

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 12, 2020

The Honorable John Hoeven
Chairman
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Hoeven and Ranking Member Merkley:

We write to request that you include supplemental appropriations for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program in a future appropriations bill.

The EWP Program is a critical resource to assist our states as they recover from this year's wildfires, hurricanes, and other natural disasters. This year, fires across the West have consumed millions of acres, with the three largest fires in Colorado's history occurring over the past few months, while the Southeast faced a record number of hurricanes. These disasters will continue to threaten watersheds, private property, and critical infrastructure for weeks and months to come.

Congress created USDA's EWP Program in 1973 to help communities mitigate damage after a natural disaster. EWP is funded on an ad hoc basis, but as of August 25, the USDA had less than \$45 million left to spend on EWP recovery projects. Without supplemental funding, it will be challenging for the USDA to partner effectively with counties, towns, and private property owners as they recover from natural disasters. Therefore, we ask the Committee to provide supplemental funding to USDA that will meet demand for the EWP program.

In addition to funding, we encourage the Committee to consider the unique economic circumstances that the COVID-19 pandemic has created. States and municipalities coping with natural disasters are also facing severe budget shortfalls and may struggle to afford the local match that the federal government typically requires for EWP projects. Therefore, we encourage the Committee to provide direction that would allow the USDA to cover up to 100% of EWP project costs, where appropriate.

Thank you for considering this request and we look forward to working with you.

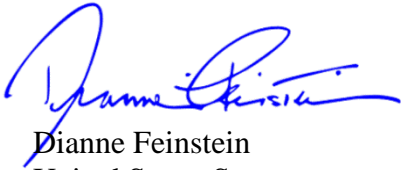
Sincerely,



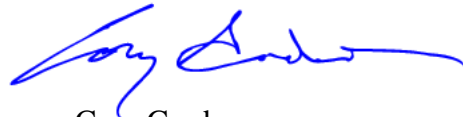
Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



Cory Gardner
United States Senator