

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-25-106862](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

In recent decades, much of the nation has witnessed an increase in the size and severity of wildfires. At the same time, development in and around wildland areas has increased. Demand for federal resources to mitigate against, respond to, and recover from these wildfires has increased.

The FEMA Improvement, Reform, and Efficiency Act of 2022 includes a provision for GAO to examine FEMA wildfire assistance programs. This report examines (1) FEMA assistance to wildfire-affected communities from fiscal years 2019 through 2023, and (2) challenges communities face with this assistance and to what extent FEMA has taken steps to address them.

GAO analyzed data from FEMA assistance programs from fiscal years 2019 through 2023 and reviewed agency policies, guidance, and assessments of FEMA's wildfire assistance. GAO interviewed officials from FEMA and a non-generalizable sample of seven state, 11 local, and four tribal governments that obtained FEMA assistance for wildfires during this period. GAO conducted site visits to Hawaii, Washington, and the Nez Perce Tribe.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making six recommendations, including for FEMA to provide immediate post-wildfire mitigation assistance and to establish a process to collect, assess, and incorporate ongoing feedback from FMAG recipients. DHS concurred with five recommendations and did not concur with one recommendation. GAO continues to believe all six recommendations are warranted.

View [GAO-25-106862](#). For more information, contact Chris Currie at (404) 679-1875 or curriec@gao.gov.

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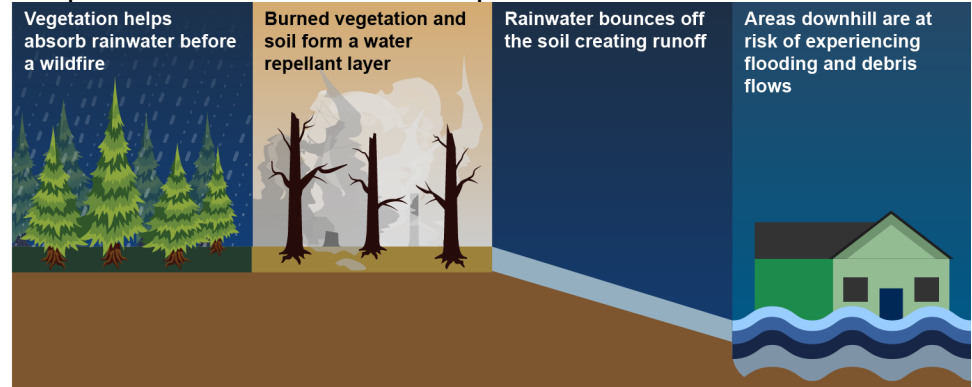
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Additional Actions Needed to Address FEMA Assistance Challenges

What GAO Found

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), provided over \$3.8 billion in wildfire-related assistance from fiscal years 2019 through 2023. The agency obligated about \$3.2 billion in Public Assistance grants for emergency work (such as debris removal and emergency protective measures), and permanent recovery work (repairing or replacing roads, utilities, and buildings).

Example of How Wildfires Can Affect Landscapes



Source: GAO analysis of Federal Emergency Management Agency and the National Weather Service documentation. | GAO-25-106862

GAO interviewed officials from 22 state, local, and tribal governments about their experiences obtaining FEMA assistance for wildfires. Examples of challenges officials cited included:

- **Post-wildfire Mitigation.** Wildfires destroy vegetation and damage soil, creating conditions that can increase immediate risks of flooding, erosion, and debris flows—fast-moving, destructive landslides that often strike without warning. GAO found that communities continue to face challenges addressing post-wildfire risks, in part because FEMA's assistance programs are too slow to support more timely post-wildfire mitigation. Taking steps to provide immediate post-wildfire mitigation assistance could help foster more resilient communities and reduce future demand on federal resources.
- **Fire Management and Assistance Grants (FMAG) management.** State, local, and tribal officials GAO interviewed said they faced challenges associated with the FMAG program, including the quantity and complexity of required paperwork, and confusion over eligibility requirements. However, FEMA does not collect ongoing, nationwide feedback from state, local, and tribal FMAG recipients, as it does for other grant programs. Collecting, assessing, and incorporating such feedback into program policy, as appropriate, would help FEMA address challenges.