

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
STATE OF MONTANA

GREG GIANFORTE
GOVERNOR

KRISTEN JURAS
LT. GOVERNOR



September 12, 2024

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

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

I am writing today to formally request a Secretarial Disaster Designation for the State of Montana due to the significant wildfire losses we have experienced in Big Horn, Rosebud, and Powder River counties during the 2024 fire season. So far this year, 1,872 fires in Montana have burned 314,156 total acres of land. The three-counties named have had a disproportionate number of acres burned by these fires. Specifically, 81,995 acres have burned in Big Horn County, 129,844 acres in Rosebud, and 23,125 acres in Powder River for a total of 234,964 acres burned, which is nearly 75% of the statewide total.

The impacts on agriculture have been significant as over 95% of the total acres of all land burned within the described counties are used for agricultural production. The State, along with our federal partners, is still doing damage assessments and loss estimates on the affected ground. I recently held a roundtable with affected producers in the region and heard of the extensive fencing damage to farm and ranch operations. Early estimates currently project a loss of more than 1,000 miles of fencing, numerous stock tanks and water supply lines, livestock grazing and hay, and several agriculture-related buildings. Sadly, livestock loss estimates have exceeded 1,000 animals so far. As winter approaches, building back capacity and getting the infrastructure back in place for livestock management is critical.

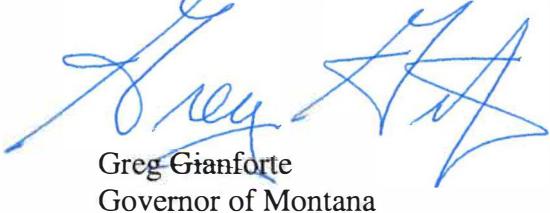
Due to the amount of fencing lost in Montana this year, I respectfully request a waiver for the in-person inspection requirement for damaged fencing and any other streamlined review processes to expedite rebuilding of lost fences. I would also like to express my support for actions that will give flexibility on payment limitations or adjusted gross income limits for program eligibility, which could inadvertently exclude producers who cannot afford needed restoration.

I would like to thank the partnership with the Farm Service Agency and Natural Resources Conservation Service state leadership in working to help with the Secretarial Disaster Designation for these affected counties.

Secretary Vilsack
September 12, 2024
Page 2

Thank you for considering this request and supporting the agricultural producers of Montana during this extraordinary time. If you have any questions, please contact the Montana Division of Disaster and Emergency Services Administrator, Delila Bruno, at dbruno@mt.gov.

Sincerely,



Greg Gianforte
Governor of Montana