July 9-10

Windstorm
A Message from
NEMA Assistant Director
Bryan Tuma

We envision safer, less vulnerable communities in Nebraska made possible through effective collaborative partnerships committed to saving lives and reducing the impact of disasters.

Our mission is to coordinate, support and serve Nebraska through an effective and relevant emergency management agency.

The severe windstorms that struck the state on July 9-10 resulted in Gov. Pete Ricketts issuing a disaster declaration on July 23. Winds, that the National Weather Service compared to an EF-1 tornado or category 2 hurricane, knocked out electricity to 188,000 customers and caused extensive tree damage in many communities. Early estimates indicate that $30 million in damage, mostly to electrical utilities, resulted. The declaration allows for use of the Governor’s Emergency Fund in response to the damage that occurred. The state declaration is needed to request a federal disaster declaration for public assistance.

The State of Nebraska and local agencies continue to conduct damage assessments and a team of Federal Emergency Management Agency staff from Region 7 is in the state to conduct preliminary damage assessments with NEMA staff. Once sufficient information is gathered, a request for Federal Public Assistance will be sent to the FEMA regional office, then to FEMA headquarters, and finally to the White House for review and approval.

Nebraska will likely qualify for the FEMA Public Assistance program, but not the FEMA Individual Assistance program. Individual Assistance is based on extreme impact such as widespread loss of housing for individuals and families, loss of employment, loss of services across multiple sectors which results in extreme hardship, etc. This event, while significant, does not meet those thresholds.

Another noteworthy piece of information for Nebraska is the inclusion of a case study on the Nebraska Preparedness Partnership, a private-public partnership (P3), in FEMA’s recently released Building Private Public Partnership guide. NPP has been an immense value to the state of Nebraska since its inception in 2014. During the 2019 flood, NPP directed significant resources to communities in need and was an active participant in the State Emergency Operation Center. The private sector brings tremendous capacity to assist in disaster response. Business leaders recognize that they can significantly assist in response and recovery following disasters that affect their workers and communities.

“We bridge the gap between the private sector businesses and nonprofits and the public sector, such as fire, law enforcement and emergency management agencies,” said NPP Director Sandra Hobson. “Our focus is on helping communities become more resilient to disasters, whether it be a single-building fire or a statewide flood.”

We value the partnerships we have with area businesses and NPP is a great partner in its efforts to make Nebraska businesses better prepared and more resilient.

Sincerely,

Bryan Tuma
Lexy Hindt, deputy state hazard mitigation officer with Nebraska Emergency Management Agency, and Adele Phillips, flood mitigation planner with the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources offered Mitigation Concepts and Funding, a one-hour course, July 15 on mitigation measures and funding opportunities.

The class covered mitigation:
- Principles
- Activities
- Partnership opportunities
- Planning, and
- FEMA funds available

Phillips reported that there are a variety of ways to mitigate, including: prevention, natural resource protection, public information, property protections, emergency services and structural projects.

Phillips highlighted that flooding is the most frequently reported hazard in Nebraska. In a 30-year mortgage, a home in the special flood hazard area has a 26 percent chance of experiencing a flood.

Hindt discussed the funding sources, including the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, Building Resilient Infrastructure in Communities (BRIC) program and Flood Mitigation Assistance.

“The NEMA HM team is looking for opportunities to talk with entities and organizations about mitigation,” Hindt said.

Questions can be directed to a member of the team by calling Nebraska Emergency Management Agency at 402-471-7421 and asking for a member of the hazard mitigation team or by emailing lex.y.hindt@nebraska.gov.

Gov. Pete Ricketts welcomes participants to the Nation High School Finals Rodeo.

The incident management team that worked the National High School Finals Rodeo, July 18-24 at the Lancaster County Events Center in Lincoln included, from left: Larry Fichtner of NEMA, Amanda Burki of Johnson and Pawnee counties, Mark Hosking and James Davidsaver of Lancaster County, Roger Conrad of NEMA, Brook Siefker of Lancaster County, Dave Reisen of NEMA, James Higginbotham of National High School Finals Rodeo Association, Colt Farringer of Thayer County and Lloyd “Eddie” Mueller of Lincoln Fire and Rescue.
Damage repair is being completed across the state and that means its time for Nebraska Emergency Management Agency public assistance unit staff to complete site inspections.

“Post COVID we are hitting the field pretty hard to close out projects and make up for time lost last year,” said Kyle Winchell, deputy public assistance officer for NEMA. “We are eager and excited to get applicants the money they deserve.”

