

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 29, 2022

The Honorable Deb Haaland
Secretary, U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Haaland:

We write regarding the urgent need to use funding from the newly enacted bipartisan infrastructure law to invest in sagebrush ecosystem restoration. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (“IIJA”), passed with broad bipartisan majorities in Congress and signed into law last year, includes \$905 million for the Department of the Interior (“DOI”) for ecosystem restoration and \$200 million for wildfire risk reduction programs. As Senators representing Western states, we urge you to allocate a significant portion of these funds to address the restoration needs of the vast sagebrush ecosystems of the American West.

Sagebrush restoration will help a critical landscape in the Western United States – one that supports vast biodiversity, contributes to the regional economy, and is vulnerable to destructive wildfires if not managed properly. The sagebrush ecosystem encompasses approximately 120 million acres of the American West, and is home to more than 350 species. Millions of Americans across the West live, work, and play in this diverse landscape, which is increasingly at risk from devastating wildfires largely driven by invasive annual grasses. Cheatgrass and other invasive grasses now cover one-fifth of the Great Basin, and these grasses fuel intense fires on the rangeland. These aggressive non-native species recolonize burned-out areas more efficiently than native plants, which further contributes to future wildfires. Consequently, fires are growing in intensity, frequency, and destructiveness across the rangelands of the American West.

With this in mind, we encourage DOI and the Bureau of Land Management (“BLM”) to use the substantial new resources we provided in Sections 40804 and 40803 of the IIJA to prioritize investments in the sagebrush ecosystems. This investment, totaling over \$1.1 billion, should *supplement, not replace*, the \$50 million provided in the bill for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service specifically for the restoration of the sagebrush steppe, which we included in recognition of the significant threats that face this uniquely American landscape.

Additionally, we urge DOI and the BLM to join the Department of Agriculture (“USDA”) and state, tribal, and local governments to promote USDA’s “Defend the Core” framework to identify and prioritize intact landscapes and defend these places against invasive species and wildfire. Investments by USDA and DOI, using data developed by the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, together with on-the-ground stakeholders and land managers, represents the best opportunity to reverse the devastating trends that are degrading the sagebrush landscape.

Finally, the IIIA funding provides a unique opportunity for creating jobs in rural America while addressing important conservation needs. DOI has at its disposal \$100 million for fuels removal efforts that employ locally-based laborers – an historic opportunity to put people to work while helping restore the sagebrush steppe and protect the landscape from wildfires. We encourage you to enact a robust program that will have lasting benefits – both conservation- and employment-based – for an entire generation of Americans in the West.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



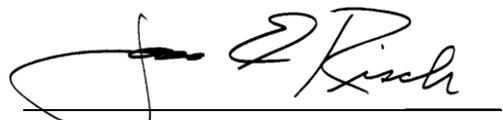
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United States Senator



Mike Crapo
United States Senator



Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator



James Risch
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
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Mitt Romney
United States Senator



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