



D 2025 012

EXECUTIVE ORDER

Declaring a Disaster Emergency to Support Early Wildfire Response and Reduce Fire Risk

Pursuant to the authority vested in the Governor of the State of Colorado and, in particular, pursuant to Article IV, Section 2, of the Colorado Constitution and the relevant portions of the Colorado Disaster Emergency Act, C.R.S. § 24-33.5-701, *et seq.*, I, Jared Polis, Governor of the State of Colorado, hereby issue this Executive Order declaring a state of disaster emergency due to multiple fires in Colorado to support early wildfire response and to reduce continued fire risk in Colorado.

Pursuant to C.R.S. § 24-33.5-706(4.5)(b), I hereby direct the State Treasurer to transfer funds from the Disaster Emergency Fund to the Wildfire Emergency Response Fund.

Further, pursuant to Article IV, Section 5 of the Colorado Constitution and pursuant to C.R.S. § 28-3-104, I hereby authorize employing the Colorado National Guard, when requested by the Department of Public Safety, for the purpose of responding to multiple fires in Colorado during the disaster emergency.

I. Background and Purpose

The Governor is responsible for meeting the dangers to the State and people presented by disasters. C.R.S. § 24-33.5-704(1). The Colorado Disaster Emergency Act defines a disaster as “the occurrence or imminent threat of widespread or severe damage, injury, or loss of life or property resulting from any natural cause or cause of human origin, including but not limited to fire.” C.R.S. § 24-33.5-703(3).

The state benefits from early engagement of fires with resources and operational support immediately following detection of new fire starts when possible and appropriate. Early attack on fires can keep those fires from becoming costlier and more dangerous events. This Executive Order supports the Division of Fire Prevention and Control (DFPC) within the Department of Public Safety (DPS) to continue its practice of initial aggressive attack in the early stages of developing fires, working with local agencies to provide prepositioning of resources prior to fires occurring or when they are first detected, with overhead support, aviation, handcrews, modules, engines, and other assets eligible for Wildfire Emergency Response Funding (WERF) pursuant to C.R.S. § 24-33.5-1226 and Attachment A of the 2025 Wildland Fire Preparedness Plan. This strategy supports community safety and prevents economic loss.

Colorado is facing a challenging fire season. On July 10, 2025, a widespread and severe weather event resulted in dangerous fire conditions leading to more than twenty lightning-caused wildfires burning across the western slope in multiple counties, including the South Rim and Deer Creek Fires in Montrose County, the Turner Gulch Fire in Mesa County, and the Sowbelly Fire, which burned in Delta, Mesa, and Montrose Counties. On July 13, 2025, I verbally declared a disaster emergency due to these conditions in Delta, Mesa, and Montrose Counties, and memorialized this declaration in Executive Order D 2025 010.

Continuing throughout July and into August, and as part of the same prolonged weather pattern, parts of Colorado have experienced continued high temperatures, high winds, severe to extreme drought conditions, and near record level fire indices, leading to regularly occurring new fire starts. On August 3, 2025, I verbally declared a disaster emergency due to the Elk Fire in Rio Blanco County, which burned on private and state-owned land. Additionally, at least two other fires were burning in Rio Blanco County, the Lee and Grease Fires, which initially were completely on federal Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land and later spread to federal, state, and private land. On August 5, the Lee and Grease Fires combined into one large fire, designated the Lee Fire, which has since burned and grown rapidly, displacing residents due to evacuations and placing others on pre-evacuation status. The Elk and Lee Fires burned within 15 miles of each other near the town of Meeker.

On August 5, 2025, I expanded the initial disaster declaration for the Elk Fire to include the Lee Fire. On August 6, I authorized employing unarmed members of the Colorado National Guard to respond to the Elk and Lee Fires by providing fire suppression support. Also on August 6, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) approved a Fire Management Assistance Grant (FMAG) for the Elk and Lee Fires after determining that each fire threatened such destruction that either fire would constitute a major disaster. The FMAG authorized the use of federal funds to help with firefighting costs.

On August 4, 2025, I verbally declared a disaster emergency due to the LeRoux Fire in Delta County, which burned on private and BLM land. As of August 5, the fire had a fire path towards heavy fuels and a potential for aggressive and expansive growth. The LeRoux Fire necessitated evacuations of primary homes and 152 homes were on pre-evacuation status, and an additional 60 structures were threatened. As of August 13, the LeRoux Fire had burned 195 acres.

On August 10, 2025, I verbally declared a disaster emergency due to the Oak Fire in Archuleta County near Pagosa Springs, which burned multiple structures and caused numerous evacuations on private land in the Wildland Urban Interface. The Oak Fire has threatened over 5,100 buildings and 2,000 homes. I also authorized employing unarmed members of the Colorado National Guard to respond to the Oak Fire as requested by the Department of Public

Safety. On August 11, FEMA approved a FMAG for the Oak Fire, determining that the fire threatened such destruction that it would constitute a major disaster.

