



STATE OF OREGON

KATE BROWN, GOVERNOR
RON WYDEN, UNITED STATES SENATOR
JEFF MERKLEY, UNITED STATES SENATOR



UNITED STATES SENATE

September 26, 2018

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue,

We write to thank you for your assistance in helping Oregon producers recover from an unprecedented wildfire season and to ask your continued support with recovery efforts. In particular, we request that USDA permit emergency haying and grazing on Conservation Reserve Program land in Gilliam County and extend the emergency haying and grazing period in Wasco, Sherman and Wheeler counties as long as appropriate without impacting nesting species. In addition, we ask that you consider use of authorities and programs to address soil erosion that could affect farmland as well as salmon and steelhead habitat.

As you are aware, starting in June and extending through August, north central Oregon experienced a series of devastating wildfires, which destroyed thousands of acres of grazing, forest and crop lands. Community volunteers worked in tandem with firefighters from Oregon and across the nation to protect property and lives during these fires that spread voraciously due to hot, dry weather and high winds. The most recent fire burned over 50,000 acres in Gilliam County. All told it was a devastating year for rural agriculture communities in Oregon.

Now, as these communities seek to recover, producers need support from the government to utilize appropriate resources. The loss of grazing land in particular presents an ongoing concern for producers in the area, and the opening up of CRP land in Wasco, Sherman and Wheeler counties has proven invaluable to producers in those counties. The authorization for those three counties is scheduled to expire on September 30, but the loss of grazing still presents a significant challenge, and as such, we request an extension of the authorization through February 28, 2019. We further ask that USDA extend the CRP haying and grazing authorization to Gilliam County for the same period.

Gilliam county producers, elected officials and county departments, local agency watershed and field staff are working diligently to replace fences in steep canyons, rebuild roads and water structures, repair fire lines, etc. However, one outstanding concern is the effects of soil erosion on steep and barren burned slopes. Programs or authority that would allow work to reduce risk of soil erosion and stream sediments is likewise needed.

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We greatly appreciate your work on behalf of Oregon producers during this devastating fire season. We also want to commend the efforts of your field staff in your local Farm Services Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Services, Risk Management Agency, and Rural Development offices for their quick action to help producers and communities move forward.

While the fire season was truly devastating, we stand in awe of how these communities came together to fight these fires, with volunteers putting themselves on the line to protect their and their neighbors' homes and livelihoods. These are truly resilient communities, and we have no doubt that they will emerge even stronger. We strongly encourage your use of all appropriate programs and authorities to help these producers and communities to get back on their feet. Thank you for your service to the nation and immediate consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Kate Brown
Oregon Governor



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator