



# A Voice for Claimants

Fiscal Year 2023 Annual Report

Office of the Advocate

Hermit's Peak/Calf Canyon Claims Office

May 2024



FEMA

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## Table of Contents

Message from the Advocate .....	ii
Executive Summary.....	1
About the Claims Office.....	3
1. The Hermit’s Peak/Calf Canyon Fire .....	3
2. The Claims Office Mandate .....	4
3. From Mandate to Operations .....	5
About the Office of the Advocate .....	6
1. Mission and Functions .....	6
2. Staff from the Community .....	6
3. Connections.....	7
Accomplishments.....	9
1. Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Partnership.....	9
2. Direct Claimant Advocacy and Process Improvement.....	12
3. Claimant-Centric Outreach Videos .....	15
4. Stakeholders’ Roundtable.....	16
The Way Forward.....	17

# Message from the Advocate

New Mexico is the Land of Enchantment, rich in diverse cultures, history, and traditions; we in the Advocate’s Office are part of that diversity and proud to be able to advocate for our fellow New Mexicans. In just six months of fiscal year 2023, my team established the Advocate’s Office and had significant successes that demonstrate our commitment to education, partnerships, process improvement, and advocacy for our communities, neighbors, and family in Northern New Mexico. I am pleased to present the first annual report of the Advocate’s Office for the Hermit’s Peak/Calf Canyon Claims Office.



Congress passed the Hermit’s Peak/Calf Canyon Fire Assistance Act to compensate people and organizations that suffered losses from the Hermit’s Peak/Calf Canyon fire, a fire for which the federal government accepted responsibility. While the Act did not require the establishment of the Advocate’s Office, agency leadership felt strongly that this office was essential to ensuring that the claims process would be simple, agile, and customer-centric and to keeping claimants’ voices and perspectives front and center. That is the mission of the Advocate’s Office.

This report describes the establishment of the Advocate’s Office and the activities, partnerships, and problem-solving efforts we have applied to date to support our fellow impacted New Mexicans. We led efforts that reduced complexity, provided much needed assistance to document and support the restoration of impacted natural resources through our partnership with U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service, and established standing lines of communication to ensure claimant access to much needed answers to questions. We are off to a strong start and remain committed to claimant advocacy, education and outreach, partnerships, and continuous improvement of the claims process.

As a Tribal Member from the Pueblo of Santa Clara, my roots are deeply ingrained in this area; from a wealth of experience, including in long-term recovery from the Las Conchas Fire and presidentially declared flooding disasters, I know it is up to us to help ensure our communities’ resilience—and this will involve challenging the “normal” ways of approaching recovery to develop support that is specific to the needs of the impacted areas. With the support of Claims Office and FEMA leadership, the Advocate’s Office will be able not only to help affected communities in Northern New Mexico, but also help create a customer-centric service delivery model for helping future disaster-impacted communities and individuals across our Nation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Paula P. Gutierrez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Paula P. Gutierrez  
Advocate  
Hermit’s Peak/Calf Canyon Claims Office

# Executive Summary

On April 6, 2022, the United States Forest Service began a prescribed fire on federal land in San Miguel County, New Mexico, at the base of Hermit’s Peak. That fire would eventually grow, merge with another to become the Hermit’s Peak/Calf Canyon Fire, and burn more than 340,000 acres before it was contained in August 2022. This was the largest wildfire in New Mexico’s history. Traditional disaster assistance was not designed for the losses people and organizations sustained. On September 30, 2022, Congress passed, and the President signed, the Hermit’s Peak/Calf Canyon Fire Assistance Act, which required the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to establish an office, regulations, and program to compensate individuals and other entities for actual losses resulting from the fire.

Though not required by the Act, organizational design of the Hermit’s Peak/Calf Canyon Claims Office included the position of Advocate, hired in March 2023 just before the formal launch of the Claims Office.

The role of the Advocate’s Office is to ensure the Claims Office keeps claimants’ needs at the forefront of everything it does. The work of the Advocate’s Office involves:

- **Education.** The Advocate’s Office seeks to ensure all members of the community are aware of the claims process and understand what it can provide. With accurate information, the community itself can hold the Claims Office accountable for fulfilling its mandate.
- **Partnerships.** The Advocate’s Office fosters connections with stakeholders and partners. Opening communications channels helps the Claims Office better understand community needs and can foster partnerships to deliver needed services beyond what the Claims Office alone can support.
- **Solutions.** The Advocate’s Office proactively seeks opportunities to simplify the claims process for claimants and make it less burdensome. Yet when claimants encounter challenges, staff advocate on their behalf within the Claims Office for timely and fair resolution.



