Soldiers flying a Nebraska Army National Guard CH-47 Chinook helicopter above the Spring Creek division of the Brush Creek fire drop water from their 2,000-gallon bucket, June 25, in Holt County.

Photo by Seth Peterson, Nebraska Forest Service

Photo taken from Highway 11, about four miles south of the Niobrara River
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.

Since our last issue of The Beacon we got word that President Joe Biden authorized an increase in the level of federal funding support for public assistance repairs or rebuilding infrastructure from 75% to 90% of total eligible costs as a result of historic flooding in 2019. Nebraska will receive an estimated $65 million in additional federal funding assistance to help pay for repair of damaged public infrastructure. This is great news for the state and the counties that were severely impacted. It will significantly defray the cost of the disaster for state and local governments. The increase was triggered by a regulation that authorizes additional federal assistance when a jurisdiction is severely impacted above and beyond normal recovery costs. The 2019 flood caused approximately $500 million in damage to public infrastructure. An anticipated additional $65 million in federal assistance benefits will be a significant benefit to the state.

Governor Pete Ricketts has approved payment of a state share of public assistance projects under DR 4420, the flooding disaster of 2019. This will include assistance for power, irrigation and natural resource districts. While the state normally pays a share of the public assistance cost for other sub-recipients, it does not usually pay a share of the non-federal portion of public assistance costs for these districts. The extent of damage that occurred during DR-4420 (severe winter storm, straight-line winds and flooding from March 9 to July 15, 2019) led Gov. Ricketts to approve the addition of the state share for these districts. His decision follows the president’s approval to increase the federal cost share. While this is a bit of a departure from normal, it is within the latitude of the Governor’s Emergency Fund that we can pay this cost share.

In Nebraska, sub-recipients and the state generally pay 12.5% each of the public assistance costs and for DR 4420 it will be reduced to 5% for the sub-recipient and 5% for the state. The legislature’s appropriation of $54 million to assist with disaster recovery will assist in paying the state’s share of public assistance. The governor has latitude to determine how much the state share will be and how much the sub-recipient will pay of the non-federal share.

Sincerely,

Bryan Tuma
National Guard Assists with Brush Creek Wildfire Fight in North Central Nebraska

Nebraska Emergency Management Agency coordinated the state response to fires in north central Nebraska, June 24-25.

At the direction of Gov. Pete Ricketts, the Nebraska Army National Guard activated two helicopter crews and support personnel, June 25, to provide aerial firefighting capabilities at the request of local authorities in multiple north central Nebraska counties.

Eleven soldiers deployed Thursday evening from the Army Aviation Support Facility in Grand Island with one CH-47 Chinook helicopter, one UH-72 Lakota helicopter and one fuel truck. Both helicopters are equipped with water buckets.

Severe weather on June 23 in the afternoon and evening produced lightning strikes believed to have sparked at least 20 different fires, according to Seth Peterson of the Nebraska Forest Service.

The largest fire was located near Brush Creek and Highway 11 according to Peterson.

According to NEMA Preparedness and Operations Manager Earl Imler, the fire burned an estimated 6,640 acres. He reports the livestock loss at an estimated 65 cow/calf pairs. Three homes had to be provided with structure protections and were undamaged. One barn and one hunting cabin, both unoccupied, were lost.

By June 25, the National Guard crews have completed 34 drops totaling more than 23,000 gallons of water.

NEMA Assistant Director Bryan Tuma said he has gotten reports from Nebraska Army National Guard representatives that they were especially pleased with the integration of their resources by incident command on the ground.

“We saw this with the Hubbard Gap fire last year and again on the Brush Creek Fire,” Tuma said. “It indicates that our investment in incident command training is leading to a more effective response.

Approximately 10 volunteer fire departments assisted, including two from South Dakota.

At one point Great Plains Dispatch was contacted to see if any of the SEATS stationed in South Dakota were available, none were due to a number of fires in South Dakota.

Both Boyd and Holt counties declared emergencies and requested state assistance.

