

Office of the Governor
State of Louisiana

JOHN BEL EDWARDS
GOVERNOR



P.O. Box 94004
BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA 70804-9004
(225) 342-7015
GOV.LA.GOV

**REQUEST FOR MAJOR DISASTER DECLARATION
COVER LETTER**

August 28, 2020

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
The White House
Washington, D. C.

Through: George A. Robinson
Regional Administrator
FEMA Region VI
800 North Loop 288
Denton, TX 76209-3698

SENT VIA EMAIL

Dear Mr. President:

Under the provisions of Section 401 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, 42 U.S.C. §§5121-5207 (Stafford Act), and implemented by 44 C.F.R. §206.36(D), I hereby request an expedited Major Disaster Declaration for the State of Louisiana as a result of Hurricanes Marco and Laura, which caused major damage to private homes, public facilities, and caused the state and local governments to incur significant costs associated with saving lives and preserving public health and safety. The damages from the hurricanes, in conjunction with the state's response efforts in the midst of our current fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, has overwhelmed the capabilities of state and local resources. I have determined that this incident is of such severity and magnitude that effective response is beyond the capabilities of the state and local governments, and that in accordance with 44 C.F.R. §206.36, federal assistance is necessary to supplement the efforts and available resources of the state and local governments, disaster relief organizations, and compensation by insurance for disaster-related losses.

I took the appropriate action under state law and declared a statewide emergency (108 JBE 2020) on August 21, 2020. Furthermore, I directed the execution of the State Emergency Operations Plan in support of the statewide emergency declaration in accordance with Section 401 of the Stafford Act. A copy of that declaration is attached. Local jurisdictions took similar emergency measures, and began executing their own emergency plans. All 64 parishes have now declared states of emergency.

I am requesting an expedited Major Disaster Declaration authorizing Public Assistance Category B statewide. For the parishes directly in the path of Hurricane Laura that were significantly damaged, I am requesting all categories of Individual Assistance and Public Assistance. Those parishes are:

Allen, Beauregard, Calcasieu, Cameron, Jefferson Davis, Acadia, Vermilion, Catahoula, Grant, La Salle, Natchitoches, Rapides, Sabine, Vernon, Winn, Bienville, Claiborne, Red River, Caldwell, Jackson, Lincoln, Ouachita, and Union.

