

Colville Tribes, FEMA Sign Historic Agreement for Flood Recovery Efforts on Tribal Reservation

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NESPELEM, Wash. – The Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) have signed an historic agreement paving the way for a nation-to-nation partnership in flood recovery.

Andy Joseph, Jr., Vice Chairman of the Colville Business Council (CBC), and FEMA Region 10 Administrator Mike O'Hare met on Friday to commemorate the signing of a Tribal/FEMA Agreement to complete the legal requirements for FEMA assistance under President Donald Trump's major disaster declaration. The funding will help reimburse the Colville Tribes for response and recovery costs resulting from near-record Okanogan River flooding in May.

The disaster declaration for the Colville Tribes and the resulting agreement are the first in FEMA Region 10, as tribes previously were required to seek federal disaster aid through a state declaration. Following Hurricane Sandy in 2013, Congress amended federal regulations to allow federally recognized tribes to directly request a presidential emergency or major disaster declaration.

"This first-ever tribal declaration in Region 10 underscores our commitment to supporting our tribal partners in their disaster recovery efforts," said O'Hare. "We look forward to strengthening our relationship as we work together to put the spring disaster in the past and help prepare the Colville tribal communities for any future hazardous event."



FEMA

Page 1 of 3

The May 5-28 flooding event was the third worst for the area since records have been kept, surpassed only by floods in 1948 and 1972. The Colville Tribes responded quickly, dispatching more than 100 employees to support efforts to protect the lives and property of both tribal members and non-member residents of the area.

“We are pleased that the Federal Emergency Management Agency has recognized the critical role of the Tribes in dealing with this disastrous flooding,” said Joseph. “We did everything possible, and a great expense to the tribal government, to save community members’ lives and property and also to protect the water quality of the Okanogan River.”

Response teams filled more than 51,000 sandbags that were distributed to residents and used to construct protective walls around homes and tribal government buildings. In addition to staff, the Colville Tribes dedicated its excavators, dump trucks and additional equipment to help prevent damage to homes and buildings in East Omak and at Brooks Tract.

On August 17 President Trump approved CBC Chairman Rodney Cawston’s request for a major disaster declaration, authorizing assistance under FEMA’s Public Assistance (PA) and Hazard Mitigation Grant programs. Under the programs FEMA directly reimburses the tribe for at least 75 percent of its eligible expenses. PA grants help cover the Colville Tribes’ costs for protecting people and property during the flooding event and for clearing debris and repairing infrastructure after the disaster. Hazard mitigation projects prevent or reduce long-term risk to life and property from future disasters.

“As a sovereign nation with both authority over, and responsibility for, our lands and waters, the Colville Tribes will continue to respond aggressively to natural



disasters and to protect all our communities,” Joseph said.

Six people stand side by side

FEMA’s mission is helping people before, during, and after disasters.