Four members of the state the Wildland Incident Response and Assistance Team (WIRAT), consisting of State Fire Marshal and Nebraska Forest Service employees, were on site. The team provides assistance on wildland fire incidents when the local organizations have exhausted all resources and strategies.

Additionally, Civil Air Patrol flew fire detection flights from Cherry to Boyd county. The federal parks service will be flying detections flights for the federal lands as well.

Imler reports that the Nebraska Single Engine Air Tanker was brought to the state early on June 28. It was scheduled to come on station July 1, but due to current conditions NEMA ordered an earlier start.

The SEAT will be based in Valentine for now and the mobile SEAT Base is moving to O’Neill. The state also has SEAT bases in Alliance, Chadron, McCook and Scottsbluff. The SEAT will be stationed at the base where the need is greatest, Imler said.
Above: Soldiers flying a Nebraska Army National Guard CH-47 Chinook helicopter drop water from a 2,000 gallon Bambi bucket in support of the incident commander and firefighters on the ground in Holt and Boyd counties, June 24-25.

Left: A Nebraska Army National Guard CH-47 Chinook helicopter lands at the O’Neill airport to refuel from a HEMTT fuel truck.
USDA Invests $975,800 in Rural Nebraska

On June 23, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Deputy Under Secretary for Rural Development Justin Maxson announced that USDA is investing $975,800 to equip, rebuild, and modernize essential services for rural communities in Nebraska. These eight projects will benefit roughly 22,000 rural Nebraska residents.

"These loans and grants will help rural communities invest in facilities and services that are vital to all communities, such as schools, libraries, hospitals, and health clinics. They also will help rural communities continue to beat the COVID-19 pandemic as America builds back better and stronger," Maxson said in a USDA press release.

Across the United States, USDA is investing $185 million in 233 projects through the Community Facilities Direct Loan and Grant Program.

More than 100 types of projects are eligible for Community Facilities funding. Eligible applicants include municipalities, public bodies, nonprofit organizations, and federally recognized Native American tribes. In addition, projects must be in rural areas with a population of 20,000 or less.

