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: Georgia</i>
Hawaii	CRS In Focus IF10069, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: Hawaii</i>
Idaho	CRS In Focus IF10070, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: Idaho</i>
Illinois	CRS In Focus IF10071, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: Illinois</i>
Indiana	CRS In Focus IF10072, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: Indiana</i>
Iowa	CRS In Focus IF10073, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: Iowa</i>
Kansas	CRS In Focus IF10074, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: Kansas</i>
Kentucky	CRS In Focus IF10075, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: Kentucky</i>
Louisiana	CRS In Focus IF10076, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: Louisiana</i>
Maine	CRS In Focus IF10077, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: Maine</i>
Maryland	CRS In Focus IF10078, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: Maryland</i>
Massachusetts	CRS In Focus IF10079, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: Massachusetts</i>
Michigan	CRS In Focus IF10080, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: Michigan</i>
Minnesota	CRS In Focus IF10081, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: Minnesota</i>
Mississippi	CRS In Focus IF10082, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: Mississippi</i>
Missouri	CRS In Focus IF10083, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: Missouri</i>
Montana	CRS In Focus IF10084, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: Montana</i>
Nebraska	CRS In Focus IF10085, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: Nebraska</i>
Nevada	CRS In Focus IF10086, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: Nevada</i>
New Hampshire	CRS In Focus IF10087, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: New Hampshire</i>
New Jersey	CRS In Focus IF10088, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: New Jersey</i>
New Mexico	CRS In Focus IF10089, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: New Mexico</i>
New York	CRS In Focus IF10090, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: New York</i>
North Carolina	CRS In Focus IF10091, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: North Carolina</i>
North Dakota	CRS In Focus IF10092, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: North Dakota</i>

State	Profile
Ohio	CRS In Focus IF10093, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: Ohio</i>
Oklahoma	CRS In Focus IF10094, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: Oklahoma</i>
Oregon	CRS In Focus IF10095, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: Oregon</i>
Pennsylvania	CRS In Focus IF10096, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: Pennsylvania</i>
Rhode Island	CRS In Focus IF10097, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: Rhode Island</i>
South Carolina	CRS In Focus IF10098, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: South Carolina</i>
South Dakota	CRS In Focus IF10099, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: South Dakota</i>
Tennessee	CRS In Focus IF10100, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: Tennessee</i>
Texas	CRS In Focus IF10101, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: Texas</i>
Utah	CRS In Focus IF10102, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: Utah</i>
Vermont	CRS In Focus IF10103, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: Vermont</i>
Virginia	CRS In Focus IF10104, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: Virginia</i>
Washington	CRS In Focus IF10105, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: Washington</i>
West Virginia	CRS In Focus IF10106, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: West Virginia</i>
Wisconsin	CRS In Focus IF10107, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: Wisconsin</i>
Wyoming	CRS In Focus IF10108, <i>Major Disaster Assistance from the DRF: Wyoming</i>

Source: CRS analysis of FEMA DRF obligations data as of December 2015.

Note: All state profiles appear as “archived” products on CRS.gov.

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