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## Winter Storms & Disaster Relief in the Northern Plains

Life on the reservation has its hardships every day, but when disaster strikes, it can bring extended hardship to geographically isolated and economically stressed communities. Fortunately, many Tribal programs know Partnership With Native Americans (PWNA) as a **first responder** for the reservations, and PWNA is often the first organization they call for disaster relief.

A national member of **VOAD** – Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster – PWNA provides emergency relief to reservations within its 9-state service area. As a state member of VOAD in Arizona, South Dakota, and Montana, PWNA concentrates its emergency relief in these areas but evaluates disasters in other areas on a case-by-case basis if requested by a Tribe.

Through our **Northern Plains Reservation Aid (NPR)** program, we respond to environmental emergencies such as hurricanes, floods, tornados, blizzards, fires, and contaminated water.

We provide basic supplies requested by partners for immediate relief in their Tribal communities, such as blankets, personal hygiene items, cleaning supplies, nonperishable food, and water. PWNA keeps its distribution centers stocked year-round so that we can quickly mobilize and deliver emergency supplies to communities in need. Our reservation partners know PWNA and our **Disaster Relief service** as a dependable resource whether disruptive events are large or small. In fact, over the past decade, we responded to 160 incidents in Native communities, with our aid benefiting more than 735,000 people.

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### Realities on the Reservations We Serve

Being prepared for anything, at any time, is more of a challenge in impoverished communities that are geographically isolated from jobs and basic resources. So, when disaster strikes on the reservations, the impact is magnified. These communities, which are often without emergency preparedness plans, tend to rally in unity to respond to the crisis and meet critical needs – and this is often when they call PWNA.

Mainstream coverage of reservation news is often low or slow, sometimes going for weeks on end without coverage of a disaster event. When the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe in Eagle Butte, South Dakota, was without power for weeks in the winter of 2010, 15,000 residents were affected. But it was about a month before a primary

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news outlet (CNN) got the word out. Similarly, when the Grand Canyon was evacuated in 2008 due to flooding, the news focused on hikers and failed to mention the Havasupai Tribe, which occupies the base of the Grand Canyon year-round. Havasupai citizens were evacuated to shelters supported by the American Red Cross, PWNA, and other groups. One exception to mainstream coverage was the impact of COVID-19 on Tribal communities; in this case, mainstream coverage was generous and helped raise awareness of decades-long disparities.

Another challenge is that donors often forget about the emergency once the storm or fire subsides – but it isn't over for the tribes. Economic recovery for losses and damages takes months to settle in Tribal areas – long after the issue is out of sight and out of mind for the rest of the U.S.

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for several days. The entire reservation was in the dark, and water pipes were frozen. Food pantries, Elder Nutrition Centers, and gymnasiums opened their doors to those in need of a warm place to stay and sleep. PWNA distributed more than \$30,000 worth of emergency supplies to the two tribes, including MREs, water, and emergency boxes with disaster blankets, batteries, a candle, hand sanitizer, bathroom tissue, and more.

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## How You Can Get Involved

To help address winter risk, PWNA is inviting you to give a helping hand to Elders affected by harsh winters and environmental emergencies in the Northern Plains and Southwest. Even the smallest monetary gift from you – or a bulk in-kind donation of new blankets, coats, hats, gloves, or socks from your business – can help bring winter warmth to those in need. Learn more about winter warmth in the [Northern Plains](#).

## Disaster Relief & Northern Plains Winters

In 2023 alone, nine Tribal communities in our service area were struck by environmental emergencies. We responded with emergency relief for two water shortages, a winter storm, a heat emergency, and COVID relief. These incidents impacted the Oglala Sioux communities of Wanblee and Pine Ridge in South Dakota and the Navajo communities of Chinle, Cornfields, Dennehotso, Ganado, and Pinedale in Arizona. In 2022, Southwest tribes requested aid for water shortages, a fire, monsoon, and flooding, and in 2021, the COVID pandemic impacted tribes across the U.S.

The thing is, you never know when the next disaster will strike. In 2017, the Cheyenne River Sioux and Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate (SWO), both in South Dakota, suffered a winter storm. SWO lost power