**Fulfilling the Mission of the Advocate’s Office Involves Education, Partnerships, and Solutions**

This annual report highlights key activities and accomplishments of the Advocate’s Office during fiscal year 2023. In less than a year of operations, the Advocate’s Office:

- Partnered with the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service to give landowners technical assistance in estimating costs of sustainably restoring working lands in a way the Claims Office can readily approve, helping accelerate putting funds back into affected communities.
- Partnered with FEMA Region 6 External Affairs to produce a series of multimedia “Claimant Stories,” letting claimants speak directly to others in the community about their losses and their experience addressing those losses through the claims process.
- Established a Stakeholders’ Roundtable with the State of New Mexico, New Mexico’s congressional delegation, local governments, community organizations, and Claims Office leadership to institutionalize regular, open dialogue on how the Claims Office can better communicate with and serve affected communities within an overall recovery strategy for the affected area.
- Developed a regular schedule of community outreach and engagement activities to meet claimants where they are and address any questions or concerns they have about the claims process.
- Became a trusted resource for claimants seeking to resolve issues and concerns regarding their claims, while using individual claimants’ issues to drive systemic improvements.

Despite these accomplishments, constituting a program from whole cloth and expediently delivering it to these communities, bereft of property and bereaved of place, proved uniquely challenging. FEMA did not always meet expectations or deliver on its intent. It is important that we acknowledge these shortfalls and renew our collective commitment to compensating aggrieved New Mexicans to the maximum extent permitted by law.

In fiscal year 2024, the Advocate’s Office will build on the outreach and partnership efforts it has established, but also focus on:

- Making better use of case data to monitor trends in claimant concerns and inform claims process improvements.
- Analyzing data to focus outreach on communities and populations that have not yet filed claims.

The Advocate’s Office staff all have connections to New Mexico and the communities affected by the fire and associated flooding, and are committed to advocating for claimant needs and the needs of affected communities.

# About the Claims Office

## 1. The Hermit’s Peak/Calf Canyon Fire

On April 6, 2022, the United States Forest Service (USFS) began a prescribed fire on federal land in San Miguel County, New Mexico, at the base of Hermit’s Peak. Shifting winds led to multiple spot fires and a wildfire declaration by the end of the day. On April 19, a dormant holdover fire from a January 2022 USFS pile burn on federal lands in Calf Canyon emerged as a wildfire. Within days, high winds caused both fires to expand to the northeast, and by April 27, the two fires had merged.

Due in part to severe drought conditions in the region, the combined fire would not be fully contained until August 21, 2022, by which time it had become the largest wildfire in New Mexico’s history. The fire burned more than 340,000 acres of land, most of it privately owned, including millions of trees and more than 900 structures. Thousands of residents of Mora and San Miguel counties had been subject to mandatory evacuation orders for the fires. Burning of vegetation and soil also contributed to flood damage following the fire and runoff of debris and contaminants into water supplies, complicating water treatment.



**Aerial View of the Hermit’s Peak Fire the Morning of April 10, 2022**



**The Fire Near Holman, New Mexico, the Night of May 8, 2022**

## 2. The Claims Office Mandate

On May 4, 2022, the President declared a major disaster under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (Stafford Act) for the Hermit’s Peak/Calf Canyon fire and associated flooding. Stafford Act programs, however, are not designed to compensate people for the full extent of their actual losses. Individual Assistance (IA) under the Stafford Act is just that: *assistance* to help meet immediate needs. For example, IA assistance for home repairs is capped (\$37,900 at the time of the fire), and support for housing needs is generally only a temporary bridge to permanent solutions. The Stafford Act does not provide compensation for permanent construction of a replacement home unless there are no alternative housing resources and temporary housing solutions are unavailable, infeasible, or not cost-effective.

To provide compensation for individuals, businesses, State, local and Tribal governments, and others damaged by the fire, Congress passed, and the President then signed on September 30, 2022, the Hermit’s Peak/Calf Canyon Fire Assistance Act. The Act established a Claims Office within FEMA. It authorized FEMA to compensate for “injuries”—personal injuries, property losses, business losses, or financial losses—resulting from the Hermit’s Peak/Calf Canyon Fire. Among other provisions, the Act required FEMA to publish interim final regulations explaining claims processes within 45 days, accept claims for two years after the interim final regulations were published, and make decisions on claims within 180 days of their being filed. Congress initially appropriated \$2.5 billion to carry out the Act and later added another \$1.45 billion.