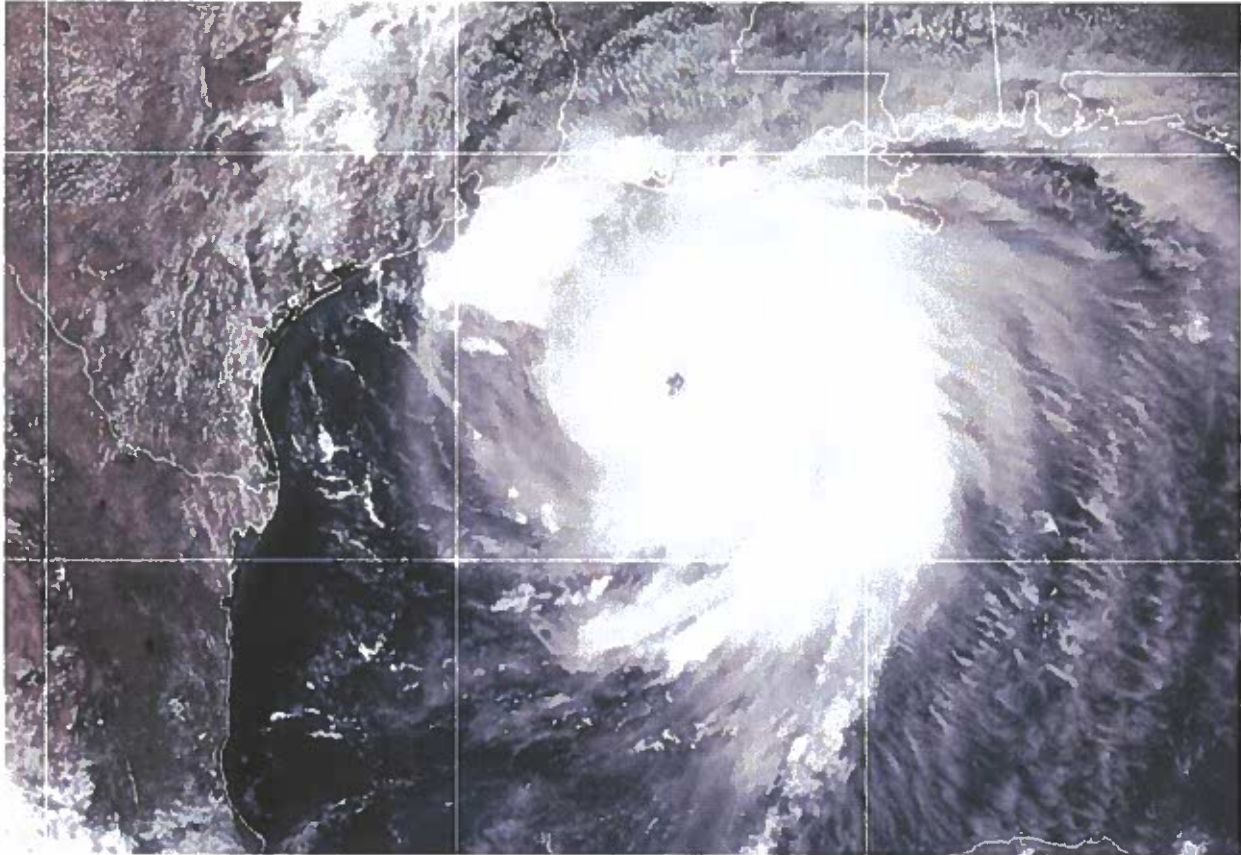
Specifically, I request all parts of Individual Assistance (including Housing Assistance, Disaster Unemployment Assistance, Disaster Care Management, Crisis Counseling, and Other Needs Assistance including but not limited to medical, dental, childcare, and funeral expenses), as well as all categories of Public Assistance (Categories A and B for Emergency Work, as well as Categories C through G for Permanent Work). Due to the large portion of Louisiana affected by this hurricane, as well as the difficulties communities will face in timely procuring goods and services to save lives and public health and safety and to preserve and restore public property, I request that FEMA acknowledge the existence of exigent and emergency circumstances so as to allow governments to expedite their procurement actions. Finally, I am requesting Hazard Mitigation statewide.

Background

Louisiana faced a unique danger when two potential hurricanes almost simultaneously threatened its coast. Tropical Storm Marco entered the Gulf of Mexico ahead of Tropical Storm Laura, and was forecast to make landfall as a hurricane in Louisiana on Monday, August 24, 2020. Tropical Storm Laura was forecast to also make landfall as a hurricane in Louisiana just two days later. In anticipation of back-to-back landfalls, I ordered the execution of Louisiana's Emergency Operations Plan. The Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness ("GOHSEP") increased the activation level of its Emergency Operations Center ("EOC"), which was already activated due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Fortunately, Hurricane Marco weakened and turned away from Louisiana's coast before making landfall. State assets that had been positioned to address problems associated with storm surge were able to handle the resulting waters with minimal damage.

