



January 21, 2026

The Honorable Donald J. Trump  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

**RE: Federal disaster assistance for Elk and Lee fires in Rio Blanco County, Colorado**

Dear Mr. President:

The Associated Governments of Northwest Colorado (AGNC), the Council of Governments and federally-designated Economic Development District for Northwest Colorado, representing Rio Blanco, Garfield, Mesa, Moffat, Grand, Montrose, and Delta counties, respectfully asks you to reconsider the denial of federal disaster assistance for the Elk and Lee fires in Rio Blanco County and to allow a direct-to-county path for that aid.

Rio Blanco County is not a typical case. Roughly three-quarters of the county is federally managed land at the heart of the Piceance Basin's natural gas production and public lands economy, making it critical to national energy, ranching, hunting, and outdoor recreation. When fires on and around those federal lands wipe out the power and infrastructure that keep gas flowing and ranches operating, it is not reasonable to expect a small rural county of 6,500—and a state government that is openly hostile to energy production and livestock grazing on federal lands—to carry almost all of the burden.

The Elk and Lee fires burned more than 150,000 acres, with the Lee Fire becoming the 5th largest in Colorado history, and caused an estimated \$27 million in damage, including roughly \$23–25 million to local electric utilities serving residents and the Piceance Basin. Without federal disaster assistance, the result will be higher power costs, slower rebuilds, reduced reliability for natural gas production, and more pressure on ranchers and small businesses already hit by state-driven coal closures. At the same time, Rio Blanco is one of the counties now dealing with wolf depredation and constant livestock risk under Colorado's rushed wolf release, another state decision that increased our burdens without real backup.

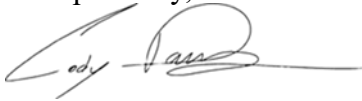
We understand hesitancy to send funding to the State of Colorado, but you have already shown that you are willing to bypass unhelpful state systems to get money where it belongs. During your first administration, you and Secretary Zinke's team worked with AGNC to ensure long-withheld Anvil Points mineral lease funds were finally returned straight to Western Slope counties instead of disappearing into the state's coffers. You have also recently spoken in favor of sending federal funds more directly, whether to American families or to trusted foreign partners, rather than through layers of bureaucracy and intermediaries. These are models of success and exactly what we are asking you to do now: reverse this denial and structure Elk and Lee fire

assistance to go directly to Rio Blanco County and its local utilities, under strong federal oversight.

In 2024, Rio Blanco County gave you just over 80 percent of the vote, your strongest support in Colorado. Our coal miners, oil and gas workers, ranchers, and multigeneration rural families stand with you because you fight for American energy, local control, and forgotten communities. They are now facing disaster-level fire damage, ongoing wolf impacts, and the risk of losing both energy production and family ranches with no realistic prospect of meaningful help from the state. We are asking you to stand with them now by reversing this decision and working with us on a direct-to-county path that keeps Rio Blanco's energy production online and its ranchers on the land.

AGNC is ready to connect your team immediately with Rio Blanco County commissioners, mayors, ranchers, and energy workers, so you can hear directly from the people most affected.

Respectfully,



Cody Davis  
AGNC Chair  
Mesa County Commissioner



Doug Overton  
AGNC Vice-Chair  
Rio Blanco County Commissioner

CC: Colorado Congressional Delegation