Following a disaster, a local entity can apply for public assistance and then becomes an applicant in the public assistance program, Winchell said. Applicants request funds for projects for damage that occurred to facilities in public entities like cities, towns, counties, public power districts, roads departments and public works among others.

Applicants, NEMA, and FEMA work together to write a project which is a description of what damage was done and what work needs to be done to repair a facility to its pre-disaster condition.

In addition to catching up after last year, Winchell said there are several reasons why the public assistance team is conducting a higher volume of site inspections this year, compared with previous years, including:

- **Increased staff.** After the state’s largest disaster (DR-4420, 2019 flooding), NEMA hired more public assistance staff to meet the demands of a record number of project. There are 11 staff members in public assistance now compared to four before DR 4420 which allows for an increase in the site inspections.

- **Nicer weather.** Even though temperatures are soaring across the state, this month, it’s easier to do inspections in the spring, summer and fall than in the winter when snow can hide the work on roads to be inspected.

- **Next phase of work.** Projects are transitioning from the project writing phase of the disaster to the phase were the work is completed. Site inspections are a great chance for locals to show us the work they have completed, Winchell said.

“Site inspections, follow validation and inspection phase of the recovery process where the work is being completed and we need to verify the work that they have completed,” Winchell said. “We verify the project is done so that we can be sure they spent the funds on what they said they would in the written project.”

“Site inspections are one of my favorite parts of the job,” Andrew Allen, program specialist. “After working with applicants from behind a computer screen and communicating thorough email and phone calls, it gives us a chance to meet our applicants in-person, Continued...
face-to-face. I find that most people are excited to schedule site inspections because it’s one of the last steps in the public assistance program. The purpose for site inspections is to verify that the work to the damaged infrastructure was completed, and enables the state to make final payments to the applicants. One of the best parts of site inspections is not only the people we meet, but the natural beauty we see while traveling throughout Nebraska.”

Unit supervisor Patrick Conway said site inspections mean the state can release final funds to the local entities.

“Local governments don’t have large enough budgets to make all these repairs,” Conway said. “They can’t afford all the expenses of these disasters. Providing these reimbursements and restoring local governments general funds is very rewarding.”

“We don’t have just one boss,” Conway said. “We are working for nearly 2 million Nebraskans and I am extremely proud of the NEMA public assistance team and the work they put into help out the people of Nebraska.”

Preliminary Damage Assessments

Currently, the public assistance team is involved in the start of one disaster and the end of another.

“It’s kind of neat that we are experiencing bookends of disasters,” Conway said. “We have members of our team who are working to gather information to help justify a disaster declaration for the July 9-10 storms and at the same time we’re going out to communities impacted by a previous disasters, including the floods of 2019. We are seeing how the process worked to repair damage and help to restore communities.

“We talk about this all of the time, how disasters start and end at the local level and we’re see that first hand with the beginning and end of two different disasters.

“Knowing that what we have done has made a difference is amazingly rewarding.”
U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is providing up to $200 million to provide relief to timber harvesting and timber hauling businesses that have experienced losses due to COVID-19 as part of USDA’s Pandemic Assistance for Producers initiative. Loggers and truckers can apply for assistance through USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA) July 22 through Oct. 15, 2021. The Pandemic Assistance for Timber Harvesters and Haulers program (PATHH) is administered by FSA in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service. Applications can be submitted to the FSA office at any USDA Service Center nationwide by mail, fax, hand delivery or via electronic means. To find a local FSA office, loggers and truckers can visit farmers.gov/service-locator. They can also call 877-508-8364 to speak directly with a USDA employee ready to offer assistance.

Small Business Administration Small nonfarm businesses in 32 South Dakota counties and neighboring counties in Iowa, Minnesota and Nebraska are now eligible to apply for low interest federal disaster loans from the U.S. Small Business Administration, announced Director Tanya N. Garfield of SBA’s Disaster Field Operations Center-West. These loans offset economic losses because of reduced revenues caused by drought in the following primary counties that began July 6, 2021. Neighboring Nebraska counties are Cherry and Keya Paha. Small nonfarm businesses, small agricultural cooperatives, small businesses engaged in aquaculture and most private nonprofit organizations of any size may qualify for Economic Injury Disaster Loans of up to $2 million to help meet financial obligations and operating expenses which could have been met had the disaster not occurred. By law, SBA makes Economic Injury Disaster Loans available when the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture designates an agricultural disaster. The Secretary declared this disaster on July 12, 2021. Applicants may apply online, receive additional disaster assistance information and download applications at https://disaster-loanassistance.sba.gov/. Applicants may also call SBA’s Customer Service Center at (800) 659-2955 or email: disastercustomerservice@sba.gov for more information on SBA disaster assistance. Individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing may call (800) 877-8339. Completed applications should be mailed to U.S. Small Business Administration, Processing and Disbursement Center, 14925 Kingsport Road, Fort Worth, TX 76155. The deadline to apply for economic injury is March 14, 2022.