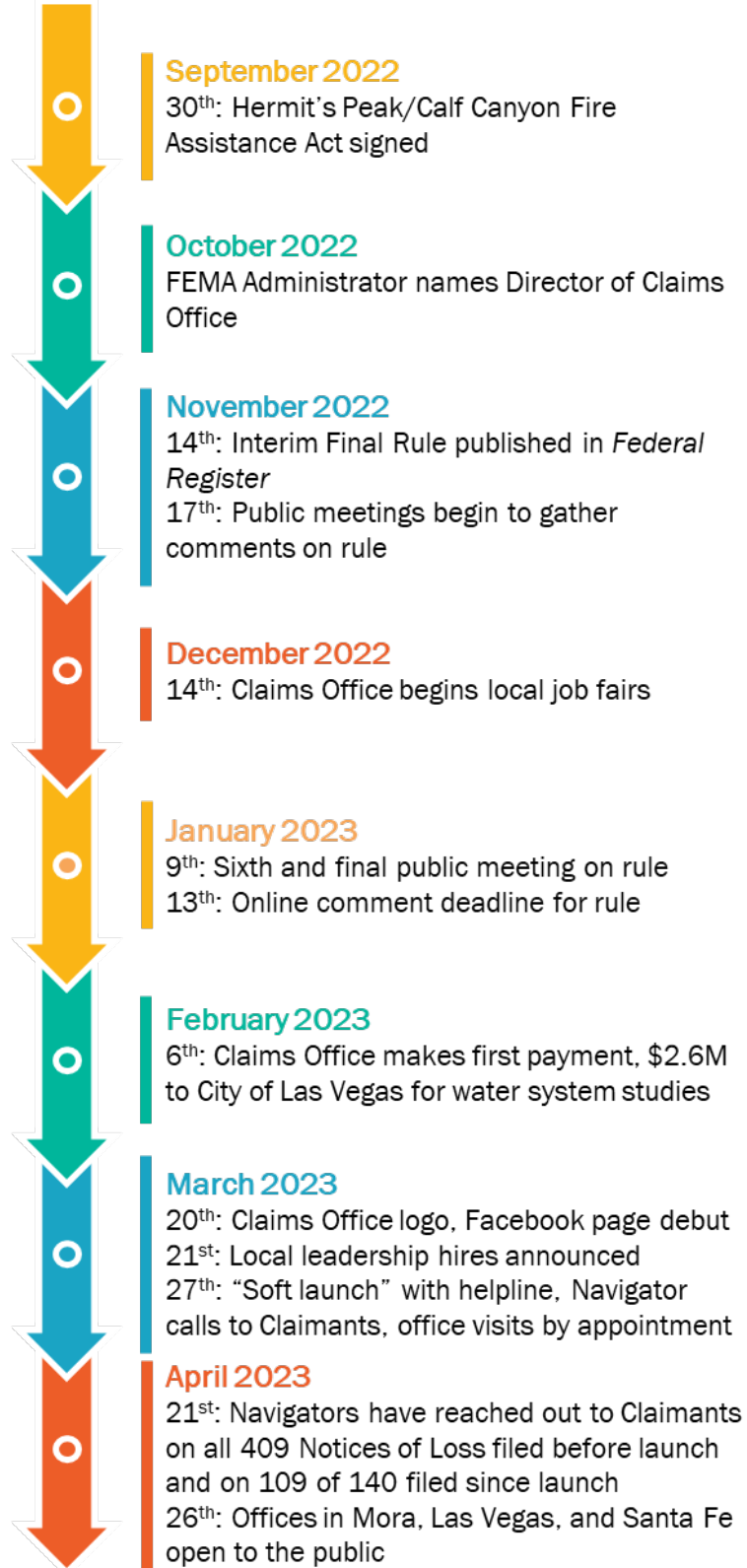
*“And I’m thinking about what you’re thinking, and that is our responsibility. It’s not a gift. We have a responsibility to help this state recover, to help the families who have been here for centuries [...].”* President Biden, Remarks at New Mexico Wildfires Briefing, June 11, 2022



### 3. From Mandate to Operations

FEMA was given the responsibility of implementing all elements of the Hermit’s Peak/Calf Canyon Fire Assistance Act, including naming leadership, publishing regulations, designing the claims process, hiring staff, identifying and building out facilities, creating support systems, and more.

The Claims Office launched on March 27, 2023—roughly a year after the fire started and six months since the Act had become law. The Claims Office activated its helpline, Navigators began contacting those claimants who had previously submitted Notices of Loss, and claimants could make appointments for in-person discussions. On April 26, 2023, the Claims Office opened sites to the public in Mora, Las Vegas, and Santa Fe.



**Timeline of the Claims Office’s Initial Development**

# About the Office of the Advocate

## 1. Mission and Functions

The mission of the Advocate’s Office is to ensure the Claims Office is claimant-centric, accountable, and transparent. The work of the Advocate’s Office involves:

- **Education.** The Advocate’s Office seeks to ensure all members of the community are aware of the claims process and understand what it can provide. Having correct information, the community itself can hold the Claims Office accountable for fulfilling its mandate.
- **Partnerships.** The Advocate’s Office fosters connections with stakeholders and partners. Opening communications channels helps the Claims Office better understand community needs and can foster partnerships to deliver needed services beyond what the Claims Office alone can provide.
- **Solutions.** The Advocate’s Office proactively seeks opportunities to simplify the claims process for claimants and make it less burdensome. Yet when claimants encounter challenges, staff advocate on their behalf within the Claims Office for timely and fair resolution.



**Fulfilling the Mission of the Advocate’s Office Involves Education, Partnerships, and Solutions**

## 2. Staff from the Community

The Advocate’s Office is a small team of people with local roots, each of whom plays a key role in the office’s mission.

The Advocate’s Office began taking shape on March 13, 2023, when the Advocate was hired. The Advocate oversees the office, reports to the Director, and plays a lead role in cementing partnerships to address claimant needs.

In April, the office added an Associate Advocate, who monitors claims processing to help proactively identify and resolve potential issues, as well as two Community Liaisons to help educate the

community on compensation available and in turn receive feedback on what the Claims Office can do better.

In September, the office added a Community Navigator, who assists the Community Liaisons with outreach and can help people complete their Notice of Loss forms on the spot, as well as two Advocate Program Analysts, who field inquiries, manage data on requests for help, and organize schedules.

