

September 14, 2022

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack  
Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

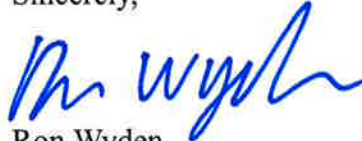
I appreciate your team's August 4th response to my inquiry on this year's wildfire season and the efforts your crews have made on the ground to combat the fires thus far this season. However, increased fire risk in Oregon this month indicates that more information is required to ensure Oregonians remain safe and prepared. Oregonians want detailed plans on how the Forest Service will use the recent increases in funding for wildfire prevention and to further address wildland firefighter staffing shortages. Please respond to the following questions by Monday, October 3, 2022:

- I am glad to see the Central Oregon Landscape receiving Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) funding over the next two years to address 50,000 acres of critical fuels treatments in and around the Bend area. What are the plans for treating the remaining 3,850,000 acres of National Forest lands in Oregon which need attention, including high-risk areas in southern and eastern Oregon? When can we expect to see IIJA funding for treatments in these high risk firesheds?
- The State of Oregon has been working on statewide wildfire risk maps. How are you incorporating that data into prioritizing hazardous fuels treatments across the state? Have you been coordinating with the State, industry, or other private landowners to maximize fuels treatments across jurisdictional boundaries?
- As Oregon is seeing more common late summer wind events and red flag outlooks, initial attack crews are starting to be hard to find as seasonal crews in the southwest are slated to end. As of this date, there are eight hotshot crews in the Southwest region that are listed as unavailable due to being "out of season," meaning their time-limited positions have expired. These crews would be of huge benefit as Oregon continues to battle potentially catastrophic fires. How are you planning on addressing these essential crew shortages while the region sees these on-the-ground changes?
- I am excited to see the movement with the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) on the wildland firefighter specific occupational series and extra pay opportunities. However, the hiring numbers coming out of the Department are marred with confusion and differing figures. How is the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) addressing these issues to

ensure the fire program, and all USFS staff, can trust that vacancies and workforce planning can proceed smoothly and without issues? Will fixes to the USFS Human Resources system be incorporated into the strategic staffing plan that your team is currently preparing? If so, what major improvements can you commit to including?

I greatly appreciate the continued dedicated efforts of the land management agencies your Department oversees to contain and respond to expansive wildfires. I stand ready to support wildfire prevention, response, and recovery for all Oregonians.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden  
United States Senator