On August 13, 2025, I verbally declared a disaster emergency due to the Crosho Fire outside Yampa in Rio Blanco and Routt Counties. The Crosho Fire started burning on August 11 on federal land, and later spread to private land. Routt County issued evacuation notices beginning on August 12, and additional evacuations were ordered on August 13. As of the evening of August 13, the Crosho Fire covered 1,700 acres, including 600 acres of private land. I also authorized employing unarmed members of the Colorado National Guard to respond to the Crosho Fire as requested by the Department of Public Safety.

The fire danger has remained at near record levels across much of Colorado, and elevated fire weather and fire risk is forecast for the coming weeks. State, federal, and local communities are mobilizing equipment and personnel to conduct fire suppression and support activities.

Colorado's state and local response has been remarkable to date; there are currently 2,395 personnel supporting nine large fires burning on more than 185,000 acres in Colorado. The firefighting efforts include 41 aircraft, including federal, state, Colorado National Guard, and county assets, working on multiple fronts. Our own State agencies are contributing as well. The Division of Fire Prevention and Control, Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management and the Colorado State Patrol have all contributed more than 100 personnel and resources in the form of firefighters and engines, recovery and damage assessment teams, traffic control, and other resources. These efforts are bolstered by early attack, and this strategy has helped to prevent large fires from becoming worse and more dangerous events, giving a leg up to the state's collective firefighting efforts. It is essential that the State continue to take steps to mitigate risk and prepare for additional fires while also working to manage fires quickly after they begin. The state has developed new firefighting capabilities that allow our response to be more nimble than in the past. Accordingly, I am declaring a state of disaster emergency due to multiple fires in Colorado and continued fire risk in Colorado.

Given the fire activity in Colorado and ongoing requests for state assistance from local agencies this fiscal year, the WERF, created by statute and meant to provide funding and reimbursement for various wildfire response expenses, is nearly depleted. DFPC has provided funding for local agencies out of the WERF on multiple incidents in support of rapid and aggressive initial fire suppression response. WERF funding is meant to prevent new, emerging fires from growing to become the responsibility of the State, and threatening life, property, infrastructure, watersheds, and communications, while easing pressure on limited resources and reducing overall suppression, recovery, insurance, and other costs. Depletion of the WERF is imminent. Given the necessity of these funds to help contain fires and prevent them from growing and necessitating disaster declarations, additional funding in the WERF is critical.

Accordingly, pursuant to C.R.S. § 24-33.5-706(4.5)(b), I hereby direct the State Treasurer to transfer funds from the Disaster Emergency Fund to the WERF.

Additionally, I am authorizing employing the Colorado National Guard, when requested by the Department of Public Safety, for the purpose of responding to multiple fires in Colorado during the duration of this disaster emergency. With this Executive Order, the National Guard will be able to assist with fire suppression and support activities, including for smaller fires and those that are declared disasters.

II. Declarations and Directives

- A. The multiple fires in Colorado, continued fire risk, and associated impacts in portions of Colorado constitute a disaster emergency under C.R.S. § 24-33.5-701, *et seq.* This Executive Order declares a disaster emergency beginning today, August 14, 2025.
- B. The State Emergency Operations Plan is activated. All State departments and agencies are authorized to assist the Director or their delegate of the Office of Emergency Management pursuant to the State Emergency Operations Plan, including provision of appropriate staff and equipment, as necessary.
- C. I direct State agencies to pursue all available federal funding for response and recovery operations.
- D. Pursuant to Article IV, Section 5 of the Colorado Constitution and pursuant to C.R.S. § 28-3-104, I hereby authorize employing the Colorado National Guard, when requested by the Department of Public Safety, for the purpose of responding to multiple fires in Colorado during the disaster emergency.
- E. Pursuant to C.R.S. § 24-33.5-706(4)(b) funds in the Disaster Emergency Fund (DEF) are insufficient to fund a necessary transfer from the DEF to the Wildfire Emergency Response Fund (WERF), created in C.R.S. § 24-33.5-1226. Therefore, I order that two million five hundred thousand dollars (\$2,500,000) be transferred from the State Emergency Reserve Cash Fund (SERCF) to the DEF. I encumber two million five hundred thousand dollars (\$2,500,000) in the DEF to fund the transfer described in Section II(F) below.
- F. Pursuant to C.R.S. § 24-33.5-706(4.5)(b), because I deem it necessary based on my determination that a wildfire-related disaster emergency is imminent, I hereby direct the State Treasurer to transfer funds from the DEF to the WERF. I direct the State Treasurer to transfer two million five hundred thousand dollars

(\$2,500,000) from the DEF to the WERF to provide funding or reimbursement for items as set out in C.R.S. § 24-33.5-1226 and Attachment A of the Annual Wildfire Preparedness Plan developed pursuant to C.R.S. § 24-33.5-1227.

III. Duration

This Executive Order shall expire thirty (30) days from August 14, 2025, unless extended further by Executive Order, except that the funds transferred pursuant to Section II(F) above are continuously appropriated for the purposes indicated in C.R.S. § 24-33.5-1226 and any funds not expended at the end of the fiscal year remain in the WERF and do not transfer or revert to the General Fund, pursuant to C.R.S. § 24-33.5-1226(1).



GIVEN under my hand and the
Executive Seal of the State of
Colorado this fourteenth
day of August, 2025.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jared Polis".

Jared Polis
Governor