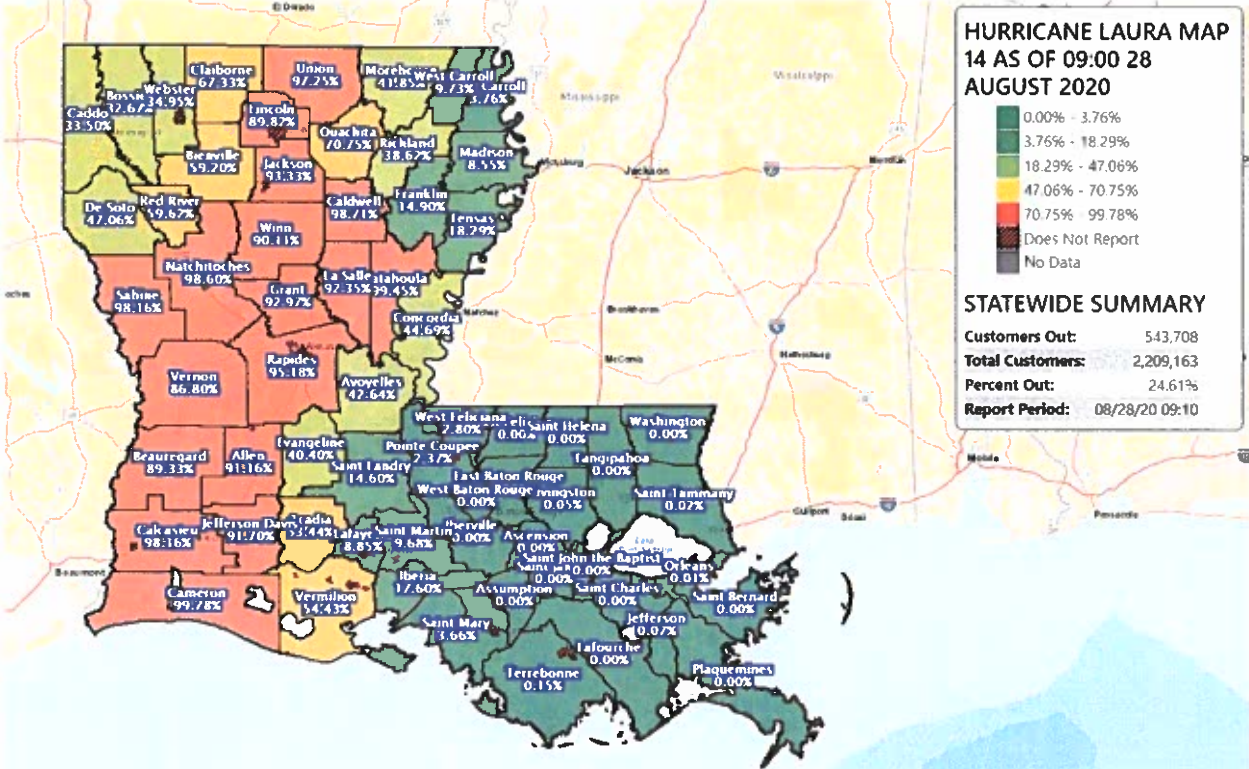
While Hurricane Marco's intensity and path changed to Louisiana's benefit, the National Weather Service ("NWS") began forecasting Hurricane Laura to strengthen beyond its original expectations. Once Hurricane Laura entered the warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico, its strength and definition increased dramatically. Despite being originally projected as a Category 2 storm, Hurricane Laura soon developed into a major hurricane. By Wednesday, August 26, 2020, just hours before making landfall, Hurricane Laura increased to a Category 4 storm with sustained winds of 150 miles per hour. It maintained that wind speed when it made landfall in Cameron Parish around 1:00 a.m. on Thursday, August 27, 2020. With the 150 mph winds, Hurricane Laura is currently being reported as possibly the most powerful storm to ever hit Louisiana.



It should be noted that Hurricane Laura followed almost the same path as Hurricane Rita did fifteen years ago in 2005. Hurricane Rita was one of the most damaging storms to hit that area of the state in living memory, leading to a major disaster declaration (DR-1607) and causing such significant damage that it took the area more than a decade to recover. Like Hurricane Rita, Hurricane Laura struck the southwest corner of Louisiana in Cameron Parish, producing a similar storm surge. Because of the speed of its travel, Hurricane Laura maintained major hurricane wind speed as it brought catastrophic destruction through numerous parishes. Hurricane Laura was the first storm in memory to maintain hurricane strength as it travelled through Louisiana's northern parishes. It eventually exited Louisiana and entered Arkansas with tropical storm-force winds. The National Weather Service is confirming that Hurricane Laura is amongst the fifth strongest storms at landfall in the United States in recorded history. It is also the strongest storm to make landfall in Louisiana in recorded history.

State and local government officials began assessing damages from Hurricane Laura once the conditions were clear enough to allow safe entry. Of course, the primary concern was the safety and health of those citizens who remained in the path of the storm. Unfortunately, we have discovered that six individuals were killed by various causes, including falling trees and carbon monoxide poisoning from a generator in the home. Fatalities occurred in Acadia, Allen, Calcasieu (2), Jackson, and Vernon Parishes. Our citizens were fortunate to avoid major injuries in several other situations. In Beauregard Parish, the roof collapsed in a shelter of last resort housing (75+) individuals. A building in Allen parish sheltering 120 individuals also suffered a roof collapse. In both situations, all survivors were able to escape the building with no reported significant injuries.