### 3. Connections

To succeed in its mission, the Advocate’s Office relies on making connections—within the Claims Office, with community organizations, and especially with individuals throughout the affected area.

The Advocate’s Office’s main partner in finding solutions for claimants’ issues is the Claims Office itself. The Advocate’s Office regularly engages Claims Office staff at all levels, from the Advocate communicating directly with the Claims Office Director on leadership matters to staff taking part in working-level policy and operational meetings. Being embedded in the work of the Claims Office allows the Advocate’s Office to help avert or resolve issues by sharing claimants’ perspectives. It also enables Advocate’s Office staff to explain process or documentation issues and potential solutions to claimants, as well as correct possible misinformation about the Claims Office, in outreach efforts.

The Advocate’s Office also participates in meetings and working groups with a variety of stakeholder groups and community organizations, including the Acequia Association, 100% Mora, and 100% Las Vegas (these last two dedicated to ensuring that 100 percent of their county residents have access to vital services), to establish collaborative working relationships of mutual trust. By engaging with a variety of stakeholder groups, the Advocate’s Office can hear community concerns, understand resources available to help claimants, and develop solutions that leverage those resources to extend the Claims Office’s impact on individual and community recovery.



**Advocate’s Office and FEMA Individual Assistance Program Staff Discuss Housing Needs**

The most important connections the Advocate’s Office makes are directly to individuals throughout the community. Community Liaisons meet claimants and potential claimants where they are—at community events, in restaurants, and at other locations where people gather day-to-day. Through public outreach, the Advocate’s Office explains what the Claims Office can provide, shares Notice of Loss (NOL) forms for people to begin the claims process, answers questions, and listens to challenges and concerns. Through September 6, 2023, the Advocate’s Office had participated in 34 formal public outreach events, including food drives, health fairs, senior center workshops, job fairs, “Music in the Park” at Las Vegas Plaza Park, and community events at New Mexico Highlands University. These outreach events resulted in:

- 655 contacts regarding the Claims Office.
- 470 NOL forms distributed.
- 69 NOL forms completed on the spot.



### **The Advocate’s Office Supports a Variety of Outreach Events to Engage the Community**

In August, the Advocate’s Office began holding twice-weekly “Get It from the Source – Advocate Connect” sessions at locations in Mora (Tuesdays) and Las Vegas (Thursdays) to be consistently accessible to the community outside of Claims Office locations and after working hours. These Advocate Connects have become a key opportunity for potential claimants, claimants, and attorneys representing multiple claimants to receive answers to questions.

The constant work of building relationships and trust—with individual claimants, with organizations throughout the community, and in the Claims Office itself—has helped position the Advocate’s Office for success.

*“I’ve been hearing some great things about the progress your advocates have been making. They have been doing some real outreach and helping people that hadn’t considered assistance.”*

Veronica Serna, Mora County Commissioner

# Accomplishments

Establishing the Advocate’s Office just prior to the launch of the Claims Office itself meant the Advocate’s Office was positioned to actively engage with communities, identify challenges while the Office’s policies and procedures were being developed, form partnerships, and develop solutions to early challenges to benefit multiple claimants. Most importantly, the Advocate’s Office has also been able to help claimants with concerns they have on individual claims. As the Claims Office and claims process continues to mature, we expect direct claimant advocacy to become an increasing share of the Advocate’s workload. This one-on-one problem solving with claimants is the cornerstone of our work and critical to establishing community trust in the Claims Office.

## 1. Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Partnership

**Challenge: Finding a streamlined way to help claimants restore working lands**

Within the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), NRCS supports America’s working lands by delivering conservation solutions for farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners to protect and sustain the natural resources on which agriculture depends. NRCS has 150 employees and 34 offices in the State of New Mexico, plus longstanding relationships with landowners from delivering multiple NRCS programs. NRCS also had, according to State Conservationist Xavier Montoya, “a huge desire to offer something claimants could put to beneficial use.”



**Delivery of a Conservation Restoration Plan for Signature**

Through early informal conversations, in April NRCS New Mexico staff learned that people they knew and trusted from prior work were now in the Advocate’s Office. A flurry of calls and meetings followed. The Advocate’s Office recognized that a partnership with NRCS could be a game-changer for claimants and developed, led, and advocated for the concept within the Claims Office. By May 4, 2023, the Claims Office had a memorandum of understanding in place with NRCS: NRCS would develop Conservation Restoration Plans for landowners using its toolbox of established conservation practices and a payment schedule developed with experts from New Mexico State University, and the Claims Office would use its partial payment authority to fund plans if landowners submitted them.

Claimants, the NRCS, and the Claims Office all benefit from the arrangement, which may serve as a model for wildfire recovery partnerships between FEMA and NRCS in the future.

Claimants gain free access to NRCS’s technical expertise and valuable information to decide what needs to be done to restore their lands—with limitations, such as not covering burned timber—and estimate what it will cost. They do not have to find, arrange for, and pay third-party experts to assess those losses that NRCS plans can address in an environment where there is more demand for such services than some providers can meet. The payment schedule (estimated cost per item) is public and revised regularly to reflect changes; as one landowner put it to NRCS, “at least it’s a start”: people may disagree with some specific cost estimates, but they are visible and consistent.

