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COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

SUBCOMMITTEES:

ENERGY AND WATER DEVELOPMENT
LABOR, HEALTH, AND HUMAN SERVICES

COMMITTEE ON BUDGET

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

September 19, 2007

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro, Chair
Subcommittee on Agriculture
Room 2362-A Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Norm Dicks, Chair
Subcommittee on Interior and Environment
Room B-308 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jack Kingston, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Agriculture
1001 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Todd Tiahrt, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior and Environment
1016 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen DeLauro and Dicks, and Ranking Members Kingston and Tiahrt:

I want to take this opportunity to thank you for your past assistance in helping the State of Idaho through disaster situations resulting from drought, floods, fires and other natural disasters and ask you to once again assist my state in meeting the challenges presented by another devastating summer.

As you may know, Idaho is in the midst of a prolonged drought that has wrought havoc on crops, livestock, and the financial well-being of far too many Idahoans. Compounding the problem this year is the overwhelming damage my state has sustained from the effects of catastrophic wildfires – most of which have begun on federally-owned lands.

As a result of these damages, it is imperative that the federal government, and in particular the House and Senate Appropriations Committees, step forward and help. Therefore, I am requesting that you consider including the following provisions in any upcoming disaster supplemental or war supplemental legislation.

I recognize that any additional disaster supplemental package may evoke a veto threat from the President and outcry from special interest groups. I stand ready to work with each of you to defend this package and overcome any objections it may attract from the White House or within Congress.

Among the provisions I believe are necessary in any supplemental package are the following:

- Extend the signup date for the Crop Disaster Program to commodities planted before October 1, 2007. The current planting deadline is February 28, 2007. This date does not cover crops planted throughout the spring and summer of 2007 – crops which have sustained tremendous damage as a result of drought throughout the western United States.

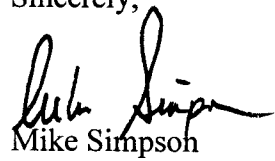
- Extend the Livestock Compensation Program and the Livestock Indemnity Program to cover losses that occurred prior to October 1, 2007. Under the current program, losses covered had to occur prior to February 28, 2007. This date does not cover losses to farmers and ranchers as a result of extreme drought and catastrophic fires through the spring, summer, and early fall of 2007. Each of these programs is critical to producers in Idaho who are having difficulty finding enough feed for their livestock and who have sustained significant loss of livestock this summer.
- Provide additional resources through the Emergency Conservation Program and other federal programs within the Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, and Bureau of Land Management to assist in the reconstruction of fencing on federal and private lands.
- Provide additional resources through the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service for the collection of seed and the rehabilitation of federally-owned lands impacted by severe wildfires. I believe this program should not be limited to native grasses and sagebrush – but should include direction to utilize other cover crops, including non-native perennial wheat grasses, that could quickly stabilize fire-impacted lands and provide grazing opportunities for displaced cattle.
- Provide compensation to states for the considerable costs they have incurred in fighting wildfires that started on federally-owned lands and spread to state and private lands. In the case of Idaho, the State has incurred at least \$28 million in wildfire fighting costs this year. The vast majority of these costs have been spent fighting fires that began on federally-owned lands – lands that in many instances have large fuel loads and had been under utilized through either logging or grazing. The federal government charges private landowners for the impacts on federal lands of fires that began on private lands. It is only fair that the federal government hold itself to the same standard and compensate states for some or all of the costs they have incurred fighting wildfires.
- In addition, state and private landowners will spend considerable resources rehabilitating lands that were impacted by fires. While the first priority should be to compensate states for the costs they incurred fighting fires, there should be some consideration given to compensating them for rehabilitation as well.
- I would like to request language permitting the Bureau of Land Management emergency authority to allow greater utilization of public lands not impacted by wildfire so that ranchers in my state, and across the west, can find suitable grazing for their cattle over the next 2 years. I would also request language permitting federal agencies to allow cattle on some fire-impacted allotments as early as this spring.
- I firmly believe the federal government should consider a pilot project on certain federal lands impacted by this year's wildfires. In Idaho, there are considerable lands that would be perfect candidates for a pilot program whose primary function is to investigate the value of grazing as a management tool for fuels reduction on federally-owned lands. It is no surprise to those of us in Idaho that these areas were ground zero for some of the

largest wildfires in the country – a partial result of the overwhelming amount of ungrazed fuel that built up over the last few years. I recognize this supplemental package may not be the appropriate place to consider such a pilot project but I am hoping to begin a discussion of such an idea for possible inclusion in the upcoming annual appropriations bills.

- Finally, as important as funding for each of these initiatives is, it is equally important that you provide additional resources for federal agencies to effectively and efficiently administer them.

Once again, thank you for all you have done to assist my state in the past and for your consideration of these requests. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at anytime.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mike Simpson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M" and "S".

Mike Simpson
Member of Congress