

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 13, 2017

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW Room 200A
Washington DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

We write in support of the Ports of Hood River and Cascade Locks, two public agencies in Oregon that recently experienced significant economic loss during the 48,831-acre Eagle Creek wildfire. We urge you to bring to bear all of the programs within the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to help these non-profit agencies recover.

The Eagle Creek fire began on September 2nd in Oregon in the heart of the federally designated Columbia Gorge National Scenic Area (CGNSA). This fire forced hundreds of evacuations and an extended closure of portions of Interstate-84 and the Bridge of the Gods (BOG), a rural toll bridge owned by the Port of Cascade Locks linking the states of Oregon and Washington in the CGNSA. The closure of the BOG and I-84 forced first responders, public safety vehicles and all other traffic that typically uses these facilities to detour across the Hood River/White Salmon Interstate Toll Bridge owned by the Port of Hood River. This bridge is the only other Columbia River crossing located in the center of the CGNSA. To facilitate the movement of emergency safety vehicles and heavy traffic demand detoured across the Hood River/White Salmon Interstate Toll Bridge, the Port of Hood River lifted tolls on its bridge during the height of the fire emergency. Toll revenue lost by the Port of Cascade Locks during the closure of the BOG totaled \$158,000 and toll revenue lost by the Port of Hood River totaled \$70,000.

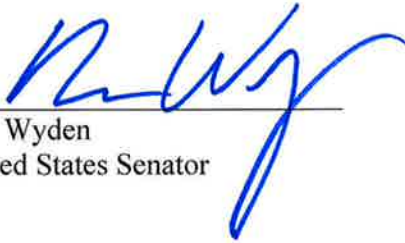
Both the BOG and the Hood River/White Salmon Interstate Toll Bridge are owned and operated by the local port authorities and are managed as non-profits. All of the toll revenue received by the Port of Cascade Locks and the Port of Hood River goes to support maintenance of the bridges and economic development within the rural areas of the Cascade Locks and Hood River. The lost toll revenue for these communities means that many important economic development initiatives will go unmet. USDA grants would be hugely beneficial to these areas and would support rural community development as these local communities begin to rebound from the economic losses incurred due to these catastrophic wildfires. Given that both port authorities function as economic development engines for the respective rural communities, we urge you to give careful consideration to the Port of Cascade Locks and the Port of Hood River to help them recover these wildfire-related economic losses.

The Ports of Hood River and Cascade Locks directly contributed to the fire-fighting effort in the CGNSA by either lifting tolls to facilitate the efficient movement of emergency responders, or closing facilities to enhance public safety by limiting potential conflicts between the public and

emergency responders. We urge you to be creative in helping these agencies meet their maintenance and economic development responsibilities.

Thank you for your consideration of my request and we look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

CC: Anne Hazlett
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