

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

August 1, 2024

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

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

We urge you to grant Governor Tina Kotek’s formal requests for multiple USDA Secretarial disaster declarations for areas of Oregon that have already experienced extreme losses this fire season. We strongly advise your department to work with the Governor’s office to ensure State, Local, and Tribal governments have access to all the federal resources available to respond to these deadly fires.

This wildfire season has already decimated communities throughout Eastern Oregon, as our state deals with five confirmed “megafires” – the Durkee, Cow Valley, Falls, Lone Rock, and Monkey Creek fires – that have all started in July alone. With approximately 113 fires currently burning across Oregon that have scorched over 1.2 million acres, it is imperative that your department continues to build upon the partnerships, collaboration, and respect between the agency fire crews, community leaders, as well as staff and volunteers, as this fire season progresses.

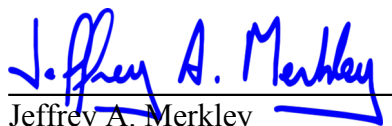
However, as thick smoke blankets communities and creates hazardous conditions for thousands, our first responders brave these perils and continue to protect and serve their communities. Their tireless work battling these fires has helped save countless lives. Moreover, Rangeland Fire Protection Associations (RFPAs) have displayed commendable efforts during this trying time – helping protect their neighbors’ lives and livelihoods to the risk of their own.

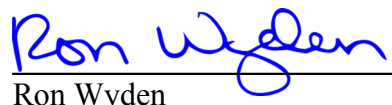
As climate chaos continues to worsen – turning fire seasons into fire years that see millions of acres scorched and countless lives forever changed – we must make sure communities can access the federal resources they need to equitably recover from these increasingly devastating fires.

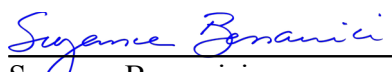
There are still several more weeks of a severe wildfire season ahead of us. Current fires are expected to grow, and new fires are likely to start with no significant precipitation forecasted. Drought intensity is projected to increase throughout the state, elevating the risk that more lightning strikes, as well as human caused ignitions, will spark additional fires.

Given the harm these fires have caused to both the physical and social infrastructure throughout Oregon, we urge you and your department to ensure the State, Local, and Tribal governments have all the resources they need to help Oregonians recover from these deadly fires.


Sincerely,



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

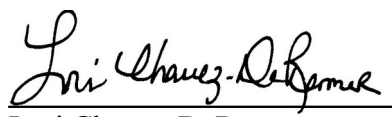

Ron Wyden
United States Senator

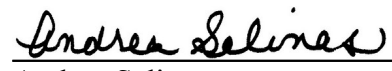

Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress


Cliff Bentz
Member of Congress


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