

WOLVERINE GUARD

SPECIAL EDITION



WINTER STORM RESPONSE 2025

COVER PHOTO BY: SGT BRAYDEN STEPHAN



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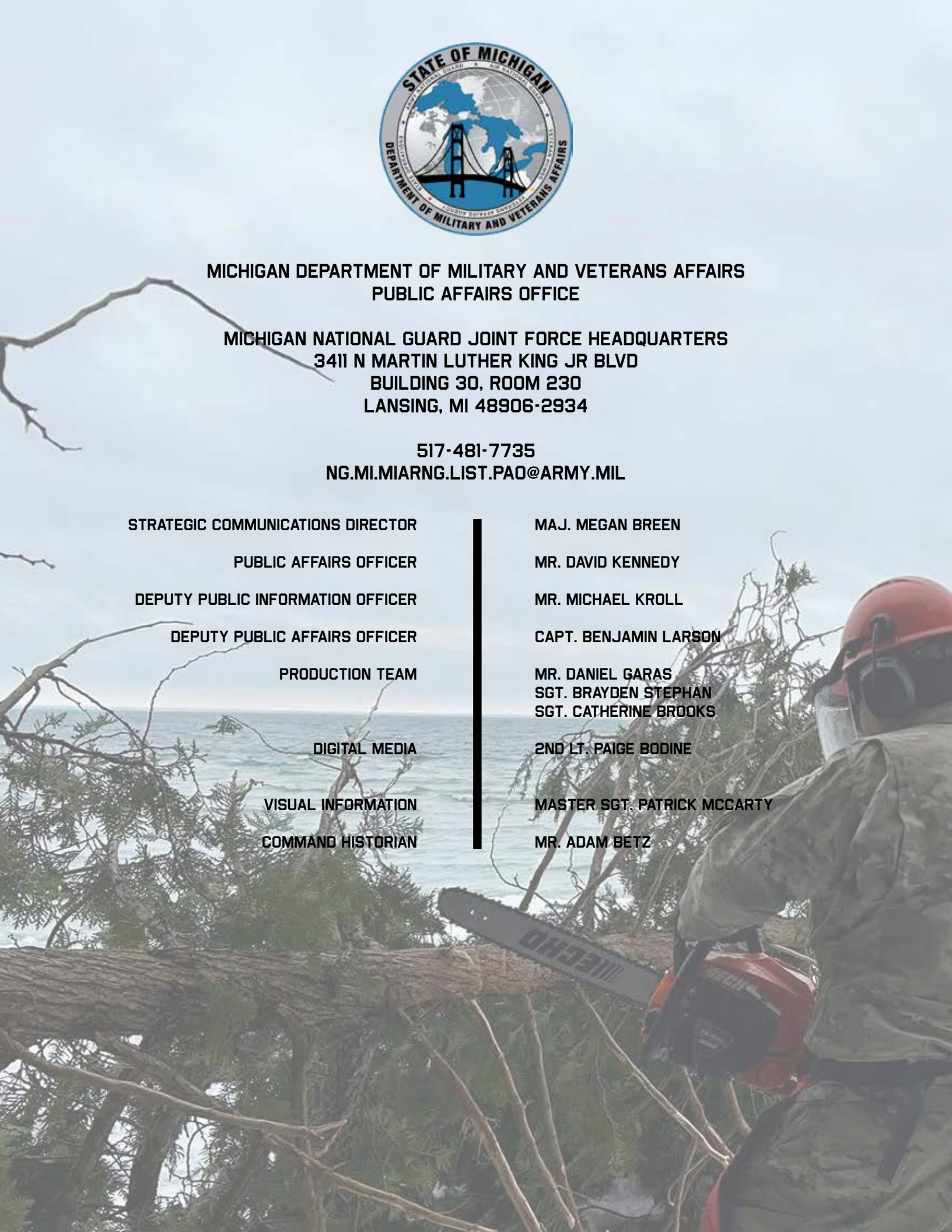


TABLE OF CONTENTS

04	TAG TALK
06	THE ICE STORM OF THE CENTURY
08	THE LION'S ROAR: TASK FORCE RED LION RESPONDS
10	BY THE NUMBERS
12	FULL CIRCLE OF SERVICE
14	CHAINSAW CREWS
16	ISLAND MISSIONS
18	OUR COMMUNITY GIVING BACK
20	WORKING TOGETHER: PARTNERSHIPS WITH OTHER AGENCIES
22	MILITARY READINESS AND FAMILY TEAM
24	SHOTS FROM AROUND THE STATE
25	WELLNESS CHECKS, WARMING CENTERS, AND FOOD DELIVERY
26	FACES OF THE STORM



TAG TALK

MAJOR GENERAL PAUL D. ROGERS

WELCOME BACK SOLDIERS, AIRMEN, FAMILY AND FRIENDS TO THE WOLVERINE GUARD.



In this special edition of the Wolverine Guard, we reflect on one of the most defining moments of this quarter. The rapid and unified response to the devastating ice storm that swept our great state. The storm brought widespread damage, downed power lines, and treacherous conditions. It also revealed the unwavering resilience of Michigan's communities and the steadfast commitment of our Michigan National Guard soldiers and airmen. Citizens, first responders, and Guard members displayed what makes Michigan great, pulling together throughout northern Michigan, lending a hand to our neighbors in need and restoring our communities.

Service members, some of whom were directly affected by the storm, packed their equipment and headed to the most devastated areas in Michigan. Within hours of being activated, members from as far north as Calumet and as far south as Detroit formed teams to assist our interagency partners with clearing critical roads and distributing life saving supplies to Michigan residents.

I extend my sincere gratitude to the leaders at every echelon across the state who coordinated closely with us, ensuring that resources were swiftly and effectively deployed where they were needed most. Leaders stepped up to ensure that activated service members had what they needed to be successful during response operations. This included bringing in additional DMVA team members to make sure the families back home received support during the activation.

To the people of Michigan, thank you for your trust and support. We are always honored to stand with you, and for you, in times of need. We witnessed firsthand the strength and kindness of neighbors helping neighbors. That spirit of community is exactly what fuels our mission.

I commend the members of the Michigan National Guard who answered the call without hesitation. Whether clearing roads, conducting wellness checks, or supporting our local first responders, your professionalism, selflessness, and readiness to serve embody the very best of our force. I also want to pay special recognition to your families, who make tremendous sacrifices so you can serve. Your strength on the home front is the foundation of our operational success.

This event reminded us of why we serve. One team – always ready, always there. Thank you for all that you do.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul D. Rogers".





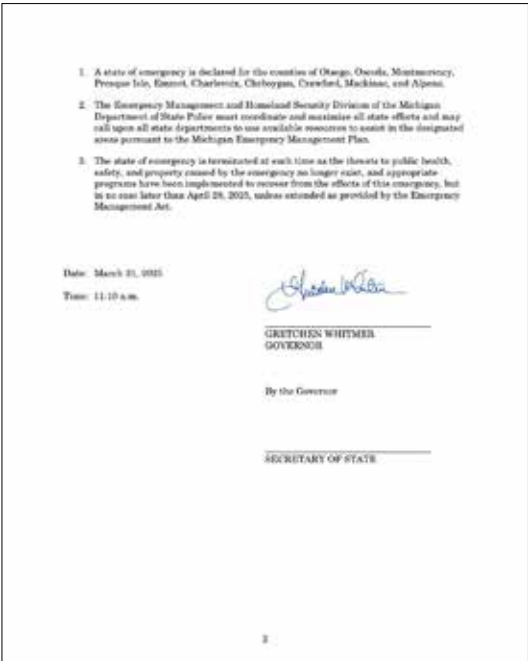
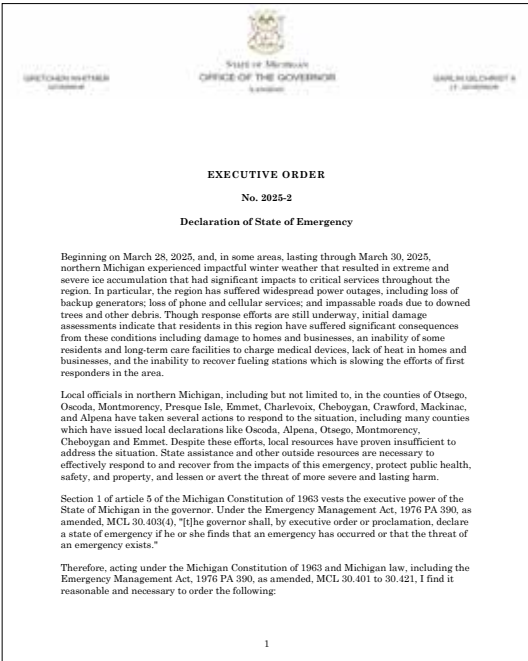
STATE OF EMERGENCY

THE 2025 NORTHERN MICHIGAN ICE STORM

LANSING, Mich. — On Monday, March 31, 2025, Governor Whitmer declared a state of emergency in ten counties after activating the State Emergency Operations Center to respond to the damaging ice storms in northern Michigan. The state of emergency declaration included the counties of Otsego, Oscoda, Montmorency, Presque Isle, Emmet, Charlevoix, Cheboygan, Crawford, Mackinac, and Alpena.

The next day, the governor signed two executive orders to add Alcona and Antrim counties to the state of emergency declaration and lifted trucking restrictions to help expedite getting fuel and other critical supplies to impacted areas.

Governor Whitmer also deployed the Michigan National Guard to provide more personnel and specialized equipment to help with ice storm recovery efforts in northern Michigan.



The Executive Order issued by the governor declaring a state of emergency.



THE ICE STORM OF THE CENTURY

THE MICHIGAN NATIONAL GUARD RESPONDS TO THE 2025 ICE STORM

The Michigan National Guard was activated in support of civil authorities to assist with debris removal and the delivery of essential services across northern Michigan. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Brayden Stephan)

**STORY BY 2ND LT. PAIGE BODINE,
MICHIGAN NATIONAL GUARD PUBLIC AFFAIRS**

LANSING, Mich—Northern Michigan was struck by what is now being called the “ice storm of the century,” according to the Petoskey News-Review, during the weekend of March 28. The storm coated trees, power lines, and roads in thick sheets of ice. In just minutes, entire neighborhoods were devastated. Trees snapped and crashed to the ground, blocking access. Power lines fell, leaving homes without electricity, while emergency crews were unable to reach those in desperate need of help.

It quickly became clear this wasn’t just another spring storm. The damage stretched across more than 10 counties. By April 2, the governor had activated the Michigan National Guard to support overwhelmed local agencies.

Lt. Col. Alex Kashenider, commander of First Battalion, 119th Field Artillery Regiment, was chosen

to lead the joint task force. He received the call while feeding his kids at home.

“I thought, alright, I’m in charge of this,” he said. “Fortunately, I have an outstanding staff behind me.”

What began as a smaller-scale mission quickly expanded in scope. What began with 50 troops quickly grew to more than 800 soldiers and airmen working across the state.

“At first, the mission focused on housing utility crews,” said Command Sgt. Maj. Matthew Hopkins, senior enlisted leader for the Michigan Army National Guard. “But then we realized it was much bigger than we anticipated. We started with 50 soldiers, and a few days later, we had 800.”

Kashenider now faced an immense challenge: strategically deploying his forces to tackle the evolving mission. In addition to the quick reaction and rapid reaction forces, military engineers were critical to the effort. Organized into specialized debris removal

teams, the units had the training and equipment needed to clear roads and debris. With roads blocked and infrastructure down, utility crews couldn't restore power until the engineers cleared the way.

Despite freezing rain, snow, and hazardous roads, the mission started with a convoy to Northern Michigan. It was not an easy task but it was done without a single vehicle accident. That kind of performance, Kashenider said, reflected the discipline and professionalism of the troops.

"They're doing hard work in awful weather, and they're doing it with care," he said. "It's unbelievable what we've accomplished."

With the mission growing by the hour, leadership knew the pace would only be sustainable if they prioritized their people. Hopkins and others worked to bring in USO support, secure hot meals and provide space for soldiers to rest between 15-hour shifts.

"It's easy to do the bare minimum," Hopkins said. "But real leadership is making sure your people are taken care of."

As the operation expanded, it became clear that rapid mobilization and responsiveness would be key. Capt. Jennifer Morrison, commander of the 1776th Military Police Company, led her team as part of the state's QRF, which was mobilized in less than 12 hours. Her soldiers were among the first to reach the hardest-hit areas.

"We were told at 6 p.m. we were going," she said. "By 6 a.m. the next morning, we were at the armory ready."

Morrison's unit helped support wellness checks and shelter operations for people who had nowhere to go. In Alpena County alone, her team helped distribute food and essentials to more than 1,800 people in under 12 hours. "It was the largest emergency distribution in the county's history," Morrison said. "The need was overwhelming." Across the state, Guard teams were working long hours to help restore normalcy. This included clearing roads, cutting trees, supporting shelters and delivering critical supplies.

For many service members, the most powerful part of the mission wasn't the scale; it was the response from the communities they served.

"People were coming out of their homes just to say thank you," Kashenider said. "We have had non-stop appreciation from everyone, firefighters, police, and residents."

Morrison said that was the moment it all sank in.

"When you see that level of devastation, and then you see the relief on people's faces when help arrives, it's humbling," she said. "That's when you realize just how important the guard is."

For Kashenider, that's what makes the National Guard different.

"We're part of these communities," he said. "We're not just here to respond—we're here to serve our neighbors. That's the heart of the mission. We bring compassion to the fight."

The Michigan National Guard has cleared over 500 roads and delivered more than 3,000 meals, with the mission ongoing.





Sgt. Marcus Martin, assigned to the 1434th Engineer Company, 107th Engineer Battalion, 177th Military Police Brigade, Michigan National Guard, operates a skid steer to clear debris from a roadway following a severe storm outside Alanson, Mich., April 3, 2025. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Daniel Garas)

THE LION'S ROAR

TROOPS FROM TASK FORCE RED LION RESPOND TO MICHIGAN'S WINTER ICE STORM

Story by 1-119th Field Artillery Public Affairs
Photos by Michigan National Guard Public Affairs

On the evening of Tuesday, April 1, Brig. Gen. Wagh informed Lt. Col. Kashenider that he would command a Joint Task Force (JTF) leading the Michigan National Guard's response to the ice storm that crippled northern Michigan named Operation Cold as Ice. The storm left hundreds of thousands without power and trapped many in their homes. Many affected residents had no heat, no access to food or water, and could not leave their homes. Emergency services were unable to reach people due to fallen trees and debris covering hundreds of miles of public roadways.

By 7 a.m. April 2, a Rapid Response Force (RRF) composing of units from the Forward Support Company, 1st Battalion, 119th Field Artillery Regiment, the 1071st and 1073rd Maintenance Companies and a Quick Reaction Force (QRF) from the 1776th Military Police Company, had mustered at armories across the state. Less than 24 hours after notification, the RRF and QRF began arriving at Camp Grayling and established command posts by 3 p.m. that day. By the end of April 2, the task force had more

than 400 soldiers on the ground at Camp Grayling Joint Maneuver Training Center and began mission planning with interagency partners. JTF Red Lion established a tactical operations center next to the Department of Natural Resources' Incident Operations Center to facilitate collaboration. Companies from the 107th and 507th Engineering Battalions began mustering on April 3 and started arriving later that day, assuming the moniker Task Force Engineer. By the end of Friday, April 4, Task Force Engineer had more than 400 soldiers and airmen on the ground supporting JTF Red Lion. By that evening, JTF Red Lion had over 800 troops in northern Michigan in support of the operation.

JTF Red Lion supported the Department of Natural Resources and worked with local emergency managers, law enforcement, and emergency medical services on missions in communities and command centers. Soldiers and airmen operated across 12 counties in both peninsulas, and on three islands. The DNR reported 747 miles of roadway cleared with support from Task Force Engineer, resulting in 236.6 million square feet of land cleared for emergency travel.

The task force also completed more than 4,650 wellness check calls, identifying individuals who needed assistance from local law enforcement, EMS, shelters, or who lacked access to food and water. Service members delivered over 5,600 meals to shelters, warming stations, and drop-off points. JTF Red Lion supported nine shelters, ensuring the safety and well-being of residents who could not remain in their homes due to prolonged power outages. In total, more than 1,400 miles of debris were cleared from public roadways to allow access for EMS, civilians, and utility workers. Soldiers from the 1776th Military Police Company conducted over 1,700 door-to-door checks with local law enforcement officers, making 739 positive contacts with residents and delivering 368 emergency meal packages directly to households in need. JTF Red Lion also supported local hospitals and nursing homes by filling oxygen tanks using mobile oxygen generating systems.

JTF Red Lion coordinated with local media, community partners, and residents to share updates and reinforce that Michigan National Guard members were committed to serving their communities for as long as needed. Many residents expressed gratitude and appreciation for their efforts. The mission helped restore power to more than 60,000 customers.

This emergency response was carried out with professionalism and dedication by soldiers and airmen from across the Michigan National Guard. Mechanics and fuelers from the 1071st and 1073rd Maintenance Companies and 119th Forward Support Company, along with Maintenance Support Teams, ensured that the soldiers in the field had what they needed. Staff from the Forward Support Company, 1st Battalion, 119th Field Artillery Regiment provided command and control for JTF Red Lion, ensuring the right people and resources were in place to support communities in need.

On Saturday, April 12, JTF Red Lion transferred command and control to a follow-on element of 65 soldiers and airmen who volunteered to remain on State Active Duty orders to complete the mission. This transition marked a key milestone for the task force. Despite being asked to conduct nonstandard missions with equipment such as chainsaws, the mission was completed without major injuries or accidents, which is a testament to the leadership and teamwork of JTF Red Lion and the commitment of every service member involved.



BY THE NUMBERS

506

ROAD SEGMENTS MADE
ACCESSIBLE

792

MILES OF TREE LINE CLEARED

900

GUARDSMEN MOBILIZED

800

POWER POLES DESTROYED

1,537

MILES OF ROAD CLEARED

23,153

WELLNESS CHECKS CONDUCTED



15,373

MAN-HOURS PERFORMED

72

OXYGEN TANKS REFILLED

12

COUNTIES DECLARED
DISASTER AREAS

900,000

ACRES OF STATE FORRESTS DAMAGED

3

MICHIGAN ISLAND
MISSION SUPPORTED

13

CELLULAR TOWERS
CLEARED AND MADE
OPERATIONAL

FULL CIRCLE OF SERVICE

AIRMAN FINDS PURPOSE IN OPERATION COLD AS ICE



Story by Capt. Tandi Bailey
110th Wing Public Affairs

BATTLE CREEK, Mich. — For Airman 1st Class Stewart Johnston, joining the Michigan Air National Guard wasn't just about wearing the uniform, it was about giving back to the same communities that once inspired him. While working as a public school

employee during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021, Johnston witnessed the Michigan National Guard in action as they delivered vaccines across the state. That moment stuck with him. "It left a massive impression on me that it is the kind of work to make

ourselves available to do, to support the state, to support the community," Johnston said. "And have an actual reason to be there, not just existing and hoping I can help in some way but having a real means to do it." That drive to serve became a reality when Johnston raised his hand and





Michigan Army and Air National Guardsmen organized into specialized chainsaw teams work alongside the Michigan Department of Natural Resources to remove fallen trees and debris from key roadways. (Courtesy photo)

joined the Michigan Air National Guard. In March, he found himself answering the call in a different kind of emergency—responding to the devastating ice storms that hammered Northern Michigan.

Activated under a state of emergency declaration, Operation Cold as Ice mobilized 55 Airmen from the Michigan Air National Guard to assist local communities. The storm system, which struck March 27, brought record-breaking snowfall—more than 60 inches in parts of the Upper Peninsula and Northern Michigan—and blizzard conditions with wind gusts reaching 70 mph.

Johnston, a native of Northern Michigan, said seeing his hometown so heavily impacted made the decision to volunteer an easy one.

“It was devastating,” he said. “I wanted to be able to address those needs.”

Assigned to Chainsaw Team 26, Johnston stepped far outside his typical role in IT support. With no prior experience operating a chainsaw, he jumped into hands-on disaster relief, clearing debris, opening blocked roadways, and distributing hot meals to residents.

“It was a major learning experience to be in a joint environment and not just doing my specialty in IT support,” he said. “There were challenges with infrastructure and communication, but we found ways to overcome them.” Despite the physical toll, Johnston said the most rewarding part of the mission was being able to witness real, tangible results from the team’s hard work.

“In my specialty, there is no physical product at the end,” he said. “With this tasking, my team cleared several miles. Being able to look in front of you and see there is a whole lot more to go, but

looking behind you and going ‘holy, we got a lot done!’ was extremely rewarding because every single thing we moved was a victory.”

In addition to his manual labor duties, Johnston leveraged his communications background to support mission navigation and data reporting in austere environments with limited or no cell service. Operation Cold as Ice was a test of strength, skill, and teamwork, but for Johnston, it was also a moment of personal validation





CHAINSAW CREWS

Photos by Michigan National Guard Public Affairs

When service members were activated they were organized into specialized chainsaw teams and deployed across the state, working alongside the Michigan Department of Natural Resources to remove fallen trees and debris from key roadways.

These joint teams focused on clearing access to critical infrastructure, including cell towers, downed power lines, and neighborhoods that had become isolated due to blocked roads. Their efforts were essential in reopening routes for emergency vehicles and utility crews, helping to restore power and communication services to affected communities.

By supporting debris removal and enabling the delivery of vital resources, the Michigan National Guard played a crucial role in helping communities recover more quickly and safely in the wake of severe weather.





ISLAND MISSIONS

Photos by Michigan National Guard Public Affairs

Northern Michigan is known for its vast forests, pristine beaches, and scenic islands. While Mackinac Island is one of the state's most iconic tourist destinations, Michigan National Guard troops were also sent to lesser-visited islands like Beaver Island and Bois Blanc Island to support local residents.

These service members helped restore essential services, including clearing roads for the power companies for the islands' year-round populations, and restoring communications for emergencies. Their efforts not only brought immediate relief to those living there, but also played a critical role in ensuring the islands could quickly bounce back in time for Michigan's busy tourism season, a key part of the region's economy.





OUR COMMUNITY GIVING BACK

Photos by Michigan National Guard Public Affairs

When our service members were called to respond, the community didn't hesitate to step up. As service members worked in tough conditions, communities from every corner of Michigan came together to make sure they had the support they needed.

Ebels Hardware answered the call by donating chainsaws and essential gear when local stores were completely sold out. Not only did they supply the much-needed equipment, but they also delivered it straight to Camp Grayling to keep missions moving without delay. The Michigan Department of Natural Resources also played a key role, partnering with the National Guard to make sure the mission was a success.

Support came in many forms to include: hot meals, donations, and countless volunteers. USO volunteers helped prepare and serve meals, lifting morale and showing appreciation when it mattered most.

A massive thank-you also goes out to Sam's Club of Traverse City, AMVETS Department of Michigan, USO Michigan, and the Crawford AuSable Community Thanksgiving Dinner Committee for their generous donations and support. Their efforts brought comfort and relief to our troops and reminded them they weren't alone.

Local organizations continued to step up. Resurrection Life Center and Family Fare grocery store provided a warm meal to both the 1439th and 1442nd Firefighter Engineer Detachments and local firefighters. Treetops Resort offered massages, haircuts, and wellness

"These volunteers along with many others, truly went above and beyond embodying the true spirit of support for our Michigan National Guard."

—Jennifer Caverson, Camp Grayling Community Relations

services to help service members recharge after long hours in the cold.

Soldiers from the 1776 Military Police Company in Taylor, MI were honored with an American Flag that was flown over the Presque Isle Township Fire Department for the past year. This gesture served as a token of appreciation for their outstanding contributions to the community. The unit

conducted nearly 900 health and welfare checks across the county, exemplifying their dedication to service and commitment to community well-being.

Camp Grayling's community, included the incredible efforts of individuals like Patty & Jim Crandall, Craig and Roberta Robinson, Amvets, Sam's Club, Treetops and Camp Grayling's USO answered the urgent call. "They selflessly provided everything from hot meals for over 800 soldiers to essential supplies and even free haircuts. Their efforts ensured our National Guard soldiers were supported and cared for," said Jennifer Caverson, Camp Grayling's Community Relations Specialist. "These volunteers along with many others, truly went above and beyond embodying the true spirit of support for our Michigan National Guard."

Residents and communities from across Michigan found meaningful ways to give back. These acts of kindness made a real difference to those serving during the storm response.

We are deeply grateful to every person and organization that stepped up to support our Soldiers. Your kindness and commitment made this mission possible.



WORKING TOGETHER

PARTNERSHIPS WITH OTHER AGENCIES

Photos by Michigan National Guard Public Affairs

Teamwork truly makes a difference. The Michigan National Guard mobilized quickly to support emergency response efforts across the state. Service members worked shoulder to shoulder with state and local agencies, including the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Michigan Task Force 1 (MI-TF1), local police departments, fire crews, and emergency managers to ensure communities received the help they needed.

These partnerships were critical. While the Michigan National Guard cleared roads, delivered supplies, and conducted wellness checks, agencies like the DNR used their field expertise to access hard-to-reach areas, and MI-TF1 deployed specialized rescue teams to assist in high-risk environments. Local law enforcement provided essential on-the-ground coordination and helped maintain public safety. Each organization brought unique capabilities to the table, creating a united front against the storm's destruction.

The ice storm may have caused widespread damage, but it also highlighted the strength of interagency collaboration. The Michigan National Guard and its partners responded swiftly, efficiently, and with unwavering dedication. Their joint efforts ensured that power was restored faster, roads were reopened sooner, and lives were protected throughout the emergency. This mission proved that when Michigan faces adversity, its emergency responders will rise together with strength, skill, and readiness.





MILITARY AND FAMILY READINESS TEAM

Michigan Guard Families Weather Storm Thanks to Critical Support Team



The late March 2025 ice storm that ravaged Michigan triggered a state activation of National Guard Members, placing unforeseen demands on both Service Members and their families. Stepping into this critical support role was the Military and Family Readiness Team (MFRT), whose tireless efforts proved indispensable in navigating the unique challenges of this state-level emergency response. On the very first day of the activation, Becky Pottruff, Military and Family Readiness

Specialist (MFRS) assigned to Camp Grayling, was on the ground, embedded within the Reception, Staging, Onward Movement, and Integration (RSOI) process, ensuring a smooth transition and offering immediate assistance for emerging needs.

Financial Strain Emerges as Top Concern

However, a significant challenge quickly arose concerning the financial implications of State

Active Duty (SAD) orders. Unlike federal Title 10 or Title 32 orders, SAD orders operate under a different pay structure, with payments often taking upwards of five weeks to materialize. This revelation triggered a surge of requests for financial assistance from service members facing immediate financial strain, particularly as they were ineligible for many standard military financial aid programs due to the nature of their orders. SAD orders also pay soldiers at a base rate often

less than their civilian earnings, do not accrue military service time or retirement benefits, and injuries sustained are considered workman's compensation claims, not VA-eligible incidents.

Leading the charge in addressing this critical issue was State Family Programs Director Tina Predmore. Recognizing the urgency, she initiated contact with Army Emergency Relief (AER) leadership, advocating for an exception to policy for the activated Michigan Army National Guard soldiers. This effort was amplified by the involvement of Command Sgt. Maj. Matthew Hopkins, who joined Mrs. Predmore in crucial meetings with AER, meticulously explaining the intricacies and financial impact of SAD orders. Their persistent advocacy proved successful. AER agreed to grant an exception, contingent upon Family Programs staff meticulously validating each soldier's need and documenting their individual circumstances. Ultimately, the team processed requests for 162 Soldiers through the AER grant system, with AER approving 146 requests for a total of \$115,749 in financial support for

soldiers supporting the disaster.

Beyond AER: Proactive Solutions and Broad Support

Demonstrating remarkable foresight and collaborative spirit, MFRT members Becky Pottruff and Melissa Alex (from Bay City), also coordinated with the president of the National Guard Association of Michigan and the National Guard Relief Foundation to unlock access to SARGE grants. This strategic outreach provided immediate financial assistance to both Army and Air National Guard members while awaiting the outcome of the AER exception request, with the team processing 500 SARGE grant requests in addition to the 162 AER applications. Total financial support data has not been received from NGRF at the time of this article.

Beyond financial concerns, the MFRT addressed a wide spectrum of challenges faced by the activated service members and their families. These included vetting requests for Release from Active Duty (REFRAD), securing emergency childcare, facilitating academic accommodations, providing

assistance for homelessness, pet care, food, and unexpected fuel costs. Adding to the complexity, numerous service members were themselves victims of the ice storm, requiring support for damage to their own homes and properties while simultaneously contributing to the state's recovery efforts.

Unwavering Dedication and Innovation Under Pressure

Faced with this influx of diverse and pressing needs, additional Family Programs staff were called in to augment the core team. MFRS Bob Frohnapfel (assigned to Fort Custer), Melissa Alex and Dawn Ulmen (from Big Rapids) reported to Camp Grayling to work with the service members requesting support. As the need and time to process requests for assistance continued to increase; Staff Sergeant Nicole Pauley, (Family Programs Specialist in Lansing); Rick Elder, (Lead MFRS); Tina Predmore, (State Family Programs Director); along with Tim Stankovich, (MFRS from Taylor); and Eric Vertlieb, (MFRS from Jackson); also traveled to Camp Grayling to assist the





team. The Military and Family Readiness Team maintained a steadfast commitment, working 14 to 16-hour days to ensure service members could meet with the team before or after working their daily missions. Collaborating closely with command teams and the task force commander, the team operated with remarkable efficiency, often seeing service members from early morning until late into the night.

In a testament to their innovative approach, the team also activated Michigan's first Virtual Emergency Family Assistance Center (VEFAC). This joint call center, which stood up in response to the ice storms and tornadoes, responded to requests for assistance from Service Members and Veterans impacted by the ice storm. The VEFAC provided assistance to over 60 clients and helped secure more than \$50,000 worth of support. Amidst these storm response efforts, the MFRT simultaneously manned a Level II SRP and a Yellow Ribbon event, processing over 200 soldiers

preparing for deployment. The Military and Family Readiness Team's unwavering dedication during the Michigan ice storm activation underscores their critical role in supporting the well-being and resilience of National Guard members and their families. Their ability to adapt, innovate, and collaborate effectively ensured that service members could focus on their mission, knowing that their families' needs were being met with compassion and expertise. The lessons learned from this activation will undoubtedly serve as a valuable framework for future state-level emergency responses, further solidifying the Military and Family Readiness Team as an indispensable asset to the Michigan National Guard.

Need Support? Contact the Military and Family Readiness Team!

The Military and Family Readiness Team is a dedicated group of federal employees tirelessly supporting

members of the Michigan National Guard and their families in all areas that impact their quality-of-life. If you are a service member or family member in need of assistance, the MFRT is here to help. They provide support in areas such as financial well-being, employment, education, parenting, healthy relationships, and Exceptional Family Member (EFM) support, as well as crisis casework – assisting those in crisis due to situations like house fires, illness, or accidents. To speak with a member of the team, scan the QR code in this article or call 888-MICH-FAM.

*For more information,
contact Family Readiness
Programs at (517) 481-9893*

WELLNESS CHECKS, WARMING CENTERS, AND FOOD DELIVERY

Story by MVAA Public Affairs

In addition to clearing debris off roads, service members conducted critical wellness checks, set up warming tents, and delivered food.

Teams delivered food, water, and other essential supplies to those who were isolated or without power. For many residents, seeing a uniform at their door brought a sense of relief and reassurance during a time of uncertainty.

To help make these interactions meaningful, Michigan National Guard chaplains embedded with the teams, and coached service members on how to communicate clearly, calmly, and with empathy. They shared tools and techniques to help soldiers and airmen navigate difficult conversations, listen well, and offer comfort to those in distress.

Together, the Guard's efforts demonstrated not only their readiness and skill, but also their deep commitment to serving Michigan's communities.



FACES OF THE STORM

When disaster struck, the Michigan National Guard stepped up. These are the voices behind the mission.

Command Sergeant Major Matthew L. Hopkins

Senior Enlisted Leader, Michigan Army National Guard

“The biggest challenge of this mission was how rapidly the size of our force was growing. We had to quickly adjust to the size and complexity, and there was no room for delay. As soon as we hit the ground, we moved straight into both supporting our communities and our service members. That meant going beyond just the essentials and figuring out what people truly needed to be safe and cared for. The Michigan National Guard isn’t just another response force. We’re part of these communities. We live here. That connection brings a level of compassion that goes deeper. It’s not just about doing the job. It’s about showing up for our neighbors in their time of need.”



Captain Jennifer Morrison

Commander, 1776th Military Police Company

“This was the ice storm of the century, and within 24 hours we knew we were going to be activated. There wasn’t a lot of time to plan, but we quickly learned how to operate under Task Force Chainsaw and adapt to the situation on the ground. My soldiers rose to the challenge. We drove through the storm the entire way to Grayling without a single accident. By the time we arrived, we were ready to receive the mission. We completed over 1,500 wellness checks and covered more than 25,000 miles in support of shelter operations, logistics, and more. In just one 24-hour period, our company directly supported more than 1,800 people. Every door we knocked on, we were met with gratitude and relief. That’s why we serve.”



Brigadier General Ravindra Wagh

Assistant Adjutant General – Army, Michigan National Guard

“We are incredibly grateful to the citizens of Northern Michigan for their strength and resilience throughout this storm. I also want to recognize the soldiers, their families, and their employers. Without their support, none of this would be possible. This mission was about standing with our communities when they needed us most, and I believe we showed the very best of what the Michigan National Guard has to offer.”



Sergeant First Class Travis Bogi

Platoon Sergeant, 1776th Military Police Company



“Working alongside first responders, linemen, state police, and local authorities was one of the best parts of this mission. We’re all from the same state, and it felt like we were one team working toward the same goal. My team focused on health and welfare missions, and we experienced zero negative incidents. The community was overwhelmingly supportive. I’m incredibly proud of how fast we deployed and how seamlessly everyone worked together once we were in place. It was a true team effort.”

First Lieutenant Brock Crystal

S4 Officer, 507th Engineer Battalion and Liaison to the DNR for Operation Cold as Ice



“I had just returned from leading a hurricane relief mission in North Carolina when this storm hit. This time, I was operating at a higher level, coordinating across agencies and working to get people on the ground as quickly as possible. One of my responsibilities was identifying where interagency coordination was falling short and bridging those gaps in real time. I made sure our staff were working in sync with each other and with civilian partners. I also want to acknowledge the soldiers pulling 10 to 14 hour shifts and the families standing behind them. My own wife and one-year-old daughter sacrificed so I could be here, and I know many other families made the same sacrifice.”

Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Kashenider

Task Force Commander and Commander of the Forward Support Company, 1st Battalion, 119th Field Artillery Regiment



“This response grew from 30 soldiers to more than 800 in a very short time. That kind of scale requires everyone, from senior leaders to junior soldiers, to step up fast and stay flexible. In less than 36 hours, we built an effective operation that could respond across a large portion of the state. The initial challenge was getting linked up with our interagency partners, but once we got into our battle rhythm, things moved quickly. The conditions were brutal, with freezing rain, sleet and snow, but our soldiers and airmen executed the mission with professionalism. I’m incredibly proud of what we accomplished together.”

Brigadier General Kramer

Assistant Adjutant General – Air, Michigan National Guard



“Thank you to the county officials, emergency managers, and community leaders who helped make this mission successful. This was a generational storm, and many of those involved had never operated in these conditions before. I also want to thank our airmen, who stepped up without hesitation. We didn’t have to search for volunteers, they came forward on their own, ready to serve. Their willingness to act made a difference, and I applaud their efforts.”

ALWAYS READY

ALWAYS THERE

