KILCountiesFEMA video link with map (Sidebar coming)

Counties, state await FEMA decision on disaster aid
BY KAY SHIPMAN
FarmWeek

 The director of the Lee County Emergency Management Agency is waiting to learn if the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) will reimburse local governments for fighting the 2019 flood. He’s not alone.

 Thirty-two Illinois counties are seeking federal reimbursement for flood-related damages and costs, known as public assistance. Lee County’s Kevin Lalley told **FarmWeek**  several local government units in his county, including county, townships, fire departments, drainage districts and the sheriff’s department, submitted expenses that were compiled for Illinois’ disaster application to FEMA.

 On Aug. 29, Gov. J.B. Pritzker submitted the state’s application for federal disaster assistance, claiming damages of $61 million in 32 counties, including Lee County.

A total of 32 counties are seeking reimbursement only for public assistance. Another 21 counties submitted for reimbursement for both public assistance and individual assistance. Woodford County is seeking reimbursement for only individual assistance. (See accompanying map).

Public assistance applies when local governments exhaust available resources and seek reimbursements, in this case, for flood-related damages and associated costs. If granted, local and state governments could receive up to 75% reimbursement for extraordinary disaster-related expenses.

Individual assistance covers uninsured or underinsured individuals, families, businesses and nonprofit organizations. If FEMA grants this assistance, those who are eligible would receive financial relief and various types of assistance, including housing, medical and mental health services, and legal help. People would be eligible to apply for up to $31,500 in grants and low-interest loans.

State officials do not know when FEMA will decide whether Illinois qualifies for federal disaster assistance because the federal agency is under no timeline, according to the Illinois Emergency Management Agency.

Illinois has struggled to meet the federal per capita disaster threshold of $1.50 per person for a major disaster declaration because of the state’s population. Illinois must incur a minimum of $19.245 million in public assistance expenses. Illinois’ recent request claimed $61 million in that category.

Once FEMA grants a major disaster declaration, the federal agency applies a county impact indicator of $3.78 per person to determine if a county qualifies for public assistance funding under the state declaration.

FEMA last granted Illinois federal disaster assistance in 2013 when severe storms, straight-line winds and flooding occurred in the spring. Impacted counties included Cook, DeKalb, DuPage, Fulton, Grundy, Kane, Kendall, Lake, LaSalle, McHenry and Will counties.

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