*“Last week, a gentleman called after he received payment. [...] He was very appreciative. He said it was fair and equitable, and all he ever wanted.”* Kenneth Alcon, NRCS State Resource Conservationist

The partnership with NRCS benefits the Claims Office: the cost estimation methodology is known, reasonable, consistent, and equitable for all claimants who choose to submit an NRCS plan for payment. Through the partnership with NRCS, the Claims Office has been able to deliver more for claimants, and more quickly, than it ever could have on its own. NRCS staff estimate that implementing the program has cost millions of dollars—but NRCS has a workforce that understands the toolbox of conservation practices. For the Claims Office to recruit or contract for a similar capability in house would have taken substantially more time; it is unlikely that the Claims Office would have been able to compensate claimants as quickly and fairly without the assistance of NRCS.



**Reassessing a Plan for a Landowner**

NRCS also has benefited. The program is using 20 planners a day, seven days a week—but it has become the most in-demand rotational assignment that NRCS can offer in New Mexico. Like the Claims Office, NRCS has many local staff, and the program represents an opportunity to do good and give back to the community. (NRCS leadership chose to fund the program from agency funds rather than seek reimbursement out of Claims Office funding that could instead go to claimants.)

*“This came about because the right people were in the right place at the right time to make it all come together. It’s about relationships. This was unprecedented. [...] I am blown away with how quickly and well this came together.”* Xavier Montoya, NRCS State Conservationist



**Staff from the Advocate's Office and NRCS Who Led This Effort**



### How Can People Find Out More about NRCS Conservation Restoration Plans?

To read more about NRCS Conservation Restoration Plan assistance, to include the most recent payment schedule (i.e., estimated costs for certain items):

- Visit <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/conservation-basics/conservation-by-state/new-mexico/hermits-peakcalf-canyon-conservation>.
- Visit <https://www.fema.gov/fact-sheet/claims-officenatural-resources-conservation-service-nrcs-partnership-mythbusters-and>.

To request a Conservation Restoration Plan:

- Email [ConservationRestorationPlan@usda.gov](mailto:ConservationRestorationPlan@usda.gov).
- OR advise the Claims Navigator assigned to your claim by the Claims Office, who can help complete the form to request a plan.

## 2. Direct Claimant Advocacy and Process Improvement

### *Challenge: Learning systemic lessons from individual claimants' issues*

Each claimant and claim is important. The most concrete accomplishments for the Advocate's Office involve helping a claimant resolve a specific issue—then using lessons from that claim to drive systemic changes that may benefit other claimants.

By early September, the Advocate's Office had opened 123 cases, primarily from individuals and households, who had a variety of concerns. (See charts on the next page.) One trend the Advocate's Office saw was an increasing number of NRCS-related queries; this led the Advocate's Office to assign a liaison to attend the delivery of any NRCS Conservation Restoration Plan to a landowner to answer questions about obtaining payment for measures outlined in the plan and what to do if actual costs were higher than estimated. Below are other examples of how the Advocate's Office has used lessons and trends from individual cases to drive systemic improvements.



### Technical Expertise for the Advocate's Office

**Issue:** Complex claims required Advocate's Office staff to interact continually with Claims Reviewers, which sometimes proved cumbersome depending on assignments and availability. To serve those reaching out to the Advocate's Office more effectively, the Advocate's Office needed access to claims expertise.

**Recommendation:** The Advocate recommended that Claims Office leadership reassign a senior Claims Reviewer to the Advocate's Office to provide dedicated technical expertise.

**Result/Impact:** The addition of an experienced Claims Reviewer had significant impact in enabling the Advocate's Office to make well-informed recommendations on process improvements involving Quality Control, Property Verification, and Structure Rebuilds, among others—for the benefit of the Claims Office and all claimants.