Hundreds of thousands of citizens are struggling without basic utilities in the aftermath of the hurricane. As of today, the Louisiana Public Service Commission reports that over 500,000 Louisiana citizens are currently without power. Below is a graphic showing current power outages for each parish in the state. Hurricane Laura’s path is clearly shown by the massive amounts of power outages in the wake of the storm.



The Louisiana Department of Health has released a report showing that 82 separate water systems throughout 24 parishes are completely compromised and unable to provide water to hundreds of thousands of citizens. This is of particular concern at the Lake Charles Memorial Hospital, where a lack of running potable water has warranted the evacuation of numerous infants and likely the entire hospital. It is reported that the majority of water systems throughout Calcasieu Parish are either on a boil advisory or completely incapable of providing water. St. Mary Parish is experiencing salt water intrusion that has rendered their water completely unfit for consumption and will have to buy water to bring in to their citizens.¹

Essentially all of the parishes in southwestern Louisiana and many in central and northern Louisiana received catastrophic damages from Hurricane Laura. Trees and power lines are causing hundreds of road blockages. In several parishes, a lack of power and cellular service has limited our ability to assess the needs of the local governments. State assets are conducting flyovers to get a better understanding of the overall destruction left in Hurricane Laura’s path. Due to the lack of accessibility across the entire area, there will be no way for officials to accurately assess the extent of damages to public infrastructure and private homes for some time. Response efforts to saves lives and preserve public health and safety will continue for some time before we can eventually

¹ See LDH Water Outage list.

transition to recovery. Because of these issues, Preliminary Damage Assessments (“PDAs”) for both Public Assistance and Individual Assistance are not feasible at this time. The survivors who have been dislocated from their homes will need assistance immediately, however. For these reasons, I am requesting an expedited Major Disaster declaration in order to bring immediate relief to these struggling communities.

Parish Information

Although we are still gathering information and beginning to assess damages, parishes are reporting hurricane impacts as they are able to obtain the information. Some examples of significant impacts include:

Beauregard Parish

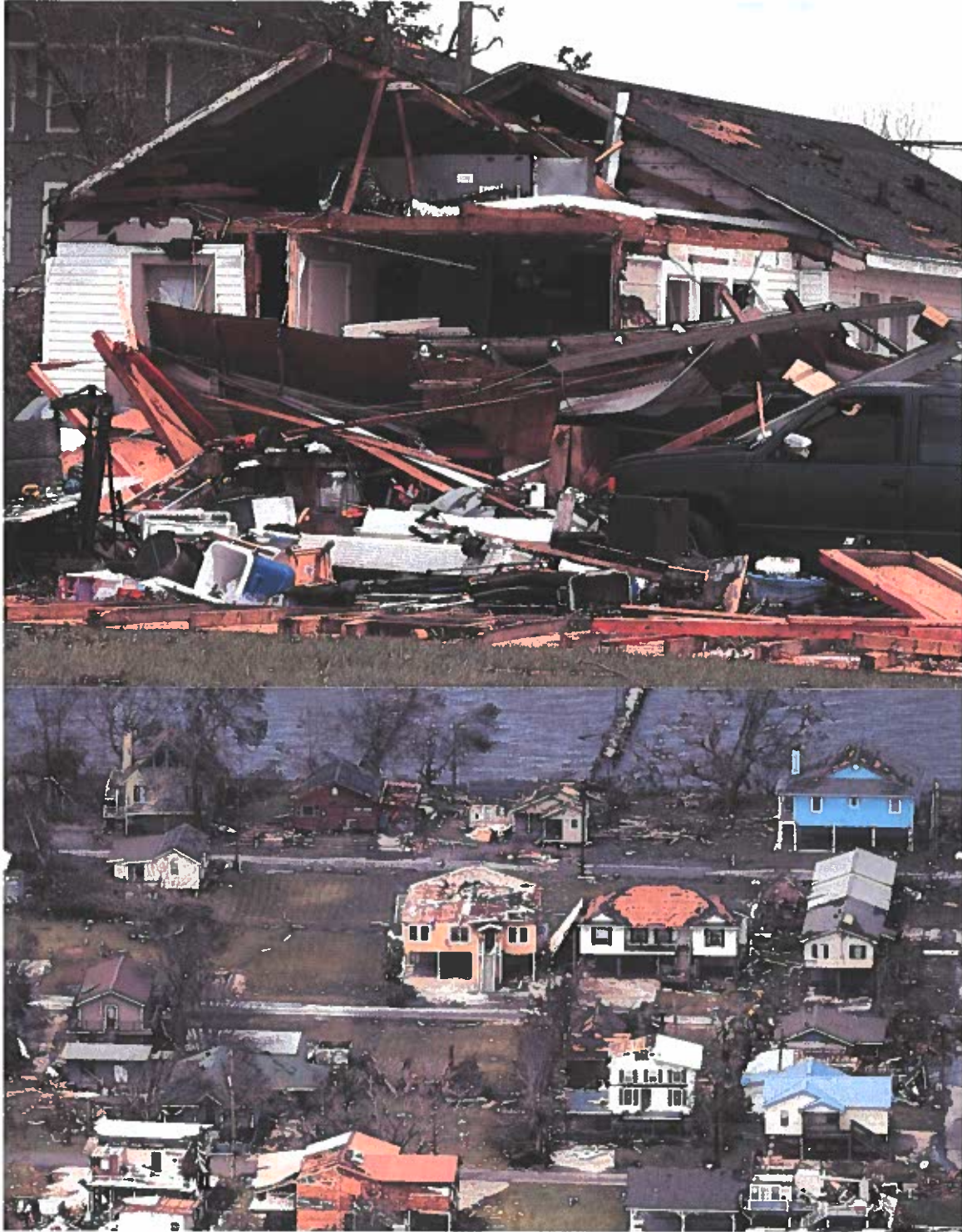
Beauregard Parish is an area that was particularly devastated by Hurricane Laura. Beauregard reports 100% power outages, and numerous compromised water and sewer systems that have deprived thousands of citizens of water and sanitation needs. Additionally, Beauregard is responding to numerous reports of citizens trapped in their home. To assist Beauregard Parish in its Search and Rescue (“SAR”) efforts, numerous state and local assets are being provided to conduct SAR missions and to clear roads that are currently blocked by fallen trees, power lines, and other debris.

