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February 13, 2017

Kevin Haugrud  
Acting Secretary  
Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street N.W.  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Acting Secretary Haugrud:

I write to express my concerns about the federal hiring freeze and its impacts on important work in Oregon's forests and rangeland. I joined my Oregon colleagues in a recent letter outlining our concerns about the federal hiring freeze and potential negative effects on wildland firefighting for the 2017 season. I have heard informally from United States Forest Service staff that hiring has resumed. But the Bureau of Land Management has been given no such assurance, which negatively impacts its ability to fight wildland fires. The White House has yet to send an official response to our letter.

Failure to have a robust and well-trained permanent and seasonal wildfire team is crucial to protecting public lands and communities in the rural West. Whether it is the O&C forests in Western Oregon or protecting the sage grouse and ranchers' livelihoods in Southeastern Oregon, hiring adequate personnel is of paramount concern.

My office has received many calls from Oregonians concerned about whether temporary or seasonal employees, particularly those hired to fight wildfires, qualify for these public safety exemptions. When looking for clarification, my staff has had multiple and somewhat conflicting responses to verbal inquiries with your agency. I would appreciate a swift response that includes the plans for hiring these much-needed positions.

Thank you for your dedication to our public lands and rural communities. I appreciate your recognition of the seriousness of this situation and the importance of getting these people ready to work.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden  
United States Senator

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