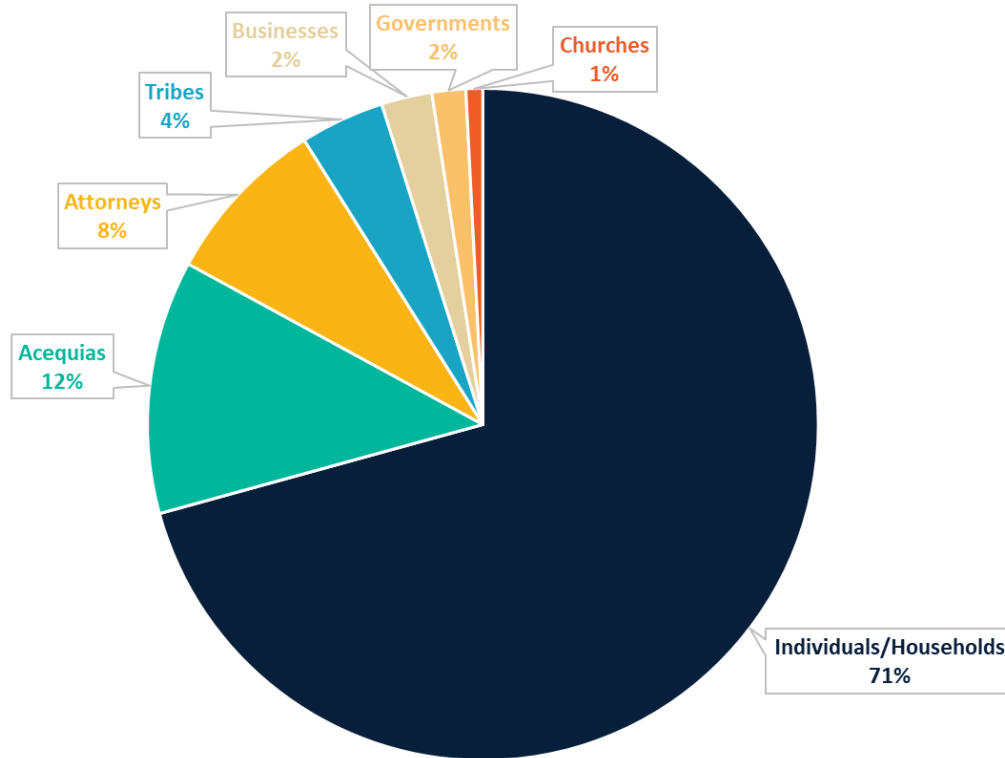
### Quality Control Checklist

**Issue:** The Advocate's Office heard that claimants were frustrated by the amount of time it was taking for claims to move through the claims process. Investigation showed that Claims Reviewers were submitting incomplete and incorrect packages, causing significant delays in the processing of claims due to rework directed by Quality Control.

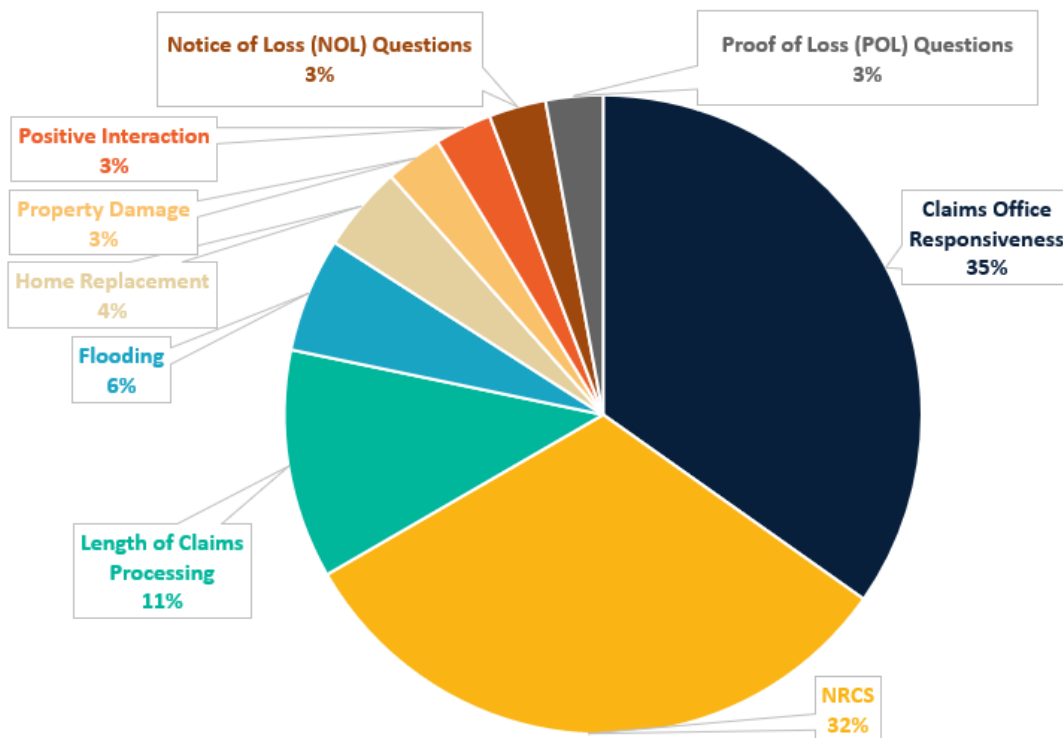
**Recommendation:** The Advocate's Office recommended a checklist to accompany each claim, with Claims Reviewers checking off the appropriate actions to help support the submission of complete packages to Quality Control.

**Result/Impact:** Implementation of this recommendation has contributed to an improved flow of claims through the process, with complete packages being sent to Quality Control for review.





**Advocate's Office Case Intake by Entity Type**



**Advocate's Office Case Intake by Issue**



## Property Verification Procedure

**Issue:** The Advocate’s Office received a significant number of calls from claimants frustrated with continual requests for property verification. Most of these claimants resided in Mora County, New Mexico. Research of the issue showed that the software used to verify property did not accurately reflect addresses for rural areas of Mora County. This led to repeated requests to claimants for documentation, causing confusion, frustration, and delay.

**Recommendation:** The Advocate’s Office identified geographic information system software that was more reliable for property verification in Mora County, New Mexico.

