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July 12, 2017

Secretary Sonny Perdue
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Secretary Ryan Zinke
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington DC 20240

Secretary Perdue and Secretary Zinke,

We write to express concern on two fronts related to federal involvement with combating wildfires in Montana.

Regarding the issue relative to the Department of Agriculture, there appears to be an ongoing refusal on the part of the federal government and the Forest Service to allow our Montana UH-1H helicopters to be classified as approved aircraft for initial attack on federal lands. The aircraft are safe and effective and are integral to fighting wildfires in Montana. For them to be allowed on all lands in the state except federal land because of a bureaucratic technicality is not logical.

The other issue is relevant to Secretary Zinke and also demands federal attention. We request that the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) pay particular attention to the wildfire risk this season in eastern Montana. Many people have worked very hard in recent years to address concerns about the greater sage grouse and the bird's habitat.

We are concerned that the BLM does not have adequate firefighting resources necessary in eastern Montana to combat a wildfire that could consume valuable sage grouse habitat and wipe out the work the state has done in recent years to protect that habitat. We ask that you bolster firefighting forces in eastern Montana as soon as possible.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sen. Chas Vincent, Presiding Officer