During the evening before Hurricane Laura made landfall, Beauregard Parish opened a shelter of last resort at a local elementary school. That shelter quickly reached capacity. The parish soon determined the evacuees would need to be moved because of problems with the generator and sewage. As the parish attempted to transfer the evacuees to another location, the roof collapsed. Parish staff and first responders were able to account for all survivors, but there were numerous injuries. Thankfully, none were significant.

Calcasieu Parish

Lake Charles has been victimized by two unforeseeable events that could potentially exacerbate its difficulty in recovering from Hurricane Laura. During the unprecedented winds that tore apart numerous structures in and around the city, the Isle of Capri Casino, a floating casino, became unmoored, floated to the I-10 bridge, and became wedged under the bridge. Because of the collision between the casino and bridge, I-10 has yet to reopen. I do expect that it should be able to re-open this afternoon. In addition to the concerns about I-10, a fire began at a nearby chlorine plant, releasing potentially dangerous fumes. The Louisiana State Police have determined that chemical product began reacting as the hurricane hit the area. I have advised citizens in the area to stay inside, close the windows, and ensure any working air conditioning units are turned off. These two events have not only increased the threats to public health and safety in an area just devastated by a Category 4 hurricane, they have also decreased mobility within that area.





State and Local Resources Committed to Alleviating Results from Disaster

When I declared a state of emergency, GOHSEP increased the EOC readiness level and began processing support requests from local governments and other state agencies. Numerous other agencies also activated and manned their own EOCs to provide assistance and coordination within their areas of responsibility.

Evacuation/ Sheltering

To provide non-congregate sheltering in the COVID-19 environment, GOHSEP contracted with 20 hotels around the state to provide almost 1,700 rooms for evacuees from southwest Louisiana. GOHSEP also contracted with the Rapides Parish Coliseum to serve as a processing point and shelter of last resort. Our Department of Children and Family Services (“DCFS”) provided staff at centralized locations to process evacuees and coordinate transportation to appropriate hotels. DCFS also provided reception centers at those hotels to ensure evacuees were adequately sheltered upon arrival. DOTD provided buses to transport evacuees to shelter sites. Security at all locations was provided by either LANG troops or local law enforcement assets. The Louisiana Workforce Commission (“LWC”) is providing meals to evacuees at eight (8) of the hotels, as well as at the Alexandria Mega Shelter. As of August 26, LWC has provided 2,567 meals. Louisiana is coordinating with ARC, which may supplement feeding efforts. ARC has also been tasked to provide fuel cards to assist evacuees in travelling to available shelters.

