

STATE OF COLORADO

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John W. Hickenlooper
Governor

D 2014-009

EXECUTIVE ORDER

Declaring a Disaster Emergency Due to the "West Salt Creek Landslide" in Mesa County

Pursuant to the authority vested in the Governor of the State of Colorado and, in particular, pursuant to relevant portions of C.R.S. § 28-3-104 and the Colorado Disaster Emergency Act, C.R.S. § 24-33.5-701, *et seq.*, I, John W. Hickenlooper, Governor of the State of Colorado, hereby issue this Executive Order declaring a state of disaster emergency due to the "West Salt Creek Landslide" ("Landslide") in Mesa County, Colorado and making resources available to assess and address the disaster emergency.

I. Background and Purpose

The Governor is responsible for meeting the dangers to the state and people presented by disasters. The Colorado Disaster Emergency Act defines a disaster as "the occurrence or imminent threat of widespread or severe damages, injury or loss of life or property resulting from any natural cause or cause of human origin, including but not limited to fire, flood..." C.R.S. § 24-33.5-703(3).

On Sunday, May 25, 2014, outside the town of Collbran in Mesa County, a section of the Grand Mesa collapsed producing a large landslide, mud slide, flood, mud flow, and debris flow. These events together have been referred to as the "West Salt Creek Landslide" by Mesa County officials. The area of the Landslide is estimated to be 3 miles long by one-half mile wide. The Landslide damaged irrigation ditches and private roads, and is threatening approximately 100 structures, approximately 35 of which are homes. The Landslide is thought to have entrapped three individuals who had been investigating the loss of water in irrigation ditches. These individuals are still missing. The Mesa County Sheriff presumes that they are deceased. The Landslide area continues to be unstable, making recovery operations too dangerous to attempt. The situation continues to evolve and presents significant risks to the community because responders, citizens, private homes, agricultural facilities, county roads and

oil/gas infrastructure in the immediate vicinity are still vulnerable to further landslides and potential flooding.

Conditions in the Grand Mesa area that caused the Landslide continue to present risks to the community. The 2013-14 winter followed a wet fall which made the soil wet to saturated. Then, the winter itself was cold and snowy with above average snowfall. By April 1 the peak snow water equivalent for the basin was 126% of normal. Today, levels are at 200% of normal. Coupled with a slow warm-up this spring, there will continue to be significant amount of snowmelt that will cause extra runoff in the area. Excessive runoff not only was a significant cause of the Landslide, but also greatly increases the future risks of flooding and additional landslides.

Exacerbating these conditions were two recent storms, one on Mother's Day weekend, May 11-12, 2014 with 1"-2" of moisture and one on Memorial Day weekend, May 24-25, 2014, with 0.8" – 1" of moisture. These amounts are slightly above average for this time of year. The near term forecast predicts that moisture will continue to stream into the area and late day storms may produce 0.10" of moisture, with up to 0.25" possible on Friday, May 30, 2014. Patchy snow pack still exists above the site - ranging from 0" to 10" of snow water equivalent. This upcoming precipitation and snowmelt will also increase both the risk of flooding and further landslides.

The Landslide also created a pocket at the top of the slide area that is stopping the normal course of water runoff from the Grand Mesa. The estimated volume of water the pocket is 700 acre feet to 900 acre feet, but once the capacity is reached, there is a significant risk of further flooding. Any spillover could also provide additional moisture that may cause additional land and mud movement.

Technical assessments are in progress by the United States Geological Service (USGS), the Colorado Geological Survey (CGS), and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) are requested to and will provide technical assistance with the flood risk and the private firm, CH2M Hill, will also be providing technical assistance on a voluntary basis. The United States Forest Service (USFS), Colorado State Patrol, and the Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management are assisting Mesa County and are participating in the Unified Command Post for the incident.

On Tuesday, May 27, 2014, Mesa County declared a disaster emergency and on Wednesday, May 28, 2014, county officials requested the state to provide a helicopter to fly assessment teams and a Planning Section Chief for the Incident Command Post. Then at

approximately 16:10 on May 28, 2014, I verbally declared a disaster emergency and approved the request for state supported resources. Given that the state anticipates future resource requests upon completion of the technical assessments and associated event modeling and given the continued risk faced by the Grand Mesa community, there is an immediate need for financial assistance.

II. Declaration and Directives

- A. The "West Salt Creek Landslide" in Mesa County constitutes a disaster emergency under C.R.S. §§ 24-33.5-701, 705. My verbal order of May 28, 2014 declaring a disaster emergency is hereby memorialized by this Executive Order and shall have the full force and effect of law as if it were contained within this Executive Order.
- B. The State Emergency Operations Plan is hereby activated. All state departments and agencies shall take whatever actions may be required and requested by the Emergency Management Director, including provision of appropriate staff and equipment as necessary.
- C. Pursuant to C.R.S. § 24-33.5-706(4), it is ordered that \$500,000 from the Disaster Emergency Fund is encumbered to pay for the response and technical assessments of the "West Salt Creek Landslide" since its inception. The Emergency Management Director is hereby authorized and directed to allocate the funding to the appropriate government agencies and execute awards, purchase orders, or other mechanisms to effect the allocation of the funds. These funds shall remain available for this purpose for eighteen months from the date of this Executive Order, and any unexpended funds shall remain in the Disaster Emergency Fund.
- D. My verbal orders activating the National Guard and authorizing the utilization of National Guard assets to provide aviation support including flying federal, state, local, and private sector personnel providing technical assistance and incident response are hereby memorialized by this Executive Order and shall have the full force and effect of law as if they were contained within this Executive Order.

III. Duration

This Executive Order shall expire thirty days from May 30, 2014, unless extended further by Executive Order, except that the funds described in paragraph II(C) above shall remain available for the described purposes for eighteen months from the date of this Executive Order.



GIVEN under my hand and the
Executive Seal of the State of
Colorado this thirtieth day of
May, 2014.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "John W. Hickenlooper".

John W. Hickenlooper
Governor