

JULY 2019 WINDSTORM

DISASTER RECOVERY UPDATE

BARRON COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT
OFFICE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

DISASTER RECOVERY UPDATE

This document is designed to provide a final operational update regarding disaster recovery efforts following the July 19th 2019 Windstorm in Barron County Wisconsin.

INCIDENT



Damage to Residence



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At 5:15pm on Friday July 19th 2019, the National Weather Service (NWS) issued a Severe Thunderstorm Warning for Barron County. At 5:30pm, a severe windstorm impacted Barron County with heavy rain, 90 mph winds, and lasted approximately 90 minutes. The storm also included two tornado touchdowns in the Turtle Lake area (one EF-0 and one EF-1).

The NWS further advised that Wisconsin experienced a total of 14 tornadoes on July 19th from the series of storms.

DAMAGE

The storm resulted in over \$2 million in damages to residential and commercial properties and impacted over 30 miles of roadways with debris including road blockages and filled right-of-ways.

The storm also produced 300 power outages leaving 10,400 residents without power for several days.

As a result, 14 municipalities filed a local disaster declaration to request assistance from county and state resources such as the Barron County Highway Department, Wisconsin Department of Corrections, and the Wisconsin National Guard.



Power Company Vehicles Staged for Deployment

RESOURCES

The following resources were activated Barron County Emergency Management to assist residents and municipalities with debris clean-up and disaster recovery operations.

Aerial Imagery

Fly-overs were provided by Wisconsin State Patrol aircraft to collect photos for situational awareness and to identify hardest hit areas.

Debris Clean-Up

The Department of Corrections provided two 10-person chainsaw crews (from the Gordon Facility and the Black River Facility) that were shared between the Towns of Crystal Lake and Almena to clear debris from right-of-ways. These crews will continue working in Barron County for the remainder of this week, then will transition back to state control.

The Wisconsin National Guard provided one Engineer Team comprised of one loader, four backhoes, six dump trucks, and 20 chainsaw operators. The team focused on debris removal around the Loon Lake area.

Additional National Guard vehicles and personnel may be added to the area over the next few days to assist with debris clean-up in right-of-ways.



National Guard Debris Clean-Up at Loon Lake

Each municipality opened a debris dump site to provide residents with disposal options. Once filled, dump site debris piles will either be chipped or burned at the discretion of the municipality.

Manpower

Personnel for the Volunteer Reception Center was provided by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Field-team leads were also provided by the DNR to assist in managing civilian volunteers conducting debris clean-up. Additional volunteers were provided by Barron County, Region 1 HERC, and RTAC.

Equipment/Tools

The American Red Cross provided hand tools to assist volunteers with debris clean-up, which included 40 shovels, 30 metal rakes, 60 safety goggles, and 200 pairs of work gloves.

Shower Facilities

High Schools in Chetek, Barron, Turtle Lake, and Cumberland opened to provide shower facilities to residents without power or water.

Food Distribution

The Salvation Army provided meals for the Volunteer Reception Center staff, DNR staff, and the Department of Corrections chainsaw crews for weeks following the incident.

Water Distribution

The Wisconsin National Guard staged one water tanker at the Comstock Creamery filled with 400 gallons of non-potable water to assist local residents without power/water with flushing toilets, etc.

The Red Cross provided one pallet of bottled water for the Volunteer Reception Center which was also shared with area high schools to hand out to local residents in need.



National Guard Water Tanker at Comstock Creamery

VOLUNTEERS

On July 22nd, Barron County partnered with United Way 211 to receive damage reports and requests for debris clean-up assistance from area volunteers.

The Barron County Volunteer Reception Center (VRC) was opened on Friday, July 26th and Saturday, July 27th registering over 150 volunteers at the Barron County Justice Center. Volunteers were processed and field-managed by 60 DNR employees, Barron County employees, Region 1 Healthcare Emergency Readiness Coalition (HERC) staff members, Regional Trauma Advisory Council (RTAC) staff members, and volunteers.

Based on the limited number of community volunteers, the VRC discontinued accepting work orders at 12:00pm Saturday July 27th. A total of 213 work orders were received with 198 completed and 15 unable to complete due to the need for heavy equipment. Remaining work orders were forwarded to the respective township for follow-up.

COST RECOVERY

On August 5th, FEMA contacted Barron County to advise representatives would be onsite on August 13th for a Preliminary Damage Assessment (PDA). This PDA determines if local municipalities qualify for federal reimbursement funding. This created a significant amount of work for municipalities creating individual disaster assessment binders.

On August 14th, FEMA reps will meet with Barron County reps to review municipal disaster assessment binders for accuracy and compliance. Within the following four weeks, FEMA will notify Barron County of the outcome. If the FEMA application is approved, the reimbursement rate to municipalities is 75% from FEMA and 12.5% from the State of Wisconsin. The remaining 12.5% is considered local match and responsibility of the applicant. If the FEMA application is denied, the Wisconsin Disaster Fund (WDF) will be approved at a reimbursement rate of 70% state with a 30% local match.

LESSONS LEARNED

- As with most disasters, situational awareness regarding the size, scope, and complexity of the incident is critical. With this storm encompassing such a large geographic area, awareness could not be fully determined until the following day.

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This was also compounded by the time of day with the storm passing at 6:00pm and dusk arriving around 9:00pm. A quicker situational awareness could have provided a better insight into the number of people trapped in homes due to debris blocking driveways, the number of county and town roads blocked by debris, etc.

- Local responders and emergency management have a strong understanding of police, fire, and ambulance resources that are available for emergency response. However, there is a less understanding of resources available from local and regional private companies including logging equipment, hauling equipment, wood chippers, etc. To prevent this from being a future concern, emergency management will be creating a private resource database over the next several months.
- Many residents hesitated to report damage by calling 211 in fear of taking resources away from other residents with greater needs. To prevent this from being a future concern, education to the public will be provided on multiple platforms (newspaper, social media, television, internet, radio, etc) regarding the many resources available to community residents.

MOVING FORWARD

Over the next few weeks, Wisconsin National Guard resources will continue to clear debris from right-of-ways in the Echo Lake, Horseshoe Lake, and Upper Turtle Lake areas. Over the next several months, municipalities will also continue to contract with private companies to complete debris clean-up in right-of-ways. Area residents should expect road closures (for the safety of workers) as the clean-up process continues.

Debris clean-up on private property remains the responsibility of the property owner, due to state assets (personnel) not being allowed onto private property. Homeowners in need of debris clean-up resources can contact their local town board for guidance.

Barron County Sheriff's Department Office of Emergency Management will continue to support and coordinate with towns, cities, and villages through the disaster recovery process.

Mike Judy, Director
Office of Emergency Management
Barron County Sheriff's Department