**Result/Impact:** The Claims Office accepted the recommendation, which has contributed to addressing the property verification issue, allowing claims from that area to go forward.



## Structure Rebuilding Estimates

**Issue:** The Advocate’s Office noted that several complaints regarding delayed claims processing involved claims for rebuilding structures. Investigation showed that, in several cases, the delay was the result of challenges in developing estimates. Further investigation showed that, for rural areas of Northern New Mexico, Google Earth was capturing distorted images, which interfered with the ability of Claims Reviewers’ software to generate estimates.

**Recommendation:** The Advocate’s Office recommended the use of another software product for more accurate images offering truer measurement for estimating costs to rebuild homes or other structures.

**Result/Impact:** This addressed the issue and improved estimates.

In summary, the Advocate’s Office has successfully used individual cases as opportunities to identify process changes and capability enhancements that can help other claimants and improve the overall flow of claims—while still being sure to resolve issues for individual claimants and leave them more satisfied with their experience with the Claims Office.

*“I felt supported by the advocates that I worked with, and their actions demonstrated that they had my back and that we are a team. I believe that my claimant’s frustrations were greatly reduced [...].”* Adrian Wallen, Claims Navigator

*“The Advocate’s Office has been a thousand times helpful [...].”* K. Lucero, Claimant

### 3. Claimant-Centric Outreach Videos

***Challenge: Helping potential claimants see their situations in others' stories***

The Advocate’s Office staff has engaged in substantial outreach to the community about what the Claims Office can do. Yet the Advocate’s Office realized that, however much trust it earned, the most credible stories for claimants would be from other claimants. In collaboration with FEMA Region 6 External Affairs, the Advocate’s Office arranged to film a series of seven claimant case study videos. The Advocate’s Office identified claimants to represent a range of situations and concerns, gained these claimants’ agreement to participate, and helped develop storyboards. In the videos, claimants told powerful stories of what they had lost and what the Claims Office had so far been able to do for them. On August 30, 2023, the Claims Office and FEMA Region 6 began publishing and showcasing one “Hermit’s Peak/Calf Canyon Claimant Story” each week on Facebook and YouTube.



HPCC Claimant Story - Frank Valdez



FEMA Region 6  
90 subscribers

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1



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#### Claimant Frank Valdez Describes Post-Fire Flooding Challenges



#### How Can People View These HPCC Claimant Stories?

To view videos in the HPCC Claimant Stories series:

- Visit the FEMA Region 6 YouTube channel at:  
<https://www.youtube.com/@femaregion6/videos>.
- Visit the Claims Office Facebook page at:  
<https://www.facebook.com/HermitsPeakCalfCanyonClaimsOffice/>.

## 4. Stakeholders' Roundtable

### *Challenge: Synchronizing efforts and sharing insights among partners in an orderly way*

Open dialogue between the Claims Office, the Governor's Office, local and tribal governments, and non-governmental organizations in communities affected by the Hermit's Peak/Calf Canyon fire and floods is critical for identifying and resolving—or, ideally, preventing—programmatic challenges that affect claimants.

The Advocate's Office created a regular forum for this dialogue by convening a Stakeholders' Roundtable bringing together a diverse group of participants, including representatives from the State of New Mexico, New Mexico's congressional delegation staff, local governments, tribal governments, non-profit organizations, and the Claims Office. Participants in the Roundtable exchange viewpoints on the strategic direction and continued implementation of the Hermit's Peak/Calf Canyon Fire Assistance Act and alignment of the Claims Office's work with broader recovery goals and objectives.

The Advocate convened the Roundtable's inaugural two-hour meeting on September 19, 2023, at New Mexico Highlands University. The Claims Office kicked off the meeting, explained expectations for the Roundtable, and provided an overview of the final rule, an update on claims processing and payment, a discussion of upcoming outreach efforts, and a preview of the metrics the Claims Office is developing to track equity in program delivery. Participants also heard an update from New Mexico's Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management on long-term recovery strategy. Key discussion topics also included reaching residents who have not filed claims, addressing potential bottlenecks in community capacity for recovery, and integrating Claims Office compensation within an overall recovery strategy.

The Claims Office and other participants found the dialogue informative and useful. One participant from congressional delegation staff expressed appreciation that Claims Office leadership has consistently sought input and been accessible—with the Roundtable dialogue as a good example.

# The Way Forward



## **Flooding of Land Near Hermit's Peak**

On March 13, 2023, the Claims Office Advocate was hired and began to build a program that would support claimants through their recovery journeys. In less than a year, the Advocate's Office grew and developed into a program that meets the advocacy needs of claimants in impacted communities with employees hired locally from those communities.

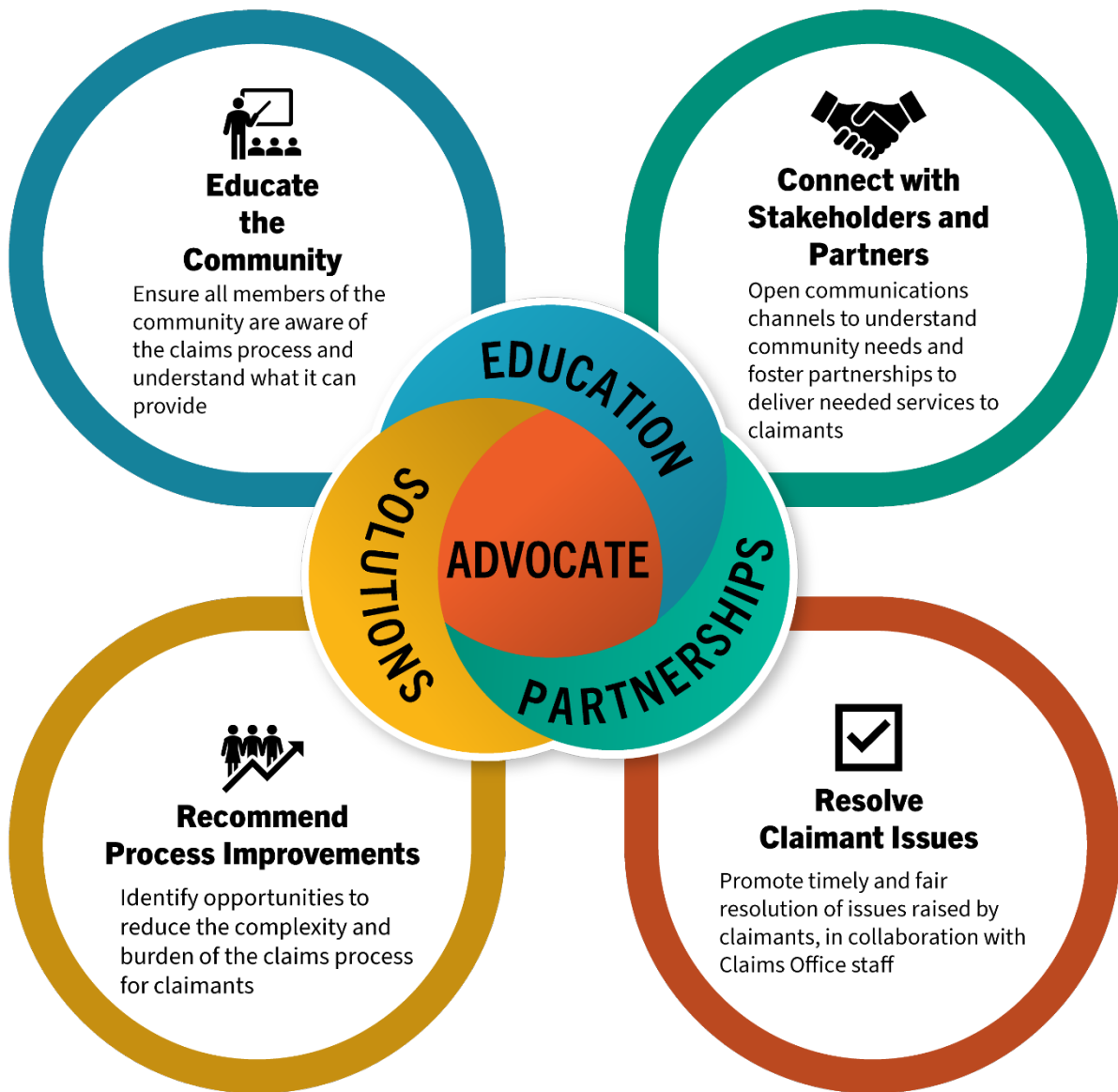
The Advocate's Office is committed to continuing to build upon our most recent outreach and partnership initiatives, the "Advocate Connects" series and the Stakeholders' Roundtable. In fiscal year 2024, the Advocate's Office will cement them as trusted venues in the community to identify and help resolve issues through open dialogue. At the same time, the Advocate's Office will expand outreach efforts to identify individuals that may not yet have filed a claim for their household or business, to raise awareness, answer questions, and address concerns.

Focusing outreach efforts will rely on data from the Claims Office, and data will be an internal focus for the Advocate's Office as well. The Advocate's Office is establishing performance metrics and will collect data to gauge program effectiveness. As part of this effort, the Advocate's Office will develop

systems to better collect, manage, and analyze data from claimant contacts and referrals, as well as actions taken to resolve their concerns. If opportunities for process improvement arise, the Advocate’s Office will be ready to take the initiative.

The next annual report will reflect those improvements in data collection and analysis. The Advocate’s Office expects to report on its performance in education and outreach, partnerships, process improvements, and issue resolution.

Overall, the Advocate’s Office will remain agile and adjust as needed to fulfill its mission and maximize support to those affected by the Hermit’s Peak/Calf Canyon Fire.



To reach the Advocate’s Office team, call 505-403-3373 or email [FEMA-Hermits-Peak-Claims-Advocate@fema.dhs.gov](mailto:FEMA-Hermits-Peak-Claims-Advocate@fema.dhs.gov).

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- Cover: John “Cyle” Sharp. Aerial View of Hermit’s Peak. Used with permission.
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  - Page 5: NWCG. Night fire activity near Holman, May 8, 2022. Available via <https://inciweb.nwcg.gov/incident-photos-gallery/nmsnf-hermits-peak-fire> (accessed September 12, 2023).
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