

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 9, 2013

The Honorable Sally Jewell
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20250


Dear Secretary Jewell and Secretary Vilsack:

We are writing to request your agencies' needed assistance in Oregon's drought-stricken communities. Given the severity of the drought and the disastrous conditions faced by these Oregon farmers and ranchers, we ask that you expeditiously consider extending emergency grazing opportunities on Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management land, including land that might otherwise be incorporated in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).


The situation facing these counties is dire, and requires bringing all available solutions to the table. The USDA has recently designated Klamath, Lake, Harney, and Malheur counties as drought disaster counties. According to the Bureau of Reclamation, the Klamath Basin experienced the second driest January through March on record. These counties are striving to overcome hardships from last season's record fire and drought. The 550,000 acre Long Draw Fire, 270,000 acre Holloway Fire, 160,000 acre Miller Homestead Fire, and 90,000 Barry Point Fire have stressed the already burdened feed, forage, and water resources in Southeastern and South Central Oregon. We are grateful that CRP land was made available after the emergency conditions last year, and ask that this assistance be expanded and made available again.

We appreciate your consideration of this request to give needed flexibility to ranchers as part of broad disaster response. This area has experienced terrible drought previously, and we have worked closely with your agencies to address those needs, particularly in the 2010 Klamath Basin drought disaster. We continue to support reauthorization and funding of critical supplemental agricultural disaster assistance and the Drought Relief Act. We look forward to working with your agencies closely to provide all assistance available and monitor these situations closely.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Jeff Merkley
United States Senator