



D 2025 015

EXECUTIVE ORDER

Declaring a Disaster Emergency Due to the Elk and Lee Fires in Rio Blanco and Garfield Counties and Authorizing Employment of the Colorado National Guard

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 the Elk and Lee Fires in Rio Blanco and Garfield Counties, enabling State and federal agencies to coordinate fire suppression, response, consequence management, mitigation, and recovery efforts.

Further, pursuant to Article IV, Section 5 of the Colorado Constitution and C.R.S. § 28-3-104, I authorize employing unarmed members of the Colorado National Guard for the purpose of supporting fire suppression efforts as deemed necessary by the Colorado Department of Public Safety for the Elk and Lee Fires.

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).

On August 2, 2025, the Elk Fire began southeast of Meeker in Rio Blanco County, burning 100 acres on private and state-owned land. The Elk Fire was caused by lightning.

Also on August 2, two fires, the Lee and Grease Fires, began southwest of Meeker in Rio Blanco County, burning initially on federal Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land and later spreading to state and private land.

On August 3, the Elk Fire exceeded local capacity, as the fire burned further up the White River valley in heavy fuels. Extreme fire behavior occurred with significant spread to the east and then to the north. Within a three mile radius, approximately 111 homes were evacuated and the town of Meeker was on pre-evacuation status. As referenced in Executive Order D 2025 012, on August 3, 2025 at approximately 11:26 AM, I verbally declared a disaster emergency due to

the Elk Fire in Rio Blanco County, and activated the State of Colorado Emergency Operations Plan and directed the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) to take all necessary and appropriate State actions to assist the affected jurisdictions with their fire suppression, response, consequence management, mitigation, and recovery efforts.

On August 5, the Lee and Grease Fires combined into one large fire, designated the Lee Fire, and burned onto private and State land. The Elk and Lee Fires burned within 15 miles of each other near the town of Meeker. The presence of the Lee Fire, a second large fire requiring external suppression and incident management resources, in addition to the Elk Fire, significantly exceeded the Counties' capacity. The Lee Fire threatened Highway 64 between Meeker and Rangely, and evacuated approximately 45 residents and caused 26 residents to be placed on pre-evacuation status. On August 5, at approximately 6:10 PM, I expanded the initial disaster declaration for the Elk Fire to include the Lee Fire given that they began from the same weather conditions and shared firefighting resources.

On August 6, at approximately 9:30 PM, 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 9, increased activity from both the Elk and Lee Fires, including the development of pyrocumulus clouds induced by high winds and extremely dry vegetation, prompted road closures, evacuations, and pre-evacuations in Garfield County.

As of August 17, the Elk Fire was 100% contained and had burned 14,518 acres. As of August 27, the Lee Fire was 90% contained and had burned 137,758 acres, making it the fifth largest fire in Colorado history.

II. Declarations and Directives

- A. The Elk and Lee Fires and associated impacts constitute a disaster emergency under C.R.S. § 24-33.5-701, *et seq.* My verbal order of August 3, 2025, 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. My verbal order of August 3, 2025 activated the State Emergency Operations Plan. All State departments and agencies are authorized to take whatever actions may be required and requested by the Director or their delegate of the OEM

pursuant to the State Emergency Operations Plan, including provision of appropriate staff and equipment, as necessary.

- C. Further, pursuant to C.R.S. § 28-3-104, this Executive Order hereby memorializes my verbal orders of August 6, 2025, authorizing employing unarmed members of the Colorado National Guard to support fire suppression efforts as deemed necessary by the Colorado Department of Public Safety for the Elk and Lee Fires and my verbal authorization has the full force and effect of law as if it were contained within this Executive Order.
- D. I direct State agencies to pursue all available federal funding for response and recovery operations.
- E. Pursuant to C.R.S. § 24-33.5-706(4)(b), funds in the DEF are insufficient to pay for fire suppression, response, consequence management, mitigation, and recovery efforts related to the Elk and Lee Fires. Therefore, I order that eighteen million five hundred ninety seven thousand dollars (\$18,597,000) be transferred from the State Emergency Reserve Cash Fund (SERCF) to the DEF. I encumber eighteen million five hundred ninety seven thousand dollars (\$18,597,000) in the DEF to pay for fire suppression, response, consequence management, mitigation, and recovery efforts related to the Elk and Lee Fires.
- F. Pursuant to C.R.S. § 24-33.5-705.4(5), the Director of the OEM is authorized and directed to allocate the funding described in Section II(E) to the appropriate government agencies and nonprofit organizations and execute awards, purchase orders, or other mechanisms to effect the allocation of funds. The funds described in Section II(E) shall remain available for this purpose until seventy-two (72) months from the date of this Executive Order, and any unexpended funds shall remain in the DEF.

III. Duration

This Executive Order shall expire thirty (30) days from August 3, 2025, unless extended further by Executive Order, except that the funds described in Section II(E) above shall remain available for the described purposes for seventy-two (72) months from the date of this Executive Order.



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

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jared Polis". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a light-colored rectangular background.

Jared Polis
Governor