

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

COMPLETE STATEMENT OF

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BEFORE

COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, PUBLIC
BUILDINGS AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT**

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

**Are We Ready? Recovering from the 2017 Disasters and Preparing for
the 2018 Hurricane Season**

JULY 18, 2018

Chairman Barletta, Ranking Member Titus and distinguished members of the Subcommittee:

I am honored to testify before you today to discuss the authorities and responsibilities of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) during disaster response and recovery operations and lessons learned during the 2017 disasters. I am Ray Alexander, Director of Contingency Operations and Homeland Security, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps).

The Corps conducts its emergency response and recovery activities under two basic authorities: the Stafford Disaster and Emergency Assistance Act (Stafford Act); and Public Law 84-99, as amended (PL 84-99), 33 U.S.C. § 701n. Under the Stafford Act, we and other Federal agencies work under the direction of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). PL 84-99 provides a separate source of authority for the Corps to prepare for and respond to floods, hurricanes, and other natural disasters, and to support emergency operations in response to such disasters.

Under the Stafford Act:

-) As provided in the National Response Framework, the Corps serves as the lead Federal coordinating agency for Emergency Support Function 3 (ESF-3) (Public Works and Engineering); and
-) As provided in National Disaster Recovery Framework, the Corps serves as the lead Federal coordinating agency for Recovery Support Function (RSF) – Infrastructure Systems.

In both of these capacities, the Corps assists the overall Federal effort, working with other Federal agencies as directed by FEMA.

ESF-3 provides temporary emergency power, debris management, and emergency infrastructure assessment. The Corps is also positioned to support other Emergency Support Functions with temporary housing, temporary roofs (Blue Roof program), critical public facility restoration as well as structural specialists to support Urban Search and Rescue missions. The Infrastructure Systems RSF works to efficiently facilitate the restoration of infrastructure systems and services to support a viable, sustainable community and improves resilience to and protection from future hazards.

Under PL 84-99, we prepare for flood, hurricane, and other natural disasters through planning, coordination, and training with local, state, Federal partners. The Corps can also assist state and local entities at their request in flood fight operations or through implementation of advance measures to prevent/reduce storm incident damages. After a major flood, PL 84-99 authorizes the Corps to repair damage to authorized Corps projects, and work with states/municipalities to rehabilitate and restore eligible non-Federal flood infrastructure to pre-storm conditions.

When disasters occur, Corps teams are able to mobilize from across the country to assist the local Corps districts that are responding to the incident. As part of this mission, the Corps has more than 50 specially trained response teams, supported by emergency contracts, to perform the wide range of public works and engineering-related support missions I just described. Additionally, the Corps uses pre-awarded contracts that can be quickly activated for missions such as debris removal, temporary roofing, generator installation, and dredging.

2017 Hurricane Season - The 2017 Hurricane Season was historic and the Corps continues to identify lessons learned in an effort to sustain and improve its emergency response performance.

Hurricanes Irma and Maria - Category 5 Hurricane Irma made landfall over the U.S. Virgin Islands on September 6, 2017, while also impacting Puerto Rico with Category 2 winds, 12 foot storm surge and up to 20 inches of rain. Hurricane Irma made landfall in southern Florida/Florida Keys on September 9, 2017. Soon thereafter, Category 5 Hurricane Maria made landfall over Puerto Rico on September 20, 2017, causing major damage to critical infrastructure and homes. The historic nature of the impacts of Hurricanes Irma and Maria on the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, in addition to affecting states within the continental U.S, resulted in an unprecedented response by FEMA and the family of Federal responders. FEMA identified 49 mission assignments for the Corps to assist in Hurricanes Irma and Maria response and recovery, totaling \$3.34 billion for Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The Corps deployed thousands of dedicated civil servant and military personnel to support the people of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands and still has 369 employees engaged executing recovery operations today. Additionally, the Corps received 43 mission assignments in Florida and in Georgia, for a total of \$45 million.

Debris Management: Across the areas impacted by these two storms, these missions resulted in over 5.03 million cubic yards of debris removed, allowing for the freedom of movement by responders and the people impacted by these storms. In Florida and Georgia, the Corps debris subject matter experts also provided technical assistance to many counties.

Temporary Emergency Power: Our temporary power teams installed over 1,350 generators providing emergency power to critical life preserving services like water, medical, energy, communications, and public safety sectors.

Temporary Roofing: Across U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, Corps teams installed over 63,000 temporary roofing systems “Blue Roofs” allowing the impacted people the opportunity to leave emergency shelters and return to their homes. The Corps completed over 13,000 blue roof installations in Florida.

Power Mission: The Corps assembled a team of Corps employees, who volunteered to assist in the repair of segments of the Puerto Rico power grid. Working with the Department of Energy, FEMA, the Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority (PREPA), the

Edison Electric Institute, and industry utility companies, they were part of a multi-agency team, which has now, based on PREPA's reporting, restored power in Puerto Rico to 99.93% of the 1,471,960 customers who had power before the storms.

Hurricane Harvey – Hurricane Harvey made landfall along the central Texas gulf coast near Rockport, Texas as a Category-4 hurricane on August 25, 2017. Harvey delivered an unprecedented amount of rain across the greater Houston metropolitan area and southeast Texas, with upwards of 60 inches of rain in some areas resulting in record flooding. During the week of August 25, 2017, the Corps increased the stockpile of flood fight materials in south Texas in anticipation of Tropical Storm Harvey being upgraded to Hurricane Harvey – from 500,000 to 2 million sandbags and 1,500 feet HESCO barriers. The Corps provided over one million of these sandbags to local/state government.

FEMA identified 23 mission assignments totaling \$140 million for the Corps to assist in Hurricane Harvey response and recovery. Nearly 1,000 Corps personnel deployed to support response and recovery efforts. Currently, 40 Corps employees are deployed supporting 11 active recovery mission assignments.

In the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018, Congress appropriated over \$17 billion for the Corps to repair and rehabilitate projects across the Nation damaged by natural disasters, to construct flood and storm damage reduction projects, and to complete flood and coastal storm damage reduction studies in multiple states and territories. The Corps has identified specific projects that will receive those supplemental funds and is working to move as quickly as possible to complete the planned work.

California Wildfires and Other Disasters – In response to October 2017 wildfires across northern California, FEMA issued seven mission assignments to the Corps totaling \$1.2 billion ESF-3 coordination, debris management and technical assistance missions. Additionally, wildfires in late December 2017 in Ventura and Santa Barbara counties led to an altered and denuded watershed. Rainstorms and flash flooding in the first week of January precipitated into deadly mudslides in Santa Barbara County. In response to those disasters, FEMA issued two additional Corps mission assignments totaling \$110 million for the removal of mudslide debris from 11 debris basins and 11 natural channels.

Debris Management: The Direct Federal Assistance (DFA) Debris Mission was the most costly in California history (\$956,000,000). The Corps engaged contractors to execute Private Property Debris Removal (PPDR) across Sonoma, Napa, Mendocino and Lake Counties. Because of the requirement to remove foundations due to excessive heat and coupled with environmental ash hazards and contaminated soil, the emergency response was complex and incorporated the expertise of several Federal and State partners, including the Environmental Protection Agency and State of California emergency management and environmental agencies. Debris removal operations began November 2017 and physically ended in early June 2018. Over 2.2 million tons

of debris were removed from over 4,500 properties so that homeowners could rebuild safely.

Temporary Housing: The Corps provided access and use of the Corps Kyen Campground in Mendocino County in order for FEMA to provide wildfire survivors with temporary housing (RVs). Over 900 civilian from the Corps and partnering agencies (such as the Department of Interior's Bureau of Reclamation) volunteered to perform Quality Assurance of debris removal.

Other Disasters – The Corps responded in total to 32 events in 2017. Events outside of the hurricane and wildfire response include the Central U.S. Blizzard, the Bighorn River Ice Jam, numerous flooding events throughout the Nation as well as Lake Ontario High Water and other severe weather events.

Preparing for the 2018 Hurricane Season

The Corps continues with 2017 Hurricane Season recovery operations in Texas, Florida, the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico as we focus on making sure we will be able to respond in the upcoming hurricane season and any other natural disasters. Combining the lessons learned and best practices from 2017, the Corps has already taken immediate actions to prepare for the 2018 hurricane season to include:

- Exercises – the Corps has completed hurricane exercises along with its Federal, state, local and territory partners for the gulf and east coasts as well as Puerto Rico. The exercise for the USVI is occurring at this time (July 17-20).
- Real Life Drill – Tropical Storm Beryl provided an opportunity for real life planning and preparations as the Corps postured teams and resources for potential impacts.
- National Level Exercise – the Corps participated in FEMA's intergovernmental and private sector National Level Exercise 2018. This exercise focused on a hypothetical major hurricane scenario, making landfall near Hampton Roads, Virginia.
- Plans – the Corps has updated its hurricane plans, annexes and standard operating procedures.
- Workshops – the Corps conducted workshops to prepare for its ESF-3 responsibilities for temporary emergency power, debris and infrastructure assessments as well as ESF-6 support responsibilities for temporary housing and temporary roofing.
- Pre-scripted Mission Assignments - the Corps worked with FEMA to update and refine 34 ESF-3 Corps Pre-scripted Mission Assignments from 2017 lessons learned, including three newly created ones for Logistic Support, Command and Control Integration and Planning Cells.

- Acquisition Center of Expertise - the Corps is developing an Acquisition Center of Expertise to create a robust, rapid and agile contracting capability to support large, complex missions that involve debris, temporary power, and roofing as well as non-standard contingency support requirements.
- Adjustments to Teams and Resources - the Corps is refitting and resetting teams and personnel (all volunteers) that have deployed extensively over the past 11 months with emphasis on ensuring that it has a ready reserve of personnel ready and trained to respond as necessary.

The Corps also remains fully committed and capable of executing its other Civil Works activities across the Nation – our commercial navigation, flood and coastal storm damage reduction, and aquatic ecosystem restoration missions – in addition to our involvement in these and future response and recovery missions. This concludes my testimony and I look forward to answering any questions you might have. Thank you.