Numerous incarceration facilities are located within Hurricane Laura’s path. To protect offenders housed in those facilities, the Department of Corrections (“DOC”) evacuated over 1,700 offenders from those facilities to facilities that are located outside of the path of the storm. After the hurricane passed through, DOC assessed its facilities and found that at least one facility sustained significant damages to fence, roofs, and at least two ancillary buildings.

The Louisiana Department of Health (“LDH”) has activated all available assets and contracted for additional staff since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. In response to Hurricane Laura, LDH has continued to address COVID-19 concerns among the evacuee population, as well as all other medical needs of evacuees. Additionally, LDH is responsible for monitoring and providing assistance to hospitals and other medical facilities impacted by the hurricane.

Search And Rescue

Louisiana has assembled a SAR force consisting of 500 public employees and private individuals. Public SAR assets include representatives from the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, LANG, the U.S. Coast Guard, and the State Fire Marshal’s Office (“SFM”). In 2018, Louisiana passed legislation that allows us to credential volunteer organizations to expand our SAR assets in the aftermath of disasters. The SFM handles those credentialing duties. We obtained an additional 200 SAR troops through EMAC requests. These individuals are assigned missions throughout the devastated areas in order to support local governments in locating their citizens and rescuing those in need.

Flood Fighting

Although Hurricane Laura was primarily a wind event, there was a significant storm surge that impacted Louisiana’s coastal community. For those areas that experienced flooding, GOHSEP and the Louisiana Coastal Preservation and Restoration Authority (“CPRA”) worked together to provide numerous pumps and other flood fighting equipment in order to mitigate the damaging effects of rising water and saltwater intrusion into water supply systems.

Points of Distribution (“PODS”)

GOHSEP is coordinating the distribution of thousands of MREs, water, and ice to those parishes anticipating a lack of utilities for over 24 hours. Louisiana National Guard troops are scheduled to work these sites, and local governments will provide assistance such as security.

Debris

On August 27, 2020, the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (“DOTD”) established an 85-man base camp at Chicot State Park to begin clearing access roads in Greater Lake Charles. DOTD will also work in Beauregard, Allen, Jeff Davis, Cameron, & other parts of Calcasieu.

EMAC

Responding to Hurricane Laura required assets beyond Louisiana’s current capabilities. We reached out to other states for assistance, and brought in a number of disaster response specialists to supplement Louisiana’s capabilities.

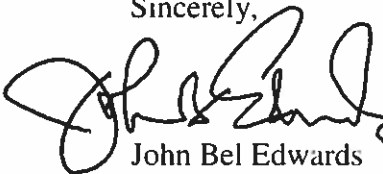
Summary

I have determined that this incident, which is currently being reported as possibly the strongest storm to ever make landfall in Louisiana, is of such severity and magnitude that effective recovery is beyond the capabilities of the state and local governments and that supplemental federal assistance is necessary. I am requesting an expedited Major Disaster Declaration authorizing Public Assistance Category B statewide. For the parishes directly in the path of Hurricane Laura that were damaged, I am requesting all categories of Individual Assistance and Public Assistance.

Because of the magnitude of damages in the southwestern Louisiana parishes, I urge you to provide an expedited declaration in order to provide immediate federal relief to these highly impacted communities. I anticipate that, after we have the opportunity to assess the damages in other parts of the state, several more parishes will need federal assistance to allow them to recover from this disaster. I hereby certify that state and local government obligations and expenditures for the current disaster will comply with all applicable cost sharing requirements of the Stafford Act.

I have designated James B. Waskom as the Governor’s Authorized Representative (“GAR”) and Casey Tingle as the Alternate GAR and also as the State Coordinating Officer (“SCO”) for this request. Director Waskom and Mr. Tingle will work with the Federal Emergency Management Agency and will provide further information and justification on my behalf.

Sincerely,



John Bel Edwards
Governor

Enclosures: