

# Wisconsin National Guard: Wisconsin leaders recognize Guardsmen as storm recovery mission concludes

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BALSAM LAKE, Wis. — Gov. Tony Evers and senior Wisconsin National Guard leaders recognized Wisconsin National Guardsmen wrapping up three weeks of storm recovery operations in northern Wisconsin.

About 150 Soldiers and Airmen at an Aug. 10 ceremony at Balsam Lake's Unity High School received the Wisconsin Emergency Service Ribbon for their debris removal efforts in Polk, Langlade and Barron counties.

"It was very special receiving this award today," said Airman 1st Class Thaddeus Spidell from Milwaukee's 128th Air Refueling Wing. "I am really appreciative of the opportunity to come up here."

Spidell was part of a Wisconsin National Guard state active duty response effort that cleared downed trees blocking more than 50 miles of road, enabling access for residents and emergency vehicles.

"We worked 10-hour days, seven days a week," said 2nd Lt. Isaac Geffers, leader of one of the debris removal teams. "We did a lot of debris pickup, hauling dump loads, a lot of chipping of debris on the roadway. We cleared roads for emergency vehicle access and ensure they could be snowplowed this winter."

The Wisconsin Emergency Service Ribbon is awarded to any Wisconsin National Guard Airman or Soldier who answered the call of the governor to a state of emergency. Responding to state emergencies is one of the Wisconsin National Guard's two primary missions.

“The state has this wonderful arrow in its quiver that is an expansion of capability in a time of need,” Maj. Gen. Don Dunbar, Wisconsin’s adjutant general, said during the ceremony. “That arrow is the 10,000 Soldiers and Airmen of the Wisconsin National Guard.

“When needed, we come out and assist but we never are in charge,” Dunbar continued. “We are always working with the sheriff or the incident commander.”

A powerful storm the evening of July 19-20 downed thousands of trees in northern Wisconsin and left nearly 100,000 residents without power. Approximately 25 Wisconsin National Guard Soldiers soon mobilized for a water distribution mission to Langlade County. The mission expanded to three task forces of 150 Soldiers and Airmen clearing downed trees in Langlade, Polk and Barron counties.

“I had to run equipment, do a lot of traffic guard, run a chainsaw, drive dump trucks and front-end loaders, lots of things so we could get the mission done,” Spidell said.

Those impacted by the storms expressed great appreciation of the Guard’s efforts.

“We’ve had a lot of good interaction with community members coming out to us and thanking us for what we are doing out there,” Geffers said. “We are glad we are making an impact.”

“I had the privilege of meeting with some of you during your mission and witnessed firsthand the positive impact you had on these communities,” Evers said during the ceremony. “You stayed positive and focused on accomplishing your mission in order to help the communities impacted by the storms.”

The three teams cleared more than 50 miles of road and hauled about 1,500 truckloads of debris. Virtually all of the Guardsmen from units all over the state volunteered for the mission.

“We have folks from Army and Air Force, from all different units throughout the state that answered the call — as far away as Milwaukee and all stretches of this state,” Brig. Gen. David O’Donohue, deputy adjutant general for Civil Support, said during the ceremony. “They came together for a single purpose — the governor called and we had communities and people in need, and they came and answered that call.”