Nebraska Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster held coordination calls following the July 9-10 wind event. Numerous partner organizations were active in meeting household needs following the windstorm. The American Red Cross opened cooling centers, assisted with medical needs arising from power outages and assisted with homes damaged by falling trees. The Heartland Hope Mission served 585 people with food distribution and the 211 emergency line fielded 80 calls for food needs, hotel stays and clean up.

Nebraska Public Power reports that scam activity has seen a sharp increase during the last week of July as scammers posing as Nebraska Public Power District (NPPD) attempt to steal money from unsuspecting victims. Scammers will either text or call a customer and tell them that they must pay their bill immediately or their power will be shut-off. If the customer pays a scammer using a green dot card, or other method such as wire transfer or gift cards, it makes it very difficult to track or recover the money. NPPD will not call or text a customer and demand payment or threaten to shut off a customer’s power. If you believe you are a target of a potential scam or are unsure if you are talking to someone from NPPD, hang up the phone and call 1-877-ASK-NPPD. More tips and a video on scam activity can be found on NPPD.com/scams.
FEMA and FCC Plan Nationwide Emergency Alert Test

The Federal Communications Commission, and Federal Emergency Management Agency

will conduct a

Nationwide Test

to assess the capabilities of the Emergency Alert System and Wireless Emergency Alerts at:

3:20 p.m. CT/4:20 p.m. MT

on Aug. 11

(backup date Aug. 25)

The Emergency Alert System test is made available to Emergency Alert System participants (i.e., radio and television broadcasters, cable systems, satellite radio and television providers and wireline video providers) and is scheduled to last approximately one minute. The test message will be similar to regular monthly test messages with which the public is familiar.
**The Beacon – July 2021 in Review**

**Becca Blizzard** joined Nebraska Emergency Management Agency on July 6 as a planning specialist in the public assistance unit.

Blizzard earned a bachelor’s degree in Homeland Security with Minors in Emergency Management and Terrorism Studies from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona Beach, Fla.

She worked for Alliant Energy in Cedar Rapids, Iowa as a physical security and emergency management Intern in 2019. Blizzard was a volunteer firefighter for 8 years until she moved to Nebraska. She is a National and Delaware EMT. She worked as a volunteer EMT on her campus for the Emergency Response Team, formally known as the Medical Emergency and Disaster Relief Club for 3.5 years.

She graduated from AmeriCorps NCCC (National Civilian Community Corps), FEMA Corps in February 2021.

Blizzard was born and raised in Rehoboth Beach, Delaware. Her parents and three sisters still live in Delaware. In August, she will be moving into her new apartment with her cat Keanu. Blizzard enjoys ice skating, skiing, hiking/nature walks, reading, gaming (Nintendo consoles), sewing, spending time with my family and friends, attending comic conventions, painting/pottery and volunteering especially with animals.

**Grace Fennelly** joined NEMA on July 6 as a planning specialist in the public assistance unit.

She graduated from Northwest Missouri State University in May with Bachelor of Science degrees in psychology and emergency and disaster management.

Fennelly started working at Old Navy after high school and continued throughout college. She also served as a program analyst for institutional research at Northwest Missouri State.

Fennelly was born and raised in Omaha and went to Elkhorn South High School. She lives with a golden retriever named Finn and enjoys cooking and reading.

**Chris Schroeder** was named unit supervisor for NEMA’s new community outreach unit.

The unit includes the long-term recovery program, Citizen Corps coordination, State Emergency Response Commission coordination and public information.

NEMA is charged by Nebraska statute to reduce the vulnerabilities of the people and communities of Nebraska in terms of injury, loss of life and property damage resulting from natural, technological or man-made disasters and emergencies.

NEMA is responsible for coordinating the state response in any major emergency or disaster including the support of local governments as needed or requested, and coordinating assistance with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and other federal partners.

*The Beacon* includes emergency management news and activities from across the state. Please forward story ideas or photos for inclusion in the newsletter to: Public Information Officer Jodie Fawl, 402-471-7428 or jodie.fawl@nebraska.gov.