In addition to the eight projects highlighted in the press release, the USDA Nebraska Rural Development state office partnered with NEMA to fund five warning sirens across the state. This investment will help to keep Nebraskans safe from natural hazards such as tornadoes and high-wind events. To learn more about Community Facilities Program funding opportunities, contact the USDA Nebraska Rural Development state office. Also, see the Community Facilities Direct Loan Program Guidance Book for Applicants (PDF, 669 KB) for a detailed overview of the application process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recipient</th>
<th>Loans</th>
<th>Grants</th>
<th>Project Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Village of Unadilla</td>
<td>$650,000</td>
<td></td>
<td>This rural development investment will be used to repair several blocks of streets within the village. The village board has identified certain blocks where the asphalt pavement streets are in poor condition and no longer provide a functional, safe and adequate driving surface for the traffic of Unadilla. This project will remove the existing deteriorated asphalt pavement and construct new 6-inch asphalt pavement on top of newly constructed subgrade. New curb ramps, where needed, will be constructed to satisfy Americans with Disabilities Act requirements. These new street sections will serve the village as well as some of the primary access routes to Highway 2, the Christian Church of Unadilla, local access routes, and access routes to downtown areas of Unadilla.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Auburn</td>
<td>$50,000</td>
<td></td>
<td>This rural development investment will be used to purchase 15 sets of bunker gear, eight self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) equipment with a cascade control system including the needed hoses and cylinders. The current bunker gear has reached or exceeded the 10-year lifetime standard set by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). The purchase of bunker gear will ensure compliance with NFPA and protects the firefighters volunteering to save lives and property. The cascade control will extend the SCBA time before the need to refill from 30 minutes to 45 minutes. Not only does it extend the time, but these will be fillable on scene, improving efficiency and time usage. The new fire equipment will keep the volunteer firefighters safe while serving to protect this community of 3,460 residents.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nuckolls County Agricultural Society</td>
<td>$27,500</td>
<td></td>
<td>This Rural Development investment will be used to renovate the Nuckolls County Fairgrounds. The Fair serves the County's 4,500 residents along with many other enthusiasts of county fairs. The project includes adding new horse stalls, animal cages, electric fans and sun-shades to the show barns, new external fencing around the show and beef barns, new aluminum bleachers, a trailer for animal transport and a new competition chute for rodeo events. These projects will enhance the experience of attendees to the Nuckolls County Fair.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sandhills Care Center</td>
<td>$48,300</td>
<td></td>
<td>This Rural Development investment will be used to assist in the replacement and upgrade of the emergency generator serving the nursing home. The existing generator is old and not large enough to power the facility. In the severe storm of March 2019 the facility had to be evacuated due to the loss of power and insufficient generator capabilities. The facility serves a population of 3,145.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brown County</td>
<td>$50,000</td>
<td></td>
<td>This Rural Development investment will be used to acquire and install a 2021 Cummings Natural Gas Generator-150KW with transfer switch. The 2021 Cummings Generator will replace a 1967 Military Surplus Generator-60KW which supplies power to the water plant in times of an outage. The existing generator does not provide enough power for the entire city and operators are forced to monitor and manually control water supply to certain parts of the city. The Cummings Generator will allow the city to provide water safely and efficiently in times of power outage.</td>
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<tr>
<td>City of Chadron</td>
<td>$50,000</td>
<td></td>
<td>The Rural Development investment will be used to purchase a 2021 Ford F-550 Crash Truck fitted with an equipment box, providing all necessary emergency equipment. The equipment includes a light tower, cascade systems for filling air pac bottle, updated battery operated extrication tool and a go light. This new truck will replace the City's current Crash Truck which is 27 years old and has exceeded its useful life and no longer meets current safety regulations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brown County</td>
<td>$50,000</td>
<td></td>
<td>This Rural Development investment will be used to acquire mobile communications equipment for the sheriff’s office. This will include a fully integrated records management system, computer aided dispatch system, mobile data terminals, and electronic citations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Loup City-Ashton-Rockville Cooperative A</td>
<td>$50,000</td>
<td></td>
<td>This Rural Development investment will be used to purchase a four-wheel-drive ambulance. The Loup City-Ashton-Rockville Cooperative Ambulance Service provides, as the name implies, ambulance service for residents of Sherman County. The Service was formed in the 1970's via an Interlocal Agreement. The new ambulance will replace two aged, front wheel drive ambulances which are beyond useful life. Four-wheel drive allows the vehicle to be able to navigate the rough roads of Sherman County, especially during poor weather conditions. As with all ambulance needs, seconds and minutes may be critical and save lives for the supportive communities of Sherman County.</td>
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Gov. Pete Ricketts announced that the State of Emergency issued for the coronavirus pandemic on March 13, 2020, would end on June 30, 2021, removing the last official pandemic measure issued by the State of Nebraska. The State of Emergency existed over the last year to help Nebraska mobilize resources to respond to the pandemic. This is a separate measure from the State’s Directed Health Measures (DHM), which ended a few weeks ago. As a result the Nebraska State Emergency Operations Center will return to normal operations as of midnight June 30.

Department of Health and Human Services announced that with the expansion of testing availability throughout the state and declining Test Nebraska volumes, that after July 18, Test Nebraska will no longer be collecting COVID-19 specimens. Testing for SARS-CoV-2 will remain available through other routes, including national laboratories (e.g., Labcorp, Quest), affiliated laboratories (e.g., CHI Health Laboratory, the University of Nebraska Medical Center, Bryan Health), rapid on-site testing and through the Nebraska Public Health Laboratory (NPHL). Over the past year, testing for SARS-CoV-2 in Nebraska has expanded from 300 tests per day to 25,000 tests per day, which was accomplished through a variety of test sites, including hospitals, primary care providers, pharmacies, mass testing sites and others. Currently fewer than 200 specimens per day are being collected and tested through Test Nebraska. To see the full advisory visit: https://dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/Health-Alert-Network.aspx.

