



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



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**MAYOR LIGHTFOOT JOINS FEDERAL, STATE AND CITY OFFICIALS TO CALL FOR  
FEDERAL DECLARATION OF EMERGENCY FOR CHICAGO'S LAKEFRONT**

*Chicago issues local emergency proclamation and calls for State and calls for State  
and Federal action to address damages in excess of \$25 million from January storm  
and ongoing challenges facing Chicago's lakefront*

CHICAGO—Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot today joined Lieutenant Governor Juliana Stratton, US Senator Richard Durbin along with city officials and department heads to request emergency declarations from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). This City is asking the federal government to act quickly and provide resources and funding to protect and rebuild the City's lakeshore. Earlier this week, the City and State both issued proclamations to declare a local disaster as the result of significant flooding and major damage to the City of Chicago's shoreline, infrastructure and recreational areas due to severe weather on January 10-11, 2020.

The Mayor is taking these actions today as the City has worked extensively for the past several months to monitor lakeshore conditions and address erosion and damage caused by near record-high lake levels. However, additional work and resources are still needed to address the scope of these unique challenges and damage that totals in excess of \$25 million for Chicago alone. Cook County has identified an additional \$12M in costs for a total of \$37M for Cook County, which includes Chicago's damage assessment.

"One of Chicago's strongest assets is our lakeshore, and due to the severity of recent storms we've witnessed irreparable damage to our lakefront beaches and infrastructure," said Mayor Lightfoot. "While the City has worked extensively over the past few months to respond to the damage and to secure the infrastructure and beaches along our lake front - it is clear that this is a challenge we can't solve alone. To respond to the immediate challenges facing our lakefront as highlighted by the storm on January 10-11, we have declared disaster status to ensure Chicago receives the supports needed for addressing the scope of this issue for the long term. We remain committed to working with all stakeholders at the state and federal level in order to protect and preserve this vital piece of Chicago's landscape."



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Yesterday, Mayor Lightfoot sent a letter to Governor JB Pritzker requesting a state proclamation for the City of Chicago, which would authorize the Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA) to coordinate State resources to assist in response and recovery as well as request Federal resources and assistance. The Governor issued a state disaster proclamation for Cook and Lake Counties to help communities recover from the storm, including substantial property damage along more than 30 miles of the Lake Michigan shoreline. City personnel will work closely with the State to gather, validate and document the information needed to support a federal major disaster declaration.

“Chicagoans were once asked in a poll what they loved most about the city—Lake Michigan won by a large margin,” U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin said. “The recent extreme weather combined with rising water levels has caused shoreline erosion and infrastructure damage to our treasured lakefront. We need to recognize the challenge climate change poses to the Great Lakes and Chicago’s lakefront and meet that challenge with investments that address climate change through both mitigation and resiliency. I look forward to working with Mayor Lightfoot to help protect our lakeshore.”

The City of Chicago is currently working to remedy damage from the January storm, which unleashed heavy rain, snow, ice, and localized flooding, followed by strong winds and widespread lakeshore flooding. Gusting winds in excess of 50 mph brought large, battering waves up to 23 feet high onto shoreline areas. The flooding from this storm resulted in full and partial road and trail closures near the lakefront and substantial damage to Chicago's beaches and recreational areas along the shoreline.

“Governor Pritzker’s state disaster declaration is the first step to allow municipalities to apply for federal funding,” said Lt. Gov. Juliana Stratton. “Our administration has a clear message to all of the families that have been impacted: we are here to support you during this time of need.”

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Lake Michigan water levels will remain high over the next several months. Over the past several months, the City has worked extensively to mitigate damage, prevent erosion and protect infrastructure along Chicago’s North and South shorelines. The Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT), OEMC, the Chicago Park District and other City departments have been coordinating closely with the US Army Corps of Engineers on these efforts.

“The safety of residents living along the lakeshore is one of my top concerns, and for months the lake has presented a series of safety concerns to residents from severe



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damage to infrastructure, property and our beaches,” said 49th Ward Alderman Maria Hadden. “I want to thank our Federal, State and City officials for taking these important steps to secure our lakefront and protect our residents’ safety.”

Beginning in November of 2019, the City of Chicago launched the Chicago Shoreline Protection Project to deploy emergency resources to the North and South shorelines. Since that time, CDOT has installed more than 10,000 cubic yards of rip rap over the last two months at Juneway, Howard and Rogers beaches on the far North Side to halt further damage and erosion caused by the recent storms. CDOT and the Park District are also coordinating with the Army Corps on a project to install rip rap from 48th to 50th streets starting in March.

“Over the past four months Chicagoans have been victim to a series of storms and incidents of severe weather that have damaged our lakefront. However, the severity of conditions Chicago experienced during the January 10-11 storm caused catastrophic damage to our city’s shoreline that we must address urgently,” said 48th Ward Alderman Harry Osterman. “This is an emergency, and while the City has taken several steps to address and mitigate the damage, more must be done to protect our shoreline and recreational areas along the lake. I want to thank these elected officials for coming together and taking the necessary steps to address these severe circumstances.”

In addition, the City has installed more than 5,000 feet of jersey barriers and 1,000 feet of sandbags at sensitive locations on the North and South shorelines to protect roadways from flooding during storms.

“In the face of a disaster, it is essential for government at all levels to work together to find solutions,” said 7th Ward Alderman Greg Mitchell. “I want to thank all elected officials for meeting at the table to address and find solutions to damage Chicago has sustained over the past four months and protecting one of Chicago’s most beloved attractions to ensure the safety of everyone who lives and visits here for generations to come.”

The Department of Water Management has also been supporting these efforts by ensuring catch-basins are kept clear along the lakefront. This plus the concrete barriers and sandbags are intended to stop the waves from flooding local streets, arterials such as Sheridan Road and Lake Shore Drive and South Shore Drive.

In order to help the City better understand the full scope of shoreline vulnerability, CDOT and the Park District have been working to gather data on the damage caused by recent storms and potential future impacts on private property. While the City’s request for federal assistance will allow the City to conduct a thorough assessment



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of the recent damages, the City is also working with local, state and federal partners to examine ways to develop long term solutions for the imminent erosion and climate impacts to Chicago's lakefront terrain and infrastructure.

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