

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow  
Chairwoman  
U.S. Senate  
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry  
328A Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC, 20510

The Honorable John Boozman  
Ranking Member  
U.S. Senate  
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry  
328A Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC, 20510

The Honorable David Scott  
Chairman  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Agriculture  
1301 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Glenn “GT” Thompson  
Ranking Member  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Agriculture  
1301 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow, Ranking Member Boozman, Chairman Scott and Ranking Member Thompson;

I am reaching out on behalf of the Oregon Water Resources Congress (OWRC) to request that critical funding for the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) forest health programs be retained as Congress continues discussing the budget reconciliation package and infrastructure legislation.

OWRC is a nonprofit trade association of irrigation districts and other local government entities delivering agricultural water supplies. The water stewards we represent operate complex water management systems, including water supply reservoirs, canals, pipelines, and hydropower facilities. Oregon, like other states in the West, has a large percentage of federal forest lands, including the headwaters and essential watersheds that provide water supplies not only to agriculture but also drinking water for millions of citizens. Many of our members and the thousands of farmers and ranchers they serve have been heavily impacted by catastrophic wildfires over the last several years. This series of devastating wildfires damaged water delivery infrastructure and imperiled water supplies for irrigators and communities alike.

Access to a safe, reliable, and affordable supply of water is of critical importance to agricultural as well as our nation’s entire economy and the environment. The forested lands of the United States play a vital role in the water supply that much of our nation depends on. Healthy forests provide a myriad of watershed, ecosystem, and recreation benefits. Unfortunately, throughout much of the U.S., the fires burning through our forests are historically devastating in scale and duration, destroying critical habitat, and causing catastrophic impacts to communities and the environment. They are also disastrous to the economy, causing billions of dollars in damages to homes, businesses, cattle and crops. These fires also pose severe threats to local government and other water suppliers’ efforts to supply clean water, with severe and deleterious impacts to watersheds enduring for years to come.

The Senate and House Agriculture Committees have an excellent opportunity to advance the health of our nation’s forests, protect communities, ecosystems and watersheds in the reconciliation and infrastructure bill efforts. We recognize there are complex discussions underway as part of the reconciliation package but it is important that forest health is not a casualty of the process and that USDA receives funding to help address and prevent catastrophic wildfires in Oregon and throughout the United States.

Thank you for considering our request. We appreciate your leadership on the many issues facing our nation’s agricultural community.

Sincerely,  
April Snell, Executive Director  
Oregon Water Resources Congress