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has provided more than $447 million to 66,800 people to assist with COVID-19 related funeral costs for deaths occurring on or after Jan. 20, 2020. Nearly 2,500 dedicated FEMA employees continue to work with applicants to review every application and determine eligibility each week. Eligibility determinations are not driven by state/location; instead, they are based on when the applicant submits all required documentation. “Applications” in the below chart reflect the number of individuals who called to begin the process for assistance. Please find state-specific information in the attachment. Applicants may apply by calling 844-684-6333 from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. ET, Monday through Friday. Multilingual services are available. Applicants who use a relay service, such as a videophone, Additional information about COVID-19 funeral assistance, including frequently asked questions, is available on FEMA.gov.

FEMA Provides Financial Assistance COVID-19 Funeral-Related Expenses Families that have inurred funeral expenses as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, may be eligible for financial assistance under the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2021 and the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021. FEMA is providing financial assistance for COVID-19-related funeral expenses incurred after Jan. 20, 2020. To access information and assistance call the COVID-19 Funeral Assistance Helpline, 844-684-6333 | TTY: 800-462-7585, Monday – Friday 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Eastern Time. Call this dedicated toll-free phone number to get a COVID-19 Funeral Assistance application completed with help from FEMA’s representatives. Multilingual services will be available.

To be eligible for funeral assistance, you must meet these conditions:
- The death must have occurred in the United States, including the U.S. territories, and the District of Columbia.
- The death certificate must indicate the death was attributed to COVID-19.
- The applicant must be a U.S. citizen, non-citizen national, or qualified alien who incurred funeral expenses after Jan. 20, 2020.
- There is no requirement for the deceased person to have been a U.S. citizen, non-citizen national, or qualified alien.

You are encouraged to keep and gather all funeral-related documentation. Types of information should include:
- An official death certificate that attributes the death directly or indirectly to COVID-19 and shows that the death occurred in the United States, including the U.S. territories, and the District of Columbia.
- Funeral expenses documents (receipts, funeral home contract, etc.) that includes the applicant's name, the deceased person's name, the amount of funeral expenses, and the dates the funeral expenses were incurred.
- Proof of funds received from other sources specifically for use toward funeral costs. We are not able to duplicate benefits received from burial or funeral insurance, financial assistance received from voluntary agencies, government agencies, or other sources.

If you are eligible for funeral assistance you will receive a check by mail or by direct deposit, depending on which option you choose when you apply for assistance. Additional resources may be found by going to https://www.fema.gov/disasters/coronavirus/economic/funeral-assistance.
University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC) reports that a recent survey shows vaccine hesitancy remains a challenge in the state. Public health directors from agencies across the state are reporting reluctance among their residents.

"A lot of people are hesitant because it is so new, while others have been seeing in statistics that the first shot is 80 percent effective, so they think that is good enough and don't come back for their second shot," said Brandy Bird, nurse director with the Red Willow Health Department in McCook. Or as Meghan Trevino, coordinated services director with the West Central Health Department in North Platte, said, "People just do not want to vaccinate overall."

The survey jointly conducted earlier this year by the Center for Reducing Health Disparities in the College of Public Health at the University of Nebraska Medical Center and Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) revealed that among Nebraska adults who have not been vaccinated, 23 percent are reluctant to take the vaccine. According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, as of June 24 only 47.5 percent of Nebraskans were fully vaccinated. The state has been aggressive in outreach through several online town halls, media interviews and a public service announcement campaign airing on radio stations across the state.

"Vaccination in the state is the most critical component to control the COVID-19 pandemic," said Ming Qu, MD, PhD, epidemiologist with Nebraska DHHS and co-principal investigator of the survey. The survey of more than 1,200 Nebraskans was conducted under the direction of Dejun Su, PhD, associate professor in the department of health promotion in the UNMC College of Public Health and principal investigator. Safety concerns, side effects and lack of trust were the top reasons given for not wanting to take the vaccine, Dr. Su said. The survey also showed that there is more vaccine hesitancy in rural areas as compared to urban; and there is more vaccine hesitancy among minority groups, most notably among Hispanics, he said.

The results of the survey, Qu said, already are helping to inform targeted communication strategies public health officials will use to encourage greater vaccine uptake. "We have a long relationship with the UNMC College of Public Health and have worked together over the years to address many issues," Qu said.

"The information gathered by this survey is helping us to understand public perceptions and quickly address those concerns to make an impact on vaccine hesitancy across the state," said DHHS Chief Executive Officer Dannette Smith. "It paints a vivid picture of vaccine hesitancy in the state that we can then share with our federal partners and pivot when we need to address new concerns."

The survey, which was part of the study "Community Assessment to Recommend an Optimal COVID-19 Vaccination Plan in Nebraska," funded by the Holland Foundation and Nebraska DHHS, was mostly conducted between Feb. 1 and April 15. It was done in partnership with public health districts and other stakeholders via the online platform REDCap. "The study findings greatly informed our understanding of vaccine hesitancy across the state and have helped to facilitate appropriate strategies tailored and targeted interventions to address documented barriers in receiving COVID-19 vaccinations in under-served communities and to promote health equity," said DHHS's Chief Medical Officer Dr. Gary Anthone, said.

FEMA and FCC Plan Nationwide Emergency Alert Test

In coordination with the Federal Communications Commission, the Federal Emergency Management Agency will conduct a nationwide test to assess the capabilities of the Emergency Alert System and Wireless Emergency Alert at:

3:20 p.m. CT/4:20 p.m. MT on Aug. 11 with a backup date of 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.
FEMA funding for Hazard Mitigation Grant Program projects often requires that an approved Hazard Mitigation Plan is in place. Learn more about how to create a funding strategy for hazard mitigation projects using your Hazard Mitigation Plan. Click the illustration at left or this [link](#) to FEMA’s Guide to Expanding Mitigation. Please share this information with your stakeholders, community officials and others who may find this information helpful.

Learn more about FEMA’s Hazard Mitigation Assistance Division’s [grant programs](#).

The Natural Hazards Center, in partnership with FEMA, is pleased to present the Making Mitigation Work Webinar Series. These free one-hour webinars feature innovative speakers and highlight recent progress in mitigation policy, practice, and research. [Learn more and register](#).

Comments or questions? Contact a FEMA Hazard Mitigation Specialist for your region. [Download](#) the FEMA app today for weather alerts, safety tips, and recovery center locations.

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**The Beacon – June 2021 in Review**

**Mitigation Minute**

Create a Funding Strategy to Help Finance Your Hazard Mitigation Project

To receive funding through FEMA’s Hazard Mitigation Assistance Grant programs, state, local, tribal and territorial governments must have an approved hazard mitigation plan. Additionally, approved projects often require non-federal matching funds be provided to supplement federal grants.

**QUESTION**

So how can governments acquire the non-federal share needed to turn mitigation plans into projects or actions that increase resilience?

**ANSWER**

The best time to think about how to fund mitigation projects is to consider funding sources while developing hazard mitigation plans.

FEMA’s [Guide to Expanding Mitigation](#) explores how community officials can work with local finance officials to support hazard mitigation planning, and how mitigation investments can align with community budgets and financial management priorities.

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**NEBRASKA**

**Emergency Management Agency**

Good Life. Great Strength.

2433 N.W. 24th St., Lincoln NE 68524
www.nema.nebraska.gov

Main Line: (402) 471-7421
Toll Free: (877) 297-2368
Fax: (402) 471-7433

Governor Pete Ricketts
State Homeland Security Director, Lt. Gov. Mike Foley
NEMA Director, Major General Daryl Bohac
Assistant Director Bryan Tuma

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.